



SIEBENQUELL

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# When seeing becomes seeing

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ILJA REPIN: MODEST MUSSORGSKY

Seeing more deeply deeper is an indispensable prerequisite for perceiving the fullness of life and ultimately arriving at an attitude in which we can gratefully say: »We are blessed«.

This was very much on our minds on our second Wellspring Day this year. In preparing for it, I came across an article by Gotthard Fuchs (in Christ in der Gegenwart 5-2023) in which he reflects on the importance of contemplative looking. He reminds us of the important exercise of looking at pictures in art classes, which can help us to move from looking quickly to lingering. Suddenly a memory arose in me:

Years ago, in an exhibition at Bonn's Kunsthalle, I saw extraordinary paintings from the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow that I had never seen before. »Russia's Soul« was the title of the exhibition and there was one portrait I will never forget: Modest Mussorgsky, at the end of his life, painted by Ilya Repin. It drew me in and held me, more and more it shook me. I looked at

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the eyes, the rings under them, the shaggy hair and the beard, as if he had just gotten up. Then I noticed the dressing gown and increasingly had the feeling of invading the privacy of this person, a person who was not in good shape. Everything I saw spoke to me of him. He came alive before my eyes. I was moved by what and who I saw. I felt sorry for him, sitting so exposed in front of me. Every detail my eyes took in sank into my heart.

How then did the painter look at his subject - with how much time, devotion and attentiveness for the reality that presented itself to him?

Real looking, true seeing is a contemplative act. Then we can understand what Rilke described in a letter from Paris in 1907, where he visited and contemplated Paul Cézanne's paintings every day:

»Gazing' is such a wonderful thing of which we know so little. We are completely turned outwards with it, but just when we are the most so, things seem to be going on in us that have been waiting longingly to be unobserved. And while they are taking place, intact and strangely anonymous, within us, outside of us, - their significance is growing in the object outside, convincing and strong, - their only possible name, in which we blissfully and reverently recognise what is happening within us.« (quoted by G. Fuchs op. cit.) Contemplating, Rilke sank into the way Cézanne perceived the world, his counterpart, and realised that this painter wanted nothing more than to »release the friendship of all these things into the wide air« (op. cit.).

Seeing in this manner leads us to perceive the fullness that is offered to us.

Seeing like this can move us to an attitude of confessing, »We are blessed.«

*Rosemarie Monnerjahn*

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