

BREATHING UNDERWATER – The Art of Snorkeling—Avoiding death and Embracing the water of Baptism...

INTRODUCTION - Over 5,000 years ago, there were divers in Crete that used hollow straw reed snorkels to breathe underwater in order to look for valuable sponges.

The divers would use the reeds to allow less splashing and a better view in the deep looking for something valuable. The ancients believed water to be life giving and life taking. The divers defied the death of going into the water for something more valuable.

The modern snorkel was invented in 1936 by a Dutch man for submarines. Submarines used to float at the top of the water and went under to attack valuable cargo ships bound for enemy ports. The submarine could stay under water using a snorkel for breathing and engine combustion without coming up to the surface for air.

Today we have pressurized air hoses, SCUBA air tanks, and Oxygen Rebreathers, but we still rely on the snorkel to try to breathe underwater.

Fr. Richard Rohr wrote a spiritual book about Breathing Underwater as: "Only those who have tried to breathe under water know how important breathing really is, and will never take it for granted again. He was inspired by a poem by Sr. Carol Bieleck's poem called "***Breathing Underwater.***" I have a handout of the poem and will read it now... (Poem to be read with everyone in attendance).

They are the ones who do not take shipwreck or drowning lightly; they are the ones who can name 'healing' correctly, they are the ones who know what they have been saved *from*, and the only ones who develop the patience and humility to ask the right questions of God and of themselves."

Breathing under water sounds like the opposite of what we are supposed to do in the world. But for God, the opposite is expected to transcend survival...

...to hope to ascend to what the will of God really meant for Adam and Eve, and for all of us, even if we are stuck between the waters of Heaven and Earth.

Baptism invites into a moment when God acts on us...to invite us...to save us...so we can breathe water and spirit to learn how to act...how to work with God's grace....how to be an adopted child of God....

When we receive baptism, we commit ourselves to a way of life that begins with the Ten Commandments. When we deviate from that life, we take our spiritual breath under water and benefit by the sacraments, the grace of God and tools that are available, like the 12 Steps.

Breathing this water...this Spirit is the ground for a whole moral teaching based on the baptismal commitment and on the effects of baptism.

The letter of First Peter, understood baptism as an appeal for, or a pledge of, a clear conscience. (William A. Van Roo, SJ, The Christian Sacrament.)

[“Pneuma” (πνεῦμα) is an ancient Greek word for "breath", and in a religious context for "spirit" or "soul".]

The breath of God was in existence from the beginning of time, “when His Spirit hovered over the face of the Waters.” (Tanakh JPS 1917).

Genesis begins with, “Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters...”

As we travel in this Third Week of Lent, I would like to breathe with all of you and ponder this evening the “Pneuma” the “Spirit” the Breath of God that can allow us to breathe that first spiritual breathe of our baptism.

We breathed a sacrament that helped us respond to the divine offer by **acting** on us.

A breath that is fed by the 10 Commandments, the Sacraments and paths that recognize and rely on a God to help journey from the depth of even struggling spiritual lives as in the 12 Step Program.

St. Paul sees the spiritual life as fighting against the Ten Commandments in order to lose the ‘Me’ or the ego that gets in the way of our breathing underwater.

In the Letter to the Romans (7:11, 13), Paul sees our sins as trying to confuse us or mislead us in fighting the commandments. It is when we die to the desire to fight the commandments we then lose the “me” and obey the commandments.

We try to swim in the waters by our own rules and power so that we refuse transformation and we splash as if we are half in and half out of the water....

When we take that first real breath of the Holy Spirit by letting that me die, then we are able to breathe through a snorkel that allows us to get the glimpse of the deep.

We are free to dive deeper and to return to our Holy Spirit Snorkel, or we are free to break the surface and struggle without the Holy Spirit...

Rohr quoted Einstein who said that no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused the problem in the first place.... The grain of wheat that must fall to the ground to die is our ego. The fruit that is waiting to grow simply waits for the person to let go and let the Spiritual Life float with God’s snorkel.

The secular world sees this in the 12 Steps and the Christian sees this in the Ten Commandments and the Sacraments.

Breathing under water doesn't make sense. God acting on us does not make sense - in a world where **we** thought **we** succeeded, or failed on OUR OWN.... It is the opposite of what we expect as Jesus tells us that:

We suffer to get well.

We surrender to win.

We die to live.

We give it away to keep it.

Every day, we can touch our baptism, every day, we touch the 10 commandments, every day, and we struggle with steps in our spiritual journey...

The Catechism of the church explains that: [2067] The Ten Commandments state what is required in the love of God and love of neighbor. The first three concern love of God, and the other seven love of neighbor.

Beginning with the Old Testament, the sacred books refer to the "ten words,"¹⁶ but it is in the New Covenant in Jesus Christ that their full meaning will be revealed.

1) The First Commandment and The First Step:

I am the LORD your God. You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

We admitted we were powerless over our separation from God—that our lives had become unmanageable.

St. Paul wrote Romans 7:15 to share with us that we do not do the things we want to do and we do the very things we do not want to do...we do the things we hate.

St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 explains that when we are weak, we are strong.

We are tempted to reduce the Gospel to some moral issue over which we can feel in control. Aaahaa! We can do that, and pity those who cannot, but to adore God

is to submit and acknowledge that we would not exist if not for God. (2097 of Catechism)

The worship of the one God sets us free from turning in on ourselves, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world.

I was told in seminary that my prior life had been about solving medical and focus problems of the eye. I was told that in the Priesthood, I would not be able to solve very much...but, I could be “present” to the situation...I could be there for someone, not as myself, but as “in Persona Christae!”

When I get out of the way of Christ, then I admit my own **powerlessness**, my own inadequacy as a personal effect in the universe...But, I offer up myself and others to Jesus Christ... My own ego is attached to performance and to final results, Our Lord is attached to simply living us eternally.

If my response is that I can solve it myself, then it is inadequate and possibly wrong.

The First Commandment seems so obvious, but cannot be obeyed if I am in the way....The First step tells us to get out of the way of God....

The false self is afraid of freedom as it may lead to perdition and a wasted life.... How can we handle that kind of freedom? We need to detach from the false ego or self-blinders of what I want, what I need, what hurts me, what I prefer....

The English poet W.H Auden suggests that “We would rather be ruined than changed. We would rather die in our dread than climb the cross of the present and let our illusions die.”

2) The 2nd and 3rd Commandments and the Second Step

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day.

We Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that we can rely on a God whose task is to raise the dead to life.

Remembering the holiness and power of God may be the way to slow down the ego that wants to run away...

An oath engages the Lord's name.

In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist speaks of why he performed the baptism of repentance while admitting that he was NOT the Messiah: (Jn 1:31b)

"but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel."

The Sacrament of Baptism makes known Jesus Christ, the truth, the Higher Power! The patristic writer, Ephrem the Syrian saw this moment as being betrothed to Christ as the bride of Isaac was found at water,

2156 The sacrament of Baptism is conferred "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁵ In Baptism, the Lord's name sanctifies man, and the Christian receives his name in the Church.

The "baptismal name" can also express a Christian mystery or Christian virtue. "Parents, sponsors, and the pastor are to see that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment."⁸⁶

Repentance in Greek (*metanoia*) means to "turn around." (Jack Graham [Jesus.org].) To finally surrender ourselves to healing is a profound turnaround!!!! Our head, heart and body are ready to be opened as we can make the sign of the cross.... This is the work of a Power greater than ourselves and it leads to true faith.

Rohr said that Religion "is lived by people who are afraid of hell....but Spirituality is lived by people who have been through hell."

Some belief systems may split us apart, but actual faith puts our body, heart and head on a call to action to unify.

Not taking the name of the Lord in Vain and Keeping the Lord's Day holy confronts our mind to pray in a more contemplative way without superficial rote efficiency.

The real matter is that all of the banquet stories of Jesus are now beckoning us to drop our very proper excuses that we cannot come...we are asked to be present to allow the moment, the person, the idea or the situation change us as Pope Benedict says that:

"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction."

Is our mind, heart and body ready for this encounter?

Some form of contemplative or meditation practice, simply “Prayer” has been neglected in our lives. We rush to the next email or tweet or text...our eyes are supposed to be on the road, our hearts are supposed to be on God, our bodies are meant to be in communion....

Modern Social Science Commentary writers call this the unification of the Three Zone Personality of the Mind, Heart and Hands as St. Paul prays in First Thessalonians (5:23): “May the God of peace make you whole and holy, may you be kept safe in body, heart, and mind, and thus ready for the presence. God has called you and will not fail you.”

- 3) **The Third Step:** *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him.* Rohr says that surrender will always feel like dying, but it is a necessary path to liberation.

Rohr asks how long it takes just accept what is, to accept ourselves, others, the past, our own mistakes, and the imperfections.

But surrender is not giving up, but it is a “giving to” the moment, the event, the person, and the situation. We are blocked to turning our will over and only a decision can begin the process of surrender away for our false programs for happiness.

The desire for the power over our selves can be a trap. Jesus made this the first step in the mission...that is why the Rich Man went away sad when Jesus told him to give everything away and follow him...he could not make that decision.

But the idea of “Personal Sacrifice” is the possibility to assist the will to make the decision and hold to it. Personal sacrifice is part of the Olympics

and the way of the hero....the recent movie, “Rogue One,” is about a sacrifice in a science fiction movie which caused many young people to respect the movie and cast.

But the genius of these steps is that the hero is not any kind of worthiness, but is in fact unworthiness.... “When I am weak that I am strong (2 Cor 12:10)

- 4) The Fourth Commandment and the Fourth Step: Honor your father and your mother.

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The fourth commandment opens the second table of the Decalogue.

It shows us the order of charity. God has willed that, after him, we should honor our parents to whom we owe life and who have handed on to us the knowledge of God. We are obliged to honor and respect all those whom God, for our good.

Matthew 26:41 shows Jesus warning the Apostles: Be awake and pray that you pass the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” He is at the Mount of Olives in the Garden of **Gethsemane** and has been praying. He says this and leaves them for the second time to pray that his cup of sacrifice may pass, but He concludes with “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done! (Mt 26:42).

- 5) The Fifth Commandment and the Fifth Step: You shall not kill.
Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

2262 In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment, "You shall not kill,"⁶² and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred, and vengeance. Going further, Christ asks his disciples to turn the other cheek, to love their enemies.⁶³ He did not defend himself and told Peter to leave his sword in its sheath.⁶⁴

Rohr believed that some people were driven to addictions to quiet their constant inner critic; another reason to hate themselves!

The moral inventory is not to discover how good or bad I am and regain some moral high ground, but it is to begin some honest "shadow boxing" which is the heart of spiritual awakening.

Without confidence in a Greater Love, none of us will have the courage to go inside...

There is a vacuum that God alone can fill. Therese of Lisieux called this her "Little Way."...the Gospel itself. This is not about moral superiority according to Rohr, but the struggle itself, and the encounter and wisdom that comes from it.

A search for a moral inventory for the sake of truth and humility and generosity of spirit, not vengeance on the self...

Fifth Commandment **2288** Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good.

- 6) Sixth Commandment You shall not commit adultery.

2331 "God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image. ... God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the *vocation*, and thus the capacity and responsibility, *of love and communion*."¹¹⁵

7) Seventh Commandment You shall not steal.

[The Seventh Commandment] It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor.

8) [The Eighth Commandment] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Offenses against the truth express by word or deed a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness: they are fundamental infidelities to God and, in this sense, they undermine the foundations of the covenant.

9) [The Ninth Commandment] You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

10) [The Tenth Commandment] You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

2514 St. John distinguishes three kinds of covetousness or concupiscence: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life.³⁰¹ In the Catholic catechetical tradition, the ninth commandment forbids carnal concupiscence; the tenth forbids coveting another's goods.

2515 Etymologically, "concupiscence" can refer to any intense form of human desire.

As a result of **original sin**, according to Catholics, human nature has not been totally corrupted (as opposed to the teaching of Luther and Calvin); rather, human nature has only been weakened and wounded, subject to ignorance, suffering, the domination of death, and the inclination to **sin** and evil (CCC 405, 418)

Discipline and Virtue are needed according to Fr. John Connelly.

11) The Fifth Step: *Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

John 20:23- "If you forgive others their sins, they are indeed forgiven. If you withhold forgiveness from one another, they are held bound."

Sin and failure is the setting and opportunity for the transformation and enlightenment of the offender...THE WATER'S OF BAPTISM MAKE THIS POSSIBLE AS IT OPENS US UP TO RECONCILIATION FROM DAY ONE....

Accountability is at the spiritual level to directly encounter God's love. The biblical way of healing is to take proper responsibility for the mistake, not for punishment, but for the sake of truth and healing.

While the classical understanding is that sin invokes punishment which allows for repentance and transformation, Rohr suggests that the perfection of God's love in Ezekiel shows sin being embraced by unconditional love which causes transformation and abets repentance.

The Sacrament of Confession is an accountability system that can expand and make real what Ezekiel discovered so as to not leave us in the punishment phase, but to lead to the transformation in repentance way of life.

Fulton Sheen was asked by Psychiatrists in New York City, why those Catholics who frequented the Sacrament of Confession seemed to be on less medication for their Psychiatric ills?

Rohr asks us to see justice in retribution or in restoration. The former more common and more secular than the latter. Restoration is healing what is acknowledged.

Ezekiel is seen as laying the groundwork for understanding Yahweh's Self as not reacting to human failure when Israel fails in covenant, but by loving and forgiving them by keeping His side of the covenant.

The pattern of sin followed by punishment followed by repentance followed by transformation is recalibrated by Ezekiel to sin followed by unconditional love followed by transformation followed by repentance.

Accountability and healing is the heart of confession which is only made possible by coming up from water.

The restoration of a relationship will build integrity with oneself and communion with God.

Rohr says that the forgiveness obtained is to let go of our hope for a different or better past. Acceptance of what happened leads to freedom as long as accountability and healing is part of the action.

12) The Sixth Step: *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*

We must fully own and admit that we have defects of character called sin and we are now ready to let God do the job! This is really working with the grace of God. This is the moment we really snorkel as we stand under and let things have their way with us as God will do the job. We breathe through the snorkel and God lifts us...

We pray as if it all depends on us, and we work as if it all depends on God.

God finds a way to get invited into our mess!

13) The Seventh Step: *Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*

King David in Psalm 51 asks God for mercy when his sin has been found out by Nathan. He asks to be washed clean from his guilt and to be purified from his sin.

Rohr mentions that this keeps us from a sense of “Entitlement” that is a notion that I am owed something and am more important than others. Such entitlement keeps us from the eye of the needle and the Kingdom of Heaven.

The idea of being a beggar with Prayers of Intercession or petition is raised so as to not have a self-centered, controlled version of conversion.

That lets make our own rules of our restoration....we stay motionless and do not come out of the water, we do not breath, we drown....

We humbly ask God to remove our short-comings.

14) The Eighth Step: *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*

King David told Nathan the Prophet that David had indeed sinned in taking Bathsheba and killing Uriah....

Our broken relationships are still broken in pain that we caused. The whole idea of Purgatory or indulgence is not getting off this pain, but looking at it to pray and hopefully address it. To mend the fences of pain....a pain that we cause...not who hurt us, but who we hurt....

1 John 2:9 “Anyone who claims to be in the light, but hates his brother or sister, is still in the dark”

Without this list, we are in Pop Psychology or secular philosophy to “feel good.”

It is painful to recall, or admit this past, but the grace of lamenting and grieving over how we have hurt others is a liturgy.

Einstein said that no problem can be solved by the same consciousness that caused the problem in the first place.

Resentments are not fed, and the mind feeds on gratitude and humility—all the time....

15) The Ninth Step: *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

The Prodigal Son told his father that he had sinned against heaven and against the father. He no longer deserved to be called the son. He asked to be treated as one of the servants. (Luke 15:19)

The books of Wisdom or Sophia looked at the Bible to find the best way to get things done.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount lets Him be a sage, a wise man, a teacher of commonsense spiritual wisdom. Jesus said to "follow me" and never once said "worship me."

Is the spiritual life to liberate the humanity of others and to use wisdom to protect our own humanity?

Rohr ponders that it takes seven to ten years for a married couple to fight fairly.

When to apologize, to who? How to do it and where to make amends? To make amends in ways that do not injure others... Rohr says that the 12 Steps are about two things: making amends and keeping us from wounding one another further.

16) The Tenth Step: *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter was upset that He asked him a third time and said, 'Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.' John 21: 17

The endless examination of conscience seems never to end...it prepares one for Prayer and Meditation as only when ready to stop obsessing, can we pray without ceasing...

The consciousness that sees me seeing...that knows that I am knowing...that which underlies and observes me observing...steps us back from compulsiveness and attaching..... The obsessions stop or slow down.

Becoming aware of my feelings... Ephesians sees this transformation as a “spiritual revolution of the mind” (Ephesians 4:23).

Step 10 is not a moral inventory, but a personal inventory to watch ourselves, objectively, calmly, and compassionately as Jesus told us to ‘love our enemies.’

17) The Eleventh Step: *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.*

Elijah is in the cave looking at fire and storms, and then all is calm...He hears: “Be still, and know that I am God.” (In Psalm 46:10 & 1 Kings 19:9-13)

9There he came to a cave, where he took shelter. But the word of the LORD came to him: Why are you here, Elijah? 10He answered: “I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant. They have destroyed your altars and murdered your prophets by the sword. I alone remain, and they seek to take my life.” 11^c Then the LORD said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD;* the LORD will pass by.

There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake; **12after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound.***

13When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. A voice said to him, Why are you here, Elijah?

Elijah AND Paul now put aside the Old Self which was corrupted by following illusory desires, The mind must be renewed by a spiritual revolution (Ephesians 4:22-23)

How do we let God change us? Do we force the breathing or the snorkel?

Rohr calls this “conscious contact with God.”

Merton said, “The will of God is not a ‘fate’ to which we must submit, but a creative act in our life that produces something absolutely new, something hitherto unforeseen by the laws and established patterns.

We are ready to do the will of God.

Watch your thought; they become words.

Watch your words; they become actions.

Watch your actions; they become habits.

Watch your habits; they become character.

Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

18) The Twelfth Step: *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Simon, Simon, you must be sifted like wheat, and once you have recovered, you in turn, **but strengthen your brothers.**” (Luke 22:31-32)

“What was given to you freely, you must give away freely.” Matthew 10:8

St. Paul said, “ For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures;^a that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures;^b that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.^c After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.⁷After that he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me.^d For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.^e But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God [that is] with me. “(1 Corinthians 15:3-10)

Does religion just rearrange the deck chairs on a titanic cruise ship with isolated passengers, maintaining his or her personal program for happiness as they sink?

“If good works do not accompany faith, it is quite dead” (James 2:17).

WE ARE NOW BACK ON THE WATER....I AM HOLDING MY SNORKEL AND MASK....(mask now held up...)

We will suffocate if we just keep breathing in, we will dry out if we do not dip into the water, and we will drown if we stay too deep...

The sound of Yahweh is an imitation of the sound of breathing in and out according to Rohr. The name of God is in the cycle of taking in and giving back out.

We breathe the Air that always surrounds us, feeds us, and fills us. Some call it God. Rohr tells us that we will suffocate if we just keep breathing in. The Jewish Name for the Holy One is Yahweh which is believed to be an imitation of the sound of breathing in and out. The cycle of taking in and giving back out.

Rohr mentions that he would like to see more church members giving their talents to their church after the breath in the prayers and liturgy to avoid “passive membership.”

I would rather ask that when we come to church, the sacraments or liturgy that we simply place our minds to be open to “participate” in silent prayer, response prayer, or in communal song. The silent prayer is seen by the priest as we know that the person is focused on the snorkel of the breath of God.

Perhaps the Step 12 Spiritual awakening is only possible once in a while for many of us, but in that “moment,” we breathe with a focus that allows an open soul to touch God.

St. Paul felt like a “wretched man as he wished to be delivered from the body of death in Romans 7:24. Rohr was told that in the Hebrew Bible, there is really only one sin, and the one and only sin is idolatry: making something a god that is not God. These idols have no mouths that speak, no eyes that see, no ears that hear and no breath to breathe into us and no love to offer us...

The spiritual love, the spiritual breath, the grace, is the way... The waves of Sr. Carol Bieleck’s poem called “*Breathing Underwater*” wash over us and we breathe again, we clear out the snorkel and dive, and come up again....we are in the moment and then out of the moment of prayer, we are in relationship with God and then we feel out of relationship. We only get the glimpse of love when we fall into it, almost against our wills because it is too scary to be imagined ahead of time....the higher power, the love of God is still there....the grace of God, the Mercy of God was always there for us to breathe in.

We can breathe, and we can even breathe under water, because the breath of God is everywhere.

Breathing Under Water, by Sr. Carol Bieleck, R.S.C.J. (unpublished)

I built my house by the sea.

Not on the sands, mind you;
not on the shifting sand.

And I built it of rock.

A strong house
by a strong sea.

And we got well acquainted, the sea and I.

Good neighbors.

Not that we spoke much.

We met in silences.

Respectful, keeping our distance,
but looking our thoughts across the fence of sand.

Always, the fence of sand our barrier,
always, the sand between.

And then one day,

-and I still don't know how it happened –
the sea came.

Without warning.

Without welcome, even

Not sudden and swift, but a shifting across the sand like wine,
less like the flow of water than the flow of blood.

Slow, but coming.

Slow, but flowing like an open wound.

And I thought of flight and I thought of drowning and I thought of death.

And while I thought the sea crept higher, till it reached my door.

And I knew, then, there was neither flight, nor death, nor drowning.

That when the sea comes calling, you stop being neighbors,

Well acquainted, friendly-at-a-distance neighbors,

And you give your house for a coral castle,

And you learn to breathe underwater.

