**Visual Journaling and Spiritual Direction: A way to go deeper than words**

**How Words Betray Our Feelings**

“When we use words to talk about our feelings, what we often get is the left brain’s judgmental interpretation. But when we use the right brain’s language of imagery, we get the truth of our experiences and feelings, because judgment is not a right-brain function.” *Art and Healing,* Barbara Ganim, p. 23

‣ this way of prayer is good for those who tend to live in their thoughts and for people who mistake themselves for their thoughts: “I am my thoughts.”

‣ when we use words to talk about feelings, we often add judgmental interpretations of those feelings.

‣ when we access the right brain’s language of imagery, we get at more of the truth of our experiences and feelings, because judgment isn’t a right brain function.

‣ even if we draw a picture of our left-brained, judgmental interpretation of an emotion, the process of drawing pulls us into a more right-brained presentation.

**Visual Journaling Exercise**

**Instructions:**

·        You will need a journal, a large sheet of paper and pastels, crayons or markers for this exercise.

·         Read through the entire exercise a couple of times so that you understand the progression.

·         Then, keeping the instructions close at hand, begin with a time of silence and heart preparation. Begin when you feel ready. Know that you won’t have to show your picture to anyone; if you’re self-conscious about this sort of thing you can now lay that aside!

* Take a few moments to relax, breathe deeply and turn your heart toward God in a posture of prayer. Once you feel ready, ask the Spirit to bring to mind a recent experience or event that has evoked a strong emotion (positive or negative).

1.    Think of the best word to describe the emotion and write it down in your journal.

2.    Think about it, how it feels to you and then write one or two sentences to describe your

feeling.

3.   Read your description. What do your words tell you about how you experience this

emotion inside you, in your body?

* This time, ask God to help you become present to how this emotion feels in your body.

1.   As you do, imagine what this emotion would look like if it was an image.

2.      When an image comes to mind, open your eyes, select colors that express this

image/emotion and begin to draw the image.

3.      If no image comes to mind readily, then select a color and begin to let your hand

spontaneously express what this emotion feels like. As you draw, you will likely see a

form emerge. Complete the image.

4.      Now that you have expressed the feeling in an image, look at it and see what else you

learn about your experience of this emotion. What questions do you have? What do you

observe?

* Compare your image with the words you used to describe the emotion and answer the following questions in your journal.

1.    How do you feel your image symbolizes your emotion?

2.    What do the colors tell you about this feeling?

3.    What do you learn about yourself and what this emotion evokes?

4.    How might you use different words (left brain) to bring agreement to your

        experience (right brain)?

* End your time by releasing, in prayer, what you feel to God. Invite Him to speak more to you as you take a few moments of silence.

**Resources:**

* *Awakening the Creative Spirit: Bringing the Arts to Spiritual Direction* by Christine Valters Paintner and Betsey Beckman
* *Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal your Body, Mind, and Spirit* by Barbara Ganim
* *Visual Journaling: Going Deeper than Words* by Barbara Ganim
* *The Artist’s Rule: Nurturing the Creative Soul with Monastic Wisdom* by Christine Valters Paintner
* *Awaken Your Senses: Exercises for Exploring the Wonder of God* by J. Brent Bill and Beth A. Booram