



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 7: Attitudes Towards God



Gustave Doré, Paradiso, Canto 34 1868

"The Christian spiritual path is based on a deepening trust in God. It is trust that first allows us to take that initial leap in the dark, to encounter God at deeper levels of ourselves. And it is trust that guides the intimate refashioning of our being, the transformation of our pain, woundedness, and unconscious motivation into the person that God intended us to be."

- Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God*

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your mind.  
This is the great and first commandment.  
And a second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*  
- Matthew 22:37-39

What is your attitude toward God? And why is it important to consider this when embarking on the spiritual journey?

Our attitude towards God was formed in childhood and may carry unconscious fears and misconceptions. Early religious training, harshness from parents or teachers, and abuse or trauma suffered along the way can contribute to reflexive fear, defensiveness, distrust, and a sense of being judged that inhibit a relaxed, open, receptive and trusting disposition towards God, other people and all of life. Uncovering these beliefs, attitudes and motivations can help reduce the obstacles in developing and deepening our relationship with God.

The practice of Centering Prayer *itself* is a doorway into cultivating a relationship with God and learning who God really is, beyond any idea, image or attitude. The very act of sitting and consenting day after day is a practice of trust and surrender that will naturally expand into our lives outside of prayer.

"If you want to get to know who God is, why don't you let him introduce himself? And here is how you do it. If you want to pray, Jesus says in Matthew 6:6, 'enter your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret and your Father who is in secret will reward you.' Now this is the formula ... of how to reach the deep knowledge of God – how to relate to the God who really is and not the God of our childhood imagination, projections, or ethnic or cultural limitations."  
- Thomas Keating, *Who is God?* Talk at Contemplative Outreach Annual Conference, Chicago 2000

## **A Meditation**

For You alone my soul waits in silence;  
from the Beloved comes my salvation.  
Enfolding me with strength and steadfast love,  
my faith shall remain firm.

Yet, how long will fear rule my life,  
holding me in its grip like  
a trembling child,  
a dark and lonely grave?  
Fear keeps me from living fully, from  
sharing my gifts;  
it takes pleasure in imprisoning  
my soul.  
Fear pretends to comfort, so long has it dwelled within me;  
truly, it is my enemy.

For you alone my soul waits in silence;  
my hope is from the Beloved.  
Enfolding me with strength and  
steadfast love,  
my faith shall remain firm.  
In the Silence rests my freedom and my guidance;  
You are the Heart of my heart,  
my refuge is in the Silence.

- Nan Merrill, Psalm 62, *Psalms for Praying*

## **To Practice**

- View the video excerpt "Attitudes Toward God." This excerpt is 18.3 minutes in length. Fr. Thomas introduces two models of spirituality: The Western Model of Spirituality and the Scriptural Model of Spirituality. The Western Model is what most who were raised in Western cultures were taught in religious education and is essentially about reward and punishment based on external acts. The Scriptural Model is closer to what Jesus taught, which emphasizes cultivating a relationship with God in the present moment, what we might call the contemplative dimension of the Gospel.

- Reflect on the questions: What attitudes towards God might you have that get in the way of an ever-deepening relationship with God, and then by extension, all of life? Offer up inhibiting attitudes to God for healing.

## **Resources for Further Study:**

You may wish to read Chapter 1, "Making Friends with God" in *Intimacy with God* (2017 edition), Chapter 2, "Attitudes Towards God" in older editions.

## **Notes and Reflections:**