



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

Background and Invitation ... and A Blessing

The *Spiritual Journey* series is the foundation of the teaching legacy of Fr. Thomas Keating. It is our wish that it be made accessible and readily available within the worldwide community of Contemplative Outreach and beyond for those who wish to gain wisdom and understanding of the Christian spiritual path of transformation into Christ. The implementation of this *Spiritual Journey* offering is based upon a 2018 online course offered in conjunction with Spirituality & Practice, which was based on the original *Spiritual Journey* video series now available, unedited in its entirety, on YouTube.

*I have heard of your faith ... and your love ...
and for this reason, I do not cease to give thanks for you
as I remember you in my prayers.
I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ...
may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know God,
so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened,
you may know what is the hope to which God has called you ...*
- Ephesians 1:15-18

Like the Magi of old, on this journey we are following the star to a land that God has called us, at once unknown and yet strangely familiar as it unfolds. Along the way we encounter signposts, companions who have gone before us and companions still with us, and we encounter that most mysterious of places – our inmost being. This journey is lifelong, and it is daily. It requires all our gifts. And it is going somewhere. And where is this star that guides us to be found? The star abides in the silence and in a thousand microsigns borne of grace in ordinary life.

Background

For a number of years, the Contemplative Outreach community discussed creating a curriculum to lay a foundation of teaching, formation and community support for first understanding, and then living, the contemplative Christian life. An idea emerged from Fr. Thomas, who in January 2017 stated that he felt his legacy was the *Spiritual Journey* video series. He went on to express his desire that their viewing and study be stressed as foundational to understanding the human condition and the spiritual journey and that it should be experienced by all who aim to take this journey.

From this conversation with Fr. Thomas came the idea to offer a yearlong, in-depth, online program with the *Spiritual Journey* video series as the foundation. The intentions for the offering were:

- For education, participation, and formation, assuming a yearning to know, but no particular religious background.
- To encourage participants to listen from silence and stillness, in and through the heart, and to ground themselves in a life of contemplative practice. Embodiment of the teachings is essential for understanding.
- To the extent possible, to reframe psycho-spiritual language for our times.

A Life to Be Lived ...

Right before Christmas 2017, Fr. Thomas was interviewed about the background for the *Spiritual Journey* series and its formation more than 30 years ago, as well as his intention today. Following is an edited excerpt from this conversation:

"My motivation was first to realize that the Christian religion has a very deep and very rich tradition of spirituality and contemplative prayer. It's not merely a moralistic religion or a set of rituals to express our relationship with God. ... It's something that goes very deep, indeed into our psychic awareness and into our unconscious. So, having realized that the Christian tradition offers insights into the human condition, what we've tried to add is developmental psychology and the discoveries in the whole area of the human psyche and psychology that are being revealed as important accompaniments of the mystical wisdom of the ages. What the mystics have always envisioned is now available in many areas as a kind of 'Contemplation 101' you might say. ...

"The course that will be presented to you involves a certain openness to the wisdom of other spiritual traditions, and to the discoveries of contemporary science, especially the oneness of human nature, the interconnectedness, the interdependence of all creation from matter all the way to the deepest spiritual capacities of the human soul. ...

"The main reason we put together this whole course in Centering Prayer and its conceptual background was to help us realize that Centering Prayer is a life to be lived. Not just a method."
 - Thomas Keating, December 18, 2017

The Map and Rhythm of the Program

"[This] is an attempt to provide a roadmap for the journey that begins when Centering Prayer is seriously undertaken and to point to some of the recognizable landmarks on the journey, as well as to its ultimate destination. The latter is not so much a goal to be attained, as an ever more resolute commitment to the journey. ...

"Although [this program] seeks to establish a dialogue between the insights of contemporary psychology and the classic Christian spiritual masters, its primary goal is *practical*: to provide a solid conceptual background for the practice of contemplative prayer and the spiritual journey for our time. We are called to this journey not just for our own personal growth, but also for the sake of the whole human community."
 - Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love*

This passage is the point of reference woven through the entire program. The videos and words of Fr. Thomas are at the heart of this offering. They are supplemented by Scripture, narrative commentaries, sometimes the wisdom of other contemplative voices, and suggested practices. Each narrative is meant to be read and experienced in silence and stillness and to be an occasion for reflection, study, engagement and embodiment.

The original *Spiritual Journey* videos have sometimes been excerpted to hone-in on the essential message. They have been supplemented by some of Fr. Thomas' newer works.

In summary, this offering includes:

- An outline, this introduction, 100 session-narratives, each with art, Scripture, meditations, practice suggestions, video and audio references, and additional resources for further study.
- 58 video segments and three audio segments, and one YouTube link. These segments are numbered to the 100 session-narratives wherein they are referenced. Since not all session-narratives have an audio/video reference, the numbering of the latter is not continuous.
- Index to audios and videos which includes a short description of each. Again, the index is numbered according to how the audios/videos are numbered, and thus, the index numbering is not continuous.
- Transcripts to accompany all audio and video segments.

The program is offered in five parts:

- 1: Overture
- 2: Models of the Human Condition
- 3: Paradigms of the Spiritual Journey and the Story of Bernie
- 4: Contemplation and The Divine Therapy
- 5: Divine Love: The Heart of the Christian Spiritual Journey

A time of review and summarization follows each of the five parts, intentional pauses in order to review and reflect.

How to Use This Offering

This program is being offered to provide a foundation for understanding the spiritual journey through the Christian, psychological, evolutionary and existential paradigms. The intention is to provide a globally accessible program for education and formation.

Centering Prayer groups, retreat leaders, and any spiritually oriented group could use the various sessions and their referenced audio/videos and provide support and connection within an intentional community bonded through their common search for God and in their desire for understanding of the human condition and the spiritual journey.

Possible uses include:

- a self-paced course, linear in its application, one session-narrative building on another
- excerpted content for intensive and advanced Centering Prayer retreats
- selections excerpted for a focused study of a particular theme or topic within the spiritual journey

- spiritual enrichment accessible in whole or part to be studied, as desired, by prayer and study groups
- content for online and in-person courses on the spiritual journey

A Note on Language

We are limited in language by convention and by context. To use the word "God" is our conventional reference to what some call the Ultimate Mystery, That Which Is, the Infinite, the Creator, the Atman, the Source, the Unknowable, the Divine. Further, the terms "Father," "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are conventions of language to express the inexpressible trinitarian relationships. Often, God is referred to as "he." We realize its limitation though we will not try to change it.

Further, modern languages are marked by the patriarchalism of both the past and the present. The Latin word *homo* signifies neither male nor female but the totality of Man where there are polarities but no divisions or hierarchies. It is in this context that we will be using "he" when referring to Man, male and female.

We are sensitive to language – and yet limited by it – with no biases intended.

.....

A life to be lived: May you set out on this journey with the yearning that neither fatigue, nor distance, nor fear, nor doubt will deter. Truly, a thousand secret longings of the spirit and the heart have paved the way for us. This is an embodied life rooted in silence, deep listening, receptivity and daily practice, all the while attending to the ordinary round of responsibilities and relationships in our lives. You are companioned by the thousands that have gone before you and those accompanying you now, unknown though they may be.

To Practice:

- Intentions are powerful affirmations of our deepest wishes and can help animate our participation. Consider the reasons you were attracted to this offering and write an intention to carry within your heart.
- Listen to the audio message from Thomas Keating, *A Blessing for The Coming Year*, which was recorded on December 18, 2017, for the Feast of the Epiphany 2018. It is about three minutes long. A transcript is also available.
- Contemplative Outreach offers a free Centering Prayer mobile app timer and resource for both iOS and Android platforms. Search your app store using "Centering Prayer." You may choose to download it to structure and time your prayer periods.

Resources for Further Study:

We will be drawing from the works of Thomas Keating and others. Three foundational works by Fr. Thomas which you may wish to incorporate in your library, if you have not already done so are:

- [*Open Mind, Open Heart, The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*](#)
- [*Invitation to Love, The Way of Christian Contemplation*](#)
- [*Intimacy with God, An Introduction to Centering Prayer*](#)

Notes and Reflections: