

PRAYER OF QUIET – CENTERING PRAYER

(Adapted from some cyclostyled notes of unknown authorship)

Taken from the book “You Can Pray” of P. Ribes, s.j.

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Introduction

- ✓ *This prayer method is inspired in the **Cloud of Unknowing**, a well-known Christian classic work on contemplative Prayer. Pennington and others (see reference below) have gathered some recommendations from *The Cloud*, adapted and reformulated them into a few simple rules for fostering prayer of quiet*
- ✓ *This method is not an easy one. It is not recommendable for beginners in the spiritual life.*
- ✓ *The name ‘**Centering Prayer**’ is inspired by Thomas Merton who holds that the way to come into contact with the living God is to go to one’s ‘center’ and from there pass into God. In ‘**Centering Prayer**’ one moves in Christian faith into contact with the personal God who lies at the ground of our being.*
- ✓ *Our ordinary thoughts, images etc. are like boats sitting so closely packed together on a river that we are not able to see the river itself. We are normally aware only of one object after another, quickly passing across the screen of our consciousness, such as concepts, memories, feelings, images. But the very ground of our being lying beneath them all, escapes our consciousness.*
- ✓ *By slowing down, for a while, that continuous rush of impressions, experiences and fleeting images, gradually some space begins to appear between the boats and up comes the awareness of the reality on which they are floating, the river of life, namely God. Centering prayer focuses our attention from the boats to the river.*

PROCEDURE:

Keeping strictly to the teachings of the “The Cloud of Unknowing” follow the six rules mentioned below.

Rule 1: : ‘Simply sit down be relaxed and quiet’

It emphasizes the importance of posture and even the place in prayer. If both posture and place are expressive of what prayer is meant to be – *a listening and an openness to the presence of God and to his word*- prayer can easily take off

Rule 2: Still your mind, take your time. Vipassana, Yoga, Awareness of sounds, sensations and breathing are great helps to still the mind.

Rule 3. In faith only, approach God dwelling in the depths of your being.

- ‘Center your **entire attention and desire** on Him alone’, namely, ‘God Himself, and not what you get from of him’.
- ‘With a **detached intention** keep centered on God and God alone’
- ‘With **blind love** for God himself, strike that thick “cloud of unknowing” with the sharp dart of longing love.
- And **on no account whatever, think of giving up’’**

Rule 4. Then, take a single word which expresses your longing and faith, and repeat it, within your heart slowly, gently and without strain.

- This word is a sign of our desire to open ourselves to the mystery of God's presence within us. A short word, preferably of one syllable, could be, for example: **God, Love, Lord, Abba, Jesus, Spirit, Om.**
- This word expresses **our deep longing, our yearning for God** and its repetition helps to produce and to sustain in us an inner stillness that makes God the single focus of our attention and awareness.

Rule 5. Whenever you realize that something other than God – thoughts, images, feelings - become the center of your awareness, return immediately, to your prayer word.

- Whether such distractions are superficial thoughts or preoccupations, insights reflections or whatever, even if you have an over-whelming experience of God, this is not the time to think of them.
- Take everything that happens peacefully, gratefully, without judging, but keep ever returning to your prayer word.
- You have to 'die' to your thoughts, images and feelings even of God, while waiting in hope for 'contact' with God himself.

Rule 6. At the end of your prayer period, come out of it slowly and gradually as you may be deep within yourself.

- You may do so praying mentally the "Our Father" or any other suitable prayer.

Note: *The value of this method or of any method of prayer is to be judged by its fruits, by whether or not it helps you to live a more Christ-like manner. If it is a genuine experience of God, it cannot but transform you.*

References:

- "The Cloud of Unknowing " and " The Book of Privy Counseling" edited with an introduction by W. Johnston, S. J. Image Book 1973.
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