**Week 7: St. Hildegard of Bingen/Sanctus**

*“Whatever you are doing, that which makes you feel the most alive...that is where God is.”*

* *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

St. Hildegard of Bingen

* B. 1098-d.1179, Hildegard was the youngest of 10 children of a wealthy family. She suffered from illness, possibly migraines, throughout her life. She reported having visions along with her illness from a very young age.
* At the age of eight, Hildegard was sent to a 400 year old Benedictine monastery which had recently opened a section for women. As Benedictines valued study highly, Hildegard read and studied much during her years at the monastery. Jutta, Hildegard’s teacher, became abbess of the convent until her death in 1136, at which time Hildegard was voted unanimously to take her place.
* Work was also an important aspect of the Benedictine life. Hildegard worked as a nurse, and later as in illustrator of manuscripts.
* In 1148-1150, Hildegard moved the convent to Rupertsberg, which gave her much more freedom in the administration of her convent seeing as she would no longer have to serve under a male abbot. The convent grew in Rupertsberg to over 50 women, and the grounds became a very popular burial place for the wealthy in the area. Her convent was sometimes criticized for allowing the sisters to retain some of their wealthy lifestyle upon entering the convent. Hildegard claimed that wearing jewelry could also glorify God.
* Hildegard did not share her visions when she was young, for she did not understand them and was afraid people would misjudge her for them. In 1141, after she became abbess, she received a vision which gave her the clarity she needed to be able to begin to share her visions. She began recording her visions which were often apocalyptic. Some of her writings clarified scripture or focused on medicine and nature which were deeply tied to spirituality at the time.
* Hildegard also wrote plays, poetry, and music. She is the first known female composer. Her music had an extraordinary range compared to other music of her time, and was quite improvisatory in style.
* Hildegard was both respected and feared. Her visions were considered powerful, but truly of God. She was very stubborn, and often resisted authority adamantly insisting that God had told her otherwise. Her supervisors almost always conceded their will to her insistence of the validity of her holy visions. Even when she was in her 80s, there is evidence of her defying the will of her supervisors to provide last rights and a sacred burial for a wealthy man whom others deemed unworthy of such respect. She claimed that God told her he should receive those honors and be buried there, and eventually her supervisors conceded to her will.
* Hildegard is considered by many to have been a feminist of her time. One of her most notable feminist quotes is, “Woman may be made from man, but no man can be made without a woman.”
* Hildegard was viewed as “outside of the box” even by people of her own time, who had a general acceptance and even respect for the dramatic effect that holy visions might have on a person.
* When she was in her 60s, Hildegard began touring as a speaker. She spoke of her visions and of her insight into the clarity of scripture mostly to other Benedictine monasteries and convents, but also at other venues. She was the only medieval woman to whom the Pope granted permission to preach to both clergy and laity.
* Hildegard was canonized by Pope Benedict the XVI in 2012, more than 800 years after her death. She was only the fourth woman to be named a doctor of the church later that same year.
* The following are some fabulous quotes of Hildegard of Bingen (I could write 10 pages of these quotes, as I find them so passionate, powerful and timeless!)

*“Don't let yourself forget that God's grace rewards not only those who never slip, but also those who bend and fall. So sing! The song of rejoicing softens hard hearts. It makes tears of godly sorrow flow from them. Singing summons the Holy Spirit. Happy praises offered in simplicity and love lead the faithful to complete harmony, without discord. Don't stop singing.”*

*“Humanity, take a good look at yourself. Inside, you’ve got heaven and earth, and all of creation. You’re a world—everything is hidden in you.”*

*“We shall awaken from our dullness and rise vigorously toward justice. If we fall in love with creation deeper and deeper, we will respond to its endangerment with passion.”*

*“Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.”*

**Reflection Questions:**

In the Old Testament, the way to God was spoken in a law full of “Thou shall not…”s. With the birth of Jesus comes not only a new law, but a new voice to the law, spoken as a “Thou **shall**…” love God, love yourself, and love each other. Consider the improvisatory freedom that Hildegard of Bingen expressed in her music. Are there any “freedoms” awakened in your life? Do you have a sense of anything in you or in your life that might be blocking you from feeling free?

Part of Hildegard’s stubborn insistence to do things her own way hinged on the certainty that came from her divine visions. Part of the strength that sustained Mary and Joseph through the anxiety of their travels to Bethlehem before Jesus’ birth as well as their flight to Egypt after His birth must have come from their encounter with Gabriel. What have you encountered in your life that has given you strength for the difficult times? In what ways have you experienced the “Holy Certainty” evidenced in the lives of Mary, Joseph, or Hildegard?

Consider Mary, Joseph, shepherds, wise men, anyone else that you can imagine as being present for the birth of Christ. Imagine how they might have experienced God’s love.

Think of somebody, either that you know personally, or somebody about whom you have heard, who has expressed their experience of God’s love in a powerful way. How do you express your experience of God’s love?

What might it mean for you to “Dare to declare who you are”?