

## Hollow Out: Emptiness, Form and Purpose

---

By Lynette McGowen, guest speaker

December 14, 2014

Third Sunday in Advent

### Sermon

Our First Sunday in Advent was – ‘Wake Up! The Apocalypse is Now!’

Our Second Sunday was - ‘Open Up: The Problem with Mary’

Today we will be practicing another contemplative method for today’s worship experience. In the past we’ve practiced ‘lectio divina’ and ‘centering prayer’. Can anyone give a short description of each method?

Today’s method is called ‘guided imagery’. The purpose is to imagine you are experiencing the images, it’s important to use all of your senses (similar to lectio divina).

Before I introduce the 4 images we will use today . . . a nest, chalice, flute and bowl. I want to introduce the theme for this third Sunday in Advent . . . Hollow Out. *Read bulletin summary:*

I’m going to be relying heavily on a small booklet written in the 1950s by Caryll Houselander. She has been described as a lay Roman Catholic ecclesiastical artist, mystic, popular religious writer and poet.

The three mystical experiences she claimed to have experienced convinced her that Christ is to be found in all people, even those whom the world shunned because they did not conform to certain standards of piety. She would write that if people looked for Christ in only the "saints," they would not find him. She herself smoked and drank and had a sharp tongue. She returned to [the Catholic Church](#) in 1925, but her spiritual reading was founded almost entirely on the Gospels, rather than the Fathers of the Church or official Church documents. She met and fell in love with [Sidney Reilly](#), famous spy and the model for [Ian Flemings](#) "[James Bond](#)", but he left her broken-hearted when he married another woman. She would never marry.

Her first book, *This War is the Passion*, was published in 1941 and in it she placed the suffering of the individual and its meaning within the mystical body of Christ.

During the Second World War, doctors began sending patients to Houselander for counseling and therapy. Even though she lacked formal education in this area, she seemed to have a natural empathy for people in mental anguish and the talent for helping them to rebuild their world.

A psychiatrist, Eric Strauss, later President of the [British Psychological Society](#), said of Houselander: "she loved them back to life... .she was a divine eccentric."

Houselander titled her autobiography *A Rocking-Horse Catholic* to differentiate herself from those termed "cradle Catholics". She died of [breast cancer](#) in 1954, at the age of 53.

## Hollow Out = Emptiness

'That virginal quality which, for want of a better word, I call emptiness is the beginning of this contemplation.

It is not a formless emptiness, a void without meaning; on the contrary it has a shape, a form given to it by the purpose for which it is intended.

It is emptiness like the hollow in the reed, or flute, the narrow riftless emptiness which can have only one destiny: to receive the piper's breath and to utter the song that is in his heart.

It is emptiness like the hollow in the cup, the chalice, shaped to receive water or wine.

It is the emptiness like that of a bird's nest, built in a round warm ring to receive the little bird.

It is the emptiness like that of a bowl, shaped to hold a medley of fruit, or hearty soup.

Emptiness is a very common complaint in our days . . . the kind that is a void, meaningless, and unhappy.

Strangely enough, those who complain the loudest of the emptiness of their lives are usually people whose lives are overcrowded, filled with trivial details, plans, desires, ambitions, unsatisfied cravings for passing pleasures, doubts, anxieties and fears . . . Those who complain in these circumstances of the emptiness of their lives are usually afraid to allow space or silence or pause in their lives. They dread space, for they want material things crowded together, so that there will always be something to lean on for support. They dread silence, because they do not want to hear their own pulses beating out the seconds of their empty and unfulfilled lives.'

The emptiness that we will visualize today is a sacred space, a hollowing out, that is open and receptive . . . an emptiness that has a special form, purpose, and intentionality. It is the purpose for which something is made that decides the material which is used. And what is our material?

Caryll continues, “Our own effort will consist in sifting and sorting out everything that is not essential and fills up space and silence in us and in discovering what sort of shape this emptiness in us is. From this we shall learn what sort of purpose God has for us.

Are we reed pipes? Is He waiting to live lyrically through us?

Are we chalices: Does He ask to be sacrificed in us?

Are we nests? Does He desire of us a warm, sweet abiding in domestic life at home?”

Now, coming back to our guided imagery. The purpose is to use your imagination, to use all of your senses.

I am inviting you to use one of the four images, actually on the table. The flute, the cup, the nest or the bowl. I am also inviting you to also imagine the process in making each of these, and if possible, to liken it (or parts of it) to your own life.

For example, we know that both the male and female swallow build their nest by collecting mud and often mixing it with grass stems to make pellets. They work on it usually in the mornings, and need to make up to 1,000 trips. Maybe you’re experiencing a phase of life that feels like –one same trip after the next . . .

Or what about the glass-blown chalice . . . 12 steps. Maybe you’re just at the first step, which is to be put into the 2,000 degree furnace

Or the bowl, which can’t be made until the tree is cut down, cut apart, left to dry . . .

Or a flute, maybe you’re at a phase of life where the music is playing smoothly and in tune.

Steps:

Get comfortable in your seat

Take a few deep breaths

Then IMAGINE

10 minutes

Ring the bowl.

Quote from 'Reed of God'

It is emptiness like the hollow in the reed, which can have only one destiny; to receive the piper's breath and to utter the song that is in his heart. She (Mary) was a reed through which the Eternal Love was to be piped as a shepherd's song.