

# *Contemplative Outreach Ireland*



**Annual Newsletter  
2022**

*Silence Solitude Solidarity Service*

## Dear Fellow Traveller on the Journey,

The past few years have challenged all of us in many ways. Our sense of security has been shattered by this tiny virus which took over our lives, changing things in a way we couldn't have imagined before this. Just as we appeared to be emerging from the Pandemic, a war broke out on our doorstep and millions of innocent people, just like us, found their lives shattered by death and destruction. On top of this we are destroying our beautiful earth with our lifestyles. Perhaps we can see all this as a call to sanity – it is an illusion that we are safe in our own manmade worlds. We are safe, however, but not in the way we mostly think. We are more than safe. We are loved unconditionally by the One who says “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can anyone of you add a single hour to your life?”

This is the One “in whom we live and move and have our being”. As we sit in Centering Prayer, we allow this

all powerful, all loving God to make Himself known to us and we begin to get an inkling of what true security means. God is the only true security and we have this security all the time but we don't realise it. Being faithful to our regular practice of Centering Prayer is the most important thing we can do for our world and everyone and everything in it.

Thomas Keating regularly spoke of mankind entering a new stage of consciousness and there is evidence of that in the many ways people are turning towards meditation. The old order is crumbling and a new way is emerging where we worship “in Spirit and in Truth”.

We thank all of you who are praying, all of you who support others by facilitating prayer groups, retreats, etc, all of you who support the work of COI, financially and otherwise and all of you who contributed to this newsletter. Thanks also to Kay who put it all together in this issue and we hope you enjoy reading it.

In peace and love.

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

## Is Snomass Still Our Spiritual Home?

***We maintain a spiritual relationship with St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, CO.***

*Saint Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado is our spiritual home and a place of retreat and renewal where new insights for our spiritual journey may be revealed.*

-Guideline 10, CO Vision statement

With the explosion of Centering Prayer groups online and the expanding reach of our community worldwide, I must admit I started to wonder about the relevance of this guideline for those in Contemplative Outreach (CO) who have never, and most likely never will—have the opportunity to experience the community at Snowmass firsthand. While St. Benedict's will continue to hold value for us because of the place it had in the formation and teaching of our dear Thomas Keating and William Meninger, I wondered how an ongoing relationship with the monastery could be maintained without them and with the ongoing pandemic-related travel restrictions. Would this guideline about St. Benedict's being our 'spiritual home' continue to be relevant for CO in the years to come? And how can it be relevant now for those who have never had the opportunity to experience Snowmass as a 'place of retreat and renewal where new insights for our journey may be revealed'?

These were some of the questions in my mind as I arrived for a 10-day post-intensive retreat at Snowmass in September of this year—the first retreat

I had experienced in what was supposed to be my 'spiritual home'. Thankfully, the complexities of travel even across the Canadian border during the Covid pandemic did not prevent me from joining nine other retreatants –all from the U.S. –who arrived at St. Benedict's on the beautiful summer-warm afternoon of September 4, 2021. For me, that day began an adventure in discovering the meaning of Snowmass as 'home', an adventure which I think can be replicated the world over, regardless of where one lives and attempts to embody the values of contemplative prayer. As I wandered her hills and sat through hours of prayer in the retreat house and with the monks during vespers and morning mass, I learned that indeed, Snowmass still has much to teach us about the value of our contemplative tradition. With gratitude, I share a few of them with you here.

First, my time at Snowmass reminded me of the importance of extended prayer; an hour in the morning; 1.5 hours before lunch and another hour late afternoon. But at St. Benedict's there were added opportunities for contemplative prayer during lauds and mass in the morning and vespers in the evening. Added to this was the beautiful sound of the bell calling the monks to prayer throughout the day—similar to the gong sounding in the deep silence of our prayer room at the retreat centre. Praying in such close proximity to the monks reminded me of the power of the tradition from which Contemplative Outreach was

born, as well as the power of prayer in so many other world religions. Could the Benedictine call to prayer five times a day, for example, be compared to the Muslim practice of kneeling towards Mecca in a similar rhythm of pre-dawn vigil through evening watch? And if so, how can this type of deep commitment to prayer inform the practice of those of us who were not raised with such rituals? Fr. William Meninger says this about the Benedictine commitment to prayer in his beautiful book called *Come to the Mountain*:

*Life at St. Benedict's is structured around prayer. We first establish the time for prayer; then we plan the rest of the day's activities. Prayer is the anchor.*

Seeing this principle lived out firsthand at St. Benedict's reminded me of Fr. Thomas's instruction to set aside a minimum of 20 minutes twice a day for our Centering Prayer practice. In a subtle and beautiful way he handed on to us an age-old monastic tradition which can be lived out anywhere we are. The sacredness of Snowmass valley is apprehended by the sacredness within, cultivated by a rhythm of prayer, which then CAN be experienced on the busy streets of Hong Kong, or the rural quiet of Ireland, or even behind prison walls -- wherever it is we decide to set aside a regular time for Centering Prayer and other forms of contemplative practice.

The second thing I was reminded of by being on retreat at Snowmass was the importance of human relationships and their interplay in small communities, something which I think is being challenged in a real way through our current need to meet on Zoom and our desire (however well-intentioned!) to share Centering Prayer and its contemplative vision as widely as possible. (Guideline for Service #1). Being at an in-person retreat reminded me of what it means to actually see, hear and smell the presence of others through the vicissitudes of daily life (including our various abilities to show up for meals on time and sign up for daily chores!). This was an important reality check for me on how I view the relationships I have been building through Zoom over these many months. And living even for a short time close to the monks at Snowmass reminded me that Centering Prayer is grounded in a tradition that involves a deep commitment to living in community, regardless of how small or humble it may appear. Encounters with the outside world are clearly limited for the monks, but their commitment to one another is unmistakable, with the unique gifts of each shining through in the smallest of ways. As Fr. Meninger says:

Monastic life is no quick fix. It has a slower pace than life in the world, and it is directed toward a lifelong commitment. Thus the discernment process is cautious, providing the seeker with time to dip a toe in the water before plunging in (*Come to The Mountain*).

So I wonder, what can we learn from the Benedictine example of small, holistic communities that are developed slowly over time? Is the creation of

such communities still possible in this age of Zoom gatherings and pandemic-related restrictions?

My time at Snowmass also reminded me of the role that both place and geography can play in contemplative practice. In choosing *Come to the Mountain* as the title of his book, Fr. Meninger reminds us that St. Benedict's monastery is about much more than the people and human-built structures that exist there, however precious these may be. Indeed, his chapter entitled *Wisdom*, describes in detail how the 'more than human beings' who roam the fields and hillsides of Snowmass are essential teachers in the lives of the monks who live there. In his chapter on *Lectio Divina* --also a cornerstone of Benedictine life --Meninger explains: Anything approached with faith can be a source of *Lectio Divina*. This can include our experiences of nature, as both beautiful and awesomely terrifying. This embodied experience of God through nature was my own experience at Snowmass as well. As with other intensive retreats, I found time outdoors essential for balancing the long prayer periods and bountiful meals that comprised the daily schedule. But the geography and climate of this sacred valley had unique lessons to teach. First, I quickly learned the importance of slowing down and letting go of how far I could walk in the 30 degree Celsius heat at an elevation of 8,000+ feet. And the view down the valley from each step up the path gradually opened me to the spaciousness of this place. By the fourth day, the vastness of the landscape seemed to pervade my prayer time in the retreat house so that our circle became the rim of God's singing bowl itself! The time I spent sitting with the hills outside also gave me a new understanding of the power and untiring strength that holds us when we pray; by the end of the retreat I knew that I was not just sitting on a chair in the meditation room, but on the very rocks and landscape that held that chair. At last, I had indeed 'come to the mountain'.

Clearly, my time at Snowmass was helpful for my own spiritual journey. But did it answer the question of how St. Benedict's can continue to be a spiritual home for those who may never have such an opportunity? The answer for me seems to be a resounding yes! For what I learned is that Snowmass will continue to live in the hearts and minds of those everywhere who:

- Set aside time daily to practice Centering Prayer
- Value the long, slow process of formation in small communities
- Remember the earth and all her beings as part of this community

In this time of change and upheaval, let us remember our roots together, draw on their strength, and continue to celebrate the beauty of our spiritual heritage.

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

## **We Are Not Separate**

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I was asked to express my experience of centering prayer and I have been pondering that question for a few weeks now. Since the pandemic started, I've taken to doing centering prayer 2 to 3 hours daily. The extra hours of practice sometimes allow me to be more accepting of the mess our planet seems to be in at this point in time. Climate change all over the world is crucial and in crisis. Greed and cruelty to our fellow human beings can be witnessed daily. Here in the USA, we are witnessing mass shootings, political insanity and homelessness. As I take this daily to prayer, I feel powerless to change any of it. And yet I sit. And yet I pray. My intention is peace, not only for myself but for our world. My mantra these days is 'We are not separate'. Recognising this, I can take on some of the pain that is happening in our world and give back something of myself to alleviate that pain. I rise from my prayer, bow, do what I can and hope.

Patricia Johnson

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### **Extract from Thomas Keating's teaching on "The Practice of Attention/Intention"**

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What would be an active discipline to assist our centering prayer, so that it does not become self-centered or a mere process of self-perfection, but actually is an assimilation of the infinite tenderness of God living his life within us? In general, such a discipline might be called "contemplative service"; in the concrete, I call it the "attention/intention practice".

When you emerge from centering prayer, the present moment is what happens when you open your eyes. You have been in the present moment when you were completely open to the divine life and action within you. Now you get up out of your chair and you continue daily life. This is where attentiveness to the present moment is a way of putting order into the myriad occupations, thoughts and events of daily life. Attention in this context simply means to do what you are doing. This was one of the principal recommendations of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth century. The disciple would come for instruction and say, "I am interested in finding the true self and becoming a contemplative. What should I do?" The Desert guides would reply in the most prosaic language. "Do what you are doing". Which means, bring your attention to the present moment and to whatever is its immediate content and keep it there. For instance, it is time for supper. Well, put the food on the table. This is true virtue. Turning on the television or making a needless phone call might not be. Attending to the present moment means that our mind is on what we are doing as we go through the day. Thus we are united to God in the present moment instead of wondering what we are going to do next or tomorrow. There might be a good time set aside for planning but not now.

To be completely present to someone you are talking to is one of the most difficult of all practices. Your presence will often do more than what you say. It gives others a chance to be present to themselves. Moreover, if your presence is coming from a place deep within, the divine compassion that is inspiring you will be there for them in the degree they are capable of receiving it. To be totally present to children, if you have them, to old folks, if you have them, to counselees, if you have them, to the job of the present moment that needs a responsible fulfilment - this is what might be called to act from the center, how to put order into daily life by being present to the occupation of the present moment. This cuts off an enormous amount of needless reflection, projects of self-aggrandisement, and wondering what people are thinking about us.

If we refuse to think of anything except what we are doing or the person that we are with, we develop the habit of being present to the present moment. In a way, the present moment becomes as sacred as being in a church. Far better to be present to your duty if you are a bartender, than to be present in church and to be thinking about being in a bar. At least you are present to yourself when you are paying attention to what you are doing.

Attention, then, is a way of doing what we are doing. It cracks the crust of the false self (our psychological awareness of daily life) in which we are the center of the universe while everything else is circling around our particular needs or desires. This is an illusion but unfortunately it is the heritage we bring with us from early life.

A practice, then, of just paying attention to what you are doing for a certain part of the day for the love of God and disregarding every other thought is a practical way of opening ourselves to a deeper level of contemplation. It will not work instantly, but regular practice has long-range effects. It might be called the **how** of activity.

The spiritual level is also healed of the false self by the **why** of what you are doing. Your attention to do what you are doing for the love of God connects you with the divine presence in a powerful way. The power of intention is immense. The will willing God actually enters into union with God although you may not consciously experience the effects of this union straight away. My intention is why I am doing what I am doing.

Here is the practice: Choose a certain time when you deliberately establish and renew your intention of doing some particular work for the love of God. Our minds are generally so scattered that we keep forgetting. To have a time or one particular activity when you do this deliberately as a daily practice will show you the influence of your intentionality on the false self. Nobody does anything without a motive. You don't know why you are doing something unless you know both your conscious and unconscious motivation. For instance, as you start trying to do a particular job at hand for the love of God, the motivation of the false self begins to arise and you may find yourself acting out of jealousy; or you want to get even with someone who has wronged you; or you are trying to get ahead in some situation and you trample on someone else's rights. The galaxy of bad intentions motivated by the false self emerges when for a few minutes you try to maintain pure intention.

The great insight of the Desert Fathers and Mothers was that a pure intention leads to purity of heart; selfish motivation is gradually evacuated and the habit of pure intention is firmly established. You begin to enter into God's intentionality, which is to manifest infinite compassion in the present circumstances, however painful, however joyful, however seemingly bereft of

divine presence.

As soon as you focus your intention – why are you doing this particular action – your unconscious motivation arises. The unconscious motivation might be that in our service, however devout it may appear to be outwardly, we are really looking for praise. In other words, our secret desires begin to emerge into consciousness when we deliberately focus our intention on loving God in all that we do.

How to work – attention. Why I am working – intention. Awareness of these two aspects lead to the third and final quality of contemplative service – **who** is doing the work. Having uncovered the spiritual obstacles of pride, envy and whatever else might be hidden in the unconscious, we are now approaching our true self; we are approaching our inmost center; we are approaching Love loving itself. What is going to happen? Without your intending anything special, without necessarily doing anything special, people begin to find God in you as you humbly do what you are supposed to be doing. Complete submission to God allows the divine energy to radiate, and others seeing you have a sense of being in touch with God or in the midst of being in a community where divine love exists. This is what a Christian community is supposed to be, whether it is a family, parish or organisation. The third way of working or acting in daily life might be called transmission.

When attention to the present moment and a pure intention are established as habits, then you have, in the fullest sense of the word, contemplative service. Your contemplation is then perceived, enjoyed and received, perhaps without a word, or without anyone being able to explain it. People know that somehow, Christ is acting in you, is present in you, and is loving them in you. This is the atmosphere in which people can grow and become fully alive. And the greatest love of course is divine love, especially when it becomes transparent in another person. And it is most impressive when that person is not even aware of it and it just happens.

Thomas Keating

# *Soul Sighs*

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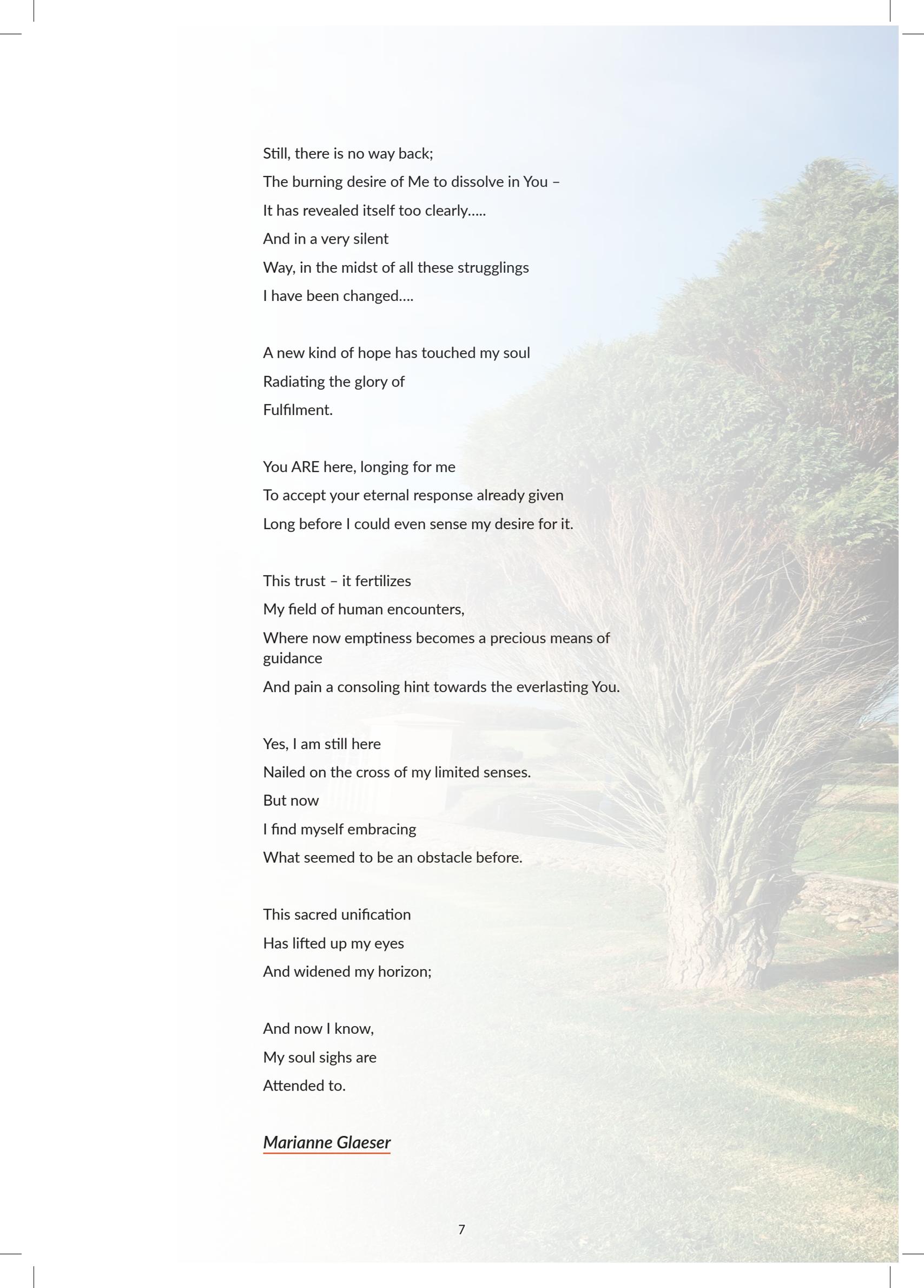
Something is telling me, there is more  
Much much more, and yet – here I am  
Nailed on the cross of my limited senses.

Where is it,  
The key to get in touch with this source of my longing?

I start searching within me,  
Trying to define the features of my individuality.  
Soon I am trapped by the demands  
Of my little selfish needs, pressing to move  
Into the centre of my attention, just  
To leave me back –  
Lonely as never before.....

The Me in me –  
A helpless cretin,  
Unfit for life.  
Unless....  
It opens up for the unpredictable adventure  
With You:

The You in me  
Is making me Me.  
The Real You in me  
Is making me question the existence of 'mine'.  
The Loving You in me – pushing me to pour out my life  
without any compromise.  
An Intensity of great danger,  
Asking for an eternal response from fragile hearts.  
The slightest hesitance of the beloved  
Can turn it into a wave of overwhelming pain,  
Washing away hope and courage  
To open up again.



Still, there is no way back;  
The burning desire of Me to dissolve in You –  
It has revealed itself too clearly....  
And in a very silent  
Way, in the midst of all these strugglings  
I have been changed....

A new kind of hope has touched my soul  
Radiating the glory of  
Fulfilment.

You ARE here, longing for me  
To accept your eternal response already given  
Long before I could even sense my desire for it.

This trust – it fertilizes  
My field of human encounters,  
Where now emptiness becomes a precious means of  
guidance  
And pain a consoling hint towards the everlasting You.

Yes, I am still here  
Nailed on the cross of my limited senses.  
But now  
I find myself embracing  
What seemed to be an obstacle before.

This sacred unification  
Has lifted up my eyes  
And widened my horizon;

And now I know,  
My soul sighs are  
Attended to.

**Marianne Glaeser**

# *Earth Whispers*

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Stillness holds the early morning  
Warm mist airbrushes sea to sky  
Distant ghost ships appear in haze,  
While the solid earth beneath my feet  
Confounds the eye with colour.

And the softly lapping waves  
Echoing through my mind  
Seem to stir a distant memory  
Of forming within deepest darkness  
Rocking and cradled by drifting currents.  
Dreaming, as though for aeons,  
During a slow migration  
From sea to shore  
Toward an insistent sun.

Sun, light of life,  
Warm blessing to the earth,  
A shadow stirring memories  
Of an unseen light  
At a glorious conception.

Unseen light,  
Irresistable draw to heart and mind,  
A vision, aeons of time away  
Or ever present when you look within  
Seen in an instant  
With a refocusing of the eye.

*Lynn Turtle*

## A Sharing on the State of One Congregation, The Angel Of Death

At this stage, the life of the Congregation, such as it is, seems to be coming to an end. Strange to say, we do not feel any sadness. We get pleasure in lifting up our 174 years to God, knowing that the few years left to us are counted.

There is no sadness or impression of defeat. The Angel of the Lord is coming, and the few of us left are there with open hands and grateful hearts.

A short time before her death, our Foundress wrote the most beautiful lines on the Angel of Death.

*"The Angel of Death has come again; day and night he is bending over me, waiting for the signal to free my soul of its covering with a fire other than the first. At times he puts a spark on my lips, and a rapid and burning song of praise makes me abandon myself to all God's designs.*

*Usually he looks at me with a deep calm that attracts me; everything seems to stop; I hear no more the pulse of life; I feel I am partaking of eternal silence. At the beginning I was afraid of this nothingness, but now a secret intelligence that cannot be named upon earth, is revealing to me that God and Heaven exist, a bottomless, boundless sea, where the soul finds sovereign life.*

*The Angel of Death is beautiful; when I see him a great sweetness comes down on my soul; I find myself smiling as in expectation of a great hope that is becoming a reality. In these ineffable moments, one sees that every passing thing*

*must come to an end and everything that will remain has already begun to live in the spirit and in the flesh. In Holy Communion, we have received the pledge of immortality, and no one can take away our treasure.*

*Do not leave me, beautiful angel, until you have carried my soul to God"*

**Fortis est ut mors dilectio**

**Love is strong as death**

**Several Congregations may be expecting disparition at this time. It's encouraging to remember that "Love is strong as Death"**

**Sr Marie Dolores**

Sr Marie Dolores, now in her late 80s, has been a tremendous support to the Centering Prayer community in Ireland. She says she herself has been praying in this way all her life, even before the term Centering Prayer came into use. She was deeply involved in the first Centering Prayer retreats in Ireland, later organising and facilitating retreats in Ferns Co Wexford. Her Community, the Sisters of Adoration, is coming to an end after 174 years.

## A First Five-Day Retreat

It was a great privilege to be able to attend an Advanced Centering Prayer retreat in the Jesuit Centre of Spirituality, an oasis in our capital city of Dublin, from the 16th to the 20th of March this year. We were in Lenten spring, a time to listen more intently, a season of hope and of new growth. So it was truly a gift to be in Manresa, after the Covid pandemic during which groups were unable to meet together for prayer in their communities.

At the welcome and orientation, we learnt that this was the first five-day silent retreat for Contemplative Outreach. The eleven retreatants staying at Manresa came from as far away as Belfast, Cork, Roscommon, Galway Dublin and a beautiful lady from the Netherlands. To say that everyone loved and enjoyed their stay is an understatement, due to a number of

factors. We were snug as bugs in our single ensuite rooms and spoilt at every meal by the kind and obliging staff, providing wonderful fare suitable for every dietary requirement. Our meeting room for prayer sessions was perfect, both in comfort and in size, with a beautiful sunny south-facing aspect.

All of this helped us retreatants to relax and commit to our daily prayer sessions, some of which consisted of 2x30 minute sessions, with a contemplative walk in between. These were expertly led by our facilitators Carol and Siobhan. Indeed the silence was most profound in our prayer but also throughout, both inside and outside the house. After our prayer sessions, we were encouraged to take regular contemplative walks which I particularly enjoyed, as the peaceful grounds looked splendid in all their spring glory, being only a

few metres away from the usually busy Clontarf Road. The labyrinth on the lawn was quite something, though alas! I didn't reach the centre. Maybe next time, please God. It was good practice to remain still within, while walking outside in the glorious weather, aware of Mother Nature manifesting new growth. When I got the opportunity, I had a lovely few walks along the seafront to St Anne's Park or towards Bull Island, again practicing being within while enjoying life around me. For all of us, it was early to bed and early to rise willingly each day in this most beautiful holy place.

On two afternoons, we watched two DVDs with the late Father Thomas Keating explaining Centering Prayer practice and the use of the sacred word. Always something to learn from listening to that great man. On a couple of days, Carol and Siobhan afforded us, individually and optionally, a few minutes spiritual companionship. These were optional, for anyone needing some direction or for any query they might have had regarding centering prayer.

Late Saturday afternoon, we celebrated Holy Eucharist. Father in his homily had a few words to say about the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13:1-9). He related it to us being 'manured and watered' in Manresa as the man wanting to dig round the doomed fig tree, to help it produce new fruit; and surely we were.

After Mass, it was evaluation time. Everyone was full of praise for how well the retreat was facilitated by Carol and Siobhan, the beautiful silence, the generous hospitality and Manresa being an ideal, accessible location. On Sunday morning we had talking at breakfast, then it was time to say farewell to new friends and travel home with grateful hearts.

Truly, the Holy spirit was at work among us and within us during those holy days, gifting us with His deep peace, inspiring us to keep praying for the world and its leaders, our Church, our communities, families and loved ones and also empowering us to go forth and produce good fruits. So:

*Keep your heart open and free*

*Take time to dwell in the silence*

*Become a peaceful presence in the world.*

Psalm 34, *Psalms for Praying*, Nan Merrill.

Judith Tierney

# Images of God

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Without doubt my favourite image of God is that of the father of the prodigal son, as portrayed in Luke's gospel.

"While he was still a long way off, the father saw him coming, was filled with compassion for him, ran to meet him and embraced him".

This is the God who waits for me when I come to prayer. When I enter the inner room, no matter what state I am in, my Divine is waiting for me with open arms.

Another beautiful image is described by Thomas Keating in his book *Manifesting God* - that of God as our dance partner. He says when the honeymoon period of the spiritual journey is over and prayer becomes dry and God's nearness is apparently fading, this is not the time to give up on our prayer life. This is the time to trust, to let go of our need for felt feelings of God and to surrender. Now our relationship with our Divine is based on boundless confidence in God's infinite mercy, forgiveness and hidden protection. If we consent, God's Spirit within us increases and everyday life becomes a kind of dance. We allow the Divine to become our dance partner. Allow ourselves to be danced by Him. Our God remains the leader in this dance and we join in effortlessly.

If we can allow ourselves to surrender in this way, life takes on a new meaning or a kind of 4th dimension. When problems, fears or stresses arise, instead of reacting as we did in the past, we breathe and we remember that God is leading this dance and that He will sustain us no matter what.

Jesus describes this way of living as being in the Kingdom of God.

Dance me through this day O Lord  
Step by step  
Breath by breath.  
Do not let me worry or stress  
About things that may never happen  
Or things that are outside my control.  
Breath by breath  
All is well.

Siobhan Semple

## Translating the effects of centering prayer into daily life

Thomas Keating, in his great wisdom, understood that 'one reason that centering prayer is not as effective as it could be is that when you emerge from it into the ordinary routines of daily life your emotional programmes for happiness re-engage. Emotional reactions immediately start to drain the reservoir of interior silence that you established during the time of centering prayer.' He outlined a number of practices that can help to translate the effects of centering prayer into daily life.' (Open Mind, Open Heart, Appendices, 1).

Any or all of these can be very helpful and it is for each individual to see what might best suit them. For me, the answer has proved to be the welcoming prayer, which Keating describes as 'a practice of 'letting go' in the present moment in the ordinary routines of daily life. ...contemplative prayer is aimed at transforming daily life, with its never-ending round of ordinary activities.'

I sensed that this could provide a bridge connecting centering prayer practice with my daily activity and experience. Daunting though what it asked certainly felt to me at that point, I decided that I would be open to any promptings as to how this might come about.

I began to read and listen to very helpful material and guidance on the welcoming prayer available on the Contemplative Outreach website and other sources online. One is a Contemplative Outreach 40-day praxis booklet, Welcoming Prayer – Consent on the Go. There is also a good leaflet with guidelines on the practice on the Contemplative Outreach Ireland site. This initial learning stage proved to be an important first step, as it helped clarify for me the true intentionality behind the language of the prayer and its three phases: to feel and sink into, to welcome and then to let go, as various afflictive emotions kick in during the course of our daily life - frustration, discouragement, anger and so on. In particular, I learnt what it is not!

It is not, for instance, that the welcome we consent to is a welcoming of the situation itself, rather it is agreeing to the reality of our reaction to it - 'this is what I feel right now', in itself neither good nor bad - and God's activity within this moment. By embracing the painful or difficult emotion we may have defended ourselves against or run from, we are in effect disarming it, removing its power to hurt or to chase us back into our smaller selves.

Nor does it mean that, in the intentionality of letting go, this excludes the possible need for a response

to the person or situation that has given rise to the uncomfortable reaction. It also doesn't mean letting go of all emotions, thoughts, commentaries etc, since they are part of our human nature. What it does mean is about opening ourselves to letting go of those thoughts and feelings that control us, inasmuch as we find ourselves able to do so.

Adopting the disposition toward daily life that the welcoming practice invites us to, can free up a great amount of soul-energy that liberates a level of life that we hadn't even known existed. By welcoming what we are experiencing we are beginning to create an atmosphere of inner hospitality, welcoming God's presence in any given situation.

It is easy to recognise how the welcoming prayer is a natural complement to the essence of centering prayer practice - first to open to God's love and presence and God's action within and then during the rest of each day to try to bring that disposition expressed in the welcoming prayer in our response to whatever circumstances arise in life.

The best way for me to try to integrate the invitation of the welcoming practice is to include it each day after my morning centering prayer. This serves as a reminder of the ways in which the potential to allow the sinking in, welcoming and letting go might take place in the course of the day ahead.

The Contemplative Outreach booklet describes the welcoming practice as 'consent on the go' - a very apt description. In the midst of situations that give rise to uncomfortable emotional reactions, it is not possible to take time to reflect on these in that moment. I have found though that it can quite early on become possible to at least register, without judgement, what is happening - 'right now I am feeling so frustrated/angry etc' and any bodily sensation arising from it and to welcome both an acceptance of that as the reality and of the Divine presence within it too. There continue to be many times when this doesn't happen but I know that that is also part of accepting that we always start, and continue, from where we are.

This certainly helps to bring me more in touch with these real aspects of myself and, in the process I hope, closer to my true self. Especially in the often fraught and complex, fast-moving world we all live in, it can be all too easy to simply ignore or even lose contact entirely with so much of our constant emotional and physical reactions to daily occurrences.

As for the letting go, this is often not possible

there and then – especially with the ongoing inner commentaries that invariably follow on! But at least some of the intensity may lessen more quickly and, at a later time, I find that reflection on what might have been at the root of that particular reaction can be of benefit.

The last line in the welcoming prayer is the one I most often return to during the day: I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within. It has become possible to hold this unshakeable trust in the prayer and intention at the same time as the accepting awareness of what is closed, resistant and stubborn within me. Without that dual reality in my life, nothing would have the potential for change. But

it has, and that is the great blessing of commitment to this spiritual path – to know that my journey in life can continue to be a work-in-progress up until the final moment.

Another invaluable observation from Thomas Keating completes for me the main elements of the spiritual path: The way of pure faith is to persevere in contemplative practice without worrying about where we are on the journey, and without comparing ourselves with others or judging others' gifts as better than ours. We can be spared all this nonsense if we surrender ourselves to the divine action, whatever the psychological content of our prayer may be.

Kay Hallahan

## *The Welcoming Prayer*

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Welcome, welcome, welcome.

I welcome everything that comes my way today because I know it is for my healing.

I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations and conditions.

I let go of my desire for power and control.

I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval and pleasure.

I let go of my desire for security and survival.

I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within.

## *Maps*

---

My husband pulled over to the side of the road, frustrated by my lack of map reading skills. I handed, or perhaps threw, the map to him as I pointed to the Irish sign post with its eleven differently aimed arrows. "You figure it out!" It was not my most loving-wife moment.

An Irishman appeared, walking toward my open car window. "Are ya lost?"

"Not exactly. We are just having trouble figuring out the map."

He smiled a wonderful smile and said, "First thing, never mind the map."

I have pondered that phrase in my heart as it seems to me good advice on my husband and my travels around Ireland - as well as on the spiritual journey. On that journey, I have consulted many maps that suggested a number of paths - prayer books, biographies of saints, workshops and retreats. All have been helpful - up to a point. At some crossroads in my life, I needed to put aside such aids and listen to Christ. At such times, I was apt to hear, "Never mind the map, follow me."

Carolyn Goddard

## *Sixteen Years In*

---

Met an old habit  
yesterday:  
day-dreaming-in-prayer –  
it wanted me to play.....

whoa, now – its brother  
showing up today.....  
ah, these bad pennies  
never really go away.

Tim Fannon

## *The Prayer of the Empty Water Jar*

---

Jesus, I come into your presence knowing that you are the very emptiness of God.  
I come before you holding the water jar of my life.  
Your eyes meet mine and I know what I'd rather not know.

I came to be filled but I am already full. I am too full.  
This is my sickness. I am full of things that crowd out your healing presence.  
A holy knowing steals inside my heart and I see the painful truth.  
I don't need more. I need less. I am too full.

I am full of things that block out your golden grace. I am smothered by gods of my own creation.  
I am lost in the forest of my false self.  
I am full of my own opinions and narrow attitudes, full of fear, resentments, control, full of self-pity and arrogance.  
Slowly this terrible truth pierces my heart. I am so full there is no room for you.

Contemplatively, and with compassion, you ask me to reach into my water jar.  
One by one, you enable me to lift out the things that are a hindrance to my wholeness.  
I take each one to my heart and I hear you asking me 'Why is this so important to you?'

Like the murmur of a gentle stream I hear you calling 'Let go, let go, let go.'  
I pray with each obstacle tasting the bitterness and grief it has caused me.  
Finally, I sit with my empty water jar.

I hear you whisper, 'You have become a space for God, now there is hope. Now you are ready to be a channel of life. You have given up your own agenda.

*There is nothing left but God'.*





# CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH IRELAND

*Silence Solitude Solidarity Service*

## Centering Prayer Retreats 2022-2023

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

9th-11th  
September 2022

**Weekend Retreat**  
Corrymeela Centre, Ballycastle, Co Antrim.

16th-18th  
September 2022

**Weekend Retreat**  
(Online)

2nd -9th  
November 2022

**8 day Post Intensive**  
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

25th-27th  
November 2022

**Advent Weekend Retreat**  
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

9th-11th  
December 2022

**Advent Weekend Retreat**  
(Online)

10th-12th  
February 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
Ards Friary, Ards, Co Donegal.

10th-12th  
March 2023

**Lenten Weekend Retreat**  
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford.

22nd-26th  
March 2023

**5 Day Retreat**  
Old Rectory, Donaghmore, Co Wicklow

12th-14th  
May 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
(Online)

14th July 2023

**Retreat Day**  
Mount St Anne's Retreat Centre, Co Laois.

8th-10th  
September 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
(Online)

22nd-24th  
September 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
Tobar Mhuire Retreat Centre, Co Down

1st -8th  
November 2023

**8 day Post Intensive**  
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford

1st - 3rd  
December 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre, Co Wexford

8th-10th  
December 2023

**Weekend Retreat**  
(Online)

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