

### **Some Practical Points**

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning, and one in the afternoon or early evening.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer, provided it does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
3. The principal effects of Centering Prayer are experienced in daily life, not in the period of Centering Prayer itself.
4. Physical Symptoms:
  - a. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
  - b. We may also notice heaviness or lightness in the extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
  - c. In either case, we pay no attention, or we allow the mind to rest briefly in the sensation, and then return to the sacred word.
5. Lectio Divina provides the conceptual background for the development of Centering Prayer.
6. A support group praying and sharing together once a week helps maintain one's commitment to the prayer.

### **Points for Further Development**

1. During the prayer period various kinds of thoughts may be distinguished.
  - a. Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
  - b. Thoughts that give rise to attractions or aversions.
  - c. Insights and psychological breakthroughs.
  - d. Self-reflections such as, "How am I doing?" or, "This peace is just great!"
  - e. Thoughts that arise from the unloading of the unconsciousness.
2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harbouring expectations or aiming at some specific goal such as:
  - a. Repeating the sacred word continuously.
  - b. Having no thoughts.
  - c. Making the mind a blank.
  - d. Feeling peaceful or consoled.
  - e. Achieving a spiritual experience.

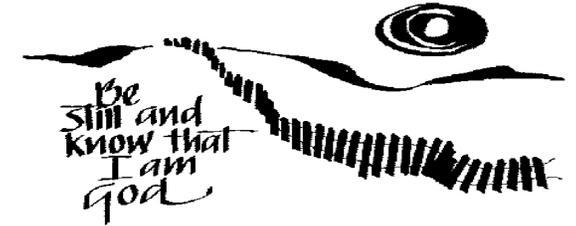
***Centering Prayer is practiced every  
Wednesday at 10am at  
St. Stephen Sanctuary  
Please join us***



*Silence  
Solitude  
Solidarity  
Service*

## **THE METHOD OF CENTERING PRAYER**

**by Thomas Keating**



**Psalm 46:10**

### ***Contemplative Prayer***

Contemplative Prayer is the normal development of the grace of baptism and the regular practice of Lectio Divina. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Contemplative Prayer is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative Prayer is a process of interior purification leading, if we consent, to divine union.

### ***Centering Prayer***

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to cooperate with this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier time (e.g., The Cloud of Unknowing) in an updated form and to put a certain order and regularity into it. It is not

### **Centering Prayer (Cont.)**

meant to replace other kinds of prayer; it simply puts other kinds of prayer into a new and fuller perspective. During the time of prayer we consent to God's presence and action within. At other times our attention moves outward to discover God's presence everywhere.

### **Lectio Divina**

Lectio Divina is the most traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on his word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing, or as Gregory the Great (6<sup>th</sup> century), summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition, put it, "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of contemplative prayer for the first sixteen centuries.

### **Theological Background**

The source of Centering Prayer, as in all methods leading to Contemplative Prayer, is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of Centering Prayer is the deepening of our relationship with the living Christ. It tends to build communities of faith and bond the members together in mutual friendship and love.

### **Wisdom Saying of Jesus**

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount:

"...But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret.

And your Father, who sees in secret, will repay you." Matthew 6.6 (ANB)

It is also inspired by writings of major contributors to the Christian contemplative heritage including John Cassian, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Theresa of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton.

### **Centering Prayer Guidelines**

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts\*, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

\*thoughts include body sensations, feelings images, & reflections

### **What Centering Prayer is not:**

- a. It is not a technique.
- b. It is not a relaxation exercise.
- c. It is not a form of self-hypnosis.
- d. It is not a charismatic gift.
- e. It is not a para-psychological experience.
- f. It is not limited to the "felt" presence of God.
- g. It is not discursive meditation or affective prayer.

### **What Centering Prayer is:**

- a. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship.
- b. It is an exercise of faith, hope, and love.
- c. It is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion.
- d. It habituates us to the language of God which is silence.

### **Extending the Effects of Centering Prayer into Daily Life**

1. Practice 2 periods of Centering Prayer daily...
2. Read Scriptures regularly and study *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
3. Practice one or two of the specific methods for everyday, suggested in *Open Mind, Open Heart*, chap. 12.
4. Join a Centering Prayer Support Group or Follow-up Program (if available in your area.)
  - a. It encourages the members of the group to persevere in private.
  - b. It provides an opportunity for further input on a regular basis through tapes, readings and discussion.