

**CENTERING PRAYER....At St. John Neumann
Lawyers Road, Reston, VA
7:00 PM on almost every Thursday of the Month
10:00 AM on 2nd and 4th Thursday of the Month**

1. What is Centering Prayer? - It is an ancient practice of meditation within Christian tradition.

- “Centering prayer attempts to present teaching of earlier times (e.g., The Cloud of Unknowing, 14th century classic) in updated form.” Fr. Thomas Keating, Open Mind, Open Heart.
- “A wordless, trusting, opening of self to the divine Presence. Far from being advanced, it is the simplest form of prayer there is.” -Cynthia Bourgeault, Centering Prayer.
- “Centering prayer is NOT a relaxation exercise, nor form of self-hypnosis, nor charismatic gift. Centering prayer is movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with God. Centering prayer habituates us to the language of God which is silence.” T. Keating
- “Silence is God’s first language.” St. John of the Cross (16th century mystic).

2. Why do we do Centering Prayer?

- Tried and true practice for deepening spiritual growth...from the time of the Desert Fathers & Mothers through the present times (e.g. Thomas Merton, Fr. Keating).
- Ash Weds. gospel from Matt. 6- Jesus directs that when we desire to pray, we “go to our inner room and shut the door.”
- “Even when the outer world has been wrestled into silence, we still go right on talking, worrying, arguing WITHIN ourselves, daydreaming, fantasizing. To encounter those deeper reaches of our being, where our own life is constantly flowing out of and back into divine life, what first seems to be needed is some sort of interior on/off switch to tone down the inner talking as well. That’s probably the simplest way to picture what Centering Prayer is. At root, it is a very simple method for reconnecting us with that natural aptitude for the inner life, that simplicity of our childhood, once our adult minds have become overly complex and busy.”
C. Bourgeault
- “We surrender to the attraction of interior silence, tranquility and peace. We do not try to feel anything, reflect upon anything. Without effort, without trying, we sink into this Presence, letting everything else go. Let Love alone speak: the simple desire to be one with the Presence, to forget self, to rest in the Ultimate Mystery.
In Presence, I know that I am known. Everything in my life is transparent in this Presence, which knows everything about me—all weaknesses, brokenness, sinfulness, and still loves me infinitely.
The Presence is healing, strengthening, refreshing....non-judgmental, self-giving, seeking no reward, boundless in compassion.”
T. Keating
- And when we tie ourselves more to God in centering prayer, we then experience “healing, strengthening, refreshing” and are ourselves more capable of being “non-judgmental, self-giving, seeking no reward” and compassionate. Why try centering prayer? That is why.

[For more information, including local groups that gather weekly, see:
Contemplative Outreach of Northern Virginia \(CONOVA\)](#)

How Do We Do Centering Prayer?

1. Body Posture: Sit comfortably so you forget your body (try hands on thighs & sitting in chair, relaxed shoulders, feet balanced on floor, eyes closed).
 2. Establish **intention** to open your heart to God and turn off your mind/ego. Express this in an opening prayer. Consider either or both to start with:
 - “I lift myself up to you, O Lord, with a gentle stirring of love. Desiring you for your own sake, to be with You, and **NOT** to get anything from You.”
---adapted from The Cloud of Unknowing
 - “Be --- Still --- and Know ---That I am --- God!” - Psalm 46:10
Each time drop one word or phase until you end up at “Be” as only word.
 3. Whenever your thoughts drift - **as they will** - come back to your intention of being open to God. Consider words – “I will return to my meditation,” or consider focusing on breathing in and out, or imagine letting go of your thoughts and watching them pass away like clouds or leaves in a river.
 4. Also you can try to repeat your own phrase or word during meditation. For instance, when breathing in, I sometimes say “Loved” to myself and on breathing out, I then say “Love”.
- Whatever --- you chose your own word or words and they can change from day to day!
5. Every meditation is a success – so long as it is your **intention** to be with God!
 6. At end of your prayer time (aka: “sit”), come out slowly...this enables you to better bring atmosphere of silence into daily life.

“Gradually, after deliberately choosing quiet times with God, our heart begins to sharpen its perception of God’s Presence. The quiet of God begins to speak and direct us, and our heart becomes more finely tuned to the frequency that God uses to speak to us.”

“When your tongue is silent, you can rest in the silence of the forest.

When your imagination is silent, the forest speaks to you, tells you of its unreality and of the Reality of God. But when your mind is silent, then the forest becomes magnificently real and blazes triumphantly with the Reality of God.”

Both are from Thomas Merton on contemplative prayer and silence.

Rest: Boats Floating Downstream

In Centering Prayer, a contemplative practice taught by Thomas Keating, we choose a “sacred word” to help us return to our intention of awareness to God’s presence. The word might be “Peace” or “Be” or “Love”—something simple. Don’t spend too much time analyzing the word. Hold it lightly and let it go when it is no longer needed, but come back to it any time your thoughts interrupt the stillness.

Keating uses the imagery of a river in Centering Prayer to help compartmentalize our “thinking” mind. He says our ordinary thoughts are like boats on a river so closely packed together that we cannot experience the river that flows underneath them. The river is the Presence of God holding us up. When we find ourselves getting distracted or hooked by a thought or feeling, we are to return ever so gently to our sacred word, letting the boat (thought or feeling) float on downstream. Gradually, the mind is quieted, with fewer thoughts/feelings and more space between “boats.”

Be patient with this practice. We all have ingrained patterns. Sometimes the same thought or feeling will circle by again and again, saying “Think me! Think me! Feel me! Feel me!” as it tries harder to be noticed. Just keep returning to the sacred word and letting the boats float downstream.

Gateway to Silence:
Christ is in me, and I am in Christ.

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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 the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off.
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
 - a. We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - b. We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - c. In all cases we pay no attention and eventually return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of centering prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.
5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God's first language which is silence.

Points for Further Development

1. During the prayer period, various kinds of thoughts may arise:
 - a. Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
 - b. Thoughts and feelings 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 and feelings that arise from the unloading of the unconscious.
 - f. When engaged with any of these thoughts return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring 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.(*Open Mind, Open Heart*)

Ways to Deepen Our Relationship with God

1. Practice two 20-30 minute periods of Centering Prayer daily.
2. Listen to the Word of God in Scripture and study *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
3. Select one or two of the specific practices for everyday life as suggested in *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
4. Join a weekly Centering Prayer Group.
 - a. It encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practices.
 - b. It provides an opportunity for further input on a regular basis through tapes, readings, and discussion.
 - c. It offers an opportunity to support and share the spiritual journey.

What Centering Prayer Is and Is Not

- a. It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a deeper relationship with God.
- b. It is not a relaxation exercise but it may be quite refreshing.
- c. It is not a form of self-hypnosis but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.
- d. It is not a charismatic gift but a path of transformation.
- e. It is not a para-psychological experience but an exercise of faith, hope and selfless love.
- f. It is not limited to the "felt" presence of God but is rather a deepening of faith in God's abiding presence.
- g. It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions.

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The Method of

CENTERING PRAYER



THE PRAYER OF CONSENT

BY THOMAS KEATING

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Contemplative Prayer

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition Contemplative Prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace 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.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of Contemplative Prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. It is an attempt to present the teaching of earlier times in an updated form. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him.

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.

The Root of Centering Prayer

Listening to the word of God in Scripture (Lectio Divina) is a 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. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of Contemplative Prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries.

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 reward you." MT 6:6

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, Thérèse 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. (*Open Mind, Open Heart, Thomas Keating*)
1. The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities include: Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.

II. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

1. "Sitting comfortably" means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
2. Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
3. We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
4. We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
5. Should we fall asleep upon awakening we continue the prayer.

III. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

1. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
2. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
3. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word" a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
4. During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.

IV. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

1. The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
2. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord's Prayer, while the others listen.

The 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 and action 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, and reflections

3. Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
4. The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent.
5. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be engaging thoughts.

MEDITATION 101

1. Set comfortably so you forget your body (try hands on thighs & sitting in chair).

2. Close your eyes.

3. Start with:

I lift myself up to you, O Lord, with a gentle stirring of love.
Desiring you for your own sake and NOT for your gifts.

4. Whenever your thoughts drift, come back to your intention of being open to God the words – “I will return to my meditation”.

5. Every meditation is a success – so long as it is your intention to be with God!

6. **Peaceful way to start Psalm 46, verse 10**

Be --- Still --- and Know ---That I am --- God!

Each time drop one word or phase until you end up at “Be” alone/only.

7. Also you can try to repeat your own phrase or word during meditation. For instance, when breathing in, I sometimes say “Loved” to myself and on breathing out, I then say “Love”.

Whatever --- you chose your own word or words and they can change from day to day!

Lectio Divina and Centering Prayer

Lectio Divina and Centering Prayer are two distinct prayer forms. *Lectio Divina* is a reading, reflecting, responding and resting in the word of God that helps one grow in relationship with God.

Centering Prayer is a method of prayer in which we consent to rest in God's presence. It is a prayer that moves us beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Him. It prepares us to receive the gift of contemplation.

Lectio Divina is a gift to **Centering Prayer**. As our relationship with God deepens we will be renewed in our intention to rest with God in **Centering Prayer**.

Centering Prayer is a gift to *Lectio Divina* as it frees us from obstacles to hear the word of God on a much deeper level in *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina and Bible Study

Bible Study is the reading of the scriptures for information and an understanding of the context of the passage. It provides a solid conceptual background for the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

Lectio Divina is a reflective reading of scripture. It is a method of prayer that leads us into the deeper meaning of scripture and the transformation of our lives. A contemplative reading of the Scriptures is compatible with well-grounded interpretation of the Bible.

BECOMING A WORD OF GOD

Being transformed into the Word of God is a process that happens as we faithfully read, reflect, respond and rest in God's Word.

An attitude of resting in God's presence becomes a part of our daily lives. We become a channel of God's presence to others.

Living in union with God we are able to transcend ourselves as the "center" and experience all in God and God in all.

Our energy becomes one with the Divine Energy. We become merciful, compassionate and loving as God is merciful, compassionate and loving.

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LECTIO DIVINA



LISTENING TO THE WORD
OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is one of the great treasures of the Christian tradition of prayer. It means Divine Reading, which is reading the book we believe to be divinely inspired. This tradition of prayer flows out of a Hebrew method of studying the Scriptures which was called *haggadah*. *Haggadah* was an interactive interpretation of the Scriptures by means of the free use of the text to explore its inner meaning. It was part of the devotional practice of the Jews in the days of Jesus.

Listening to the Word of God in Scripture

Listening to the word of God in Scripture (*Lectio Divina*) is a traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the text 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. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of Contemplative Prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries.

Monastic Form of Lectio Divina

The monastic form of *Lectio Divina* is an ancient method that was practiced by the Mothers and Fathers of the Desert and later in monasteries both East and West. The monastic way is unstructured. One listens to the word of God in a particular passage chosen for the occasion and then one follows the attraction of the Spirit. This method can also be prayed in a group.

Guidelines for

Monastic Lectio Divina

Moment One: (Lectio) Read the Scripture passage for the first time. Listen with the "ear of your heart." What phrase, sentence or even one word stands out to you? Begin to repeat that phrase, sentence or one word over and over, allowing it to settle deeply in your heart. Simply return to the repetition of the phrase, sentence or one word, savoring it in your heart.

Moment Two: (Meditatio) Reflect, relish the words. Let them resound in your heart. Let an attitude of quiet receptiveness permeate the prayer time. Be attentive to what speaks to your heart.

Moment Three: (Oratio) Respond spontaneously as you continue to listen to a phrase, sentence or word. A prayer of praise, thanksgiving or petition may arise. Offer that prayer, and then return to repeating the word in your heart.

Moment Four: (Contemplatio) Rest in God. Simply "be with" God's presence as you open yourself to a deeper hearing of the Word of God. If you feel drawn back to the scriptures, follow the lead of the Spirit.

Scholastic Form of Lectio Divina

This way of practicing *Lectio Divina* developed in the Middle Ages at the beginning of the Scholastic Period. At this time, there began a tendency to compartmentalize the spiritual life. As this tendency grew, the emphasis was placed more upon rational analysis and less on personal experience. The scholastic form divides the process into stages or steps in a hierarchical pattern. The scholastic method is a good way to learn *Lectio Divina* whether privately or in a group.

Guidelines for

Scholastic Lectio Divina

Step One: Read the passage, encouraging everyone to listen with the "ear of their heart." What phrase, sentence or even one word stands out to you?

Step Two: Read the passage again and **Reflect** on the word of God. Encourage everyone to be aware of what touches them, a thought or reflection that is meaningful. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Three: Read the passage again and **Respond** spontaneously to the word of God. Be aware of any prayer that rises up within that expresses the experience. Allow a minute or two of silence.

Step Four: Read the passage a final time and **Rest** in the word, reflect or pray and allow God to speak in the silence. Allow three or four minutes of silence.

To Extend the Practice: After the resting, take the phrase, sentence, or word into your daily activity and listen to it, reflect on it, pray over it, and rest in it as time allows during the day. Allow it to become part of you.

The Method of 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 was suggesting the topics of conversation. It is listening with the "ear" of the heart. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on His Word leads beyond mere acquaintance to an attitude of friendship, trust and love. *Lectio Divina* leads us to communion or as Gregory the Great (6th c.), summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition says, "resting-in God."

Growing in Relationship

Growing in relationship with God is a process like any other **relationship**. We need to begin by listening and entering into dialogue with God's word. As the dialogue unfolds we will discover different ways of being in **relationship**; different moments of being with God.

There are the moments of listening to the other and pondering the meaning of his/her words. There are the moments of responding and dialoguing, as well as being with the other when no words need to be said.

A **relationship** with God is also made up of many moments. These moments may come in any order.

Begin by walking through each moment, taking as much time as needed. There are no "shoulds, oughts or musts." Listen with the ear of your heart and let the dialogue with God unfold in its own time and let the Holy Spirit take the lead.

We need to trust that God is eager to be with us and to share with us the inner peace and freedom we desire.

Taken from: Richard Rohr's Daily Meditation

To sign up: <http://cac.org/sign-up>
or more generally: info@cac.org

Rest: Centering Prayer

Choose a word or phrase (perhaps this week's Gateway to Silence -- *That all may be one* – or simply *Be one*) as an expression of your intent and desire. Sit comfortably and upright, eyes closed, breathing naturally, and begin to repeat this sacred word silently. As your attention is focused on the desire behind the word, gradually let the word slip away. Rest in silence. When thoughts, images or sensations arise, gently return to the word, a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within you.

Two periods of twenty minutes each day is recommended for Centering Prayer. To learn more about Centering Prayer, visit www.contemplativeoutreach.org.

Rest: Examen of Consciousness

St. Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits, proposed a daily exercise, which he called the Examen of Consciousness – a simple exercise in discernment. Rather than focusing on what went right or wrong, how you failed or succeeded throughout the day, this exercise encourages you to reflect on moments in the day when you were aware of God – when you were present to Presence – and those times when you were forgetful or distracted.

Center yourself in silence and an awareness of God's presence. Recall the day with an open spirit. Notice the emotions, sensations, and thoughts that arise as you review the day's events. Let your attention settle on one of these instances and look for God's presence within it, whether you were aware at the time or not. Pray from this memory and within this present moment. Release the day with gratitude and rest in God's grace. Learn more about Examen of Consciousness at www.ignatianspirituality.com.

Rest: Object Meditation

Look around you and notice your surroundings at this moment. Let your eyes fall on some object – perhaps a candle, tree, rock, or creature. Simply observe the object, without judging or labeling. Give your full attention, senses, and presence to this object.

Gradually let your gaze soften and take in the more-than-matter-ness that is also here. Deepen your awareness of God's presence within this thing and within you.

Rest in silence for several minutes (or continue with a longer time of contemplative prayer) and then turn your gaze to bless the rest of the room, landscape, and world in which you find yourself, one in Love.

Rest: Gaze of Grace

Invite a trusted beloved (friend, lover, parent, or perhaps yourself through a mirror) to spend a few minutes sharing each other's gaze. Sit facing each other and begin by lighting a candle or ringing a bell. Take a couple moments with eyes closed to find your center, the still witness. Then open your eyes and simply look at the face of the person across from you.

Give and receive this gaze in silence, being present to the other and to the presence of Love within and without. Let your eyes, face, and body be soft and relaxed while alert. Breathe. If your attention wanders, bring your awareness back to your partner's eyes and to the presence of Love flowing between you.

When two or three minutes have passed, ring the bell again or bring your hands together and bow to signal the close of the practice. Share a few words, an embrace, or an expression of gratitude.

Rest: Visio Divina

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, icons are windows into God's heart; they are symbols of deeper than apparent wisdom. Approaching images with openness to God's presence is also known as the practice of *visio divina*, sacred seeing.

Choose an image (painting, photograph, sculpture, or other artwork), perhaps the banner for this week's meditations. Set aside some quiet time with this piece and begin with a prayer of intent to be open to God.

Look slowly at the image, taking in every detail without critique. Observe the colors, shapes, shadows, lines, empty spaces. Allow your unfiltered response to arise – feelings, memories, thoughts. Notice and welcome these reactions, without evaluation, whether they seem negative or pleasing.

How do these feelings, evoked by the image, connect with your life? What desires are stirring in you? How are you drawn to respond?

Take a few moments to reflect in writing, movement, or sound – whatever embodiment fits your expression. Finally, simply rest in God's presence.

Rest: Ecstatic Dance

Choose a favorite or new piece of music – classical, world, contemporary; anything that calls you to move! – and find a place in which you can listen and move uninhibitedly, barefooted if possible.

Allow your body to lead, following the invitation of the music. Let mind take a back seat and tune in to the sensations of each part of your body. Feel your feet

connect with the ground. Limbs and joints turn and bend as they will. Swing and sway head, shoulders, hips. Sink deep into your body, remembering what it is to be a human animal.

Dance until you are pleasantly tired and gradually slow your movements, perhaps to another musical tempo. Continue moving in smaller, gentler ways: breathe deeply, stretch arms and legs, roll head. Come to a seated position and rest in stillness.

Rest: Drawing Empty Space

It's difficult to see what is not manifest, what is intangible and yet the most objective of all reality. Yet we can learn to see differently, to be present to Being. This simple practice shifts our usual way of literal seeing and invites an inner change in how we see ourselves, the world, and the Divine.

Sitting at a table or desk with a pencil and a piece of blank, unlined paper, look at a nearby object. Turn your attention to the empty or "negative" space surrounding the object. Rather than focus on the object's contours, look at the lines and curves of the space butting up against the object, the places in between and around the object itself. Breathe deeply and begin to draw these nooks and crannies of air and emptiness. Keep your focus on the negative space as you draw.

You might draw all of the spaces around the object or spend just a few moments drawing. When your pencil comes to a stop, observe the form and detail of the "nothingness" you've drawn. Know that your True Self, though perhaps less visible than ego and persona, is spacious and objective. Let your inner witness quietly observe the "negative space" within yourself. Rest in this abundant emptiness, full of Presence.

Rest: Wilderness Wandering

Go to a place in nature where you can walk freely and alone, ideally some place where human impact is minimal – a forest, canyon, prairie, bog, mountain. Tell someone where you will be and how long you expect to be there. Take adequate water and clothing for the conditions.

Begin your wandering by finding or creating a conscious threshold (perhaps an arched branch overhead or a narrow passage between rocks). Here offer a voiced prayer of your intention and desire for this time. Step across the threshold quite deliberately and, on this side of your sacred boundary, speak no words, but only *expect!*

Let the land, plants, and creatures lead your feet and eyes. Let yourself be drawn, rather than walking with a destination or purpose in mind. If you are called to a particular place or thing, stop and be still, letting yourself be known and know,

through silent communion with the Other. Before you leave, offer some gesture or token of gratitude for the gift the wild has given you.

When it is time to return to the human world, find again your threshold and cross over. But now you have learned to *expect* God in all things.

Rest: Yahweh Prayer

A rabbi friend taught this prayer to me many years ago. The Jews did not speak God's name, but breathed it: inhale – *Yah*; exhale – *weh*. God's name was the first and last word to pass their lips. By your very breathing you are praying and participating in God's grace. You are who you are – living God's presence – in the simplicity and persistence of breath.

Breathe the syllables with open mouth and lips, relaxed tongue:

Inhale -- *Yah*

Exhale -- *weh*

Rest: Sacred Time

I invite you to set aside time for contemplative practice in this New Year. People ask me, "How long should I Pray?" I say, "As long as it takes you to get to an emotional and mental yes!" Many find that they need two periods of twenty minutes a day to come to such surrender. Perhaps it is early in the morning, before your brain has a chance to begin its list-making and judgments. Or, it could be in the evening, which might include an examen of *consciousness*, looking for the God-encounters during your day. Maybe it is taking moments throughout the day to pause, breathe, be still, and recognize how you have returned from yes and back to various kinds of no.

The sacrament of Sabbath – keeping a chosen time sacred (though all time is holy; there is no distinction or division between profane and sacred!) – was offered by the Jewish people as a gift for all of humanity. And in our busy, technology-driven culture, it is especially important that we intentionally seek rest and recreation. It might be saying that *at least* one-seventh of life must be about non-performance and non-egocentric pursuit, or we forget our life's purpose.

Take a moment now. Perhaps breathe in and out with this week's Gateway to Silence, "My true self is love." Rest in the awareness of Presence. And know that you are never apart from it. When this moment ends, Presence will still be here, now, always.

Some Books to Consider

The Cloud of Unknowing edited by William Johnston

Open Mind, Open Heart by Thomas Keating

Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening by Cynthia Bourgeault

The Contemplative Heart by James Finley

Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation by Thomas Merton

The Loving Search for God by William Meninger

Contemplation in Action by Richard Rohr and Friends

Silent Compassion: Finding God in Contemplation by Richard Rohr
Drawing from Fr. Richard's talks at the 2013 Festival of Faiths with the Dalai Lama, *Silent Compassion* focuses on the divine silence that offers peace, calls us to compassion, and brings wholeness of being.

Embracing the Call to Spiritual Depth: Gifts for Contemplative Living
by Tilden Edwards

Living in the Presence: Spiritual Exercises to Open Our Lives to the Awareness of God
by Tilden Edwards

Will and Spirit by Gerald May

The Book of Awakening and, also, **Seven Thousand Ways to Listen** by Mark Nepo

- **The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living** by Thomas Keating
- **The Better Part** by Thomas Keating
- **"Fr. Thomas Keating: A Rising Tide of Silence"**
Documentary Film won an award at 2013 Sundance Film Festival