

In Loving Memory



A Prayer for Belonging

Dear Lord,

Let me belong.

Let me belong to you.

Let me belong to a community.

Let me belong to a family.

Let me belong.

In the daylight, let me belong.

At night, let me belong.

During times of illness and strife, let me belong.

During good times, let me belong.

But always, let me belong to you.

For it is your belonging where all belonging begins;

And does not end.

In this I pray. Amen.





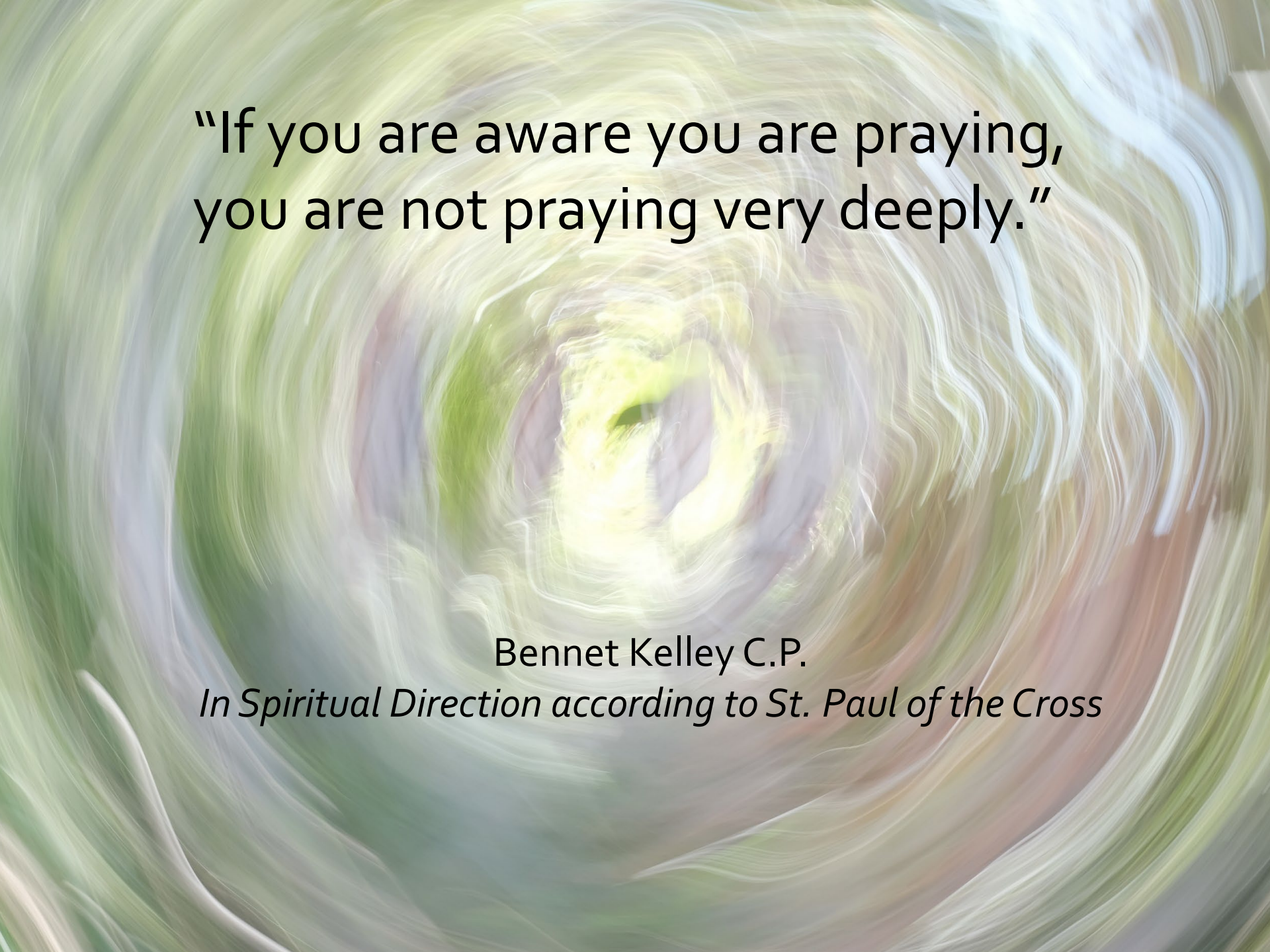
Lent 2023 with the Los Angeles Retreat Center Community

A photograph of a stone path winding through a field of dry, golden-brown grass. The path is made of flat, light-colored stones and leads from the foreground into the distance. The grass is tall and wispy, with some seed heads visible. The overall tone is warm and natural. The image is framed by a white border.

Introduction to Centering Prayer

MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM

O.F.S.



“If you are aware you are praying,
you are not praying very deeply.”

Bennet Kelley C.P.

In Spiritual Direction according to St. Paul of the Cross

“The notion
that God is
absent is the
fundamental
illusion of
the human
condition.”

Fr. Thomas Keating





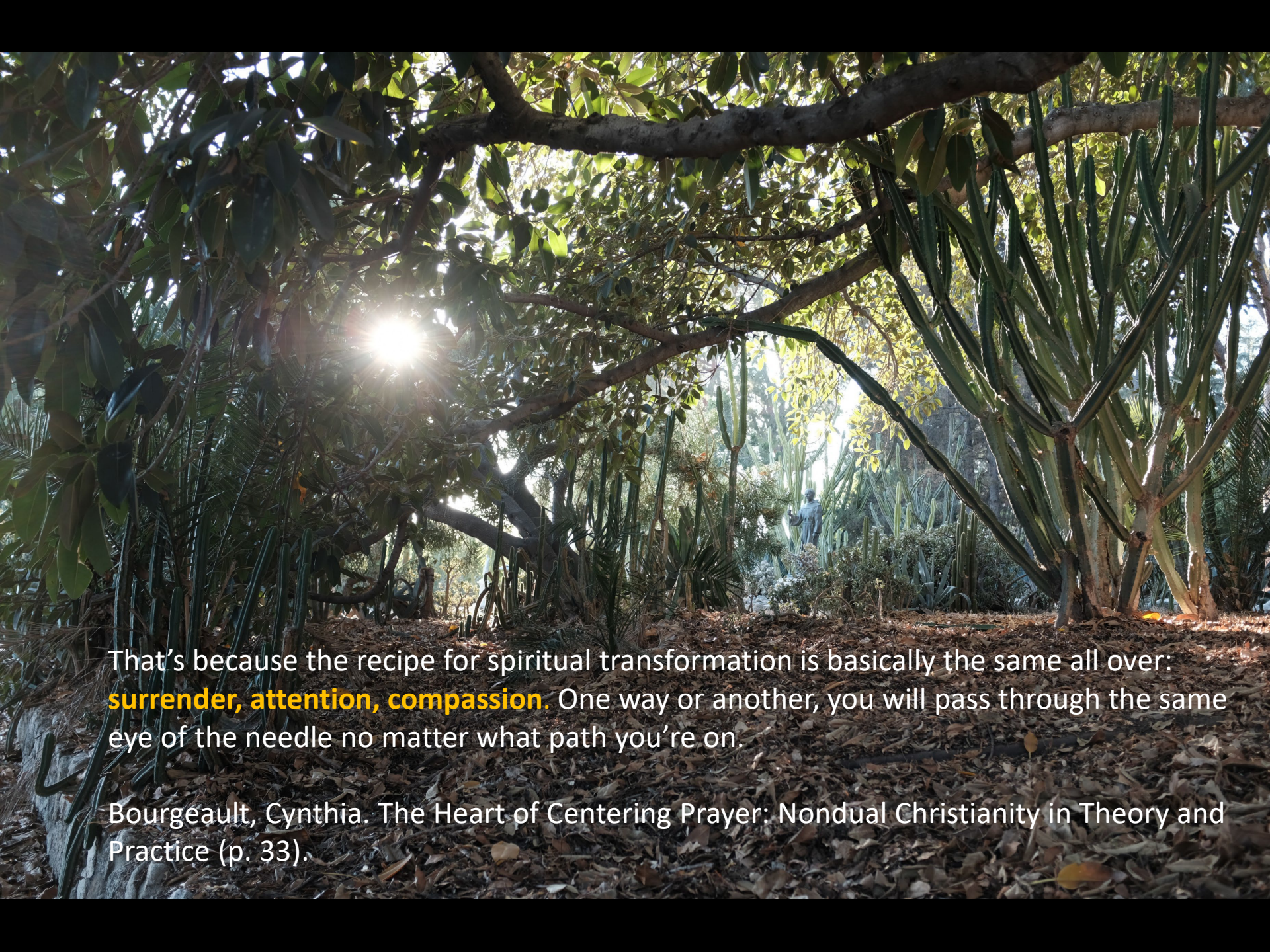
“NOT MY WILL, BUT YOURS, BE DONE”

Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42

“For if such a soul should desire to make any effort of its own with its interior faculties, this means that it will hinder and lose the blessings which, by means of that peace and ease of the soul, God is instilling into it and impressing upon it.”



We can't think our way to God. We can only encounter God.



That's because the recipe for spiritual transformation is basically the same all over: **surrender, attention, compassion**. One way or another, you will pass through the same eye of the needle no matter what path you're on.

Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (p. 33).

“Pray as you can, not as you cannot!”

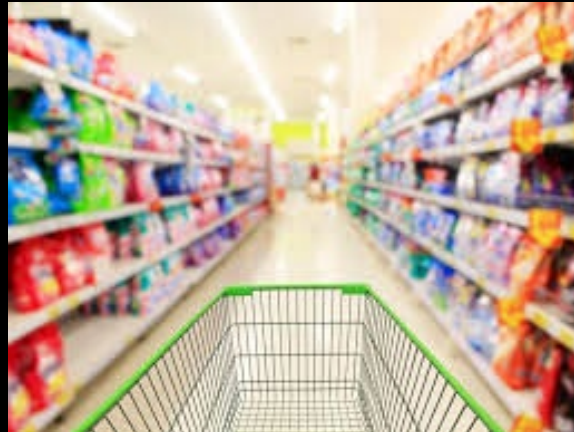


John Chapman, O.S.B.

Silent Prayer

Imaginative Prayer

Visio Divina



Centering Prayer

Eucharistic Adoration

Lectio Divina

The Contemplative Supermarket of Prayer

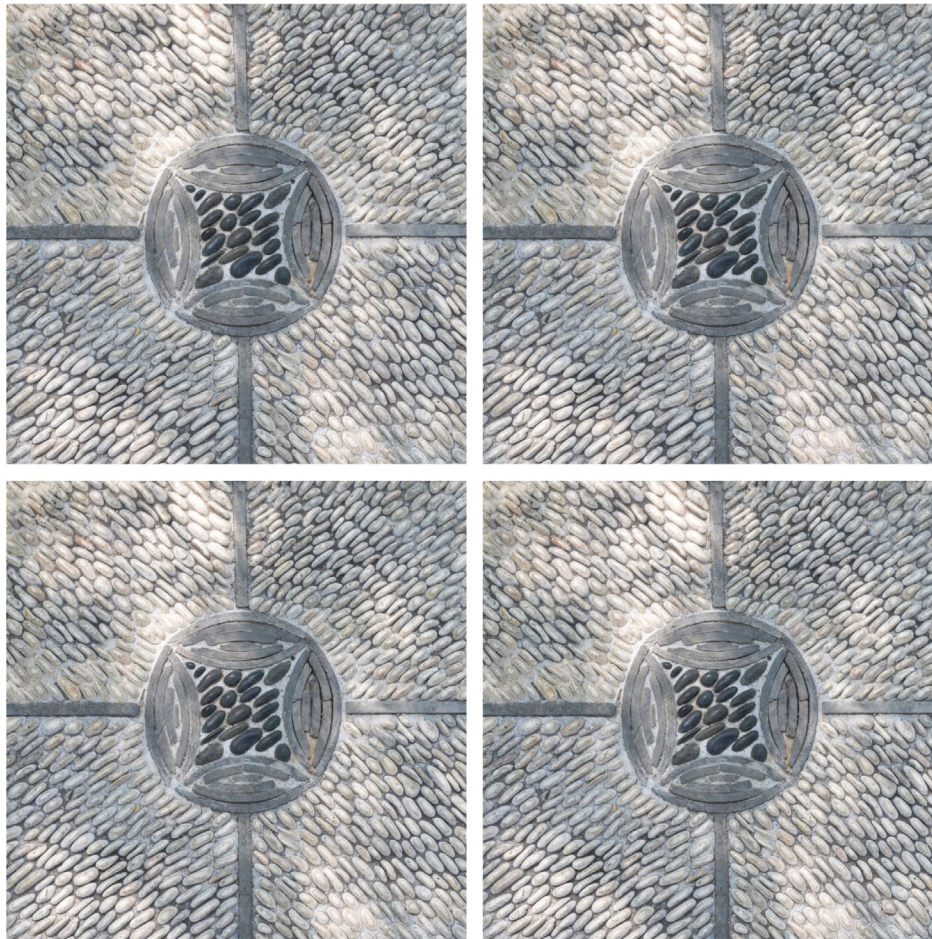
Whenever we want to ask something from powerful people, we do not presume to do so without humility and respect. How much more ought we to pray to the Lord God of all things with profound humility and pure devotion! And we must realise we shall not be heard for our many words, but for our purity of heart and tears of compunction.

Rule 20, Rule of St. Benedict

What the Catechism says

- **2712** Contemplative prayer is the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved and who wants to respond to it by loving even more.⁸ But he knows that the love he is returning is poured out by the Spirit in his heart, for everything is grace from God.

Contemplative prayer is the poor and humble surrender to the loving will of the Father in ever deeper union with his beloved Son.



INTRODUCTION TO THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING PRAYER

PART I

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*“Be still and know that I am
God”*

- Psalm 46:10



Prayer as Relationship



Contemplative Prayer

Gift

Opening of mind and heart

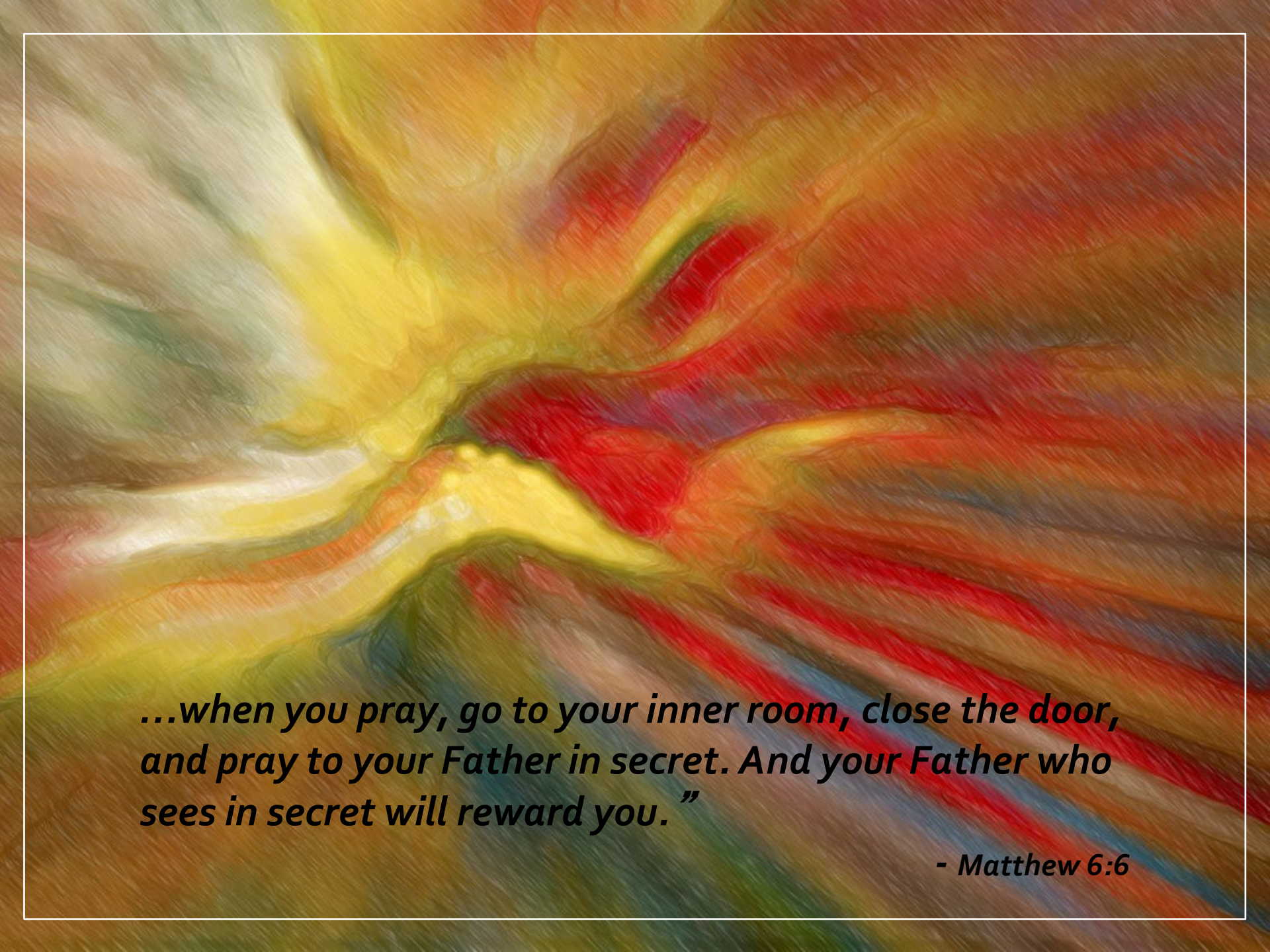
Resting in the presence

Rooted in scripture

The indwelling Trinity

“We love God because God first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)





***...when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door,
and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who
sees in secret will reward you. ”***

- Matthew 6:6



Prayer is a Relationship



Contemplative Prayer



“When that day comes you will know that I am in my Father and you are
in me and I in you.”

THE METHOD OF CENTERING PRAYER

THE PRAYER OF CONSENT

PART II

Centering Prayer Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Guideline 1

“Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within”

- The sacred word expresses your intention to consent
- It is sacred because of the meaning you give it as a symbol
- Consent is the heart and soul of Centering Prayer

God's Presence and Action

What is God's presence and action?

- God's presence is the divine life within us, which affirms our basic core of goodness
- God's action is the grace of the transformation process

The Sacred Word

- A word of one or two syllables as recommended in *The Cloud of Unknowing* in the 14th Century
- A few examples:
 - Jesus – Shalom – Love
 - Abba – Joy – Peace
 - Mercy – Open – Yes
- *We will choose our sacred word before our first period of Centering Prayer*

Guideline 2

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

- **Sitting comfortably** ... back straight
- **With eyes closed** ... as a symbol of “letting go”
- **Silently say your sacred word** ... as a symbol of your consent


Guideline 3

- *"When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word."*
- **"Thoughts"** is an umbrella term for every perception, including
 - body sensations, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences
 - Thoughts are inevitable, integral, and normal
- **"When engaged with your thoughts return ever-so-gently..."** a minimum effort is indicated
-

Guideline 4

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

- The additional time enables us to gently bring silence into the activity of everyday life
- Minimum time 10 minutes
- Practice two periods of Centering Prayer daily

An abstract painting featuring a central figure, possibly a person, rendered in bright yellow and white. The figure is surrounded by a swirling, ethereal atmosphere of warm colors, including reds, oranges, yellows, and greens. The brushstrokes are visible and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall composition suggests a spiritual or divine presence.

*Loving Spirit of God, we open our hearts to your as we
choose our Sacred Word*





THOUGHTS & THE USE OF THE SACRED WORD

PART III



Thoughts

- “Thoughts” is an umbrella term for any perception at all including:
 - Body sensations, images, emotions, memories
 - Reflections, concepts, commentaries
 - Spiritual experiences
 - Thoughts are an **INEVITABLE, INTEGRAL,** and a **NORMAL** part of Centering Prayer

Kinds of Thoughts

- Ordinary wanderings of imagination or memory
- Attractions / aversions
- Insights
- Self-reflections
- Thoughts and feelings arising from the unconscious (‘hidden in the darkness’)

“.... (when) the Lord comes, He will bring to light what is hidden in the darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts...”

- 1

Corinthians 4:5

The background image is a photograph of a person standing in a dark, industrial space, possibly under a bridge or in a large warehouse. The space is filled with numerous vertical concrete pillars that create a strong sense of depth and perspective. The floor is wet and reflective, mirroring the light from the bright opening at the far end of the structure. The person is silhouetted against the bright light, which creates a strong backlighting effect. The overall mood is contemplative and dramatic.

Thoughts and the 4 R's

- *Resist* no thought
- *Retain* no thought
- *React* emotionally to no thought
- *Return* ever-so-gently to the sacred word

Centering Prayer is a method, not a “technique”

- During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring expectations or aiming at some specific goal, such as:
 - Repeating the sacred word continuously
 - Having no thoughts
 - Making the mind blank
 - Feeling peaceful or consoled
 - Achieving a spiritual experience
- Generally, having expectations about the prayer experience is an attempt to control the relationship

Deepening of Faith

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with sighs too deep for words”

— Romans 8:26

- Our experience in Centering Prayer is not limited to the “**felt presence**” of God but rather it is a **deepening of faith** in God’s abiding presence
- We do not judge our periods of Centering Prayer as “good” or “bad” (by the psychological experience)

In Summary

- Consent to Gods presence and action is the heart and soul of Centering Prayer practice.
- When engaged with your thoughts, **return** ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
- Once you grasp the fact that thoughts are not only inevitable but also an integral part of the process of healing and growth initiated by God, you will be able to take a friendlier attitude towards them.
- Progress in Centering Prayer does not eliminate thoughts, but leads to detachment from all thoughts.
- Thoughts do not interrupt this prayer unless you deliberately engage them.
- As we establish the Centering Prayer practice we let the thoughts come and let them go.

DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

PART IV



Resources

- Contemplative Outreach
- Centering Prayer app –Free
- MDPRC APP

Centering Prayer at LARCC

- Sunday PM Mater Dolorosa 6:30-7:30pm Virtual Event
- Wednesday PM Mary & Joseph Center 7:30-9:00 pm Virtual Event
- Thursdays AM Holy Spirit 10:00-12:00 pm Virtual Event
- Thursdays PM Holy Spirit 7:30-8:30pm Virtual Event



