

THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING PRAYER

(excerpts from Thomas Keating's teachings on Centering Prayer)

The Root of Centering Prayer Listening to the word of God in Scripture (Lectio Divina) is a traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of Scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and He were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on His word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust, and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as "resting in God." This was the classical meaning of Contemplative Prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries. Wisdom Saying of Jesus

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount : "...But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you" MT 6:6

It is also inspired by writings of major contributors to the Christian contemplative heritage including John Cassian, the anonymous author of The Cloud of Unknowing, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton.

A. CHOOSE A SACRED WORD AS THE SYMBOL OF YOUR INTENTION TO CONSENT TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTION WITHIN. (OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART, THOMAS KEATING)

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

B. SITTING COMFORTABLY AND WITH EYES CLOSED, SETTLE BRIEFLY AND SILENTLY INTRODUCE THE SACRED WORD AS THE SYMBOL OF YOUR CONSENT TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTION WITHIN.

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

C. WHEN ENGAGED WITH YOUR THOUGHTS, RETURN EVER-SO-GENTLY TO THE SACRED WORD.

1. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.
2. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.



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3. By “returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word” a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.

4. During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.

D. AT THE END OF THE PRAYER PERIOD, REMAIN IN SILENCE WITH EYES CLOSED FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES.

1. The additional 2 minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.

2. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer, while the others listen.

3. Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one’s breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.

4. The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent.

5. Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be engaging thoughts.

THE GUIDELINES

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

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

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

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

*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections