

Contemplative Prayer & Living—A Christian Way of Transformation

Contemplative prayer is a part of contemplative living. We all experience and engage in prayer and living. But, what does it mean to be contemplative? My Benedictine friends tell me that one does not have to be a monk or a member of a religious community to be a contemplative. Rather, a contemplative is one who has chosen the “inner way” as her/his journey into a fuller life. It is a quest for praying and living from the heart.

Our spiritual journey, especially contemplative prayer, together with its practices for daily life are graces by which we awaken to the unity of God in ourselves, other people and all of creation. The practice of contemplative prayer includes centering prayer/meditation, *lectio divina* and other forms of spiritual awakening. These practices lead to social outreach so as to build up the kingdom of God and the spiritual transformation of humankind.

At St. John Vianney, our contemplative prayer practice consists of centering prayer and *lectio divina*. We meet every Tuesday morning from 10:00 to 11:00 in the rectory parlor. Everyone is welcome!

Centering Prayer—is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to experience God’s presence within us. This form of prayer engages the whole person—body, mind, heart and spirit. The Centering Prayer method of meditation invites us to be—to be still, to be quiet, to let go of thoughts and feelings, and to simply rest in God. Letting go and becoming interiorly empty is a sign of our consenting to the action of God; that is, to be totally available. In self surrender, through faith, we open ourselves to spiritual consciousness—an awareness of divine indwelling. This awakening happens through the heart, which spiritual teachers name as the “God positioning system” connecting the visible and the invisible worlds. This path of prayer is putting the mind in the heart.

How does one get to the heart? Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk, answers the question this way:

Release your attachments to self; greet God as the center of your being.
Surrender to the moment; creative energy and love will appear.
Awaken to the truth that: “It is not I who live, but Christ who lives with me.”

Centering prayer teaches that the fruits of the prayer are to be found in daily life—happy are the poor in spirit; happy are the pure of heart; happy are the peacemakers; happy are the merciful; happy are the gentle; happy are those who hunger and thirst for justice.

Lectio Divina—is an ancient practice of praying the scriptures from the Christian contemplative heritage. In the monastic tradition, the moments of *lectio* consist of listening, reflecting, resting, responding and praying. This process is geared towards a transformation of consciousness and life. Our desire is to have the “mind of Christ”—to see things, to evaluate things, to respond to reality in the way of Jesus, the Christ.

Although the literal translation of the word *lectio divina* is “divine reading,” we do not come together, each with his or her Bible, to read and study the scriptures. Instead, we invoke the Holy Spirit to help us hear the sacred text with the “ear of the heart.” Our desire is to have a sacred word come alive for us and truly speak to us.

As we listen to the scripture passage being read, we ask God to touch us with a life-giving word or phrase. Some days God may not speak clearly to us. Nevertheless, we wait patiently; we remain faithful—believing that God is also present in silence and that the word may break into life later in the day when we are about our ordinary living. Other days, a whole phrase may shout at us immediately. God speaks and we hear! We ponder; we reflect; we hold the word in our heart, which may overflow into praise and an invitation for action.

The day a word of God truly comes alive for us, we will gradually come to live by faith justly. Through God’s loving kindness and grace our consciousness will be transformed. Choosing to put on the “mind of Christ” will alter our relationships with God, others, the earth and all of creation.