

Religious Practice January 2 to Epiphany St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious Friday,
January 4, 2019 **1 Jn 3:7-10;** Jn 1:35-42 (Our actions and our thoughts and our way of
living has to reflect our experience or our faith of God and of our unity with God and our unity with
one another.)

“In this way, the children of God and the children of the devil are made plain; no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother.”

On the one hand this might seem a little bit too extreme, too black and white, but it has to be said, because **the Christian community has to strive to live in righteousness.** Another way of putting this is this: all religion, all religions, have always been based upon a fundamental experience or intuition of the unity of everything, that all creation is one reality and God is the reality behind all other realities, so that **everything really exists in God.** That is simply put what religion is about.

Now this letter is saying if that is our experience or our intuition, then our life has to follow suit, which is what **religious practice** is about; it's about following suit, **not just having a religious experience, but practicing that experience: ethically, in terms of prayer and mental life and intellect or understanding, so understand how it all fits together.**

Now we all can't do that for ourselves; there are what you might say **schools of religious practice.** In our Church I could say five, off the bat, basic ones, five different flavors you might say of religious experience. You could call them yogas; that's the original meaning of yoga. It's a practice; it's **a practice of life that is consistent with a perception or an intuition or an experience of utter unity.** Now you can think about this just for a moment; there are many ethical implications here. **You understand where all the commandments come from. They are all ways of saying this is not compatible with the unity we all have.**

Now this is important to write about because, and especially in the Western world, we have **two major errors** that have entered. The first came with the **Protestant Reformation, the idea that somehow faith supersedes and cancels out consequences.** Not exactly. Mercy is great and mercy can bring a healing to all aspects of our lives and help us to right consequences, but it just does not blot out consequences, but that is the idea that many of the reformers had, which is why they **eliminated the idea of merit.** Well merit is based on the idea that good actions have good

consequences and bad actions have bad consequences. Well they didn't want consequences. **They wanted to believe if they simply believed in God as their Lord and Savior, all the consequences of their wrong choices would be canceled out.** Well not quite; that's not realistic. I don't blame them for their bad idea, but if you look at history and you look at human experience, you see it doesn't work that way. It's not correct.

The second wrong idea came from the **Enlightenment that said we don't even need faith anymore; all we need is experience.** This has led to the slogan today: "I'm not religious; I'm spiritual," meaning I have some experience of spiritually, whatever that is, and I don't need to practice anything. **I don't need to follow any school of thought.** Well yeah, we do. We can't all make up our schools of thought.

And by the way, what are they? **Benedictine**, the Benedictine way of life is a yoga, is a religious practice. **Carmelite**, the Carmelite way of life is a religious practice, a yoga, the two great leaders Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross. The **Dominican**, the three great leaders were Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, and Meister Eckhart. Then there's the **Franciscan** with St. Francis himself and Bonaventure. And then there's finally the **Jesuit** with Ignatius and all his followers. **These are holistic ways of living.** And except for the Benedictine they are applicable to every person. **No matter what our station in life, no matter what we are doing, we can practice one of them.** In some way we have to find a way of doing.

Now **there are others.** Today we celebrate St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. She also had a definite religious practice, which she taught her sisters. And there are many others. But **the idea is integration. Our actions and our thoughts and our way of living has to reflect our experience or our faith in God and of our unity with God and our unity with one another.** Thus, "no one who fails to act in righteousness belongs to God, nor anyone who does not love his brother or sister."