

The wisdom of recollection

Frequently practise recollection to train yourself. Before we dive into what this may look like, it seems a helpful thing to get a sense of the weight of many meanings that Osuna brings to the word 'recollection'.

The word 'recollection' – a hologram of meanings and movements.

Osuna uses the word to express and describe contemplative wisdom as a whole. The word implies the fullness of the transforming experience within the Christian tradition - more than the stages along the threefold way, more than a series of spiritual exercises, more than mystical states, more than mystical theology - yet all of those are included. He uses the name 'recollection' rather like a hologram that in itself has a recollecting dynamic – it gathers up and collects together many 'namings' of contemplative experience and wisdom already in use in the tradition, and also the many namings 'hidden in plain sight' in the holy scriptures. As a hologram the word recollection is powerfully active – it gathers up all these meanings and is more than the sum of its parts. It's a word that keeps unfurling meanings when we live with it.

Osuna also loves the word recollection because it fits the universal experience of all of creation, all humanity, all the powers of the human soul being gathered and collected up in God – it's a divine activity. And in the very aliveness of the word, it evokes and connects us with the wisdom and living presence of Jesus who entered into the desert as place of spiritual recollection. In imitation and communion with Jesus of Nazareth, Osuna says; 'enter the desert of recollection'. Enter fully into the spiritual training in becoming recollected.

Entering into training in recollection.

He says - enter the desert of recollection often – and train yourself in this 'sweet science' of the dynamics of recollection. Osuna is not prescriptive about specific spiritual training exercises – but is descriptive of inner process. In his meditation on this maxim he describes up to ten movements of recollection to help us notice the movements happening within us and become active participants. With this broadly descriptive process in mind each

person looks for the spiritual exercises that help them. He likens the training in recollection to learning the fine arts of spinning and weaving in the soul following the movements of spiritual recollection as they play out within us.

Recognising and participating in 'recollecting' movements

The first movement of recollection is described in terms of transforming human encounters. In the presence of another we experience a joining together as one heart and mind. We enter into this oneness of heart and mind as trainees in spiritual intimacy - within a community, with a soul companion or a spiritual teacher.

Then as we continue, we might recognise a movement of gathering and drawing in of awareness in to connect with inner resources. Before our attention has been fixed on exterior roles and activities - but now we train ourselves to stay inwardly connected to spiritual resources. Osuna urges us to train ourselves to sit and eat what nourishes us inwardly; train ourselves not, so to speak, to simply grab mouthfuls on the go as we serve in the banquet of life in whatever roles and activities we are called to fulfil.

There are also many reconciling movements where the capacities and energies of our sensual nature are gathered into the momentum of recollection to work together seamlessly. Osuna gives particular attention to the reconciling of our sensual nature and reason. The powers of both are being gathered and collected up in the wider process of recollection. There is then perceived disconnection between body and mind.

At another time we will recognise an increasing desire in us to draw apart into solitude - a desire that moves us to rest inwardly by withdrawing from the business and busyness of mental activities that have constantly preoccupied our minds. For some there is also an exterior withdrawal from usual occupations and relationships if that's appropriate. But wherever we are we need to train our minds in detachment, in quietness until we are able to anchor and keep our attention in the heart from which all life flows.

Osuna's description of recollection continues with the powerfully transforming dynamic of increasing stillness. When the mind is still there's no longer such a reliance on knowing through sense and understanding, and a greater reliance on that subtle way of

perceiving with the 'eye' or 'ear' of the Heart .Our huge investment of energy and identity in thoughts is gathered up and brought home into the art of inner watchfulness and spiritual discernment.

And then there is also in his description of what he calls a tempering of the body energies. It is like a recollecting of the powers of embodied instincts of protection, of aggression, of sexuality , so that there can be a deeper releasing and intensifying of the subtle spiritual energies . These instincts are not destroyed but are healed and transformed. So we want to train ourselves in this wise alchemy of quietening , balancing, releasing , directing, strengthening energies.

The description continues – a re-remembering and re configuring- of the capacities of the intellect, the will and the memory in the Heart where these human potentials are being aligned with the wisdom and desires and memory of our true nature . In this realigning movement the will is infused with loving energy and the mind is illuminated . As Osuna says – wisdom and goodness begin to enter spontaneously into the house of the soul.

The deeper dynamics of recollection take us into being trained in not doing anything apart from the radical repose in the heart . Here there is no separate 'I' needing to do anything and the sense of self is located and fulfilled in spiritual communion. Osuna offers two word pictures : in recollection the soul is at the same time as humble and at rest as a hedgehog in deep hibernation and yet recognises the glory of her 'royal' nature – as a daughter of the king.

In the fullness of recollection which all soul training prepares for is the realigning of the powers of the soul into one seamless operation . In visionary seeing. In prophetic speech. In bringing love to everything and drawing love from everything. This joining of the powers of the human soul gives rise to a completely new form of consciousness . We may say it gives rise to the mind of Christ. And in Osuna's descriptions of this union there is an infusing of light and penetration of love. This he says, is the soul joined to God and God joined to the soul.

It is for this possibility of 'knowing' and 'putting on the mind of Christ' that we enter the desert of recollection to train ourselves.