

# Contemplative Outreach Ireland



## Annual Newsletter 2021

*Silence Solitude Solidarity Service*

## Dear Friends,

This has been a difficult year for many of us as we struggle with our changed world and cope with lockdowns and easing of restrictions amid a climate of uncertainty and anxiety. Some have lost loved ones from Covid as well as from other causes and have been unable to have the support of families and friends at the funeral and afterwards. Others have lost jobs and many have found themselves isolated from loved ones. Children and young people have missed the socialization and education provided by schools and colleges. Parents have struggled to cope and the restrictions have meant that most religious events were cancelled or severely impacted. Somewhere behind all of these difficulties there is peace the world cannot give and the Spirit is gently leading us to a place where "...all creation awakes to the delight of just being" (Stillness – Thomas Keating). More and more people are turning to silent prayer, opening themselves to this God of ours and knowing that no matter how difficult things seem to be we are being lovingly held at every moment and not a hair on our head will be damaged.

We, on the Core Team, have supported each other from a distance, being unable to meet up for our meetings. We are planning to continue with the Zoom weekend retreats as well as workshops on Zoom. If it is considered safe to do so, we hope to offer the first in-person retreat, the 8 day Post Intensive Retreat in Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre Nov 3rd–10th this year. The Advent Weekend Retreat will be offered in-person, in Ballyvaloo, as well as an online weekend retreat two weeks later.

A special thank you to all of you who shared your spiritual journey in articles and poems for this newsletter and thank you to everyone who supports each one of us through your prayer.

With love and blessings,

*Alan, Niamh, Eileen, John,  
Tom, Michele and Kathleen*

## Staying with the Trouble

"God is not necessarily going to take away all our difficulties. God does something much more wonderful, which is to join us in them. Thus they become redeeming and healing for ourselves, and at the same time a means of healing for everyone we love, and indeed for everyone in the whole world." Thomas Keating, *The Transformation of Suffering*

As I think back over my first full year as administrator with Contemplative Outreach, it is difficult to imagine a time more filled with challenge and difficulty, on both a personal and collective level. Along with these words of Fr. Thomas, the title of a book by Donna Haraway resonates deeply as I think back over these past 12 months. A rather complex read, Haraway's book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, illustrates on an ecological level what I believe Keating was saying about the power of God "making kin" with us during difficult times. In her introduction, Haraway points out that the word trouble derives from a 13<sup>th</sup>-century French verb meaning "to stir up," "to make cloudy," "to disturb." And according to Haraway, the word chthulucene describes "an age in which the human and non-human are inextricably linked in tentacular practices." As I understand it, Haraway's key message is that the mixed-up and disturbing times we live in provide the perfect milieu for generating new life, but that this can only happen as we learn to stay with the trouble and pay deep attention to the new relationships now available to us because of this disturbance – much as the rotting and decaying components of a compost pile generate all kinds of microbes and nutrients needed for new growth. In other words, the main challenge for us in this time of great ecological and social disturbance

is to make kin in lines of inventive connection [including interspecies connections] as a way of living and dying well with each other in a thick present (Haraway, 2016, pg. 1).

Perhaps you already see why Haraway's title and Fr. Keating's words about "joining us in our difficulties" resonated with me in reflecting on our community experience over this past year. Certainly, there has been ample trouble for many of us. But even more remarkable are the inventive connections and new kin I have seen forming amid these troubles. I would like to elaborate on a few of these connections, with the prayer that this celebration of "staying with the trouble" will inspire us to understand at ever-deepening levels how Contemplative Outreach (CO) is "a living organism that is interactive, interconnected, interdependent and dynamic." (CO guideline for service #1)

First, on a personal level, the very deep trouble I was invited to stay with last summer was watching my beloved partner of 14 years suffer through and die from a very aggressive form of cancer. This suffering went far beyond what either one of us thought we would ever be able to bear. Yet the heart connections that emerged for both of us in staying with this pain went far deeper than I could ever have imagined. First, our own love for each other found its deepest home in our final hours of waiting and watching together: Rod from beyond any ordinary level of consciousness, and me from the depth of music and tears that enveloped both of us during that time. And in the months after he passed, the outpouring of sympathy and love I received deepened my own connection with many of you, a gift which enabled me to continue to stay with my grief. My connection with Fr. Thomas also seemed to

be strengthened. Not having met him in person or grown up with the idea of communicating with those who have passed, I sensed that Rod's death opened a door to meeting Thomas from the other side. Now what greater gift could a CO administrator ask for than that!

On a collective level, it's hard to imagine a trouble greater than that caused by the Covid pandemic. With infections and deaths still soaring in places and the livelihoods of millions in jeopardy, CO has been challenged to stay with our own trouble of shifting many of our programs to Zoom and grappling with how the pandemic will affect the role of smaller, face-to-face prayer groups and retreats that have traditionally played such an important role in our community life. While not easy questions, there are some fruits arising from staying with this trouble.

First, the inventive connections that have developed in our international community since the advent of the pandemic are truly amazing. The first obvious experience of this Covid-related connection happened with the "Global Embrace" conference co-hosted with South Africa in May of 2020 (the recordings are freely available on our YouTube channel). And think how things have evolved since then using Zoom: our first international offering of a Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop last July; the Lectio Divina and Welcoming Prayer service teams offered workshops and practice sessions, respectively, to a global audience; followed by the beautiful experience we had celebrating Thomas' birthday on United in Prayer Day in March! A translation working group comprised of members of our international communities also now meet regularly via Zoom to support each other with the sometimes challenging task of translating Fr. Keating's work into over 17 different languages. Now if that isn't staying with the trouble through inventive connection I don't know what is!

Beyond the trouble of Covid, our community also grew new connections in our efforts to stay with some of the very real social and political disturbances of this past

year—not an easy task when some of these troubles have their roots in centuries-old imbalances in economic, social and spiritual realms. One example of this is the daily prayer group that was started by our Minnesota, USA chapter in response to the death of George Floyd in May 2020. This group continues to this day as a way of staying with the troubled spirits of both the perpetrators and victims of racial violence in this age of deepened disparity. Similarly, our 12-Step Outreach groups continue to serve those suffering with the generational effects of substance abuse, self-hatred and harm that plague so many in our human family. Where would our world be without these connections and prayers? Certainly not experiencing the kind of generativity and deep compassion that I see emanating from so many in these 12-Step groups and communities. And related to this, I have seen some beautiful connections emerging among those serving our prison contemplative community over this past year. Thanks to the work of Chandra Hanson, Kathy Devaney and a small team of dedicated volunteers, a supportive network is evolving for those involved in this unique ministry, a network that is essential during these times when meeting with those behind walls is especially difficult.

Given the evidence of this past year, it is clear Contemplative Outreach has much to offer in terms of a "staying power" that may be of enormous benefit to our world. After all, is not our core practice one of "staying with the trouble"? Each day as we sit with the myriad of thoughts, feelings and sensations that bombard us during our prayer period, we open ourselves to an ever-deepening connection with ourselves, with the ones we love, and indeed with everyone in the whole world, both human and non-human. With such a tentacular practice, how can we help but generate new life and healing?

**Mary Jane Yates,**  
**Administrator, Contemplative Outreach**

## 20<sup>th</sup> Contemplative Outreach International Conference

You are invited to the 20th Contemplative Outreach international conference which will be held on September 16-19, 2021. The theme for this year's conference is: The Global Embrace: Our Widening Reach, Our Deepening Connection. For the first time in Contemplative Outreach history, this conference will be offered through a combination of both online and in-person sessions, with the primary focus on learning about and celebrating the diversity of our worldwide family. We will gather together to confer with one another, reminding ourselves of the true meaning of conference: to come together for conversation about our common hopes, interests and concerns; an interchange of views shaped by faith and love flowing from our shared contemplative life. Mark your calendars and check the website [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org) soon for registration information.

# *Advent Magnificat.*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord  
And my spirit exults in God my Saviour.

For in his mercy he gave me  
To live my Advent in the womb of Mary.  
She, wild web, has wound me  
Round and round with Mercy.

I wait in Mary-darkness, and I know  
Someone is hidden in this dark with me.

No more anxious asking  
Are you the one who is to come.?...  
For in a very short while  
He will open the clouds and come.

Then, he will rejoice over me with gladness  
He will renew me in his Love,  
He will exult over me with loud singing  
As on a day of festival.

Never will I need to wonder  
am I worthy? have I done my best?  
For he who is my Saviour  
Will have lifted me unto Himself  
Safe beyond all striving  
At long last at rest.

Never more will I need to be "doing".  
Only learn to float  
Into Creator Spirit's deep embrace  
Knowing no effort earns  
that all surrounding grace.

The world awaits with outstretched arms:  
Creep in beside us, Jesus,  
Let all hearts be prepared  
To trust the unknown  
And receive the gift of joy  
With which you sealed my soul.

Oh God! On this Holy Night  
May I let you be  
The unexpected happening in my life. Amen.

Sr. Marie Dolores O'Brien

# *Days Like These*

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By Anne Walsh Donnelly

I dream of entering a cellar, illuminated by a candle.  
A veiled being sits on a stool, I whisper,

'You've come back to me?'

'I never left.'

Who are you? Mother? Father?  
What pronoun do I use? He, She, They?  
What do I call you? Universe, Source, Divine?

I separate letters, shuffle them around the Scrabble board  
of my being, try to find what fits,  
throw them into the air, watch them land.  
I can find no word to describe what I've found – within me.

The glacier of disbelief begins to melt.  
I sit in silence, my muscles relax  
and I feel a hand, not of this earth, on my shoulder.  
I close my eyes, press the pause button  
on unanswered questions, rest in the mystery.

In the space between the end of one breath  
and the beginning of another, I feel a quiver  
run through me, that could possibly be divinity.

I still can't say for certain if I've found  
what I've yearned for.  
But maybe, just maybe, God is,

My      Greatness.  
My      Ordinariness.  
In      Days like these.

# *Ancient but ever New*

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Ancient but ever new  
a thin place  
in a thin time  
where silence speaks  
in rhyme

John Tehan

# Emergence Through Story-telling

## Community Conversations

It has been almost three years since Fr. Thomas Keating left us the task of expanding the vision and continuing his legacy in the world. How are we doing with this very precious work? Are we becoming the interactive, interdependent, and ever-evolving organism he envisioned us to be? In May this year we were invited to convene a conversation in our own Centering Prayer community about how the pandemic has influenced the way we interact and how we are being called into new ways of serving and walking together. A Conversation Guide was offered comprising the following questions;

1. **What?** What events or activities are currently happening in your Centering Prayer community?
2. **So What?** What difference do you think these activities are making in the development of contemplative practice and the process of transformation in your community?
3. **Now What?** Recalling Fr. Thomas final words to us in 2018 – "... We are called to start, not with the old-world contract ... but with what we know is the truth", use your answers to questions 1 and 2 to reflect on the following questions:

- What is working well in your community that you would like to continue?
- What is not serving you well that might you need to let go of?

And so in July three members of Core Team of COI, Kathleen Ormond, Eileen Foley and Niamh Brennan held a conversation through Zoom to reflect on those questions, have a conversation around them and to summarise our sharing. The following is the summary we submitted to Contemplative Outreach International on behalf of Contemplative Outreach Ireland.

### What?

- Between March 2020 and July 2021 COI has held four online weekend Centering Prayer Retreats through Zoom. Numbers registered between 50 and 120 for each retreat.
- Online Lectio Divina workshops x 2 offered on Zoom. Approx. 40 participants attended each workshop.
- A number of Introductory workshops held on Zoom including 6 follow-up sessions.
- A retreat morning held on the last Saturday of every month on Zoom. This commenced in March 2021 and there were 75 participants at the first session though not as many attending since.
- Some local groups have met weekly online and numbers attending have grown in this way.
- Core Team meetings have been held bi-monthly on Zoom.
- Silence at Six: This group started as a small Centering Prayer group following an Introduction by COI and went online in the early days of the pandemic. As the numbers grew it became a community who prayed in silence together each day at 6pm. All are welcomed and there is no emphasis on any particular method of prayer. It takes place in the Wisdom Chapel every evening at 6pm.

- Fr. Tom Dalton was interviewed for radio for the American Church in Paris by Joerg Kaldeway.
- COI Annual Newsletter was sent digitally to all on the COI contact list in 2020. The 2021 edition is due to be sent out at end of July 2021. The newsletter consists of reflections and poems written by members of the COI community.
- An email is sent out monthly with COI updates to everyone on the contact list.
- Easter and Christmas messages were emailed also to the COI community.

### So What?

We have observed how the Pandemic has resulted in people being more curious and searching in regard to their own spiritual journey. People have had time to reflect and ask the deeper questions. We believe more people have come forward to explore their spiritual journey. Zoom has offered a really helpful way to keep people connected as we were forced to keep our distance from one another and could not meet in retreat centres in the usual way. Meeting online has been a great encouragement to new people and has helped them to be faithful to the daily practice of Centering Prayer. Those who cannot travel or who perhaps are looking after an elderly family member can now access groups and retreats online. In a sense the move online has brought Centering Prayer into people's own homes and at no cost.

Some of the challenges encountered were that there is a consensus that we have all missed the human connection and sitting in silence to pray in a circle together. Also some groups have lost members who didn't feel comfortable going online. We missed the opportunity to offer Soul Friending on the retreats, as people didn't take up the offer online. We are also very aware of the challenge for us as a Core Team to protect the integrity of the Method of Centering Prayer and being faithful to what has been passed on to us. This can be challenging online, where we are not meeting people face to face and giving the opportunity to have questions answered or different aspects of the Prayer clarified.

### Now What?

We have learned that people wish to be offered a combination of in-person and online experiences.

We are keenly aware of the importance of maintaining silence in our retreats, and not to fill our time together with too much information. Also we are more aware of the importance of always sharing the Guidelines to the Method at the opening of all retreats and workshops.

We realise that while there is a wide range of teaching available online that what we have to offer is our deep commitment to be guardians of the Method of Centering Prayer and the teachings of Thomas Keating and to share all we have learned with all those whom we come in contact with through COI throughout the island of Ireland, always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

# *Centering Prayer for Beginners*

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In the afternoon darkness of this December,  
I am practicing.  
I bring my frazzled mind to the table,  
sit straight on a kitchen chair, comfortable  
but not too comfortable. In the background  
or should I say foreground, the dishwasher  
is ticking and swishing, going about its business.  
I had to switch it on - I'm running out of plates.  
A night light flickers its honeyed glow, held  
in the safe embrace of three ceramic angels.  
Holding hands - imagine!

I've signed up for the follow-up to a distant  
workshop: six Friday morning Zooms -  
three this side of Christmas and three  
in what we hope will be a new year.  
I remember the woman's clear voice,  
her economy with words. I recognise  
a couple of faces in the gallery of five.  
The iPad reminds me of their names.  
For our screens, she up or downloads  
a flaming candle.  
Health and Safety, I suppose.

I like the instructions -  
go into your room, close the door.....  
the fact they are so ancient - and  
that I get to choose my own word,  
the one to bring me back  
when my foot goes numb or I'm wondering  
what's the last date for posting  
to the Rest of the World,  
and what's that insistent beeping  
but most of all, how she tells us  
this is normal.

Susie Fry

# **How do the wisdom teachings of other spiritual traditions relate to Christianity and what can we learn from the Masters of Wisdom of other religious faiths?**

I just listened to recording of a selection of short texts and verses by Meister Eckhart, the great medieval theologian, philosopher and Christian mystic. He speaks about stillness and what he calls “the ground of being” as well as God’s eternal presence, unchanging nature and fecundity. Over time, I have also read and listened to many teachings of sages and teachers of other religious and spiritual traditions. Ramana Maharshi and Nisargadatta Maharaj in the Hindu tradition, Sufi poets Rumi and Kabir, even the thinkers and mystics of no specific religious affiliation like Jiddu Krishnamurti or contemporary teacher Eckhart Tolle and many others come to mind.

To make a general statement which certainly needs to be further qualified depending on which teacher we look at, I find many striking similarities in the teachings of these “masters of wisdom” and the thought of the masters in the Christian tradition. Meister Eckhart, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila or Thomas Merton (just to name a few) all direct us to the universal and non-dual nature of the “Ultimate Reality”, to that which we as Christians refer to as God. There are obviously also many distinct differences in the expression of their ideas, but in the end, in my opinion the similarities, rightly understood, by far outweigh those differences and reveal a certain common ground pointing, in their essence, to the transcendent truth of that which cannot be named in human terms and is ultimately only found in going beyond words, concepts and ideas.

In order to comprehend the significance of these teachings, it can be helpful to attempt an analogy between the world’s many faith traditions and the world’s many languages. This is an imperfect comparison, but I think it serves to illustrate the point quite well.

So, grounded in our own language, say English, we are

able to express ourselves quite well, because it comes with familiar language rules and habits, grammar and syntax and, to some extent, an anglophone mentality based on the traditions of our culture, the way we live our daily lives in an anglophone environment, the writings of our thinkers, poets and philosophers, and so on. These specifically anglophone modes of expression and understanding then become our ways of seeing reality. While they facilitate communication with other English speakers, they can also in some ways trap us and limit our views of reality as we are seeing everything through the lens of our own cultural circumstances. They also limit the horizon of our verbal expression to interactions with only those who also speak English.

Now suppose we learn another language, perhaps French or Italian. It is quite difficult at first, and we may try to translate all the new words we learn into our mother tongue. This process leads us to reflect on the particularities of the “new” language - and on those of our own. We begin to realize that, while many of the new words can be translated perfectly and almost word-for-word, there are also many which cannot be translated literally. They have another connotation or nuance that is not fully expressed in the equivalent word in our native language. Therefore, if we want to truly convey the meaning and intention of the original word, we need to think deeply to find an approximate expression or a circumscription in our mother tongue. We begin to ask ourselves questions: “What does this word mean?” - “Why do they express themselves in this way?” - “How is this understanding different from my own understanding?” - “What can I learn from this?”

As we go deeper into the word or expression, the process eventually leads us to an expanded understanding of



Geraldine O’Malley

the object at hand. We may gain a new perspective which broadens our comprehension of the reality that is expressed by the word that we may never have questioned at that level. It allows us to look at things differently and in unfamiliar ways. Sometimes the added aspect of the meaning of a word that we so far have taken for granted, can take us by surprise and awaken us to a new and unexpected insight.

Here is a simple example of what I am trying to illustrate: The French word for "happiness" is "le bonheur" and, literally translated, it means "the good hour". The French word may make us realize that happiness has a fleeting and temporal aspect, or that it is available only in the present moment, or it can lead us to any number of further reflections that make us discover deeper layers of the truth and meaning of "the state of being happy". As we make progress in learning the new language, we give up trying to translate, but begin to think, feel, and perhaps even gesture in the manner of the new language/mentality. We no longer think about the French implicitly seeing happiness as temporary and just "take in" the new word and the expansion of understanding that goes along with it. We are still perfectly capable of switching back to our mother tongue, the only difference is that our understanding of it has now expanded.

So it is with spiritual traditions. For example, when Nisargadatta Maharaj speaks of the "Parabrahman", we need to make an effort to understand what he means by it. We must study it, think deeply about it, meditate on it. We may try to find Christian equivalents:

Does he mean the "Eternal Word of God"? Or the "I am who I am"? Perhaps the "Ineffable name of God?" Or is it Meister Eckhart's "Ground of Being"? We consider and ponder these possibilities. Eventually we give up trying to translate things into the terms of our faith tradition and begin to comprehend, beyond the limitations of concepts, translations or even words. The teaching then becomes a gateway to a deeper understanding of the reality of that which we call God in our tradition and a signpost pointing to that truth which is ultimately only found beyond words and concepts.

Paradoxically, I find that engaging with other religious traditions has led me to a deeper and richer level in my Christian faith and in my relationship with Christ. By taking me out of my familiar religious environment, it has given me a fresh perspective and opened up the possibility of discovering the truth of the gospel in new and fresh ways.

In my Christian journey, I have come to understand that in this manner, the teachings of the true masters of all traditions, taken up in prayer and in stillness and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, can be a great enrichment to our Christian faith. They have the potential to lead us into a deeper faith commitment in openness, love and respect for others. They have immeasurably deepened my understanding of Christ's revelation and made me realize that He loves us all unconditionally, no matter what religion or tradition we belong to. They

will also lead us to a deep appreciation not only of our own, but also of other faith traditions and cultures. They will do this without "watering down" Christ's teachings or "straying" from our own faith, in fact they have led me to a much deeper comprehension and love for our own Christian traditions.

The most important aspect of being able to see this truth is that, as we grow in our understanding of the Word, we become able to reflect our truth also within the truth of the great religions of the world thereby building bridges to our sisters and brothers. We can find common ground and open ourselves up to the vision of a world that finds community in religious diversity and enrichment in sharing our wisdom in community, without losing our identity.

I have thus come to understand that the Holy Spirit is at work in all people and all religions, prompting us all to form a silent hymn of glory in love and unity to Him, who is the Eternal Word of God.

Joerg Kaldewey



Helga Will

# *God among the Pots and the Pans*

*My heart is my whole being. It is the secret room where I am truly myself. Where my life story unfolds. Outside of my heart I am lost and there in its silent depths I can see the face of God, whom I seek.*

**St. Augustine**

I was not prepared to seek God. After all, I did not have contact with him in a long time. That is why I was completely surprised by the proposal to start searching for God at home among the pots and the pans. However, I agreed.

It was a weekend with meditation and contemplation in the silence at home. The meeting was organized by Eileen and Kathleen from Contemplative Outreach Ireland, and started on Friday evening and connected 98 people together on Zoom, mainly from Ireland, but also from other countries. Although it was not required, I chose to keep silent for two days, as we did last March, just before the pandemic.

We have only two rooms in our apartment, so I had to arrange with my husband space and times I would meditate in the kitchen. To my surprise, everything turned out naturally, and my husband was also pleased with it because he willingly used this time to be with himself as well.

During the meditation also my cat was called by the sound of the gong, and he used to lay down on my knee. The meetings in silence on Zoom were held three times a day. But we could choose the session. I wanted to participate in all of them. The prayers lasted twenty minutes long and were back-to-back with three minutes break to stretch our legs. One session was even three times for twenty minutes long. I could see diverse people on the screen who meditate in various spaces of their houses, but the prayer of silence brought us closer.

When I kept noiseless all day, I noticed that I was focusing more on my daily activities. I finely chopped the vegetables for a salad, although I usually make them coarsely. It came out completely natural, I did not plan to chop the vegetables more precisely. I ate dinner with my husband in silence, and it was cheerful peace, we both felt good about it.

In those two days I felt nice and warm inside me, maybe it was love? The acceptance filled me up. And I wanted to share it outside. God was also keeping silent, but I did not need any proof of his existence. I discovered that in silence I give myself the chance to hear myself, appreciate what I really feel, and let it change, flow naturally with life, and be different than I think.

Sometimes I like to hear the cool lectures, interviews, lessons, but I would like much more to allow myself to hear my own heart. Psychologists say that we really know what is good for us, but we do not always hear ourselves. I am not sure if I am myself all the time. I still try to really be in what is around me. Not in my conception which I want to force, but in this what life brings to me. I am being with sounds of cars outside the window, the scream of a seagull flies over my street, with my hands on the purring back of a cat, and natural wrinkles on my existence. Because silence is not lack of sounds, but it is the possibility to listen to something inside you, and around you.

**Malgorzata Kozlowska-Doczyk**



# *God's Thoughts*

God's thoughts are like snowflakes,  
Each unique and intricate,  
Falling thick and fast  
Into the hand that receives them,  
Which closes and melts them,  
Only partially grasped.

But we catch what we can,  
Our book writers and rule makers,  
To freeze us in postures of yesterdays,  
While God's thoughts keep on coming,  
Ever fresh in the present,  
Like a luminous snowstorm,  
Reflecting deep light.

And the mind is eluded,  
Its mechanical structure,  
Loosing transmissions,  
Like an old wireless machine,  
But the heart is receptive,  
Flexible and expanding  
To receive every aspect  
Of imparted delight.

So nothing is lost  
It is all ever-present,  
Each thought is eternal,  
It is we who dissolve,  
But our hearts last forever,  
Sustained in the moment,  
Constantly recreated  
In the exchange with God.

Lynn Turtle

# *God in Small Things*

When the little snow came  
In lockdown  
Last winter  
It fell in new white flakes  
Had a lovely way -  
I thought -  
Of gently touching things.  
Before the small snow melted  
Everything was made pure  
And afterwards  
Lord  
It made me think -  
How unprepared I am  
To meet this beautiful world!

John Frayne



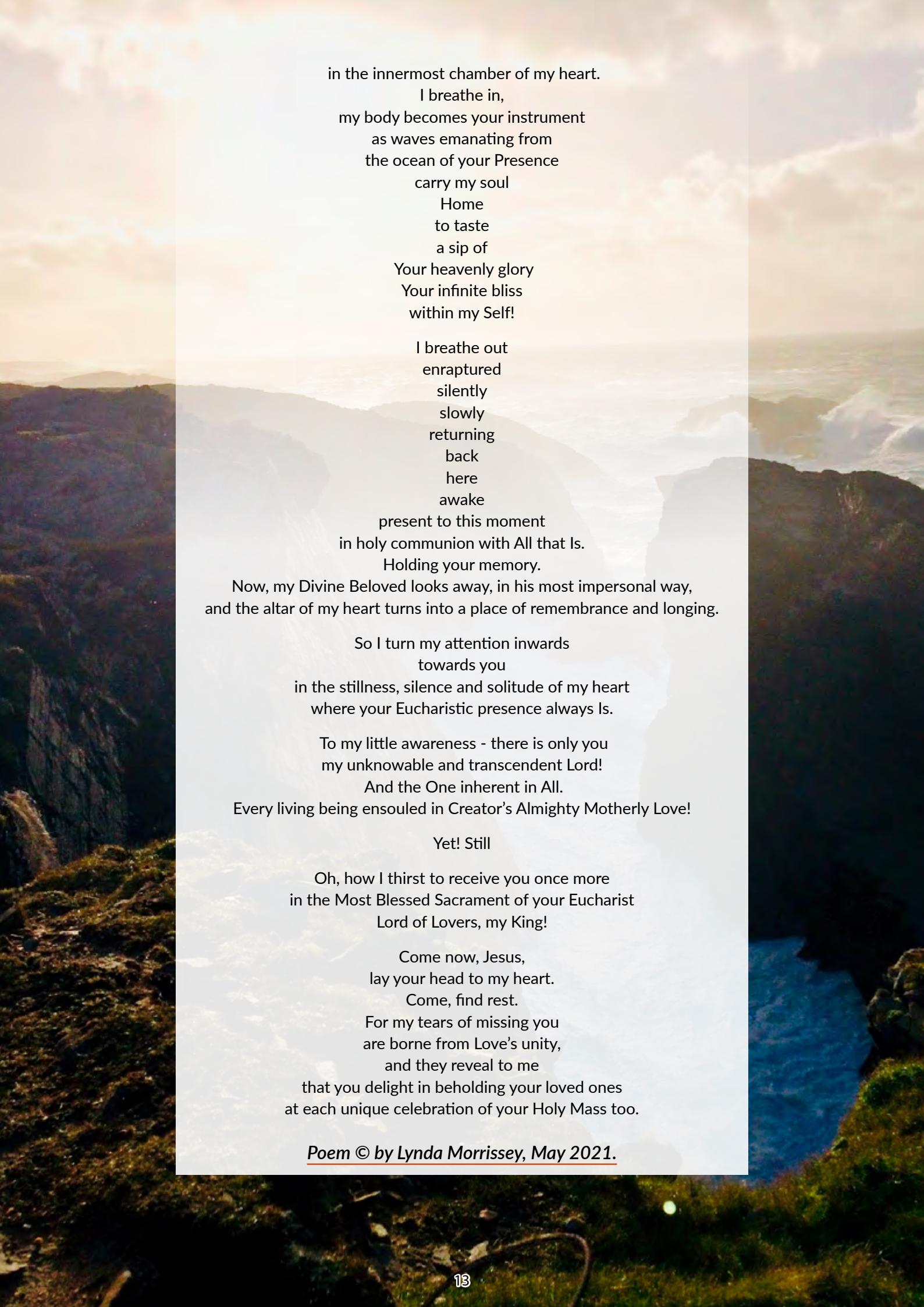
# *One Look from You*

I take that final step  
to stand before  
You  
Unknowable Mystery,  
face-to-face.  
One look from you  
and I receive a taste of the Love  
you out-pour from yourself  
as you create and sustain  
the souls of your unique planets, stars, streams,  
mountains, human beings, and moons.

One look from you  
and I see so clearly now  
that you desire union with my soul, too!

One look from you  
and I know that it's only a matter of time  
before my barriers to your Light  
melt away.

Your  
ONE  
desirous  
look  
fills my depths  
and  
entirely  
claims  
me  
one  
moment  
longer.  
And I sing  
“Yes!”  
Blinded  
by your Beauty,  
I bow my head.  
With trembling awe  
I reach out my hands,  
palm upon palm  
to receive  
You  
Lord, Jesus Christ!  
All the space in God's sacred universe cannot contain you,  
yet here you are  
inside my mouth.  
Revealing your majesty to yourself



in the innermost chamber of my heart.

I breathe in,

my body becomes your instrument

as waves emanating from

the ocean of your Presence

carry my soul

Home

to taste

a sip of

Your heavenly glory

Your infinite bliss

within my Self!

I breathe out

enraptured

silently

slowly

returning

back

here

awake

present to this moment

in holy communion with All that Is.

Holding your memory.

Now, my Divine Beloved looks away, in his most impersonal way,  
and the altar of my heart turns into a place of remembrance and longing.

So I turn my attention inwards  
towards you

in the stillness, silence and solitude of my heart  
where your Eucharistic presence always Is.

To my little awareness - there is only you  
my unknowable and transcendent Lord!

And the One inherent in All.

Every living being ensouled in Creator's Almighty Motherly Love!

Yet! Still

Oh, how I thirst to receive you once more  
in the Most Blessed Sacrament of your Eucharist  
Lord of Lovers, my King!

Come now, Jesus,  
lay your head to my heart.

Come, find rest.

For my tears of missing you  
are borne from Love's unity,  
and they reveal to me

that you delight in beholding your loved ones  
at each unique celebration of your Holy Mass too.

Poem © by Lynda Morrissey, May 2021.

## *On Interconnectedness*

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I had never seen her before. Standing at the gate of her farmhouse, she had an unusually tall stature for a woman perhaps approaching her 90th year. Feeling very alone, I gave her a half-hearted wave, as I drove by. She extended her right arm fully above her head and waved vigorously back at me. Over-taken by her exuberance, time stood still for a moment, as something within me changed.

My sense of separate selfhood was temporarily suspended, no longer able to see the other as outside of myself. We were, for that brief moment, somehow, part of each other, and part of something bigger, together. I felt connected. I felt heart-full. I felt fully alive. I have never seen her since, but her eternal imprint is held at hand.

**Fiona Peggs**

## *Island Time*

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Island time is our annual celebration of friendship and pure joy  
Slow time that releases our spirit opening our eyes to the ordinary  
Sacred time that heightens all our senses to perfect reality  
Special time that strengthens our connection to all that is  
Manifesting in a magical sense of wonder, gratitude and belonging  
Taking time to witness the dawning of the day & hear the dawn chorus  
Taking time to gaze at wild flowers nodding in the breeze  
Taking time to walk and listen for the elusive corncrake  
Taking time to contemplate the gentleness of ship in all their diversity  
Taking time to rest at the lake and watch the swallows swoop and dive  
Taking time to marvel at old buildings and wonder at their secrets  
Taking time to read weather beaten gravestones and wonder of people gone before  
Taking time to immerse ourselves in fictional characters  
Taking time to risk the exhilarating cold of the Atlantic Sea water  
Taking time to recreate pieces of a jigsaw that capture shape and shade  
Taking time to savour the simplicity of fresh mackerel and good wine  
Taking time to feed the hungry gulls and observe their pecking order  
A time to appreciate our connection to one another  
A transforming time  
We are on Island Time

**Geraldine Carroll**

(This poem is based on Geraldine's experiences of annual holidays on an island with her two friends)

# *The Process of Awakening*

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This is an excerpt from a conversation between members of the Denver Center for Contemplative Living and Thomas Keating on April 28th, 2016 at St. Benedict's Monastery

Our ultimate goal is to integrate the active and contemplative dimensions of reality within us and around us, which some mystics call ever-present awareness, enlightenment, or waking up. To handle the details of living a human life without being distracted from this primary vision is not attained through thinking, but through what might be called the practice of just being.

To take time just to be, which is to do nothing but be in God's presence for a regular period of time every day seems to be the shortest access to the mystery that is beyond any conceptual consideration. It leads to a communion with God that is more intimate than anybody can imagine or foresee. Divine love never stops coming but waits for us to shed the obstacles in us to awaken fully to the Divine Presence within us.

It's better to use the word "awakening" than "discovering" because "discovering" suggests effort, and even when effort is good, there is still some ego at work. It takes a while to perceive what the obstacles are. We may ruin our health with extreme bodily asceticism and die too soon. The spiritual journey normally takes a long time.

If we experience emotional suffering, there is probably something we haven't quite surrendered yet. If we truly surrender everything we possess, we will know the right thing to do spontaneously, and action inspired by the Spirit is where Centering Prayer is preparing us to go. It grows into contemplative prayer as presented in the Christian contemplative tradition. Saint John of the Cross writes that those who practice meditation keep moving to ever-deeper interior levels until they reach their inmost center, which is where God dwells and is waiting for us. ...

At some point in the spiritual journey, there is a shift where you realize that the best knowledge you can have of God is no knowledge. That means letting go of every thought, memory, rigid belief system, harmful forms of cultural conditioning, as well as all possessions. It doesn't mean you despise the values of belief systems because most people need some kind of discipline of mind and body in the beginning. The process of awakening normally takes time. Where is it going and where does it end? It ends in God, which is to say it never ends.

## *To Bless the Space Between Us*

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I've been drawn to John O'Donohue's book of blessings constantly as slowly move out of the pandemic. He consistently speaks to my heart space and to my experience of life. As I move into the final chapters of my time on earth, I find it imperative to focus on "blessing the space" in all areas of my life.

My beloved and I had the gift of being with all of our siblings for a week in April. We are ever conscious that this may be the last visit we make to western Pennsylvania and the importance of relationship and connecting to the culture from our upbringing. After returning from that trip east, we took a 30 day road trip west to spend time with our two children who do not live in Carbondale Colorado where we live and their spouses and children and grandchildren. I was able to see so clearly the presence of these children of ours with their grandchildren which allowed me to see how each generation does better with being present. This gives hope for a future planet.

Amazing process of having the space between us blessed so richly from the hills of western Pennsylvania to the blessings of the Roaring Fork Valley in Colorado and the northwest with the ripple effect of children being grandparents and great grandchildren being so well tended by their grandparents who are our children. And that is what blessing is all about I am sure.

Patricia Johnson



CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH IRELAND

*Silence Solitude Solidarity Service*

# Centering Prayer Retreats 2021-2022

Please note that these dates are subject to change, as we continue to follow the Covid -19 Guidelines

17<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup>

September 2021

**Weekend Retreat**

(Online)

3<sup>rd</sup> -10<sup>th</sup>

November 2021

**8 Day Post - Intensive Retreat**

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

26<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup>

November 2021

**Advent Weekend Retreat**

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup>

December 2021

**Advent Weekend Retreat**

(Online)

11<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>

February 2022

**Weekend Retreat**

Ards Friary, Creeslough, Co Donegal.

16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>

March 2022

**5 Day retreat**

Manresa Retreat Centre. Dublin.

8<sup>th</sup> -10<sup>th</sup>

April 2022

**Lenten Weekend Retreat**

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

8<sup>th</sup> July

(Friday) 2022

**Day Retreat**

Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, Killinard, Co Laoise.

9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup>

September 2022

**Weekend Retreat**

Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle. BT546QU

2<sup>nd</sup> -9<sup>th</sup>

November 2022

**8 Day Post Intensive Retreat**

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

25<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup>

November 2022

**Advent Weekend Retreat**

Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.



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