

Centering Prayer Experience

(Practicing the Silence)

CENTERING PRAYER:

- Centering Prayer is a prayer of being. Although the term was coined by Thomas Merton, this contemplative prayer practice was again made popular in the West by Catholic priest Father Thomas Keating, as a Christian alternative to Eastern meditation practices.
- Unlike a mantra, which is designed to clarify or calm the mind through repetition, the intention of Centering Prayer is to purify the heart and provide a deeper, more experiential union with God.

Therefore the sacred prayer word we employ is not used as a repetitive mantra but as an anchor, to gently draw our attention back to the Presence. Then we let it go until we find we are distracted again.

- “When we open to God we find that God is closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself.” — Father Thomas Keating.

STEPS IN ENTERING CENTERING PRAYER:

- Find a comfortable seated position, preferably with feet flat on the floor, and hands resting in your lap. Close your eyes from outer distractions.
- Turn your attention to the presence of God within and rest there for a while.
- To abide in the Presence quietly and attentively, begin to use your sacred prayer word or simple phrase — something which expresses your heart’s desire to feel your connection with the Presence, and which is personal and meaningful to you.
- Examples of sacred words that can be effective for Centering Prayer include names for God such as: Adonai, Elohim, Yahweh, El Shadai, Rabboni, Jesus, Christos, Kyrie, Dios, Abba, Amma, Emmanuel, etc.
- The word may also be “Love”, “Peace”, or “Light”. Let the word or phrase bubble up from your heart then repeat it silently to yourself.

- Allow this prayer word to begin to repeat in you.
- If you notice you've become distracted by thoughts, gently return your attention to the chosen prayer word or phrase. You may even find yourself intellectualizing the meaning and connotation of the word. If so, merely remind yourself the value of the word lies in its simplicity to act as an anchor.
- Also remember that this time of centering prayer, is not seeking or asking for anything (Matt 6:33). This is a time to give the gift of our attention to the Divine that dwells within us. All of our attention is on the Presence. If we find it is not, the prayer word gently brings us back to this intention, over and over again.
- There's no failure if we find ourselves repeatedly bringing our awareness back to the Presence of God with our prayer word for the entire meditation. This is the practice. Eventually, the gaps between distraction and focus on God will lengthen.

EXITING CENTERING PRAYER

- How we end the Centering Prayer is important. Take your time coming out of the practice. It's likely that in the time allocated you've gone quite deep into stillness, even if, initially, it may feel as though nothing much has happened.
- It's helpful to recite an affirmation or prayer, as a way to gently come back to and ground yourself in the present moment. For example, silently say "The Lord's Prayer" or the "Prayer for Protection"; very slowly, enunciating each phrase and allowing it to deepen in you.
- If you experience irritability or disorientation after the prayer this may be an indication that you've ended the session too abruptly. Simply sit again, and take a few deep breaths to compose yourself and regroup.
- Also, resist the habitual temptation to jump right back into your activities or immediately engage in mindless chatter; so as to avoid dissipating the energy of the practice.
- This is a prayer experience. Commit to engage in your Centering Prayer practice for at least 15-20 minutes a day.
- You may also choose to record your experience of and insights around the practice in a your journal
- Enjoy the process.