

THE GIFT OF LIFE

DEATH & DYING, LIFE & LIVING

GUIDEBOOK

THOMAS KEATING

WITH

CARL J. ARICO



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GUIDEBOOK

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death,
open your heart wide unto the body of life.
For life and death are one, even as the
river and the sea are one.
In the depth of your hopes and desires
lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;
.... only when you drink from the river of silence
shall you indeed sing.

KAHLIL GIBRAN, *THE PROPHET*

We acknowledge that any good accomplished by
Contemplative Outreach is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Contemplative Outreach Theological Principle 16

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With deep gratitude to many friends whose generosity has made
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INTRODUCTION

I came that they may have life
and have it more abundantly.

JOHN 10:10

For over 29 years Contemplative Outreach has been dedicated to transmitting the living tradition of the contemplative Christian heritage through the teachings of Father Thomas Keating and others, Centering Prayer, and programs and offerings that support the contemplative life in the midst of ordinary life. *The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living* continues that tradition, offering a vision of hope and a view of reality that counter the cultural norms that view death as a tragedy, or the end of living, or an entry into harsh judgment and retribution. During four days of filming in December 2010, Fr. Thomas sat with Fr. Carl Arico, his long-time friend, colleague, and founding member of Contemplative Outreach in an intimate conversation focused on the transformative process of death and dying as *part of,* rather than the *end of,* life's journey. As Fr. Thomas notes in the series:

The dying process is the culmination or peak of development –
the whole development –
of the spiritual journey
in which the total surrender into God
involves the gift of life itself.

Death is perhaps the most complete surrender –
or requires the most complete surrender.
And, for that reason, it is not death, but life,
a movement into a fullness that we can't imagine.

We are called by God to enter into the transformative process, to open to a new reality that is our True Self and beyond … the image and the *likeness* of God. This discovery of ourselves

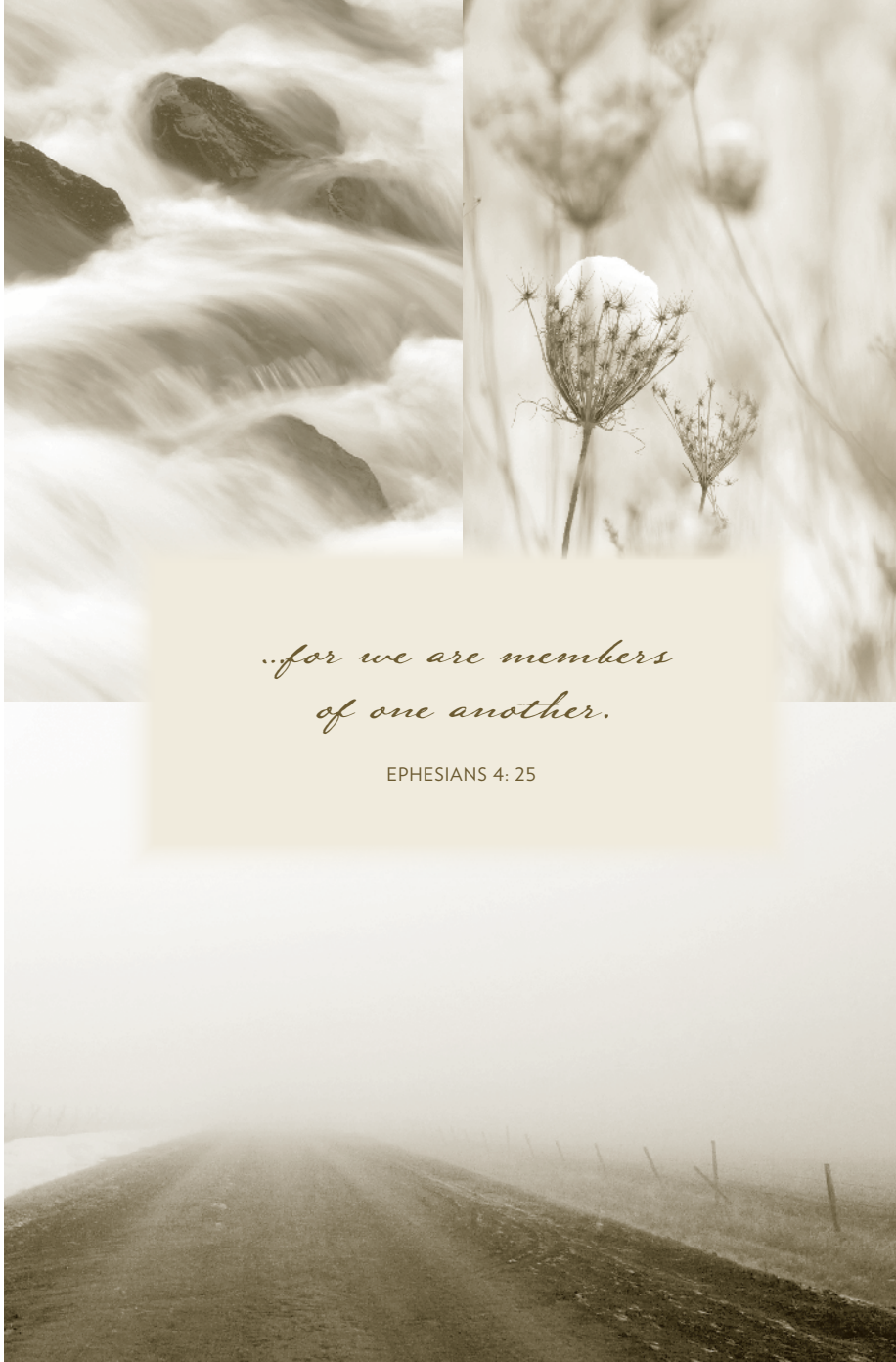
is always a losing of ourselves – a death and a resurrection. Yet, paradoxically, this is the fullness of life itself, a life abiding in the grace and truth of Christ and 'in him being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Ephesians 2:22).

We suggest that you ponder and savor the experience of this series and its many profound statements – that you partake of the series prayerfully and allow the deeper meanings of its contents to be revealed to you through multiple viewings and deep listening, taking all into your heart, into the inmost levels of your being. You might think of this as a kind of *Lectio Divina* practice – that is, listening attentively with the 'ears and eyes' of your being, reflecting and responding in your heart, and returning to silence … repeating this gentle movement again and again. Do not be concerned if you do not grasp all at once … the message will meet you where you are, each time afresh. The intention is formation for transformation, rather than information.

We hope that you will find guidance for your spiritual journey – in ways that both support and challenge your understanding – and we pray that the Spirit will reveal to you what is most necessary for your spiritual growth at this time.

This series was prepared with much prayer and blessing … Fr. Thomas and the editors offer you our prayerful support as you consent to an ever deeper relationship with God. May you be blessed with 'grace in place of grace' and may you grow in humility to welcome life in all its many phases … may you be transformed in Christ for the greater good of all humanity.

Let us all know and be certain that as we sustain our prayer practice we are building up the Body of Christ and forming a global community of high intention and purpose, one directed to divine transformation into Christ, the fullness of being itself.



The Four Consents

By Thomas Keating

The spiritual journey is a training in consent to God's presence and to all reality. Basically this is what true humility is. The divine action invites us to make the consents that we were unable to make in childhood and growing up because of the circumstances that surrounded our early lives ... [and] not only heals the emotional damage of a lifetime, but also empowers us to enter on the path of unconditional love.

The first consent is to the goodness of our being as a gift from God. The acceptance of our basic goodness does not refer to what we can do or do better than others, but to the goodness of our being before we do anything.

In the second consent, God asks us to accept the full development of our being by activating our talents and creative energies ... to emerge out of the isolated world of a child, and to assume responsibility for ourselves and for our relationships.

In the third consent, God invites us to accept the fact of our nonbeing and the diminutions of self that occur through illness, old age and death.

The fourth consent is the consent to be transformed. We might think that everybody would be eager to make this one, but even the holiest people are inclined to say, 'Let's not rush into this.' The transforming union requires consent to the death of the false self, and the false self is the only self we know.

The four consents are invitations to welcome life and death as God's gracious gifts and to appreciate the universe with al its beauty and potentialities. It is the school of divine love in which God invites us to accept the divine plan to share the divine life with us in a way that transcends all that the human imagination can foresee.

CF. INVITATION TO LOVE



USING THIS GUIDEBOOK

This guidebook is intended to serve as a companion for viewing and experiencing *The Gift of Life* series. It is suggested that the DVD segments be viewed in a group setting, each beginning with a period of Centering Prayer. Following prayer and the showing of a segment, pause for a few minutes of individual silence and reflection, and then group wisdom sharing. If the group is large, you may wish to break into smaller groups for sharing in a more intimate manner. It is suggested to end the session with the reflection question offered within each segment of this guidebook and take the suggested question into your prayer and life between viewings.

The Notes sections allow space for your personal journeying. You may wish to return to them from time-to-time for further reflection, inspiration and your own inner wisdom to emerge and inform you.

At each successive group gathering, begin with Centering Prayer, followed by any further sharings on the prior video and wisdom knowing that emerged from the reflection question, then the showing of the next segment.

Some possibilities for viewing formats …

- one video daily on a 10-day Advanced Centering Prayer Retreat
- two videos daily on a five-or seven-day Intensive Retreat
- a nine-week course
- an 18-week course with videos combined with companion readings, viewing each segment twice.

A sample format could be:

FIRST WEEK:

- ***reading of Scripture***
  (Guidebook suggestions for each segment)
- ***Centering Prayer***
- ***reading of segment overview*** *(from Guidebook)*
- ***viewing of segment***
- ***individual reflection***
- ***wisdom sharing***
- ***close with psalm and quotation following***
  (from Guidebook)

SECOND WEEK:

- ***reading of one of the segment quotations for Lectio Divina***
  (from Guidebook)
- ***Centering Prayer***
- ***further wisdom sharing from prior week's video, readings, experience with the reflection question***
- ***second viewing of same segment***
- ***individual reflection***
- ***wisdom sharing***
- ***additional reading and/or reflection***
- ***close with psalm and quotation following***
  (from Guidebook)

REPEAT WITH REMAINING SEGMENTS



AN AFFIRMATION *of* HOPE *for the* JOURNEY

Let us pray, let us remember ...

Lord, my allotted portion and my cup,
you have made my destiny secure.
Pleasant places were measured out for me;
fair to me indeed is my inheritance.

I bless the Lord who counsels me;
even at night my heart exhorts me.
I keep the Lord always before me;
with him at my right hand, I shall never
be shaken.
Therefore, my heart is glad, my soul rejoices;
my body also dwells secure.
For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
nor let your devout one see the pit.

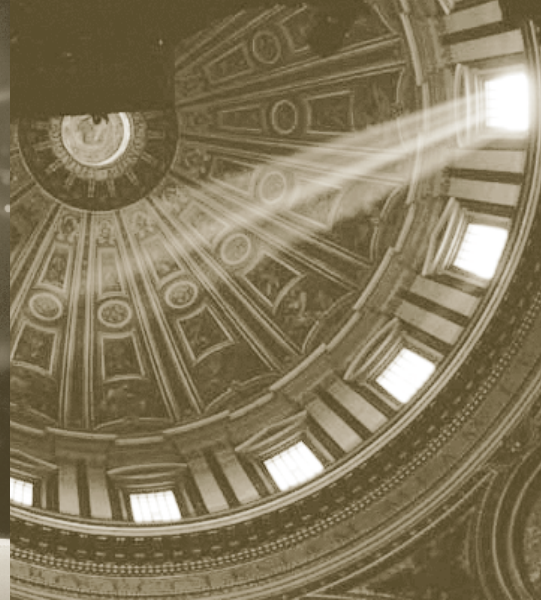
You will show me the path to life,
abounding joy in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

PSALM 16: 5-11

SEGMENT 1:

Prologue





Overview

The dying process is the culmination or the peak
of the whole development of the spiritual journey
in which the total surrender into God involves the gift of life
itself as we know it. Centering Prayer, when it reaches
the full consent to our nothingness, is the perfect preparation
for death, because it *is* death – death of the false self
and even the True Self has been transcended.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⌖

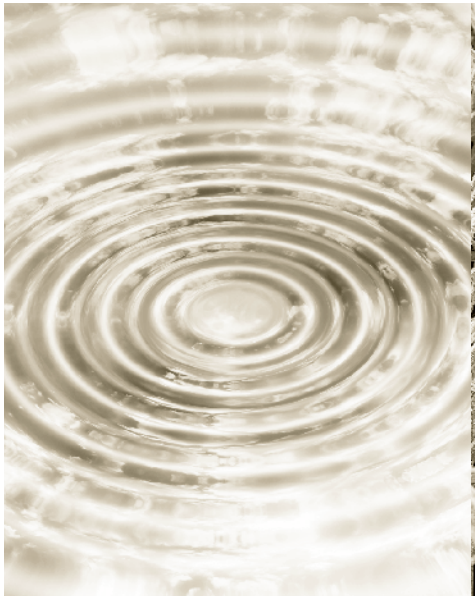
To accept death is to accept God.

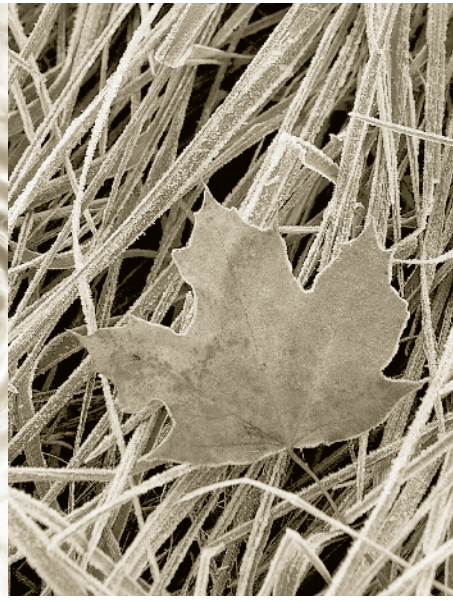
⌖

Death is resurrection.

⌖

The dying process is the culmination or peak
of the whole development of the spiritual journey
in which the total surrender into God involves
the gift of life itself as we know it.





Centering Prayer, when it reaches the full consent to our
nothingness, is the perfect preparation for death.

⌖

Death is not the end of anything, but the final completion
of this process and the triumph of the grace of God.



Scripture for Lectio Divina

Jesus said to his disciples: "Amen, amen, I say to you,
unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies,
it remains just a grain of wheat;
but if it dies, it produces much fruit.
Whoever loves his life loses it,
and whoever hates his life in this world
will preserve it for eternal life."

JOHN 12: 24-25

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.

LUKE 23: 46

Reflection

What is your attitude toward death?

Into your hands I commend my spirit;
you will redeem me, Lord, God of truth.
I will rejoice and be glad in your mercy.
You will not abandon me.
I trust in you, O Lord;
you are my God.
My destiny is in your hands.
Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.

PSALM 31: 6, 8, 15-17





This discovery of ourselves is always
a losing of ourselves – a death and resurrection.

"Your life is hidden with Christ in God."
... It cannot be an escape. It must be a fulfillment.
… The courage to face myself exactly as I am.

Therefore, this discovery of myself is always
a losing of myself – a death and resurrection.

CF. THOMAS MERTON, *NO MAN IS AN ISLAND*

NOTES

SEGMENT 2:

Stages of Dying





Overview

Death is a transformative process that begins in earnest once the acceptance of the inevitable and the diminutions of the self take place. There is a work going on that is relentless and very challenging but its purpose is to heal all the wounds of the soul so that it can open itself completely to God and begin to feel the regenerating or the powerful forces that it may have been separated from all of its life ... in other words, experiencing, in the full sense of the term, inner resurrection of the Ground of Being which is the Trinity within us.



Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⌖

Acceptance of the inevitable begins to enable
the transformative process to begin in real earnest
and launches one towards the attitude of surrender
which is accepting the diminutions of self …
allowing the dynamic energy of the Ground of Being,
or the Divine Indwelling, or the Holy Spirit,
to start healing and regeneration.

⌖

Often in these final stages, there is the sense of coming home,
the sense of welcoming death, and of experiencing the life
that is contained in death … experiencing,
in the full sense of the term, inner resurrection.

⌖

There is a kind of integral freedom that characterizes
the final stage of transformation in Christ.



Dying in the transformative process, one rises and experiences
the inner resurrection of the Ground of Being
which is the Trinity within us.

⁂

There is work going on that is relentless, that is very challenging,
but its purpose is to heal all the wounds of the soul
so that it can open itself completely to God
and begin to feel the regenerating or the powerful forces
that it may have been separated from all of its life.

STAGES OF DYING

1. Denial	⟷	unwillingness to face
2. Anger	⟷	How could this happen to me?
3. Bargaining	⟷	If I am given more time, I will ...
4. Depression	⟷	Withdrawal
5. Acceptance	⟷	Awareness of the inevitable

Chaos

↓

Surrender

↓

Unity Consciousness
(Transcendence of the Ego)



Scripture for Lectio Divina

None of us lives for oneself,
and no one dies for oneself.
For if we live, we live for the Lord,
and if we die, we die for the Lord;
so then, whether we live or die,
we are the Lord's.

ROMANS 14: 7-8

The angel spoke to me,
saying, "Come here.
I will show you …"

REVELATION 21: 9B

Reflection

Where am I in relationship to God?

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul,
my God, in you I trust.
… Make known to me your ways, Lord;
teach me your paths.
Guide me by your fidelity and teach me,
for you are God my savior,
for you I wait all day long.
Remember your compassion and your mercy, Lord,
…remember me according to your mercy,
because of your goodness, Lord.

PSALM 25: 1-2, 4-7





Transformed in Christ, these blessed souls
will live the life of God and not their own life
– although, indeed, it will be their own life
because God's life will be theirs
... through a union of love.
This a great blessing …
As he said in the Song of Songs:
'Put me as a seal upon your heart' (Song of Songs 8: 6).

JOHN OF THE CROSS, *THE SPIRITUAL CANTICLE*

NOTES

SEGMENT 3:

Suffering





Overview

In certain parts of the dying process, however great the physical suffering is, there is sometimes an even much greater spiritual suffering as the ego is asked to let go of its memories, attachments and concerns ... to let go of life ... and sometimes there is fear of God, or punishment. These same sorts of states occur in extended periods of the Dark Night of the Soul. But when surrender occurs, then suffering leads to wisdom and the perception of the divine goodness and purpose in everything that happens. Suffering becomes meaningful, providing the energy of love that transforms the whole body. Christ's example is the major example.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⁜

Everything depends on attitude. … When there is surrender,
then suffering is not really suffering any more.
It's suffering that leads to wisdom. And wisdom
is the perception of the divine goodness and purpose
in everything that happens.

⁜

Wisdom and peace and calm and faith – that is, perfect trust
in God – transforms suffering into a – I won't quite say 'joy' –
but gives it meaning that takes away the resistance
so that one sees a value to suffering that is God-like.





Death is really not death but a life
of union and unity with God that is
beyond anything we can imagine.

⁜

In all the suffering and pain,
there is a dimension beyond the
sense-level and one experiences a
shift … and passes through
and comes out the other side.
Then, though there is still
suffering, at the deepest level
of the Ground of Being,
there is the intuition that
the suffering is meaningful.

⁜

There is no self-centeredness
in the transcendence, or the
transformative purpose,
as there was no preference
in Christ but a compassion
that is willing to take on
the suffering of others, without
an undue regard for oneself.

An Affirmation of Hope

By Thomas Keating

In God's goodness, everything that happens to us has the capacity
to raise us up through an inner resurrection that enables
us to see every tragedy, mistake and even sin
as part of God's plan for our healing …
Nothing can describe how deep God's love is.

In Him,
With Him,
Through Him,

we will have the strength to see beyond every tragedy
that may lie ahead of us. Whatever happens,
since God is present in us, nothing can disturb
the basic peace that is there ... the Divine presence empowers us
to perceive what God is asking us to do in each circumstance
as it unfolds, without being anxious or fearful.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SUFFERING; MANIFESTING GOD



I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chatted all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh! The things I learned from her,
When sorrow walked with me.

ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

Scripture for Lectio Divina

"Sit here while I pray."
He took with him Peter, James, and John,
and began to be troubled and distressed.
Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful
even to death. Remain here and keep watch."
He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed
that if it were possible the hour might pass by him;
he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you.
Take this cup away from me, but not what I will
but what you will."

MARK 14: 32-36

We hold this treasure in earthen vessels,
that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.
We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained;
perplexed, but not driven to despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed;
always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus,
so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.
So, death is at work in us. …
[But] we have the same spirit of faith
… knowing that the one who raised the Lord Jesus
will raise us also with Jesus and place us
with you in his presence.

2 CORINTHIANS 4: 7-10, 12-14





Reflection

The basic question is “Why me?”
Who are you actually?

My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
He will not allow my foot to slip,
or my guardian to sleep.
The Lord is my guardian;
the Lord is my shade
at my right hand.
By day the sun will not strike me,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will guard me from all evil;
he will guard my soul.
The Lord will guard my coming and going
both now and forever.

CF. PSALM 121: 1-3, 5-8



Suffering is a surer and more advantageous
road than that of joy and action.
In suffering, strength is given to the soul
by God.
… And it is purified
and made wise.

JOHN OF THE CROSS, *THE DARK NIGHT*

NOTES

SEGMENT 4:

Judgment and Mercy



Overview

Our tradition teaches about the Last Judgment and that sometimes is a concern for people as they are coming to the end of their lives. One of the things that disturbs a lot of people as they approach death is whether they could have done better with their lives. A part of the process of letting go is to forgive ourselves and to trust God enough that, if we are sorry, God has completely forgotten all and would prefer that we would too. So part of the process is to disregard the other voices and just be still and surrender to God knowing that all God wants is our love.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⌖

Part of the process of letting go is to forgive ourselves and to trust God enough that if we are sorry for our misbehaviors, God has completely forgotten about them and would prefer that we would too.

⌖

We can never judge the dispositions we had then with what we would think now. It's an injustice to ourselves to apply guilt feelings that are the result of more experience of life and wisdom and seeing the harm that we've done that we didn't perceive at the time.

⌖

There's a question as to whether we can forgive others until we have learned how to forgive ourselves.





Part of the acceptance is to disregard the voices and just be still and surrender to God knowing that all God wants is our love. God's attitude toward sinners is all in the story of the Prodigal Son. Just come home, for God's sake! The past is gone; put all your trust in God!

⌖

The dying process is a process created by God to release the forces of divine energy within the soul that have always been there so it is better called an 'awakening.'

An Affirmation of Hope

By Ronald Rolheiser

We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives.

By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance.

The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

⁜

Every year Fr. Ron writes an article on suicide because, in his words, so many people have to live with the pain of losing a loved one in this way … a pain that includes confusion (Why?), guilt (What might we have done?), misunderstanding (This is the ultimate form of despair) and deep religious anxiety (How does God treat such a person? What is to be his or her eternal destiny?). Following is an excerpt from a message he wrote in July 2012:

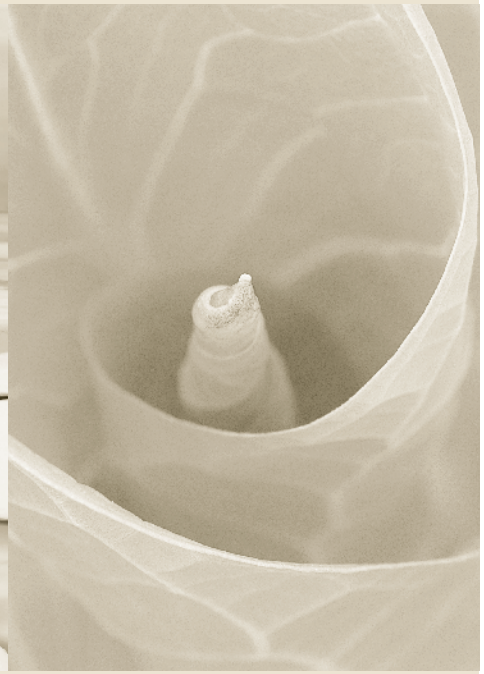
What needs to be said about suicide? First, that it's a disease, something that in most cases takes a person out of life against his or her will, the emotional equivalent of cancer, a stroke or a heart attack. Second, that we, the loved ones who remain, should not spend undue time and energy second-guessing as to how we might have failed that person, what we should have noticed, what we might still have done to prevent the suicide….

As with a physical disease, we can love someone and still not be able to save them from death. God too loved this person, and like us, could not interfere with his or her freedom. Finally, we shouldn't worry too much about how God meets our loved one on the other side. God's love, unlike ours, goes through locked doors, descends into hell, and breathes out peace where we can't. Most people who die by suicide will awake on the other side to find Christ standing inside their locked doors, inside the heart of their chaos, breathing out peace and gently saying: "Peace be with you."



Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.





Scripture for Lectio Divina

We have come to know and to believe
in the love God has for us.
God is love, and whoever remains in love remains
in God and God in them.
There is no fear in love,
but perfect love drives out fear
because fear has to do with punishment.

1 JOHN 4: 16, 18

While he was still a long way off,
his father caught sight of him,
and was filled with compassion.
He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

LUKE 15: 20

Reflection

Can we forgive others until we have learned
how to forgive ourselves?

Remember your compassion and your mercy, O Lord,
for they are ages old.
Remember no more the sins of my youth,
remember me according to your mercy,
because of your goodness, Lord.

PSALM 25: 6-7





It will be a great thing at the hour of death
to see that we are going to be judged
by the One
whom we have loved above all.
… It will not be like going
to a foreign country
but to our own.

TERESA OF AVILA, *THE WAY OF PERFECTION*

NOTES

SEGMENT 5:

After Death



Overview

What is left is the awareness of the True Self, the image of God in us. Obstacles to God have been dissolved and one sees exactly what one's state is: whether one is ready for perfect love and to join the Communion of Saints, or whether one needs to prepare those things in oneself that were self-centered and opposed to the agapic love that is divine life. One has perhaps for the first time complete freedom without interference to choose God, or to surrender to God, which only death can bring about – the dispossession of everything for the love of God. No one can imagine what God has prepared for those who love him.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read

Reflect

Respond

Rest

Share wisdom in community

⁜

One sees exactly what one's state is, whether one is ready for perfect love and to join the Communion of Saints, or whether one needs to prepare or be enlightened as to those things in oneself that were self-centered and opposed to the agapic love that is characteristic of divine life.

⁜

The stages of contemplative prayer in the spiritual journey are an anticipation of heaven …. The self is dead. We only see life and other people through the eyes of God. Everything is finally what it is – namely, God manifesting himself.

⁜

Heaven is not the end of the journey but the beginning of a new life … and primarily the beatitude of total self-surrender.



The Communion of Saints is not a nice association … but the whole inter-relatedness, the common sharing of the human life, and the common contribution of each generation to try to further the project of divine life, to pass it on to the next generation, and to fulfill one's particular role to which the Spirit calls and works through us.

⁜

No one can imagine what God has prepared for those who love him, so it might be good to take seriously those words and, at some point, just to be quiet and still.



Scripture for Lectio Divina

What eye has not seen,
and ear has not
heard,
and what has not entered
the human heart,
what God has prepared for those
who
love him.

1 CORINTHIANS 2: 9

Behold, I tell you a mystery.
We shall not all fall asleep,
but we will all be changed, in an instant,
in the blink of an eye,
at the last trumpet.
For the trumpet will sound,
the dead will be raised incorruptible,
and we shall be changed.
Death is swallowed up in victory,
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?

1 CORINTHIANS 15: 51-52, 54-55

Reflection

Can you imagine what God has prepared
for those who love him?

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offense.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.
Indeed, you love truth in the heart;
then in the secret of my heart teach me wisdom.
A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.

PSALM 51: 3-4, 8, 12





Personally, I have come to see myself as one with Christ.
And everything which he has done
– the work of salvation, the conquering of hell,
and Ascension to the right hand of God –
has been done for me.
My place is with him.
So it is for everyone who is united with the
heavenly Lover of souls.
You and I can only understand this
as our soul grows in the love that is planted
in us.

JULIAN OF NORWICH, *REVELATIONS OF DIVINE LOVE*

NOTES

SEGMENT 6:

The Cross



Overview

The meaning of the cross is not just redemption from sin or even to manifest God's great love for us, but to invite us, in the most powerful way possible – by showing God's willingness to do anything to fill us with the gratuitous love, joy and bliss of sharing the life of the Trinity. In that sense, pain is joy and joy is pain because from the perspective of self-surrender it's the same.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⌖

The cross, ultimately, is infinite love, God's great love. It's an invitation to join him in his project of bringing the whole human family into the gratuitous love, joy and bliss of sharing the life of the Trinity.

⌖

The immense love of God could have redeemed us from our guilt feelings and deliberate faults without having to put his Son through that extreme sacrifice.

⌖

We're invited to participate in the redemption of the world; this is the level of unity consciousness in which divine capacities for love are offered to us.





The cross is the symbol of the willingness to be nothing, the willingness to be whatever our share of the human condition is, the willingness to be completely transformed into Christ.

⌖

By being always aware of the Divine Ground within makes us capable of living in the Mystical Body and contributing to its building up, which is the healing of humanity.



SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS OF THE CROSS

1. Naked cross	⟷	The human condition
2. Body on the cross	⟷	God identifies with the human condition
3. Sacrifice	⟷	Radical healing
4. Taking away of all sin	⟷	Dissolving the guilt of sin
5. Divine love	⟷	The love that is beyond love
6. Christ as sin	⟷	Invitation to join Christ in the healing of the human race
7. Descent into hell	⟷	Dis-possession of self
8. Resurrection	⟷	Triumph of love: the gift of the Holy Spirit
9. Ascension	⟷	Abiding in the Mystical Body of Christ

An Affirmation of Hope

By William Meninger

Whether one dies after a long illness,
or immediately from a heart attack,
or a large group dies in a natural disaster,
it is a 'Passion,'
a participation in Christ's Death
and Resurrection.

HOMILY, ST. BENEDICT'S MONASTERY, AUGUST 29, 2012





Scripture for Lectio Divina

And when I am lifted up from the earth,
I will draw everyone to myself.

JOHN 12: 32

Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them,
"Peace be with you."
… He said to them again,
"Peace be with you.
As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
And when he had said this,
he breathed on them and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit."

JOHN 20: 19B, 21-22

Reflection

Are you willing to embrace the cross?

Return, O my soul, to your tranquility;
for the Lord has been good to you.
For he has freed my soul from
death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from
stumbling.
I shall walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.

PSALM 116: 7-9





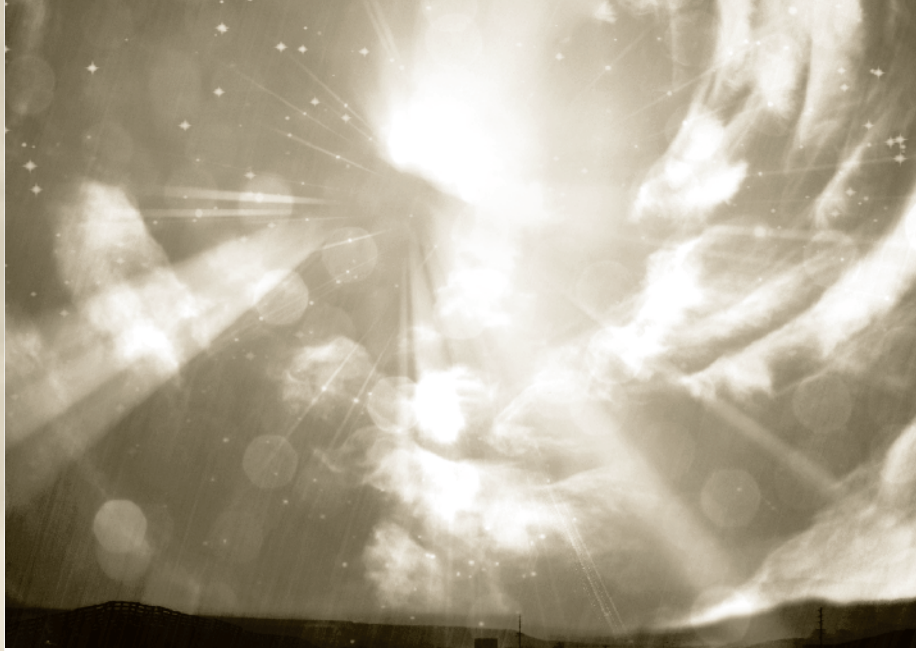
To follow the Lord to the cross means this:
Every day surrender yourself – body and soul –
…to do the work of the Father,
wherever he leads you and whatever it costs you.
And each day God will lay out the work you must do.
That is his part.
Your part is to forsake the life you would choose
for yourself and follow him
to do what he shows you to do.
… And by this practice,
you will pass beyond the cross
… from death to life (John 5: 24)
and have entered the Kingdom
of the Father.

CF. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *SERMONS ON THE ASCENSION*

NOTES

SEGMENT 7:

The Mystery of God



Overview

We have the capacity to know God by relationship through the experience of human development. It makes a great difference in what the basis of your starting point for seeking the Unknown is. The Ground of Being which is the source of our being and everything in the universe, is a living being determined to share with us the beauty, goodness, freedom, compassion and the forgiveness of God. The eye of faith is the seeing eye that penetrates the senses and events and sees God in everything.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⁜

We have the capacity to know God by relationship and a sense of belonging to the universe and a reverence for the Creator … It makes a great difference for seeking the Unknown.

⁜

As the spiritual life evolves, there is a time for ritual that is external, for vocal prayer and for relating to God as more or less another human being.

⁜

When the journey externals are interiorized, there may be a great devotion to the saints and the Communion of Saints, and a time for an interest in the angels.

⁜

Then there is a time for a deepening relationship with Christ ... when Christ becomes the center and one tries to imitate Christ, become Christ. And then comes the Trinity and, finally, unity with the Trinity ... an enormous river of divine love that is flowing among the members of the Trinity forever. Nothing is more delightful than to have and give away and to receive again this infinite agape, the pure love of God, which is totally non-possessive.





The dying process is designed to create a non-possessive attitude where one gives up all of one's possessions, including one's body and loved ones … and enters into the flow of divine life eternal … unity with God that sees God in everything and, in a sense, that ultimately everything is God.

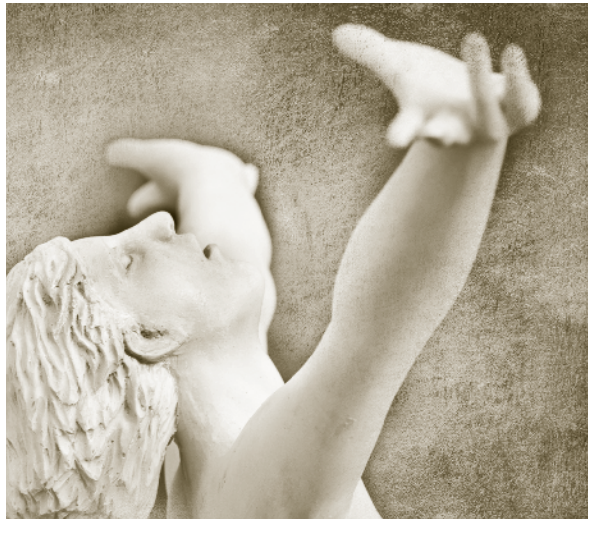
⌖

Mysterium tremendum et fascinans is Latin for the tremendous mystery … or, the unknowable mystery, deep in human nature such that other purposes in life cannot quite satisfy.
It is a factor in the process of surrender to a mystery that is not understandable to us, but is determined to share with us the beauty, goodness, freedom, compassion, and forgiveness of God.

When in Centering Prayer, one presents one's limited being just as it is … with all the wounds that we bring with us from early childhood … the divine presence begins to emerge in ways proportionate to our capacity to handle such relationships. ...
Everything is carefully balanced so that as life goes on we can experience more and more presences, both in prayer and in action.

⌖

The transformative process happens to those devoting themselves to be seekers of the Mystery, who are motivated to get to know, serve and do the will of this immense Mystery which becomes more and more intimate and tender.







Scripture for Lectio Divina

It is he who gives to everyone
life and breath and everything.
He made from one the whole human race
to dwell on the entire surface of the earth,
and he fixed the ordered seasons
and boundaries of their regions,
so that people might seek God,
even perhaps grope for him and find him,
though indeed he is not far from
any one of us.

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES 17: 25-27

For we know partially and we prophesy partially,
but when the perfect comes,
the partial will pass away.
When I was a child,
I used to talk as a child,
think as a child,
reason as a child;
when I became a man,
I put aside childish things.
At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror,
but then face to face.
At present I know partially;
then I shall know fully,
as I am fully known.

1 CORINTHIANS 13: 9-12

Reflection

Do you have the sense of belonging to the universe
and a reverence for the Creator?

"Come," says my heart, "seek his face."
Wait for the Lord, take courage;
be stouthearted,
wait for the Lord!

PSALM 27: 8, 14





When the truth is revealed to us in this deep way
it gives us a picture of God's very nature,
which cannot be perceived with any eye.
… It can never be erased
but continues to shine brightly upon all
our innermost thoughts.
There is nowhere that he does not exist.
He is completely present everywhere.

AUGUSTINE, *ON SEEING GOD*

NOTES

SEGMENT 8:

Theological Foundations



Overview

In most western Christian traditions there is a reliance upon reason to try to explain the existence of God, to study the mystery of God from the perspective of metaphysics and rational thought. Thinking tries to dominate God and bring the divine mysteries into our capacity to understand them; whereas, in Scripture there is an extraordinary invitation to the human species all together and one-by-one to consent to God's invitation to share the divine life.

The Eastern Fathers emphasized the scriptural basis for theology and it's there that the Trinity is revealed, and experience itself is the communication of God.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
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Share wisdom in community

⁜

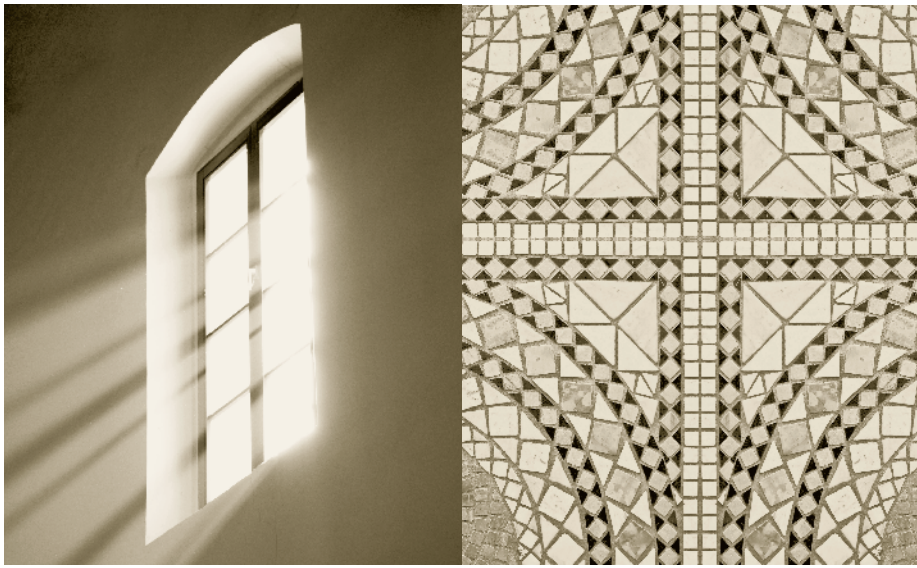
Scripture expresses an extraordinary invitation to the human species all together and one-by-one to consent and accept God's invitation to share the divine life.

⁜

The meaning of the icon is to transmit the experience of God rather than the thought of God. Thinking tries to dominate God and bring the divine mysteries into our capacity to understand them.

⁜

The development of the rational faculties seems to have been a process that has led step-by-step to the exaltation of reason and of rationalizing about the mysteries of faith. This frame of mind sees reality as something that the human mind can dominate; whereas, Scripture presents God primarily as relationship, as seeking us and seeking to communicate with us.



Without the Trinitarian revelation of Scripture, it is virtually impossible to enter into divine union or understand the cross as levels of intensifying relationship with God.

⁜

The Eastern approach needs greater study and research by the Western theologians. This is happening with the introduction of inter-religious dialogue.



Scripture for Lectio Divina

I will place my law within them,
and write it upon their hearts;
I will be their God,
and they shall by my people.
No longer will they have need to teach
their friends and relatives
how to know the Lord.
All, from least to greatest,
shall know me.

JEREMIAH 31: 33-34

May all be one,
as you, Father,
are in me and I in you,
that they also may be in us.

JOHN 17: 21

Reflection

What is your starting point for seeking
the experience of God?

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me;
give ear to me and hear my prayer.
Show the wonder of your great love,
… Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings.
… Let me see your face;
… let me be filled with your presence.

PSALM 17: 6-8, 15





Do you see the wonderful mystery of it all?
– that he who could fill a thousand worlds and more
by his greatness is so great that he can confine himself
in such small space.
… And that he, whose love for us is so high,
has lowered himself to enter our nature.
... A little at a time, God enlarges our soul's capacity
to comprehend him, as he sees the need
to do so.

THERESA OF AVILA, *THE WAY OF PERFECTION*

NOTES

SEGMENT 9:

Coming Home



Overview

The dying process is the culmination or the peak of the whole development of the spiritual journey in which the total surrender into God involves the gift of life itself, as we know it. Redemption is the capacity to be completely transformed to consent, to the taking over of our entire being by the divine goodness. Thus, Centering Prayer, when it reaches the full consent to our nothingness, is the perfect preparation for death ... which is not the end of anything, but the final completion of the process of the spiritual journey and the triumph of the grace of God.

Quotations for pondering in the manner of Lectio Divina

Read
Reflect
Respond
Rest
Share wisdom in community

⁜

The dying process is the culmination or peak of the whole development of the spiritual journey in which the total surrender into God involves the gift of life itself as we know it.

⁜

Centering Prayer, when it reaches the full consent to our nothingness is a perfect preparation for death, because it is death – death to the false self in the Night of Sense and the Night of Spirit and to the ego in the Night of No Self.
Even the True Self has been transcended.

⁜

It's a journey that never ends, because what is home?
It's to live in God's house all the days of our lives.

⁜

Whatever good in the past is present in each of us right now.

⁜

The hour of our death has been figured-out exactly, and it's not going to change, and it won't be delayed a single minute, and it won't be anticipated by a single minute.

⁜

Death is not the end of anything, but the final completion of the process of surrender into God and the triumph of the grace of God.



Wasn't it Bach who has a chorale "Come Sweet Death?"
Well it is sweet when it's perceived as the last barrier to the total ... loss of self in God ... and the fullness of life ... that is the home of everything that is, that is good. So, it's time for lunch!

Scripture for Lectio Divina

Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You have faith in God; have faith also in me.
In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.
If there were not,
would I have told you that I am going
to prepare a place for you?
And if I go and prepare a place for you,
I will come back again and take you to myself,
so that where I am
you also may be.

JOHN 14: 1-3

Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we shall be has not yet
been revealed.
We do know that when it is revealed
we shall be like him,
for we shall see him as he is.

1 JOHN 3: 2



Reflection

Have you made the decision to come home?

One thing I ask of the Lord;
this I seek:
to dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life.

PSALM 27: 4





In your dismay and fear you think, "How can anyone be prepared for him if the hour will come like a thief? Isn't this unfair?"
This "hour" will be a surprise to those who consider themselves "master of their own house"
… who proudly govern their affairs without considering the will of their true master.
… You ask me, "Then what shall I be like?"
Be like the man you have heard about from the psalmist who cried,
"I am poor and afflicted" (Psalm 68:30).
... Then your eyes will ever be upon the Lord, and you will receive the mercy that both comforts and give you strength to continue.

AUGUSTINE, *HOMILIES ON THE PSALMS*

NOTES

FINAL WORDS

It is quite clear that I will not be alive in the spring.
But I will soon experience new life in a different way.
… What I would like to leave behind is a simple prayer
that each of you may find what I have found –
God's special gift to us all: the gift of peace.
When we are at peace,
we find the freedom to be most fully who we are,
even in the worst of times.
We let go of what is non-essential
and embrace what is essential.
We empty ourselves so that God may more
fully work within us.
And we become instruments in the hands
of the Lord.

JOSEPH CARDINAL BERNARDIN, *THE GIFT OF PEACE*

The greatest problem is not how to continue
but how to exalt our existence.
The cry for a life beyond the grave is presumptuous,
if there is no cry for eternal life prior to
our descending to the grave.
Eternity is not perpetual future
but perpetual presence.
He has planted in us the seed of eternal life.
The world to come is not only a hereafter
but also a herenow.

ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL, *I ASKED FOR WONDER*

God of all grace, who did send your Son,
our Savior, Jesus Christ,
to bring life and immortality to light;
most humbly and heartily we give you thanks,
that by his death
he destroyed the power of death,
and by his glorious Resurrection
opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all ...
Grant us assuredly to know that because he lives
we shall live also,
and that neither death nor life,
nor things present nor things to come,
shall be able to separate us from your love,
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER



May the Lord bless you
all the days of your life.

PSALM 128: 5

Amen

ACTIVE PRAYER SENTENCES

These sentences, taken from among the headings used in the series, could be used as Active Prayer Sentences; that is, affirmations to repeat throughout the day in order to work them into your memory. The practice of the Active Prayer Sentence is to maintain a link with the reservoir of interior silence to the ordinary moments of your day and allowing the Spirit of God to work within you.



STAGES OF DYING

Surrender and transcendence are the fullness of the contemplative life.

God is present, whether one dies or lives.

SUFFERING

Suffering leads to wisdom, when it's accepted.

In regard to suffering, everything depends on the attitude.

Suffering is when we resist the pain of life.

Death is not death but a life of union and unity with God.

JUDGMENT AND MERCY

Death is the last judgment for each of us.

A part of the process of letting go is to forgive ourselves.

Just be still and surrender to God, knowing that all he wants is our love.

The past is gone, put all your trust in God.

The dying process is releasing the forces of divine energy within the soul.

AFTER DEATH

What is left? The True Self, the image of God in us.

Accept the purification process while in this world.

We make our own hell.

Everything is finally what it is, namely God manifesting himself – the celebration of being.

The Communion of Saints is the whole inter-relatedness and the common sharing of human life.

No one can imagine what God has prepared for those who love him.

THE CROSS

Total self-surrender enables Christ to renew all the mysteries of his life in each of us.

Pain is joy, and joy is pain.

Death is resurrection, and resurrection is death.

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

We have the capacity to know God by relationship.

The great question of life is a mystery to us.

The Ground of Being is a living being.

Nothing is more delightful than to have and to give the pure love of God.

Contemplation is the easiest way to access the spiritual level of our being.

This mystery becomes more and more tender.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Thinking tries to dominate God and bring the divine mysteries into our capacity to understand them.

Eastern Fathers insisted on the experience itself.

Without the Trinitarian revelation of Scripture, it is impossible to enter into divine union or understand the cross.

Scripture presents God primarily as relationship.

COMING HOME

If we really trust God, we don't have a care in the world.

The fullness of redemption is to consent to the taking over of our entire being by the divine goodness.

Centering Prayer is the perfect preparation for death.

Death is not the end of anything, but the final completion of this process, and the triumph of the grace of God.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THOMAS VORCE

1943-2011



Photographer and poet, Thomas Vorce wanted to be assured that his work would have a place in the world. Susan Rush, who is a member of Contemplative Outreach, coordinator in New Mexico, and a hospice worker accompanied Thomas in the last period of his life. Shortly before his death, Susan introduced Thomas to Carl Arico and Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, and he graciously offered his photographs for this series. He was a man interested in the mystics, especially the work of John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, David Steindl-Rast and Thomas Keating. Mostly, he was interested in the Mystery and light.

Perhaps his photographs in their stark black and white simplicity, with their dance of light and shadow, express the essence of the message of this series: that the spiritual journey is a stripping away of the inessential to find the heart of reality and when we arrive at that place, we will know God face-to-face, as well as ourselves. And the light will overcome the darkness.

His photographs are used as the images before the showing of each of the nine segments of *The Gift of Life*.

ABOUT CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH

Be still and know that I am God.

PSALM 46: 10



The Vision of Contemplative Outreach

The intent of Contemplative Outreach is to foster the process of transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your strength, and will all your mind;
and your neighbor as yourself.

LUKE 10: 27

Theological Principles

1. Contemplative Outreach is a community of individuals and Centering Prayer groups committed to living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in everyday life.
2. A commitment to the daily practice of Centering Prayer is the primary expression of belonging.
3. Listening to the word of God in Scripture through the practice of Lectio Divina is encouraged, particularly its movement into contemplative prayer, which a daily practice of Centering Prayer facilitates.
4. The source of Centering Prayer is the Indwelling Trinity. Its practice consists of responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to consent to the Divine presence and action within.
5. The Divine presence affirms our basic core of goodness made in the image of God.
6. The Divine action is the process of transformation in Christ which inspires and deepens our consent.
7. The contemplative dimension of the Gospel manifests as an ever-deepening union with Christ and the practical caring for others that flows from this relationship. It reveals the deeper meaning of Christ's life and teaching.
8. Our relationship with the living Christ is the bond uniting us together in mutual love.
9. While formed by our respective denominations, we are united in our common search for God and our experience of Christ through Centering Prayer.
10. We identify with the Christian contemplative heritage in which Centering Prayer is rooted. We recognize this heritage as the common ground for Christian unity.
11. We affirm our solidarity with the contemplative dimension of other religions and sacred traditions.

12. Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience a deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation.

13. We foster a spirit of unity, generosity and utmost charity in all our relationships.

14. Following the teachings of Jesus, we exercise leadership through an attitude of humility, listening and service.

15. We recognize and maintain a spiritual relationship with Saint Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado.

16. We acknowledge that any good accomplished by Contemplative Outreach is the work of the Holy Spirit.



So that they may all be one;
just as you, Father, are in me,
and I in you,
may they also be one in us.

JOHN 17: 21

Administrative Principles

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit;
there are different forms of service but the same Lord;
there are different workings but the same God
who produces all of them in everyone.

2 CORINTHIANS 12: 4-7

1. Contemplative Outreach is an evolving community with an expanding vision and deepening practice, serving the changing needs of Christian contemplatives.

2. As members of this evolving community we are responsible to foster and transmit the Vision of Contemplative Outreach.

3. We fulfill our Vision through attraction to the Centering Prayer practice not by proselytizing.

4. The gift of contemplative practice enables us to bring an attitude of humility, listening and service to our daily activities.

5. We reach decisions through discernment and consensus.

6. We serve in leadership, ordinarily in a voluntary capacity.

7. All who provide Contemplative Outreach services do so in consideration of, and in balance with their personal, family and professional responsibilities.

8. We avoid indebtedness and owning real estate in order to remain free to devote our resources to sharing the gift of Centering Prayer.

9. We employ staff and contractors as our growth may require.

10. We cooperate with church authorities in the areas where we work, but do not seek to become a religious or lay institute.

11. We wish to remain accessible to everyone. For this reason, we do not endorse particular causes or take part in public controversies, whether religious, political or social. As private individuals, we act according to our consciences.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Books by Fr. Thomas Keating

Active Meditations for Contemplative Prayer

And the Word was made Flesh

Awakenings

Crisis of Faith, Crisis of Love

Divine Therapy & Addiction

Finding Grace at the Center

Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit

Intimacy with God

Invitation to Love

Journey to the Center: A Lenten Passage

Manifesting God

Open Mind, Open Heart

Reawakenings

Spirituality, Contemplation & Transformation: Writings on Centering Prayer

St. Therese of Lisieux: a Transformation in Christ

The Better Part

The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living

The Heart of the World

The Human Condition

The Kingdom of God is Like...

The Mystery of Christ

The Thomas Keating Reader

The Transformation of Suffering

Other Offerings of Note

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