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Continuous Intimacy with The Divine



Thomas Keating

As we practice contemplative prayer and learn to listen to the sound of sheer silence, we are instructed to disregard thoughts that are going by due to our receptive apparatus in the brain that receives all kinds of data. We let go into God all that is happening, including our thoughts, and open ourselves completely. God begins to work with us on a level of intimacy that might be called the divine therapy. In this perspective God is the greatest psychologist there ever was. Since the person we know least is ourselves, we need all the help we can get.

As we move into the silence of contemplative prayer, we experience in some degree who we really are, which is beyond our thinking mind and more real than any sense experience. If we give God the space to be God in us, he takes into consideration all the limitations and weaknesses of our human situation as reflective and self-conscious beings and heals our self-inflicted and culturally imposed woundedness.



We don't have to succeed in this world, we just have to be.

God is closer than our name, resume, personality, character, temperament, or number on the enneagram. At every moment he is manifesting God-self to us, healing the wounds of a lifetime, and using our imperfections to transform our weaknesses into humility and pure love.

As silence deepens it morphs into the divine presence in contemplative prayer. This is a pervasive presence that invites us to accept the embrace of divine love and the realization of how much God loves us.

Life is a process of increasing intimacy with God and of relaxing into the present moment by accepting and consenting to whatever is happening. The wear and tear of daily life tests the level of our transformation. If we can maintain the peace of mind that is present during the time of prayer in external difficulties and in the feeling of powerlessness, our spiritual maturity is clearly advancing.

We don't have to succeed in this world, we just have to be. That means to consent to the slice of the human condition that God has given us. There are seven or eight billion people in the world right now in whom God is working to build an intimate personal relationship, one that has never been known before and can never be repeated.

Trust in God gives us the peace to endure anything. If you don't feel you have the strength to deal with some difficulty or trial, do not let that worry you either, because then you are most identified with Christ and the infinite mercy of God. ☩



Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler

Growing in Love

Is Centering Prayer for beginners? The short answer is yes and no. The rest of the answer is Centering Prayer meets everyone at their level of preparation and their level of need. My lived experience tells me that beginning again and beginning again and beginning again is what we do in Centering Prayer. And, there are many nuances that change during a lifetime of practice. For example, we may not always return to the sacred word or symbol, as there are times when we are able to remain still and silent and simply wait.

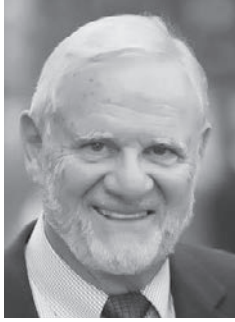
I was introduced to Centering Prayer back in 1983. For seven years prior, I had an established practice of non-conceptual meditation. When practicing Centering Prayer for the first time, the use of the sacred word did not work for me because I was already used to being in a non-conceptual state; the use of a word brought me into my head and generated thoughts. Instead, I simply used presence/being. With a desire to “do it right,” I went to see Fr. Thomas about what was going on in my practice and he simply said, “You are already where Centering Prayer is going, just relax and be still. Don’t worry about the sacred word.”

My desire to do it right was getting in the way of simply being in God’s presence. “Doing it right” in Centering Prayer meant letting go of thoughts by gently returning to the sacred word. My cultural conditioning wanted to do it right so it would “work.” When I went back to the sacred word it took me to the level of mind/thoughts which in essence took me out of prayer and into a method – which caused confusion. I had to return to my reason for changing my practice at that point in my contemplative journey – it was for the sole purpose of deepening my relationship with God, which my previous practice did not offer per se. The Centering Prayer practice is a means to deepen relationship with God, the God hidden in the darkness of the inner room, the God at the center of our being, the Indwelling Spirit.

There are deepening movements of a Centering Prayer practice – from learning the practice, to committing to daily periods of prayer, to a dedicated long-term discipline – all which disposes one to surrendering to the deeper transformative aspects of letting go into Divine Therapy. This process has its moments of beginning again; sometimes we may feel we are being moved two steps forward and one step back.

Centering prayer is a method that disposes one to contemplative prayer; it is a means of putting yourself at God’s disposal. In other words, at some point, the method drops away. It’s a waste of time to figure out how or when or why/why not this happens. This draws attention away from the Beloved One and back into the analytic mind of self-absorption and self-reflection. As in every relationship, spending time figuring it out is missing the opportunity of being present to the other and growing together in love.

Growing in love is both experienced in relationship with God and with others and often the relationships with others can mirror our relationship with God. Since my retirement message was published in the June newsletter, I have experienced countless numbers of notes, letters, emails and telephone calls from many of you that I met over the years. What a surprise to receive these messages of appreciation and love. I am grateful to each and every one of you that took the time to remember where, how and when our paths crossed. I leave this position with Contemplative Outreach enriched by the joy of your friendships and will hold you in my heart and prayers as we continue to traverse the contemplative path together. Much love and gratitude always! ☸



Fr. Carl J. Arico

“Relax – Then Just Let It Happen”

That is what he said to me when I asked him how he was doing. In his late 80’s, he has been a faithful pray-er since the 1970’s. The Centering Prayer group he started almost 35 years ago in his parish is still going strong. He is filled with gratitude for all that has been received through the years and so proud to have been on the ground floor of this miracle of God’s grace we call Contemplative Outreach, now in its 33rd year.

As Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler likes to say, “None of us have it all together but together we have it all.”

“Relax and then just let it happen.” What does this mean? For me it means you do all you can to offer your gifts to the experiences of life and then let go of any expectations and results. One of the wisdom sayings I live by is, “Trust the process,” which is another way of allowing the Holy Spirit to do whatever needs to be done.

*Send her forth from your holy heavens
and from your glorious throne dispatch her
That she may be with me and work with me,
that I may know what is pleasing to you.*

*For she knows and understands all things,
and will guide me prudently in my affairs
and safeguard me by her glory.*

- WISDOM 9: 10-11

The big stumbling block in the way of full trust is over-conceptualizing – always trying to figure it out. Trying to figure everything out, thinking we know what is best prevents us from seeing beyond our limitedness to other possibilities, to the bigger picture. We can’t be led if we are trying to lead.

The wisdom of the desert fathers has much to offer: “Thoughts lead to desires, desires lead to passion and passion leads to action (Evagrius).” How true! Thoughts have unintended consequences. Our thoughts are the seeds of our activity. What is the motivating source of our thoughts?

We talk a lot about the energy centers and the thoughts that flow from them – security and survival, affection and esteem, and power and control. These energies are natural and necessary, but our intentions are what makes them life giving or life inhibiting. Let us use the example of control.



Art by Sandy Muckleroy

If the source of our motivations is a disproportionate attachment to power and control then it will influence and color the desire, passion and action of the activity. If there is no attachment and the action is being done with “clean hands and clean heart” then the desire, passion and action will look the same but will have a different feel and influence.

*My thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says that Lord.
As high as the heavens are above the earth,
so high are my ways above your ways
and my thoughts above your thoughts.*

- ISAIAH 55: 8-9

It is interesting that once the seed is planted – out of our hand – it has a life of its own. We can nourish the area around where it is planted but cannot take it back.

This is where a nightly review of the day, an examen, can be so useful for our awakening and growth in the Spirit. What were my motivations? What thoughts dominated my day? Lord help me make them your thoughts.

Father, Son and Spirit stir up in me today true power and control, true affection and esteem, true security and survival. By true I mean that which flows from our true self and the divine presence within us, which animates our life with utmost charity and forgiveness.

I asked the artist to make this tree sculpture especially for me because it shows the essence of what the spiritual journey is about. It is modeled after the Lone Pine in Pebble Beach, California, which hovers over the Pacific Ocean, the wind blowing it whichever way, molding and shaping it. And so I pray it is with me: may I allow the Holy Spirit – the Ruah, the Sacred Breath — to mold and shape me as I consent to the presence and action of God and grow where I am planted, putting on the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 16).

The liturgical year is beginning again – another invitation to be molded and shaped. Advent calls us to awaken, Lent calls us to repent (change the direction we are looking for happiness) and the rest of the year in Ordinary Time encourages us to do what we need to do and “relax – just let it happen.” ☪



Laundromat

I have spent
Long hours in the
laundromat of my mind

pre-soaking neurons
in dank waters of
every why and why not,

obsessing
through each cycle
of life,

spin-dry thoughts
tossed and tumbled
over and over

until my synapses
run out of quarters
to feed this need

for a clean heart.

by Anne Magee Dichele, from *Ankle Deep and Drowning*, Antrim House, Simsbury, CT

*There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord;
there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.*

2 CORINTHIANS 12: 4-7

Dear CO Community,

The June newsletter announced the year-end retirements of three of our longtime, faithful and much loved staff members: Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, Susan Komis and Marie Howard. At that time, we reported that we would be putting an interim plan in place. The framework for the coming year includes two part-time positions: an Interim Administrator and a Coordinator of Volunteers, as well as an Ad Hoc Transition Team. We believe this structure will maintain all the excellent programs and services we offer now while at the same time allow us to explore how to be a contemplative community in this next chapter of our history. We want to have a process of engagement — to be able to listen closely to the voice of the Holy Spirit in each other so that we may carry out our Vision. This interim structure is designed to be flexible and open in order to readily follow the Spirit's call.

We joyfully share that Pat Johnson is serving as the Interim Administrator. Marie Howard, instead of retiring at the end of the year, will become Coordinator of Volunteers. The Ad Hoc Transition Team members are Jenny Adamson, Maru Ladron de Guevara, Adal Henriquez, John Kelsey and Julie Saad. We greatly appreciate the generosity and open hearts of these experienced servant leaders.

We would also like to acknowledge and thank our dedicated continuing staff members: Pamela Begeman, Mary Anne Best, Donna Cole, Claire Eng and Fionnuala Quinn. They prayerfully support our community with great skill and joy. Their commitment is exceptional. Gracias.

We thank Gail and Susan who have been tireless mentors, servant leaders and friends. We look forward to their continued presence with us as retirees. We offer our heartfelt gratitude and wish them many blessings.

This time of transition offers many wonderful opportunities: a chance to look back with deep gratitude for what has been and for all those who have given so much; a time to collectively listen and take the next step; and a time to deepen our trust in God's abiding Presence.

We look forward to having a community conference in Denver September 21-24, 2017. Please save these dates. After a two year conference hiatus, coming together will be especially important as we look to our future.

One of the board's responsibilities is to articulate our intentions for the coming year. They are listed on the following page.

As Fr. Thomas Keating reminds us in *Consenting to God as God Is*, "The primary act of leadership that anybody can perform for us is doing Centering Prayer twice daily and letting ourselves be led into the mystery of God within us." We look forward to seeing where the Spirit leads and we thank you for your vital participation in this unfolding. As always we invite your input.

With gratitude,

Nick Cole, Kathy Di Fede, Mary Dwyer, Thomas Hall, Tom Smith, Lois Snowden and Fr. Gilberto Walker

2017 INTENTIONS

PRAYER AND COMMUNION

- Share the Prayer: Focus on sharing prayer practices of Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, Welcoming Prayer and Forgiveness Prayer.

COMMUNICATION

- Communication Channels: Recognizing the high priority of communication in the vital functioning of CO, commit to using all available communication channels.
- International Conference: Hold an International Conference to bring together the CO community, encouraging open communication, discussion of ideas, and sharing of the CO vision.
- Listen and Respond: Ensure that leadership is designed to listen deeply and respond to the emerging needs of the CO community, including providing financial support.

OPENNESS/TRANSPARENCY

- Transparency: Commit to transparency and openness on all levels, respecting all insights and information as vital and available to the entire organism.
- Trust: Commit to supporting a culture of radical, invincible trust.
- Financial Openness: Ensure financial transparency to the CO organization.

CONTEMPLATIVE STRUCTURE

- Contemplative Community: Support the transformation from a corporate structure to a contemplative community.
- Collaboration and Empowerment: In transitioning to a broad-based contemplative structure, led by the Holy Spirit and serving the needs of all members, respect and engage the principles of collaboration and empowerment.
- Stability: Stabilize the support system for CO.
- Volunteer Organism: Promote the involvement of volunteers (and minimize the hiring of paid staff as much as possible and reasonable). Recognizing that Contemplative Outreach is essentially an organism served by and for volunteers, ensure consultation, support, and appreciation of volunteers.
- Simplicity: In supporting the needs of the CO community, avoid complex structures. Strive for simplicity in communication, programs, and resources.
- Self-Sustaining Activities: Encourage chapters and local programs/activities to be self-sustaining.
- Board Meetings: Facilitate three face-to-face Governing Board meetings. Include Transition Team members.

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

- Resources: Support the CO community with resources, activities and programs that are accessible, affordable, and available.
- Chapter Support: Ensure that CPS service teams and chapter volunteers receive the resources needed (financial and personal support) to share the practices and support the needs of chapters.
- International: Support international growth and development in a real and concrete way, including financial investment, recognizing that growth in Centering Prayer and contemplative practices in new locations is a genuine fruit of the divine economy.
- Investment: Seek ways to invest financially in CO growth, partnering, and support.

ECUMENICAL AND INTERSPIRITUAL OUTREACH

- Dialogue and Partnering: Energetically reach out to other contemplative groups for dialogue and potential partnering.
- Interspiritual Dialogue: Similarly, become aware of ways to participate in interspiritual dialogue. Seek out opportunities to sponsor or partner with interspiritual contemplative groups.

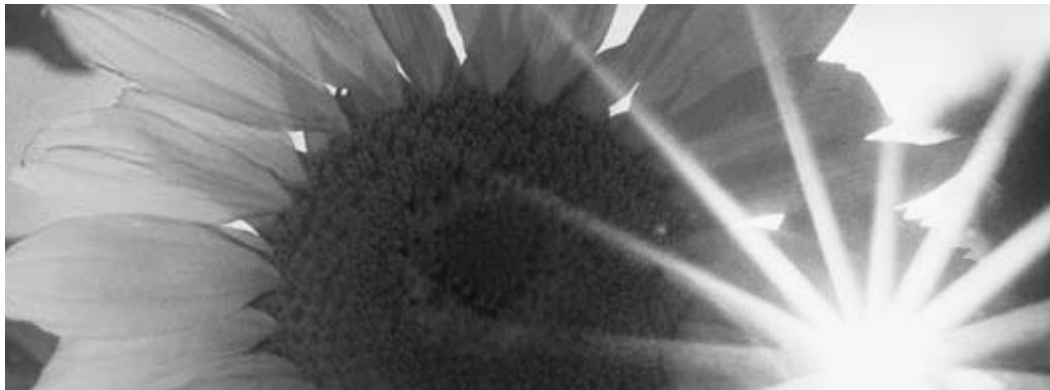
Note of Gratitude

Thomas Keating

As Gail Fitzpatrick Hopler and Susan Komis complete their service as staff members of Contemplative Outreach, they have shared their plan to continue to serve the community in various ways. They are not leaving us, but moving to other forms of service that may prove to be even more inspired and effective than those they have already given.

My deep appreciation goes to Susan for her great gifts of teaching and retreat-giving which she has so generously provided for more than 26 years. In addition I treasure her instruction and guidance of so many aspirants to the contemplative life. I especially admire her training workshops in the skills of servant leadership which so many have benefitted from and which, along with her retreat and visioning days, she plans to continue. Thanks, Susan, for your untiring and dedicated support of our contemplative vision and for your witness of friendship and love for all of us, your grateful colleagues.

What kind of thanks can I offer to Gail who has born the heat of the day as Executive Director of Contemplative Outreach for over 30 years? My heart is broken by the remembrance of how much she suffered and struggled to sustain our vision and maintain our existence during difficult times and seemingly hopeless situations. She was at the center of all the activities that led to our growth through her creative energies and genuine love of Contemplative Outreach and all of its members. I will greatly miss our precious collaboration. She will continue to support our work always just by being who she is.



The Gift of Being: Lessons from My Grandson

by Mary Anne Best



What is the loftiest gift that there is in the whole universe? Do you have an idea? I have an answer: the bestowal of being. To really take this in in a deep and profound way actually changes everything.

The first way I looked at this vast question was through Scripture. We find in Scripture various mentions of children. Jesus said that we are to be like them, to let go of our self and become as little children. St. Paul says, “Christ, for whom and through whom all things exist, is bringing many children to glory.” Jesus said, “Let the children come to me and do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” And, “I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it. Then he embraced them and blessed them, and placed his hands on them.”

We’ve been given a promise: “The kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” They will be brought to glory and they will be embraced and touched and blessed. What does this mean?

Ram Dass in his book *Be Here Now* says this: “ ‘Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.’ That’s a secret? Think of how many times you’ve heard that and you say: ‘Yeah, that’s really interesting. That’s great.’ The secret is a secret to you because of where your head is at. Your receiving mechanism isn’t tuned to that particular frequency.

“In my case I kept reading the books but I didn’t understand them. They were yelling the secrets but I couldn’t hear them because I was looking at them from the wrong place! I still wanted to know that I knew. See? I was still Western man so I went and I looked and looked and looked like a rational man looking and I didn’t find anything.

“I saw that my whole game didn’t work. It gave me all the rewards that seemed to be offered but it didn’t work. There was a place in me that knew it wasn’t working. I knew there was something else but I couldn’t get to it. At that point I gave up. And then I was ready for the next message.”

Here is the next message: It didn’t take me too long with these passages to realize that one of the primary doors to my own understanding took a profound leap on February 20, 2013 with the birth of my grandson, Charles Lawrence Best.

Three years have gone by and I have learned six lessons from my grandson. Probably more, but for now let’s focus on these six.

The first is the gift of presence and being. I had the privilege of being with him a couple of hours after he was born, and I tell you, he looked at me in a way that I knew that Somebody was there. Somebody was there, and someone was alive, and someone knew something very deep at a cellular level that I connected with, because I knew it too, even though it is lost in my “looking and looking and looking,” as Ram Dass says. He looked at me straight on and there was a radiance streaming forth from him that I have come to describe as the “original template” that all of us have imprinted on us just by the fact of the bestowal of being. It is mysterious, unexplainable.

I looked at him and I thought, “What is man?” I’ve spent decades studying about the spiritual life and practicing and doing all the things that a person could be doing, and yet looking at him made me realize in a vast way that this is a big mystery. A BIG MYSTERY, and all I can do is get little angles on it. What is a human being? Who are you? Why are you really here?

Confronted with the vast mystery of Charlie’s existence, I couldn’t help but ponder the vast mystery of my own, or anybody’s. Or the fact that there’s anything here at all. Then I realized that everything that I could take as sin or ignorance or useless suffering could be traced back to not being aware of the vastness of the mystery of life. The Psalmist said, “When I see the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you arranged, what is man that you should be mindful of him, woman that you should care for her?” Three thousand years have gone by, and we still ask the same questions.

The author of *Meditations on the Tarot* expresses it a little differently when he says, “Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Is it conceivable that a being who experiences his or her true self as belonging to the eternal hierarchies, whether a human being, an angel, or some other being, would not join in the heavenly chorus? For this chorus signifies acknowledgement that the highest good, the loftiest gift there is and that could ever be thought of in the whole universe is the bestowal of being with its endless possibilities of unfolding, straight from the great bestower of being, God.”

Jacob Boehme, who was a seventeenth century shoemaker and mystic, said, “For you must realize that the earth unfolds its properties and powers in union with Heaven, aloft above us, and that there is one heart, one being, one will, one God, all in all. When this is forgotten, confusion and disturbance resonate throughout one’s whole being.”

There’s much confusion and disturbance in the world today. I don’t sense any of it within Charlie. Not yet. He begs the question for me: Can I somehow access that place of grandeur and reside in such a place, even if it’s only from time to time?

The second gift he gave me is the gift of nonviolence. Again, the author of *Meditations on the Tarot* says that all violence can be traced back to five wounds in the human psyche. These five wounds are the desire to take and to get; the desire to retain or to keep; the desire to advance at the expense of others; the desire to hold onto things at the expense of others; and the desire for greatness. Fr. Thomas Keating expresses these same wounds in the three programs for happiness: security, affection and control.

These are necessary desires. They’re innate, necessary for survival, but at some point along the way they have to be relativized, otherwise they just keep going and extending, and the fullness of a human being is never reached at all.

I love the story Maurice Nicoll tells in *The Mark*. In a dream he had, he is climbing a hill, and he is watching a sergeant at a distance drilling some new recruits. These recruits are not paying a bit of attention to him. They’re wandering off, doing other things, their mind is not there, they’re pushing against him. Yet he sees that the sergeant keeps going, with equanimity. He doesn’t seem to be moved by the situation, he’s not angry about it, he just keeps doing his work.

Maurice Nicoll was shocked when he saw this and would later write, “This man showed no violence. He had not a will of violence. He seemed purified from violence. That was the secret. That was the source of the curious power that I detected in him; a man without violence.

“... I had only been given a glimpse into the meaning of what it would be to have a new will, a will not based on violence or having my own way. I repeat, it was only a glimpse, but I realized the possibilities of following this new will and new direction in every moment of my life.”

The third gift: the gift of silence. There isn't as much silence now as there was three years ago, but with Charlie there isn't the silence of premeditated thought or, when I speak to him he's not looking at me, thinking of what he's going to say next. It is a being-to-being exchange in the present moment, because we're meeting at a place that is beyond language and words.

If you've been on a Centering Prayer retreat you know that you can be in silence with a group of people for an hour a day, five days, seven days, ten days, and never say a word to them, and leave feeling in love with them. Why is it? Because you're meeting someplace in the deep mystery of silence. There is nothing so much like God and mystery than there is in silence. It is actually the secret of secrets. The amazing thing is that it looks like we're not doing anything at all, but what we are doing is learning to live ordinary life with, as we say, extraordinary love.

The fourth gift is that of non-judgment. With Charlie I feel recognized, not judged. What that does for me is enliven me. I feel more alive, I can let go of all masks, all pretenses, everything. To give somebody else the gift of actually being present to them without judgment is an extraordinary thing, and it is very, very rare. He allows me to touch the deepest level of my own being, my own template. When I am with him I feel truly alive, just because he's with me in non-judgment.

The fifth is the gift of playfulness. How could you not be playful around a three-year-old? I used to be busy and doing things when I was around him, but he recently stayed with me for a few days without his parents, and even though I was half dead when he left, I decided to drop all the doing-ness and just be present with him, playful. Playful is not a word that I would use to describe myself. But I was playful, and it was incredible. The connection with him was great, and it enlivened me again to be playful.

This brings me to one of my most favorite readings of Thomas Merton's: "What is serious to men is often very trivial in the sight of God. What in God might appear to us as play is perhaps what he himself takes most seriously ... and if we can let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear his call and follow him in his mysterious cosmic dance.

"We do not have to go very far to catch the echoes of that game and of that dancing. When we are alone on a starlit night, when, by chance, we see the migrating birds in autumn descending on a grove of junipers to rest and eat, when we see children in a moment when they are really children, when we know love in our own hearts, or when, like the Japanese poet Basho, we hear an old frog land in a quiet pond with a solitary splash, at such times the awakening, the turning inside out of all values, the newness, the emptiness, the purity of vision that make themselves evident, provide a glimpse of the cosmic dance.

"The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness and absurdity and despair, but it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things or stain the joy of the cosmic dance, which is always there.

"Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood whether we want it to or not. Yet the fact remains, we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds, and join in the cosmic dance."

Finally, the gift of gratuitous love. It is not earned, it is not based on worthiness, it just is.

Is this what Jesus is trying to tell us about being as a child? Just maybe. So, let us take an experiment into the new year: When you find someone in front of you that you're not particularly attracted to, or have some judgment about or are resistant to, think of them as a little child. Just think of them as a little child — what they look like, what they spent their days doing, and move toward that. Child-like, join in the cosmic dance. And we can check-in with one another in a year. ☸

Evolving into Christ

by Fionnuala Quinn O.P.

Contemplative Outreach International • Contemplative Outreach Dublin

Good poetry is inspiring and brings the reader to depth, encouraging one to take another look. Such is the case with Mary Oliver, one of America's best-loved poets. One of her poems is *Wild Geese*, and most notable is the final four lines: "Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you like wild geese, harsh and exciting - over and over announcing your place in the family of things."

We each have a place in the family of things, and finding that place is part of the human and spiritual journey. Without a doubt there is a unique role each of us is called on to play; no one else can do that for us. The world offers itself to our imagination, calls to us and draws us in.

Imaginative children can be spider man, an astronaut or a doctor, all at the same time. Our spiritual imagination can be nurtured by visiting places of great natural beauty, buildings like the Pyramids of Egypt or the art of the Sistine Chapel, or by reciting prayers or psalms, listening to Taize music, using incense with rituals and Gregorian chant, and lots more besides. These experiences can give us a sense of something beyond the immediate, can draw us inwards and upwards as we gradually experience how our imagination can lead us to continually seek God's face in mystery.

In others words, we move from the externals to greater interiority, where in and through silence the journey within becomes rich and endless and without bounds. Praying non-conceptually, disengaging from our thoughts and opening to the Spirit praying within us is what brings depth over time.

Practicing contemplatives know our silent prayer is not always "smooth sailing." The Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, says, "Things fall apart, the Center cannot hold."

In fact, the contours of our lives, such as fear, anxiety, sadness, grief, joy and a sense of being fulfilled, are all experienced in the prayer. The presence of these emotions is what makes our Centering Prayer authentic, bringing the reality of our lives and that of our world to the center.

Gregory the Great, writing in the sixth century, said that contemplative prayer is "a resting in God" that is "beyond thought, beyond word and beyond emotion," to quote Thomas Keating. This interior place has nothing to do with the "monkey mind" that likes to jump from Billy to Jack. The resting place referred to by Gregory the Great is that deep down interior place where stillness is found, supported by our silence and solitude.

As the liturgical year starts again with the Advent and Christmas seasons, the birth of Christ will become our focus. A Christmas card greeting I have sent over the years is taken from Ephesians 3:17, "May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith." What does this mean for contemplatives? Will the Advent and Christmas seasons be the same as last year, will we be a new creation at the end of it? The answer is Yes to all of the above, providing we return to "resting in God" again and again, in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the commercial world. At the spiritual level of our beings, we are continually being renewed and recreated. As the water of a river is in constant movement, so too is the inner life constantly renewed.

The spiritual journey is never static, for we are forever moving into Christ. For our Centering Prayer practice evolves from method to method-less, from head to heart, from words to wordless contemplation, to greater consciousness; we evolve into Christ slowly and ever so gently at the promptings of the Spirit. The Spirit is our guide, and as we consent to its action, our inner world changes, minute by minute. As Mary Oliver says in *Wild Geese*, "Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination, calls to you ... announcing your place in the family of things." You are invited to find your place in the family of things by entering into silence and evolving into Christ through your consent. ☸



William Congdon, *Eucaristia* 1961

*In the beginning was Power, intelligent, loving, energizing.
In the beginning was the Word ... molding whatever
might come into being in the world of matter.
... the Word through which all our most far-reaching speculations
and our encounter with the universe come together into a unity.*



*Glorious Lord Christ:
the divine influence secretly diffused and active
in the depths of matter,
the dazzling center where all innumerable fibers
of the manifold meet;
... You whose hands imprison the stars;
You who are the first and the last,
the living and the dead and the risen again;
You who gather into your exuberant unity every beauty, every affinity,
every energy, every mode of existence;
You to whom my being cries out with a desire
as vast as the universe:
In truth you are my Lord and God.
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Hymn of the Universe*

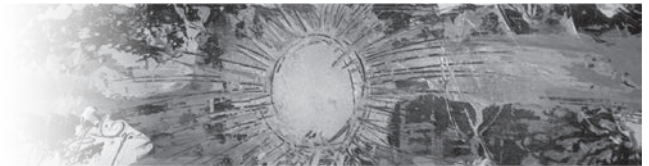


*Divine love is compassionate,
tender,
luminous,
totally self-giving,
seeking no reward,
unifying everything.*

Thomas Keating
"Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation #16,"
Open Mind, Open Heart

Please send your comments, suggestions and content submissions to Pamela Begeman at clp@coutreach.org.

NEW **GOD is LOVE**
The Heart of All Creation



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As Fr. Thomas notes in the series:

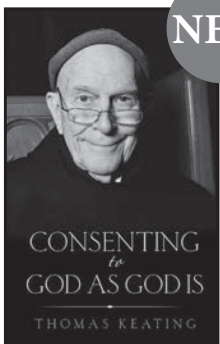
Everything in the universe – everything our senses observe and technology uncovers at the highest level of infinitude and the deepest levels of the infinitesimal – is prophetic witness of the Divine.

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... is happening in, through, and amidst every detail of life ... penetrates all that exists.

... is in relationship to every part of creation.

... is trying to move humanity to the next stage of consciousness.



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