
CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH OF MIDDLE TENNESSEE



Spring 2015

Leading a Balanced Life

by Rev. John Runkle

As the Executive Director of St. Mary's Sewanee retreat center, I am often asked, "Why should I go on retreat? What's the point?" Good questions, given we are a culture of busy people, who are led to believe that an active life is virtuous and admirable, and anything less is a waste of time.

In response, I offer some food for thought from two notable spiritual writers.

The first lesson comes from Esther de Waal:

*Here is something essential, inescapable for any of us. Unless we learn to live with ourselves, how can we live with others? Unless we know ourselves, accept ourselves with honesty and forgiveness, how can we possibly know or accept other people? I know that maturity comes only from staying still, from facing what has to be faced, perhaps from engaging in a battle with the forces that threaten me from within and without. Yet in all my years of growing up, no one, neither my own family, my school, or college, helped me to think about what was involved in living with myself. In my more adult years I have not found a church that has taught me this, and it is only in recent years that I have begun to find books and retreats that have given me some practical help and experience and wisdom. **The Celtic Way of Prayer, 95.***

The second lesson comes from Abraham Joshua Heschel, where his call for Sabbath time is analogous with the call for retreat time:

[One] who wants to enter the holiness of the day must first lay down the profanity of clattering commerce, of

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When You Stop Talking to Yourself

by Rev. Geoffrey Butcher

Have you experienced talking to yourself in what seems to be an endless conversation? A problem or an issue consumes your attention, and you work it over and over again in your mind. Your hope is that you will find a solution. As time goes by this internal conversation begins to become your identity, noticed by friends to whom you tell your story. Perhaps because it is so familiar you even tend to keep the problem. It at least provides sympathy from others.

A friend of mine was given a wall hanging with these words: "I love the way you sound when you shut up." The gift was given with playful humor and the response was laughter. But the message also carries a point that is appropriate for our spiritual lives. There are times when we need to "shut up" and stop talking to ourselves.

In the centering prayer practice we are accustomed to letting go of our thoughts, emotions, and mental images to be present for God alone. It is a time when we try to stop talking and to silence our minds. We seek "to be" and not "to do" anything. This can be a challenge if we have problems that are assumed to need resolution through our thoughts and actions. But it occurs to us that in the silence God may solve the problem. "Perhaps if I am quiet enough God will give me answers to resolve my issues." So we are quiet, but with the expectation of a response. It is as if we were saying to ourselves, "I'll be quiet, Lord, if you will give me the answer I need." God may indeed give you an answer in the silence, but desiring an answer pulls you back into the "doing" tape that is on constant replay. Your prayer of silence becomes conditional. Spending time with God ceases to be a pure act of devotion since a personal benefit is required.

For those of us who have practiced centering prayer for years, a time may come when we actually slow down talking to ourselves. We manage in centering sits to let go of thoughts more easily. But we are also more likely to fall asleep. For those of us in the last quarter of our lives, taking naps is as important as sits, and sometimes the two are one in the same. Awaking one may wonder if anything is happening. "Is my spiritual journey at a

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Contemplative Opportunities

9th Annual Meeting ~ August 15, 2015
GRACE, GRIT and GRATITUDE

Our 9th Annual Gathering of Contemplative Outreach of Middle Tennessee will be held at Holy Family Catholic Church, 9100 Crockett Road, Brentwood, TN, on Saturday, August 15. Registration begins at 9:00 a.m. A registration form is on our website at www.centeringprayermidtn.com. We welcome Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, Executive Director of Contemplative Outreach, LTD, as our Keynote Speaker.

Breakout sessions include an Introductory Workshop on Centering Prayer, Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina prayer periods, the Enneagram, Qi Gong, Contemplation and the Natural World, Pilgrimage as a Contemplative Practice, How to Make a Personal Retreat, Writing as a Spiritual Practice and other topics of interest to people seeking to live a contemplative life.

The cost is \$35 before August 2, \$45 after that date. Light breakfast items and lunch will be served.

Hosting a Workshop

If your church or group wishes to host an Introductory Centering Prayer Workshop or a Lectio Divina Workshop, please contact our Workshop Coordinator, Janis Lovecchio at Janis.lovecchio@holyfamilycc.com or 615-373-4351 at ext. 235.

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being yoked to toil. He [or she] must go away from the screech of dissonant days, from the nervousness and fury of acquisitiveness and the betrayal in embezzling his [or her] own life. He [or she] must say farewell to manual work and learn to understand that the world has already been created and will survive without the help of [people].

Six days a week we wrestle with the world, wringing profit from the earth; on the Sabbath we especially care for the seed of eternity planted in the soul. The world has our hands, but our soul belongs to Someone Else.

*Six days a week we seek to dominate the world; on the seventh day we try to dominate the self. **I Asked For***

Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology, 57.

Both statements make clear the fact that retreats are not a luxury reserved only for the select, pious few, but are essential for each one of us to lead a balanced, authentic life. On a regular basis, you and I need to put some distance between ourselves and the world in which we live, to seek out a place of sanctuary, a place of refuge set apart and spend some quality time there in silent reflection and solitude. Doing so will provide us with a better perspective from which to evaluate the direction our lives are moving, the content of our character and our relationships with God and our neighbor.

William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, once said, "Your religion is what you do with your solitude," which in turn implies the question, "What do you do with your solitude?" Or a more piercing question, "Do you even allow time for solitude?"

If not, then day-to-day life will be much more difficult to negotiate. History is littered with the bones of those who dismissed retreat time, Sabbath and solitude as a complete waste of time.

So, do yourself a favor, as well as for your family and loved ones; make regular time for a retreat; stay in touch with the life force that inhabits your soul; listen for that still, small voice of the living God that calls out to you from the silence. Doing so will bring a sense of clarity, purpose and satisfaction that will sustain us for the days that lie ahead.

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rest stop?" It's not a dark night of the soul, but you feel that something should be happening, so you return to the internal conversation.

Michel Quoist in his book **Prayers** writes about the transition we take from "doing" to "being" in prayer: "*Words, ideas, mental images are needed to nourish the beginner's prayer; but little by little, he finds that all these props are obstacles in reaching God. Christ, when he takes hold of his disciple, makes him understand that it is useless for him to say or imagine or think anything at all. He must let God work in him.*"

The practice of resting in God is the place where we are nourished without knowing it. It is as if we were being breast fed by God, held in loving arms. We may even fall asleep in our feeding, but that's okay. God cuddles us in the tenderness of our lives. And to our surprise, incessant internal conversations become quiet too. We discover that solutions to problems and positive growth don't have to originate in our minds. God is the miracle worker. It is seen daily in creation. And on oc-

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE PRAYER GROUPS

Antioch	St. Ignatius	Carnie Harmon	615-471-1077	Fri 9:00 am
Brentwood	Holy Family Catholic Church	Church	615-373-4696	Mon 9:40 am
	Holy Family Catholic Church	Irene Neilan	615-371-1015	Thur 7:00 pm
Chattanooga	Center for Mindful Living	Dr. Barbara Ray	423-486-1279	Mon 1-2 pm
Chattanooga	Christ Episcopal	Fr. Harry Lawrence	423-266-4263	Tue 6:30 pm
Chattanooga	Church of the Good Shepherd	Rev. Margaret Marshall	423-290-1640	Wed 4:30 pm
	Church of the Good Shepherd	Beth Chamberlain	423-821-2755	Tue 11:15 am
Chattanooga	Grace Church	Rebecca Williams	423-843-0657	Fri 1:00 pm
Chattanooga	St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Barbara Ray	423-490-0735	Wed 12:30 pm
Chattanooga	St. Peter's Episcopal Church	Joani Koch	423-877-3140	Mon 11:30 pm
Franklin	St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Scott Faulkner	615-595-1072	Mon 6:30 pm
	St. Paul's-Lectio Divina	Scott Faulkner	615-595-1072	Tue 4:00 pm
Hendersonville	St. Timothy Lutheran	Pastor Lewis Groce	615-824-6244	Sun 7:30 am
	St. Timothy Lutheran	Monica Weber	615-824-6244	Sun 6:30 pm
Johnson City	St. John's Episcopal Church	Frances Jackson	423-946-3345	Tue 6:00 pm
Knoxville	Church of the Ascension	Fr. Rob Travis	865-588-0589	Thur 4:30 pm
Knoxville	St. John's Cathedral	Rev. Canon Tom Rasnick	865-525-7347	Wed/Fri 8:30 am
	St. John's Cathedral	Rev. Canon Tom Rasnick	865-525-7347	Thur 5:30 pm
Knoxville	John XXIII Student Center	Beverly Froning	865-607-3627	Fri 11:00 am
Mt. Juliet	Providence United Methodist	Kasey Hitt	615-598-5350	Tue 1:15 pm
Murfreesboro	St. Paul's Episcopal Church	Sandra Clemmons	615-867-6318	Tue 6:00 pm
Nashville	Cathedral of the Incarnation	Church Office	615-327-2330	Sat 9:30 am
Nashville	Christ Church	Arlene Wilson	615-336-1766	Sun 9:45 am
		Mimi Shimmin	615-298-2483	Tue 5:30 pm
		Laura Copeland	615-500-4683	Thurs 12:15 pm
Nashville	Christ the King	Martha O'Brien	615-484-0934	Fri 8:00 am
	Christ the King-Lectio Divina	Carolyn Goddard	615-438-3216	Mon 8:30 am
Nashville	South Minster Presbyterian	Helen Blakely	615-819-0515	Wed 11:30 am
Nashville	St. George's	Bets Ramsey	615-463-2583	Mon 4:00 pm
Nashville	The Cloisters	Martha Likins	615-352-0025	Wed 1:15 pm
Nashville	VU Center/Integrative Health	Jean Jackson	615-585-4287	Mon 7:00 am
Nashville	Westminster Presbyterian	Rev. Guy Griffith	615-292-5526	Thur 11:30 am
Oak Ridge	Home Residence	Janice Watkins	865-335-9921	Tue 7:00 pm
Sewanee	Otey Parish	Jennifer Michael	931-598-5094	Mon 7:00 pm
Sewanee	St. Mary's Sewanee	Janet Graham	931-598-0822	Tue 3:30 pm
Winchester	Trinity Episcopal	Marsha Carnahan	931-626-7565	Tue 11:45 am

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casation we are blessed to carry the miracle to others. As we begin to understand this, our anxiety to be the author of healing is calmed. Trusting in God is all that is needed to move mountains, or to let them stand still where they are. Listen in the silence without expectations. Be surprised.

A Prayer by Michel Quoist

To be before you, Lord, that's all.	Empty of all ideas,
To shut the eyes of my body,	of all images,
To shut the eyes of my soul,	In the darkness.
And be still and silent,	I am here as I am
To expose myself to you who are there, exposed to me.	To meet you without obstacles,
To be there before you, the Eternal Presence.	In the silence of faith,
I am willing to feel nothing, Lord,	Before you, Lord.
to see nothing,	
to hear nothing.	

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The Lily

Night after night
darkness
enters the face
of the lily

which, lightly,
closes its five walls
around itself,
and its purse

of honey,
and its fragrance,
and is content
to stand there

in the garden,
not quite sleeping,
and, maybe,
saying in lily language

some small words
we can't hear
even when there is no wind
anywhere,

its lips
are so secret,
its tongue
is so hidden -

or, maybe,
it says nothing at all
but just stands there
with the patience

of vegetables
and saints
until the whole earth has turned around
and the silver moon

becomes the golden sun-
as the lily absolutely knew it would,
which is itself, isn't it,
the perfect prayer?

Day after day, I sit in silence. Sometimes my thoughts seem to rest peacefully, other days they race around and around and around as in NASCAR. Mary Oliver's poem, *The Lily*, reminds me that no matter what is going within my head, there is a language that can't be heard. All I have to do is stay seated and continue to return ever so gently to that silent conversation.

by Carolyn Goddard

Empath's Prayer

A paradox:
What's yours is yours,
What's mine is mine:
beyond the enmeshment,
the transference (of us both),
the projective identification and
enactments and less jargony dances
of energy exchange and epoxy,
lies an ineffable and sacred finitude.

God is my Filter
a translucent netting,
all flexible strength
adjusting rapidly as quanta
opening to breathe and
closing to eject the non-kairos ruach
from entering sacred space
(He clears the temple,
She restoreth my soul)
like a midwifing dolphin swimming guard
when, as the archetypal fishers knew,
bereavement clears time
to mend our nets and sort our seeds.
Blessed be the cyclothymes
whose mourning turns not to melancholy,
and those who pierce the veil.

God is your Filter too,
protecting you from me,
needs from neediness,
protecting us all from our saviors.
O Paraclete,
divine seamstress,
de-Edenized,
teach us to wear your clothes.

Amen

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For further information on retreats:

www.centeringprayermidtn.com

www.contemplativeoutreach.org

www.StMarysSewanee.org

St. Mary's Sewanee: 931 598-5342

Upcoming Retreats at St. Mary's Sewanee

May 30	Introductory Workshop
May 31-June 6	8 Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Aug 1	Introductory Workshop
Aug 2-9	8 Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Oct 16-22	The Gift of Life