



# POWERLESSNESS



Thomas Keating

“My grace is sufficient for you,  
for power is made perfect in weakness.”

*2 Cor. 12:9*

Powerlessness is our greatest treasure. Don't try to get rid of it. Everything in us wants to get rid if it. Grace is sufficient for you, but not something you can understand. To be in too big a hurry to get over our difficulties is a mistake because you don't know how valuable they are from God's perspective, for without them you might never be transformed as deeply and as thoroughly. If everything else fails, the dying process is a place where you have to go through the transformation because everything is taken away. The spiritual journey is the commitment to allow everything you possess to be taken away before the dying process begins. This makes you of enormous value to yourself and to others because you have anticipated death and death is not the end but the beginning of the fullness of transformation. If you were born, you've already been through a facsimile of death and your body is well prepared for the final translation or transition as some call it. You can't see God without going through death because the intensity of his naked presence would burn you up and turn you into a grease spot.

Jesus Christ in his lifetime had to hide the dignity and power of his divine nature. A constant miracle was required to hide the enormous radiance and power of his inner nature. The one time it appears is at the Transfiguration when his face shone and his clothes became whiter than snow. That was the

Photo of Fr. Thomas courtesy of WT Bryant

only occasion the glory of his divine nature was allowed to come through.

Christ is choosing the lowest place all the time; the very lowest place. Why? Because that is what God does. God is not attached to being God. He doesn't care about praise or thanksgiving. What he is interested in is our consent to his love of us.

Paul was transformed by God's communication of Godself to him, and so he writes, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am content with weaknesses" (2 Cor. 12:9). That is the disposition of transformation. It is not great spiritual experiences but to come to terms with our own human weakness as we experience it. Paul then lists his other difficulties, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for "whenever I am weak then I am strong." When we understand that, we don't need any more education.

*If you want to know yourself,  
talk to God. He knows.*



When you feel that you're suspended on top of nothing and are not grounded anywhere, when you're confused, have no place to go and feel God is far away, that you are separated from God, or even that you are alienated from God, you have been given the dispositions that arise in the Dark Nights through God's immense love. These are the ways that our human nature is conditioned little by little and at a pace that is appropriate for everyone's needs, vocation, personality, and limitations. It is so well thought out that you can't even put it in a category like expert psychotherapy.

God knows us through and through and still loves us infinitely. While sustaining us on the physiological level, we know through biophysics that the body itself has to evolve to a certain level to sustain intelligence and then to sustain divine communications. We are not ready to receive the enormous reality of God without preparation in which all the elements of our human nature collaborate. He is working with the obstacles in us with extraordinary gentleness, tenderness, firmness, and patience. If you want to know yourself, talk to God. He knows.

Finally, powerlessness is the greatest power there is because it enables one to simply be more and more a channel of God's power and love, because the project is not our aggrandizement or perfection.

What do you really want to be at this point in your life and spiritual journey? Have you set your goal on becoming a saint? The problem with wanting to become a saint is that it is a desire that isn't good enough. One is settling for a kind of second rate identity. Suppose you are from the East and want nirvana, enlightenment, or the great wisdom of some guru. No matter how you see the goal, it is the Dark Night that is transforming because it is in the Dark Night that you become powerless. With time you become content with your weakness and happy to be utterly dependent on God.



Now you are in the first step of AA, which is probably the most brilliant synopsis of the Christian spiritual journey that ever was or is. What is the first step? "We became aware that our life (through whatever the addiction is) had become unmanageable." That is, we can't do anything with it. This is the perfect disposition for transformation. The Dark Nights bring you there; that is their job. By doing so, while it is a little uncomfortable, it is a lot easier than the inconveniences of being an addict of some kind. This plunge into the abyss of God's goodness makes your only possession the infinite mercy of God. But what more do you need? There isn't anything greater.

Here is my scriptural basis. Jesus is recorded in Matthew 10:39 as saying, "If you want to save your life (accomplish all the things the false self is interested in) you'll bring yourself to ruin. But anyone who brings himself [or herself] to nothing will find out who he [she] is." And who is that? Everything. Nothing is not nothing but no thing, no identity outside of God. By becoming no particular object, you become what God is, which is no particular object, but everything. It is a totally non-possessive attitude towards oneself.

Jesus taught that to be his disciple you need to deny "your inmost self." That is more crucial than the other things he invites us to separate ourselves from. Any identity at all, apart from God, is not it. So to have no identity or an identity that you don't know and are willing that it be anything that God wants it to be, this is what the transformative process is doing. Thus to want to be anything less than God is not humility and does not do credit to God's generosity when he wills to give us not only everything but God's self. ☩



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you become what God is,  
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Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler

# Belonging to the Human Family

A commitment to the daily practice of Centering Prayer is the primary expression of belonging [to Contemplative Outreach]. (#2)

Our relationship with the living Christ is the bond uniting us together in mutual love. (#8)

Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation. (#12)

From the THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES OF CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH

Over the past 30 years, Contemplative Outreach has evolved through the presence and action of the Spirit into a world-wide contemplative community spanning over 100 countries. As we celebrate these three decades of grace and gratitude, I've been reflecting on what Centering Prayer and Contemplative Outreach has offered seekers. As they have for so many years, the Theological Principles above helped to inspire my reflections. Here are a few questions that arose: How can contemplatives serve the growing needs of humanity? What is our collective responsibility for world problems? How do we foster peace in the troubled world?

Silence is the glue that binds us one to another in a circle of love. With a commitment to our daily Centering Prayer practice we also experience an awakening to the needs and rights of each member of the human family. Even though we may sit in silence alone in our own homes, we don't practice Centering Prayer in isolation from the human family, as our practice actually deepens and enlivens our felt connection to our brothers and sisters. Over time, we feel our oneness with all creation in and through our deepening relationship with the Divine.

"A commitment to the daily practice of Centering Prayer is the primary expression of belonging (#2)." What does it actually mean to belong? Belongingness is a very human emotional need to be an accepted member of a group. Whether it is family, friends, co-workers, or various other groups, we humans need to give and receive affection, affirmation and acceptance, and being part of a group offers us that opportunity. We long to be in relationship to one another. We seem to be built for it.

I see and experience an interdependent connection between the need to belong and the consents we make in Centering Prayer. Perhaps belonging gives us the strength to make these consents. As we mature, age, and evolve, we are called to travel through a series of consents: We consent to our basic core of goodness, to being part of the human family, to use our gifts and talents for our good and the good of others, and we consent to transformation and diminishment. Each of these consents represents a profound threshold of maturity, affirmation and participation. Belonging gives us the support we need to say Yes to these consents. We are able to see ourselves through others' eyes and have an affirming reference point – we are not alone. We see others make these consents ahead of us – we see what is possible.

“Our relationship with the living Christ is the bond uniting us together in mutual love (#8).” This silent, invisible web of contemplatives from all traditions, throughout all of time, rooted in Divine Love, is the source of our courage and faith in the human race. Through a deep sense of belonging to this invisible but very real web, our own experience is strengthened and deepened and gives us hope for the future. In a world occupied and troubled by so many things, like Mary of Bethany, we choose the better part to grow in silence. We give ourselves over to the transformative process of purification and thereby take responsibility for our share of the chaos and tumult, remembering all the while that we belong to God.

Several years ago, I took part in a group activity where we were paired with another to experience various activities together. In the final one, we were asked to look each other in the eye and take turns saying “I belong to you.” It was a profound moment; the statement went to the heart of the matter and, although we were friends to begin with, we are now forever connected in a deep way by this affirmation. I don’t see my friend very often due to geographical distance, however, when we do meet, we greet each other with joy and repeat the statement to each other: “I belong to you.” This powerful moment has never left us – a mirror reminder that we all belong to each other in God. There is no separation.

“Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation (#12).” In my own experience, this kind of powerful belonging develops in silence and has a connecting energy that transcends differences and distances. As members of the human family, we do share a common bond; we are one heart born from the One Heart. I wonder what the world would be like if everyone believed “we belong to each other?”

Every year for 20 years I made a post intensive retreat in the middle of March with essentially the same group of people. The environment, a windy, dusty and flat part of Texas, was not very inviting,



Photo courtesy of Diane Walker

and yet each year we were drawn together there to drink from the well of silence in community. I always sat in the same place with the same prayer partners on the left and on the right. Recently I received notice that one of my prayer partners was gravely ill. My heart quickened and I immediately called and left a message. Within a few hours I received a return call, both of us happy to connect. Although she was weak and suffering, we were delighted to share our joys and sorrows and our deep love for one another. It was a precious moment of grace to be open, free and honest with her. We belong to each other and we know it; we are connected in the heart of the Divine. We did not know how close she was to death, and it didn’t seem important; we realized our prayer partnership would be a forever partnership in God. We acknowledged that we could trust our timeless connection, one cultivated through years in the shared silence. She died two weeks later and now we pray together every day — she sits to the right of me.

This experience illustrates how Centering Prayer bonds us in the deepest way. I am sure many of you could share similar stories. The human family belongs to each other and my prayer is that we wake up to this truth and live it out in our daily lives.

These past 30 years leave me grateful and with boundless confidence in the goodness of humanity, rooted in the circle of love that endures all things.☸



Fr. Carl J. Arico

## He Doesn't Know (He is Dying) ... but He Does

When you go to any monastery for Compline, the evening prayer before they go off to bed, the abbot prays at the end, “May the Lord grant you a restful night and a peaceful death.”

When I first heard this prayer, I thought, “Whoa, whoa, let’s not push it.” How about just, “May the Lord grant you a restful night?”

It’s so nice to hear the abbot say, “May the Lord grant you a restful night.” Restfulness is the ability to let things go. Mark Twain said, “I’ve had a lot of problems in my life and some of them were real.”

There is a dying that goes on in our life every day, even with letting go of thoughts that come up, which often create all sorts of havoc in our life.

But when it comes to a peaceful death – we do not want to look at that part of life just yet. I have a friend who is a financial advisor. He shared with me how he approaches his task. He makes sure he puts all the cards on the table, so the person can look at all the possibilities and to have a plan for each situation. Of course there are always exceptions. But the better prepared a person is for each situation the better they will respond when that occasion occurs.

However it is a different story when it comes to death, especially when looking at all the possible scenarios of dying. We prepare for everything else,

*We prepare for everything else,  
but we don't prepare for dying.*

but we don’t prepare for dying. One of the reasons for creating *The Gift of Life* DVD series was to assist the transformation of our attitudes about dying.

Can we put on the mind of Christ when dying or preparing to die? Can we have the wisdom of Christ in the scriptures when contemplating dying? Can we see it in the greater context of the Paschal Mystery? The energy around the moment of death is very powerful. A priest friend who is called to minister to the dying, often senses that something that needs to be taken care of, and he’ll say to the person, “I think you have some homework to do before you go home.” He once went to visit a man in the hospital. The wife and the daughter were there. He asked them for a moment alone with the man. The room happened to have a glass window. He sat next to the bed of this gentleman and before he could even say one word to him, the man blurted, “I’m dying. I’m dying. I can’t say it to my loved ones. They don’t want to hear it, but I’m dying.” At that moment, there was a little light tapping on the window. My friend looked up and the daughter was holding a sign, “He doesn't know he's dying.” The implication was “Don’t bring it up. He doesn't know.” Maybe it was more of a case that they did not want to know.

It is time to talk about it and deal with it.

It was interesting putting together *The Gift of Life* series with Fr. Thomas because the more we watched it, the more it dawned on us that we were celebrating life. It wasn’t just death and dying, life and living. We were celebrating the fact that life is eternal. We’ve been a thought in God’s mind from the beginning of time. We were conceived. We came into this world. We’re going to leave the world and continue our eternal journey because Christians believe that every human being, every life is eternal.

Life is not taken away; it’s changed. Many times



when I have an opportunity to celebrate a mass of resurrection, a funeral mass, I always like to emphasize that for the deceased, this is not the first time they've died. For nine months they were in their mother's womb, very comfortable, and then without permission and with a lot of stress, they were forced out of this comfortable space and thrust into the womb of the earth. Each one of us now is in the womb of the earth. There'll come a time when we will be forced out of this womb and enter into the womb of God, the House of God where we will live eternally.

It's an awesome journey that we're on. It's a wonderful experience to see it through the eyes of our faith. It doesn't minimize the pain or the suffering or the heartache. However, faith does eliminate the static around the journey, including what we call death - the static of uncertainty.

God bless the hospice movement – it creates a sacred and safe space for the person and their loved ones to transition from the medical stage of 'there is nothing more that we can do' to 'let us deal with what is ahead of us.' Let us take a deep breath and deal with the remaining breaths of life.

There is a song written by the artist Sting entitled 'So to Speak,' from the musical *The Last Ship*. It is about a priest who is part of a community of ship builders and has been battling cancer. The lyrics are very realistic about what he has gone through; here is a short selection:

*Our mission is more than a struggle for breath,  
For a few extra rounds in a fight to the death.  
When our mission is love, and compassion and grace,  
It's not a test of endurance, or a marathon race.  
For love is the sabre, and love is the shield,  
Love is the only true power we wield,*

*An eternal love is all ye should seek,  
That ship will be ready to sail...So to speak.*

Hospice helps the person and family to be aware - if it is their tradition - that the ship has been ready right from the moment of conception and now it is time to board it and come home.

"May God grant me a restful night and a peaceful death." Say it a few times on your own. Allow that antibiotic to enter into your system, to begin to flush out whatever needs to be flushed out so that you may truly experience restful nights and a peaceful death.

If there's a secret, it is the ability to let go. That's why we invite participation in Centering Prayer. Prayer is a relationship. In any relationship worth its salt, there needs to be a time to talk. There needs to be a time to work things out together. There needs to be a time to express affection. There needs to be a time to be with your honey without your honey-do-list. Your honey is more important than the list. It's the same thing in our prayer relationship with our God. There's a time to talk and pray our prayers. There's a time to meditate and ponder what we've been saying. There's a time to express our love through the words of affection and praise. And then there's a time to simply be with the one we love, our God, in silence. Centering Prayer is that time.

Centering Prayer is really a wonderful process of letting go. One of the hardest things to let go of are our thoughts. Way back in the fourth century, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, the holy men and women of that period, said that it's not the world, the flesh, the devil that drives most of us into problems. It's the thoughts. Thoughts lead to desires. Desires lead to passion. Passion leads to action.

*Life is not taken away; it's changed.*

In Centering Prayer, one of the things we let go of is our thoughts, whatever they may be: commentaries, images, emotions, sensations - whatever might be going on, we let it go. We let it come and we let it go. You'll never have a time of no thoughts, but you'll have this attitude of letting go, letting go, letting go.

If in the quiet of my prayer and the embrace of my God, I can just be, without my agendas, my worries and concerns, then this becomes a special time of allowing God to bathe my feet. Then the simplicity of just being with God can create a ripple effect that goes out into daily life, where we are able to let go of the need to respond, the need to be right, the need to assert ourselves in every event and conversation.

Maybe with all this practice in letting go we can let go of being in the womb of the earth more easily when the time comes.

A common prayer shared by many when praying for a deceased person is, "Eternal rest grant unto them O Lord, may the perpetual light shine upon them, may they rest in peace, and may they and all the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen."

I am becoming aware that there could be an even deeper meaning to this prayer as it applies to the dying process. In Centering Prayer we are entering into an eternal rest with the Lord as we consent. In the consenting a healing is taking place – an eternal light is shining within us. "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth (Eph. 5:8-9)." A peace comes into our lives and a greater sense of the community we are part of, sometimes known as the communion of saints.

In this DVD series, Fr. Thomas says what is pretty obvious to many of us who practice Centering Prayer – that Centering Prayer is the best preparation for dying and death because it's all about letting go, especially letting go of the things that you think are so very important in your life. This is radical from the world's perspective. During Centering Prayer, we present our whole being from the top of our heads to the bottom of our feet to our God and we say, "You know...do whatever you need to do." For those of us who make it a part of our life, Centering Prayer may be the most powerful preparation for dying because we're already dying to ourselves. "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me." Or, as the Blessed Mother said, "Be it done unto me according to your word."

Fr. Thomas says in the series, "The dying process is the cumulative of the whole development of the spiritual journey in which the total surrender into God involves the gift of life itself." Diminishment, understood properly, is what the journey is really about. Letting go, letting go. We carry too much, so it is a journey of diminishment.

In the dying process, some powerful purification is taking place. Redemption is the capacity to be completely transformed, which means becoming a new creation. But it's not your work - it's all about consent, your opening to God's presence and action, the taking over of our entire being by the Divine Goodness.

Here is a blessing for death worth pondering: "I pray that you will have the blessing of being consoled and sure about your own death. May you know in your soul that there is no need to be afraid. When your time comes, may you be given every blessing and shelter that you need. May there be a beautiful welcome for you in the home that you are going to. You are not going somewhere strange. You are going back to the home that you never left. May you have a wonderful urgency to live your life to the full. May you live compassionately and creatively and transfigure everything that is negative within you and about you. When you come to die may it be after a long life. May you be peaceful and happy and in the presence of those who really care for you. May your going be sheltered and your welcome assured. May your soul smile in the embrace of your anam cara, soul friend\*" Amen. ☸

\*(beloved God); *A Blessing for Death* John O'Donohue's Anam Cara: *Spiritual Wisdom For the Celtic World* (1997, Bantam)





**A Growing Experiment in Community | Tom Ward, Sewanee, TN**

About seven years ago, Cathy McCarthy gave me a gift that continues to bear fruit in my life and in the lives of others. (For those of you who don't know Cathy, she is one of our elders, having been on the board of CO for many years, at Chrysalis House, and involved in the formation of many contemplative groups and retreats in New York State.) I was on my annual post-intensive retreat at Bethany Spirituality Center in Highland Mills, New York; Cathy and Fr. Bill Sheehan (another elder) were the primary staff.

Near the end of the retreat in the context of a private conversation, Cathy told me about what she called a "contemplative living community." She described it and then gave me a four-page rough draft outlining its character and guidelines. I was immediately attracted. While I had been participating in Centering Prayer groups for many years, I yearned for something more. Most of those groups consisted of folks who were struggling to work the prayer into their lives, as I had years before; I wanted and needed to be with others whose struggle was to deepen an already established practice.

Here were some of the guidelines for participants:

- A faithful, established, practice of Centering Prayer for three years.
- A commitment to living a contemplative life as manifested in one's own contemplative lifestyle statement (what is called a "rule of life" in some quarters).
- A commitment to supporting the community and its members by participating in a monthly meeting and by sharing the responsibility for facilitating the group.

That conversation planted a seed in me. I came back home and began to pray about how I might take Cathy's model and apply it to my circumstances here in Tennessee. After a year of discernment I sent letters to a group of folks who seemed to me to fit the vision of such a community. I was not surprised that most of them agreed to attend a meeting discussing such a group and that most of those present said yes to being part of an experiment in contemplative living. That was six years ago.

Since that time we have met faithfully from month to month. Attendance has been remarkably consistent. Three months ago we went through a period of discernment and renewal: three of our members needed to leave for various reasons; we added three new participants. And we evaluated the different moves in our monthly meetings, making some adjustments but retaining most of what we do. There are eight of us altogether, three men and five women, ranging in age from 62 to 79 (this is not a youth group).

Here is our normative schedule:	10:00 am Gather	1:00 pm Discussion
	10:15 am Centering Prayer	2:00 pm Break
	10:45 am Break	2:15 pm Centering Prayer
	11:00 am Check-in	2:45 pm Closure
	12:00 pm Lunch	3:00 pm Depart

Most of these moves are self-explanatory. The check-in and discussion call for some elaboration. The check-in gives each of us an opportunity to bring the rest of us into our contemplative journey. Its focus is on the "treasures of holiness hidden in the most trivial and mundane events" of everyday life. (Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*, p.51; I value the phrase.) We divide the hour by the number present and make a conscious effort to discipline ourselves. We all would like more time for ourselves and for others, but most of us travel a significant distant to be present— from 50 to 120 miles. We meet at St. Mary's Sewanee.

Each month the person responsible for facilitating the meeting offers some topic for discussion. We charge ourselves with bringing topics that are important to us on our contemplative journey and that we have attempted to introduce into our own lives. Some examples: the Gurdjieff Work; death and dying through the lens of Fr. Thomas's recent material and Kathleen Dowling Singh's *The Grace in Dying*; the inter-religious conversation as manifested in the life of Abishiktanada (Henry Le Saux). As with our check-in, we always wish for more time.

As the above indicates, we share the leadership of the group on a rotating basis. That dimension was in Cathy's model, and we have found it to be life enhancing.

All of the members of our group serve the organism in many different ways - from leading other Centering Prayer groups, to organizing our local chapter of Contemplative Outreach, to facilitating retreats, and more. So the fruit that our group bears is manifested not only in the daily lives of its participants but in the intentional contemplative service that each of us renders. Another manifestation of its fruit is that relations between us and among us have deepened: we are spiritual friends.

As Fr. Thomas teaches us, Centering Prayer is "ecclesial in its effects; that is, it bonds us with everyone else in the Mystical Body of Christ and indeed with the whole human family ..." (*Intimacy with God*, pp. 32-33). He also reminds us that we need support on the journey, mostly encouragement. This model that Cathy offered me many years ago — which we have adapted to our own circumstances — has served to deepen our lives in Christ here in Middle Tennessee. The Spirit is moving us to deeper union with Abba and one another, and renewing us for contemplative service.



### **My Center of Gravity** | Carolyn Goddard, Nashville, TN

Have you heard the one about the painter who won low-ball bids by cutting his paint with thinner? He'd just finished painting a new house when a storm hit, and as he watched the cheap paint run off the siding, exposing his scam to the world, all he could think was: "O God, what am I gonna do now?" And the response from heaven was immediate: "Repaint! Repaint! And thin no more."

It's a scene we all know well: people in trouble turn to God in heaven and are admonished to change their ways. While I do not wish to argue with this depiction, contemplation paints a different picture of a way to relate to God.

Contemplative prayers are not limited to times of trouble. They are disciplines that are practiced in the middle of storms and on the clearest of days. A contemplative relationship with God is not weather-dependent. It is a committed relationship, a part of one's everyday life.

Contemplative prayer does not place God in a far-away heaven. God is not distant or transcendent but rather incarnate and immanently present. God dwells within, more a part of us than our breath.

This is not to say that we contemplative pray-ers do not change our ways. It is that the changes are not self-willed. Rather than seeking orders from above and setting about to accomplish God's will, contemplatives believe that Centering Prayer organically leads us to change our behavior. Drawing on my own experience, I feel as though the Center of Gravity in contemplative prayer alters my orbital path.

The Irish have a term for spots that are more open to this Gravity, where we find ourselves more susceptible to the pull of grace. They call them "thin places." Perhaps we might want to pray that we "thin some more."

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### **The Fruit of Soul Work** | Sr. Anne Veronica MacNeil, Coordinator for the Maritime Region

I was introduced to Father Thomas Keating's book *Intimacy with God* in the 1990's, and even before I finished reading this inspiring presentation of Centering Prayer, I knew that I wanted and even was called to enter into this deep prayer for the rest of my life.

Over the years in which I have faithfully practiced Centering Prayer, I have not been disappointed or disillusioned in my experience with this prayer form. Rather I witnessed many changes in my life. These are not easy to describe as you cannot really put into words God's mysterious and profound work in your soul, but the evidence of change cannot be denied! Our vocabulary is so limited when trying to express God's presence and action within our being, but this does not prevent you from knowing from deep within that there is a deepening of the relationship you thought you already had with God, but which is now more powerful, all engaging and yet so hidden and untouchable!

How does one adequately describe the miraculous insights, nudges and unexpected calls which surface as a result of fidelity to the daily time spent in Centering Prayer? It is not ours to describe in depth. Rather, we are called to simply believe and live in the awareness of God's infinite "gifts" to each of us trying to journey on the path of surrender and acceptance of the love of God poured out so generously to us at every moment of our lives. Our only response is a joyful "Yes" uttered with faith and trust in the invitation to "Be still and know that I am God."

What is true for me as an individual is equally true for all those persons who have faithfully attended weekly or monthly Centering Prayer meetings over these last 12-13 years all across Nova Scotia. As I journey with these beautiful persons week after week, I witness the profound changes they too are experiencing in their lives and to which they give witness in the way they now live differently many of the events in which they are engaged. It is an inspiration to pray each week with these generous souls who have not departed from the various groups, searching for something else. They are so united in mind and heart that we have true Christian communities formed in each of the areas where Centering Prayer groups exist in Nova Scotia. This in itself is a powerful witness to the transformation and conversion which this prayer effects in those who faithfully practice it daily. It is God's work within us and all we are asked to do is accept and surrender to whatever our loving God desires to do within each of us.

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*Please send your comments, suggestions and content submissions to Pamela Begeman at [clp@coutreach.org](mailto:clp@coutreach.org).*



**My Contemplative Journey | John P. Martin, M.M., Maryknoll, NY**

The origin of the contemplative life style that I purport to live by these days goes back to the severe culture shock experience that greeted me five days into my arrival in Bangladesh on December 7, 1975. The place was the downriver town of Barisal where I was overdue to begin my studies of the Bengali language under the care of the Holy Cross Fathers. I found myself accosted in a nearby market place by a group of super curious, loud and hyperactive Bengali men when I had not yet developed any skill at keeping them from breaching my vulnerable walls in self-defense.

Four years later on a visit to Father Bede Griffiths' Shantivanam Ashram in South India, I received the gift of his skillful spiritual direction to learn that a dramatic shift had taken place in the structure of my personality. Without affecting my sexual orientation, he suggested that by that culture shock, I had found myself shifted from my masculine to the feminine side of my personality. And that this latter would lead me more easily into the contemplative style of living that he propagated so keenly by the ashram living, and that he found so readily available in the Hindu tradition.

During my six years in Bangladesh, I had an encounter experience in a dreamy mode of myself walking along with Jesus at my side. I suddenly turned to him and said thanks for being with me, and then turned forward, attracted to walk into a nondescript cloud that I have always associated with the Father or just plain God. I believe this was a turning point from a Christocentric to a God-centered focus in my life.

From many sources in Indian Christian Spirituality and from my stays at the shrines of several religious traditions throughout India, including Shantivanam, without sitting at the feet of any one teacher, I began to experiment with one set of instructions after another over the years about silent contemplative prayer. They had to do with modes of posture, with eyes open or closed, with the use or not of a mantra, etc. I did this during the 10 years cumulatively that I spent in South Asia until my return to Maryknoll, NY in June 1994.

My dear friend Sister Sudha (now Reverend Mother Sudha Puri) of the Vedanta Centre in Cohasset, MA had always been telling me that I just had to meet Fr. Thomas Keating. This happened briefly at a public session of the Snowmass Group that held its meeting at Cohasset at the invitation of Mother Gayatri Devi.

I got a prompt reply from Fr. Thomas suggesting that I go to Snowmass in the Fall of 1994 for a ten day intensive retreat. My motivation in sitting at the feet of an accepted Christian teacher was to discern which elements of my eclectic practice I would be called to eliminate and which others I would be taught to incorporate, given my intention of "coming home" to the culture of my birth. The wonderful result of that retreat was the realization that I did not have to eliminate anything; everything counted and was valuable. The Spirit had indeed been guiding me in my solitary journey, it seemed clear.

I had been bulging with energy and motivation to share more of my missionary journey with my crossing of cultural and religious borders. I decided to adopt the method of Contemplative Outreach both for myself through Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina and to assimilate them into my other daily practices. I foresaw that this community's resources would be the ideal framework both for myself as well as for the teaching of these methods to the people of Yucatan, Mexico where I lived and worked from 1997 through 2012. Starting with a simple workshop in Centering Prayer in March 1998, repeated annually and then several times a year, and listening to the folks' desire to gather to practice these methods, I established Extensión Contemplativa de Yucatán. Under their own guiding spirits, this community has continued to offer initial workshops and several retreat experiences yearly. They recently achieved certification by the diocese as an apostolate for teaching spirituality.

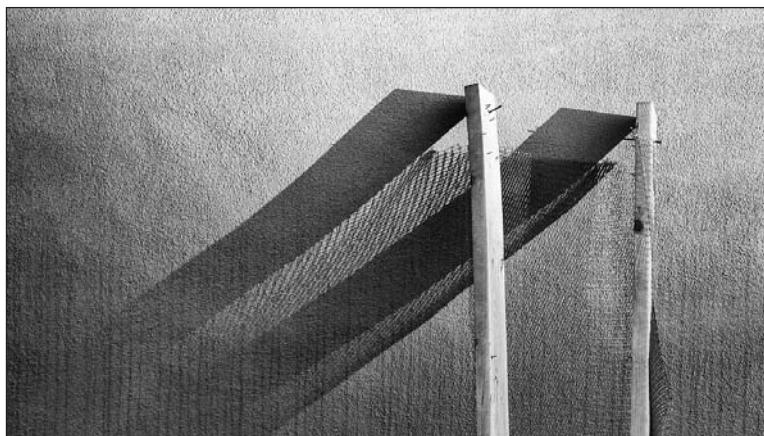


Photo courtesy of Thomas Vorce

**Entering Prayer | James Brown, NJ**

Holy Spirit God above  
 Touch my soul embrace my love  
 And take me to that quiet place  
 Where soul and Spirit join in grace

Where all is gone of earthly plight  
 Where silence reigns in pure delight  
 Where knowing grows with words untold  
 And self-surrender soon unfolds





**Living Without a Why** | Bob Hope, Rockport, MA

A single cell within a petal  
 Loves its life without a why  
 But never knows the beauty of its flower  
 And if the petal so the star  
 Each atom born for burning  
 Contented without a why  
 And if the star so my self  
 Living a why I do not know  
 Only that Love is within the each – and me  
 And that’s why enough for me  
 The divinity in my simplest act  
 Is not known yet to me



“Winter Sky” courtesy of Pat Jelley

**The Spirit Inspires** | Bill Clemmons, Memphis, TN

I first encountered Centering Prayer while living in Chicago in the 1990's, where friends introduced me to it and we met together for a while. We then invited Contemplative Outreach to hold their annual meeting in Chicago and for the first time I met Fr Thomas Keating. I was in the process of retiring from the Faculty of Northern Baptist Seminary and moving to Memphis.

In a casual conversation during the meeting, I inquired whether there was a Centering Prayer group in Memphis and was told that there was a Roman Catholic sister in attendance who was leading activities in the area. Later during the meeting I met Sr. Joann Mascari, OP, and we agreed to meet later in Memphis to explore Centering Prayer possibilities.

At that time, Sr. Joann had been going to Jackson, MS, some 60 miles south of Memphis and meeting with a group of Methodists; a Centering Prayer group had emerged. As a consequence, a group of Methodists in Jackson, TN, 90 miles north of Memphis, had invited Sr. Joann to meet with them. So the first joint effort between us was on a Saturday in 2000; then we began weekly trips there.

We also began to offer CP workshops in Memphis and at a certain point we decided to invite Fr. Keating to meet with us at the Church of the Holy Communion (Episcopal). Despite his many travels, he arranged to come by. We put the word out that Fr. Keating would be meeting with anyone interested in Centering Prayer — and 400 persons showed up!

From that point on, after a workshop on CP at the same church, with the support and encouragement of the rectors, a group emerged that has met regularly on the first Saturday of each month since 2004. From all across Memphis, people continue to come to this monthly meeting. It meets for two hours with about 20 to 35 in attendance. We begin with two 20 minute periods of Centering Prayer in the parish chapel followed by a 30 minute silent coffee break. Some participants continue to sit in silence, read or walk the labyrinth. We then convene in the chapel for a lectio divina reading of the Sunday Gospel.

Sr. Joann and I shared the leadership alternatively until new persons began to join us. Eileen Olewinski, Mike Potter and Pat Pavetto continue to encourage the people at First Saturday to practice Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina. This is an introductory point for many people in our area and they become part of the growth in our chapter here, including young adults.



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 CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH NEWS

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Visit the website at [www.extensioncontemplativainternacional.org](http://www.extensioncontemplativainternacional.org)

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**email:** [jdmuyskens@gmail.com](mailto:jdmuyskens@gmail.com)

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## Deepening the Contemplative Dimension of Servant Leadership

with  
**Susan Komis, Shawn Kafader & Susan Rush**  
**July 27 – August 2, 2014**  
Marianist Center • Eureka, MO

[www.contemplativeoutreach.org/marianist2014servant](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/marianist2014servant)

*"For I know well the plans I have for you ... plans to prosper you, plans to give you hope and a future. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart"* JEREMIAH 29:11-13

## A Centering Prayer Retreat for Women



## EMBODYING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

**Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler & Hadley Morris**  
**October 10 - 16, 2014**  
St. Mary's Sewanee: The Ayres Center  
for Spiritual Development  
Sewanee, TN

[www.contemplativeoutreach.org/stmarys2014Presence](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/stmarys2014Presence)

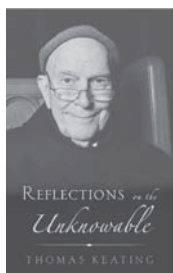


## RESOURCES IN OUR ONLINE STORE



### Download Our New Centering Prayer Mobile App Prayer Timer

FREE DOWNLOAD



### Reflections on the Unknowable

The first part of the book is a lengthy interview with Fr. Thomas in which he examines concepts of the divine available to individuals willing to open the door to God. The second section consists of 31 brief homilies with a wide range of diverse topics. *\$15 USD*

### Falling Into the Hands of God



#### DVD & ONLINE VIDEO

Thomas Keating explores the deepening that comes from the new information from science and evolution into the Mystery of God. He talks about the games that God plays with us and how this impacts on our daily living. Once again we

are struck with the intimacy, tenderness and forgiveness of our God. *DVD \$25 USD; Digital video \$15 USD*



### Thomas Keating: A Rising Tide of Silence

**DVD** *A Rising Tide of Silence* is a reflective portrait of Fr. Thomas Keating by his nephew and filmmaker Peter C. Jones. Interweaving historical footage, interviews, and extensive conversations with Fr. Thomas, the film traces his spiritual journey from an affluent New York City

childhood, to an austere Trappist monastic life, to his founding of Contemplative Outreach in 1984 to bring Centering Prayer to a worldwide audience. A renowned theologian and author of more than 30 books, Fr. Thomas is widely recognized for his ecumenical approach to spirituality. *DVD \$25 USD*



### A Path Into Divine Love

A yearlong series of online courses

These courses are available for the remainder of the year:

**Lectio Divina: Heart to Heart:  
Listening and Living with God**  
June 2 – 27, 2014

**Forgiveness: A Growth in Love**  
August 4 – 29, 2014

**Lean In, Lighten Up and Let Go: Practices for a Deeper  
Commitment to the Contemplative Life with Mary Dwyer**  
October 6 – 31, 2014

**The Grace of Advent: Consent to Contemplative Living**  
November 28 – December 26, 2014

We are partnering with our long-term friends at Spirituality & Practice to offer a year-long online program to celebrate the grace of contemplative practice and contemplative life.

Visit [www.contemplativeoutreach.org/path-divine-love](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/path-divine-love)

Self-guided online courses are also available anytime, anywhere you have internet access. A list of these courses can be found at [www.contemplativeoutreach.org/online-courses](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/online-courses).



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## EVENTS

For the most current and complete list of events, retreats and workshops, please check the **online Calendar of Events** at [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org).



# THE GIFT OF LIFE

## DEATH & DYING, LIFE & LIVING

Retreats

The dying process is the culmination or peak of development – the whole development – of the spiritual journey in which the total surrender into God involves the gift of life itself.

Really we are dying into each nanosecond of time, when we accept it.

Death is perhaps the most complete surrender, or requires the most complete surrender. And for that reason it is not death, but life, a movement into fullness that we can't imagine from this side of the dying process.

Thomas Keating  
*The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living*

AUGUST 8-15, 2014

Wisdom House  
Litchfield, CT  
Email: [jai@wisdomhouse.org](mailto:jai@wisdomhouse.org)

SEPTEMBER 5-11, 2014

Siena Retreat Center  
Racine, WI  
[www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sienacenter2014gift](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sienacenter2014gift)

OCTOBER 24-26, 2014

Weekend Retreat

OCTOBER 24-30, 2014

Weekend and Immersion Retreat

Garrison Institute  
Garrison, NY

[www.contemplativeoutreach.org/2014-garrison-gift](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/2014-garrison-gift)



**DVD PACKAGE** Contains two DVDs: nine segments + introduction; guidebook; Spanish sub-titles; English closed-captions. *\$79 USD*

**GUIDEBOOK** (included in DVD package and sold separately) 128 pages *\$20 USD*

**CD PACKAGE** Contains two audio CDs: nine segments + introduction; reflection booklet. *\$29 USD*

**DIGITAL OPTIONS** are also available.



SILENCE  
SOLITUDE  
SOLIDARITY  
SERVICE

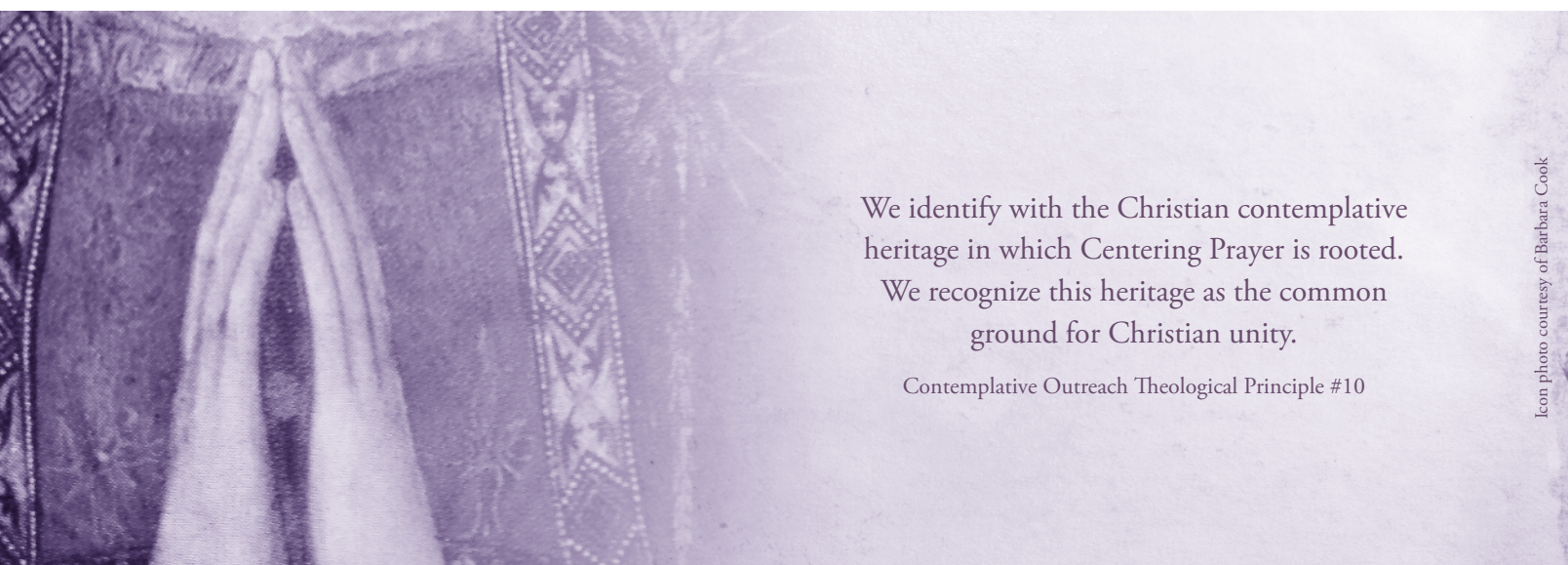
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We identify with the Christian contemplative heritage in which Centering Prayer is rooted.  
We recognize this heritage as the common ground for Christian unity.

Contemplative Outreach Theological Principle #10