



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"A Meditation"

Open Mind, Open Heart by Thomas Keating

Julie Saad

We begin our prayer by disposing our body. Let it be relaxed and calm, but inwardly alert.

The root of prayer is interior silence. We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. Deep prayer is the laying aside of thoughts. It is the opening of mind and heart, body and feelings – our whole being – to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond words, thoughts, and emotions. We do not resist them or suppress them. We accept them as they are and go beyond them, not by effort, but by letting them all go by. We open our awareness to the Ultimate Mystery whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. The Ultimate Mystery is the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment.

We are totally present now, with the whole of our being, in complete openness, in deep prayer. The past and future – time itself – are forgotten. We are here in the presence of the Ultimate Mystery. Like the air we breathe, this Divine Presence is all around us and within us, distinct from us, but never separate from us. We may sense this Presence drawing us from within, as if touching our spirit and embracing it, or carrying us beyond ourselves into pure awareness.

We surrender to the attraction of interior silence, tranquility, and peace. We do not try to feel anything, reflect about anything. Without effort, without trying, we sink into this Presence, letting everything else go by. Let love alone speak: the simple desire to be one with the Presence, to forget self, and to rest in the Ultimate Mystery.

This Presence is immense, yet so humble; awe-inspiring, yet so gentle; limitless, yet so intimate, tender and personal. I *know* that I am *known*. Everything in my life is transparent in this Presence. It knows everything about me – all my weakness, brokenness, sinfulness – and still loves me infinitely. This Presence is healing, strengthening, refreshing – just by its Presence. It is nonjudgmental, self-giving, seeking no reward, boundless in compassion. It is like coming home to a place I should never have left, to an awareness that was somehow always there, but which I

did not recognize. I cannot force this awareness, or bring it about. A door opens within me, but from the other side. I seem to have tasted before the mysterious sweetness of this enveloping, permeating Presence. It is both emptiness and fullness at once.

We wait patiently; in silence, openness, and quiet attentiveness; motionless within and without. We surrender to the attraction to be still, to be loved, just to *be*.