

## ***Etty Hillesum – A Postmodern Spiritual/Mystical Journey***

The transitional periods of Etty Hillesum's life

- 1) A life that was Damaged
- 2) A life that was Re-shaped
- 3) A life that was Offered

The 3 traits espoused by Etty that witness to her spiritual/mystical transformation

- 1) Refusal to hate
- 2) Refusal to hide
- 3) Belief in the beauty of life

The 5 aspects of her life that makes her contemporary to our times (Woodhouse video)

- 1) She came from a dysfunctional family
- 2) She had no interest in institutional religion
- 3) Contemplative practice was the heart of her faith
- 4) Her spirituality crossed the boundaries of religions
- 5) Her spirituality was forged against the background of a collapsing world filled with fear and hate

The 4 invitations Etty makes to our secular and individualistic postmodern world.  
(Woodhouse 134)

- 1) She interrupts our skepticism about faith and invites us to believe again
- 2) She interrupts our narrow assumptions about religion and invites us to pray
- 3) She interrupts our easy hatreds of our enemy and invites us to see
- 4) She interrupts our despair about the future and invites us to be courageous

### **For further reading, listening, and viewing**

Hillesum, Etty, *Etty Hillesum: An Interrupted Life the Diaries, 1941-1943 and Letters from Westerbork*. Picador, 1996

Rohr, Richard, *True Self False Self (CD's)*. St Anthony Messenger Press 2003

Woodhouse, Patrick, *Etty Hillesum: A Life transformed*. Bloomsbury, 2009

Woodhouse, Patrick, Etty Hillesum YouTube video

## Etty Hillesum Quotes for Lectio Divina

- Thinking gets you nowhere. It may be a fine and noble aid in academic studies, but you can't think your way out of emotional difficulties. That takes something altogether different. You have to make yourself passive then; and just listen. Re-establish contact with a slice of eternity.
- You must live and breathe with your soul ... If you live by you mind alone, yours is but a poor existence.
- There is a really deep well inside me and in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then he must be dug out again.
- To sum up, this is what I really want to say: Nazi barbarism evokes the same kind of barbarism in ourselves ... We have to reject that barbarism within us, we must not fan the hatred within us, because if we do, the world will not be able to pull itself one inch further out of the mire.
- We form fixed ideas ... in order to have some certainty in this confusing, ever shifting life of ours, but in doing so we sacrifice real life with all its nuances and elements of surprise, as well as selling it short. Life cannot be forced into a system ... And it is to systems, sometimes built with great hardship, that men sacrifice reality and truth.
- The greatest cause of suffering in so many of our people is their utter lack of inner preparation.
- Yes, we carry everything within us, God and Heaven and Hell and Earth and Life and Death and all of history. The externals are simply so many props; everything we need is within us. And we have to take everything that comes: the bad with the good which does not mean we cannot devote our life to curing the bad.

*The writer and theologian Philip Sheldrake suggests that there is a mismatch of questions [concerning spirituality]. There is the question which the institutions of religion still largely focus on, namely 'What or who is God?' But behind the 'contemporary spiritual quest' there is a different question (though in the mystical tradition, a related one) namely 'Who am I?' The problem for the religious institutions is that ... they are exploring an answer to the former question, which increasingly is not being asked. (Woodhouse 138)*