*“Though we may feel isolated or divided,*

***LOVE*** *gives us the power to* ***DISCOVER*** *deeper ways of knowing,*

*to* ***EXPLORE*** *our spiritual lives,*

*and to* ***TRANSFORM*** *communities and societies*

*so all people can flourish.*

***TOGETHER,*** *in this expanding movement,*

*we can create a more* ***LOVING*** *world for all.”*

***SPIRITUAL PRACTICES IN THE TIME OF A PANDEMIC***

 This is a pivotal time in our common life. The world as we have known it is changed and we are living with grief, anxiety, fear and uncertainty. We see glimmers of light in the darkness, but the future is yet unknown. The time has not come for us to begin imagining our future. All we have is the NOW. As the above quote reflects, the NOW gifts us, however, with the opportunity to “discover deeper ways of knowing and to explore our spiritual lives” in this time of slowing down and paying attention to all that we are experiencing during this pandemic. As we live this time well, we will be better able to discern all the ways we are already being called to co-create the future with our Creator and one another. I offer the following suggestions for living the NOW.

***TURN TWENTY SECOND HAND WASHING ROUTINE INTO A MEDITATION:***

* Sing the Doxology twice while washing your hands.
* Wet your hands, turn off the water and then, with attention and mindfulness,

explore your hands, their unique characteristics and remind yourself of all that your hands allow you to do each day. While you gently rub every part of your hands with soap, enjoy the gentle caressing of the sudsy bubbles before

turning on the faucet once again and slowly rinsing your hands thoroughly.

* Pair a simple mindful breathing exercise with handwashing while you take in a

 gentle breath through your nose for five seconds, then exhale through your

 nose for five seconds. Repeat. Give thanks for the gift of breath!

* Pray a favorite Psalm verse, a Mantra, a meaningful Song Refrain, a quote

or if you have set an intention for your day, each time you wash your hands is a perfect time to remind yourself of your intention and deepen it within your heart and mind throughout the day.

***LET NATURE NURTURE YOU:***

Life is different at a walking pace, you notice things! Allow nature to nurture and

 surprise you, embrace you, hold and sustain you whatever you are feeling in

 your heart. Walk without any purpose, simply let your “soul catch up with you.”

 For thirty minutes, walk **slowly** and silently. Let your senses guide your walk. If

 you are drawn to a leaf, a rock, a blossom, a fragrance, clouds above, a reflection

in a puddle of water, stop and linger, thoroughly observe, feel, hear whatever has invited you to pause. Take time to connect with its essence and hear its secrets.

At the end of thirty minutes, notice what has happened to your body, mind, spirit and your sense of time. Express your gratitude for this new awareness and the gift of this time, mindfully strolling in nature.

***PRACTICE DAILY GRATEFULNESS:***

As soon as you as you awake, confirm the obvious – your eyes are open!

 Then check to confirm you are still breathing. Inhale and exhale slowly, focusing on

 your breath. Be grateful for the next breath.

 Then, give thanks for being alive as you enter into the giftedness of another day.

*“Gratitude for the present moment and the fullness of life now*

*is the true prosperity.”*

*Eckhart Tolle*

HAVE A BEAUTIFUL, GRACE-FILLED DAY!

***BE MINDFUL OF THE GIFT OF BEAUTY:***

Beauty surrounds us wherever we are if we but open our minds and our hearts to take it

 *in. It may be in the gift of words, the smile of a child, the wonder and complexity*

 *of a single blossom, an art piece, the courage and strength of another, the*

 *unexpected gesture of love, a decadent piece of chocolate slowly melting on your*

 *taste buds! Look and see and notice the joy in your heart.*

***GRATITUDE BECOMES YOU:***

Begin a Gratitude Journal, not a superficial daily list of things grateful for but rather an opportunity to elaborate, in depth, on one experience, one event, one person, one gift at a particular moment in time. Research has shown that journaling is more meaningful and transformative when we write several times a week or at a rhythm that is meaningful for the writer, more than writing a daily litany. Suggestions for topics might be:

 What would life be like without certain blessings?

 What is a surprise that has elicited a grateful heart?

 Who are people that you are grateful for?

 What is the blessing in the midst of a major challenge or loss?

 What is a new awareness of deep gratitude for something long taken for granted.

Find a quiet moment, perhaps a cup of tea or coffee, light a candle, open your journal and express your gratitude in words or in your favorite form of artistic expression.

***BE OF SERVICE:***

 We all need community, so find ways to reach out according to your capacity. Rumi writes, “only when the ink joins with the pen can the blank paper speak.” Our bodies are the vehicle that expresses the compassion and love of our heart to touch the hearts and souls of others and bring transformation and new life. Be grateful for the ways you are already living out a call that in some small way allows you to participate in creating a world of greater love, compassion, justice, peace and joy. Be alert and open to new opportunities you may be called to during this time of chaos created by the COVID 19 pandemic.

May we all remember we are loved and remind each other that we do not make this journey alone. May we find healing and renewed hope in each day and when we live the blessings as well as the challenges of this time, may we say with Christine Valters Painters,

“*When this has passed*

*may we say*

*that love spread more quickly*

*than any virus ever could,*

*may we say this was*

*not just an ending*

*but also a place to begin.”*

***BLESSINGS IN THE NOW, MAY IT BE SO!***

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