



Stillpoint

Stillpoint is the official magazine of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation
June 2023

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Websites to visit:

christianmeditationnz.org.nz

wccm.org

wccmaustralia.org.au

christianmeditationorg.uk

bonnevauxwccm.org

Teresa of Avila and Contemplative Prayer

by Avril Manley

The talk below was given at a Waikato/Bay of Plenty community day. It introduced the group to the mystical thought of Teresa of Avila. In the meditative community of WCCM we are familiar with the various aspects of the spiritual journey being presented in different ways, e.g., a spiral or a labyrinth. Teresa presented the spiritual journey through the image of a group of mansions in a castle, in the form of a linear set of stages that the soul progresses through. The talk has been abbreviated for publication.

Who was Teresa of Avila?

In 1515 Teresa was born into a pious Roman Catholic, Spanish, noble family. At the age of twenty she joined a Carmelite convent in the town of Avila. While there she read about Mental Prayer, what we today might refer to as Meditation, Contemplative Prayer, Silent Prayer or Prayer of the Heart. In the 1500's mental or internal prayer had been largely lost to the Roman Catholic church. Those who practised contemplative prayer were considered at serious risk of being deceived by the devil, especially if you were a woman.



What Did Teresa Teach About Contemplative Prayer

The kind of prayer Teresa said the Lord taught her came from what she believed Jesus himself taught and practised: She quoted Jesus from the gospels such as Matthew six where he taught: *Verses 5 -8 ...when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love....to be seen...*

Concerning the simplicity of contemplative prayer, she wrote: *'we only need a place where we can be alone and look upon him present within us'*.

What did Teresa learn about prayer that is helpful for modern day contemplatives?

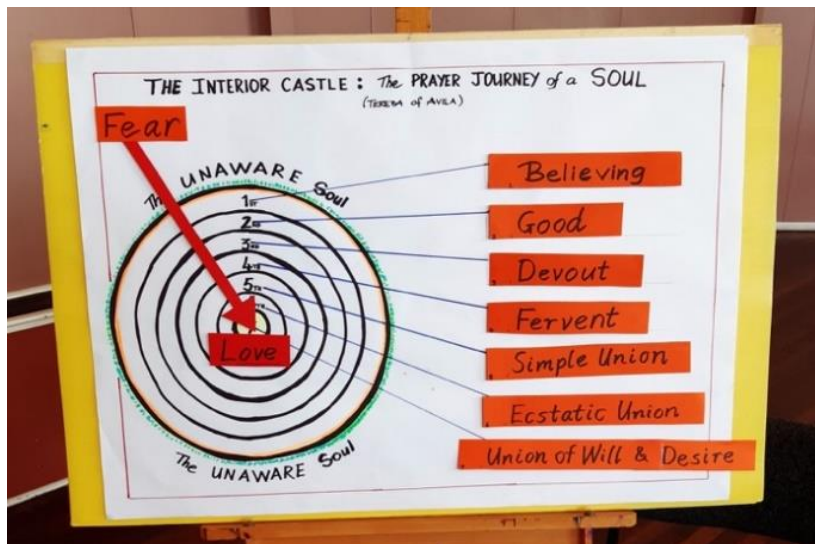
1. God dwells in unconditional love in the centre of our being
2. Contemplative practice progressively purifies the soul enabling the development of a greater degree of love for God and neighbour
3. There will be both spiritual and everyday life challenges to contemplative practice but God is always present to help
4. It is only through loving union with God that we really know who we are and how the world is to be lived in

Continued next page

The Interior Castle: A Soul's Journey to Union With God

About her spiritual experiences she wrote: *I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle in which there are seven mansions or dwelling places. In the centre is the chiefest mansion where 'the most secret things pass between God and the soul'.*

That God was dwelling within was a startling revelation to her Confessors as previously God was considered as being somewhere else. In Teresa's image God is present unconditionally for us at the centre of our being, whether we believe it or not, and there is nothing we can do that can turn that love away.



The Interior Castle: Each mansion represents a stage or level of prayer.

Outside the Castle Wall

In Teresa's image the soul begins its spiritual journey toward union with God from outside the castle wall. At this stage it is *Unaware* of the value of prayer and of the Divine dwelling within. The 'noise' or distractions of everyday events prevent the *Unaware Soul* from hearing the Shepherd's voice. By prayer and meditation the *Unaware Soul* enters through the castle wall to become the *Believing Soul*.

The 1st Mansion

The *Believing Soul* has greater self-knowledge of sins in its life which it begins to fight against. It seeks to love God through vocal prayer. It prays intermittently but there exists an element of fear and it takes courage to stop and listen to God through contemplation as we don't know what we will hear. Through humility and meditation the *Believing Soul* grows in faith and moves to the next level of prayer which is that of the *Good Soul*.

The 2nd Mansion

The *Good Soul* has a greater sense of being called, and feels greater commitment to, the journey towards God. During prayer the mind and imagination are active in an effort to understand the relationship of the inner self or soul with God. At the same time there are battles arising within, out of an awareness of the false self and false gods. The soul acknowledges its brokenness, wounds and inner demons that haunt but the struggle that ensues is a necessary component of Christian maturity. Despite this inner struggle with imperfection, it was still possible to draw close to God. All this growing and awareness was the way to healing and wholeness but jarring for the soul.

The 3rd Mansion

Through humility and meditation the *Good Soul* develops into the *Devout Soul*. The soul now wishes to follow Christ and seek perfection. It does not want to offend God. Contemplative prayer is more regular

but, Teresa warns, insecurity and questioning can creep in to the extent that the unnerved soul begins to wonder if it has taken a wrong path.

Periods of spiritual dryness occur due to the soul trying to guide its progress by reason and intellect instead of putting faith in God. There is a greater need to surrender the will to the Shepherd through contemplation as it is only in God-given contemplation that the soul is mystically united with God, becoming transformed into Him.

These first three Mansions or stages of the soul's growing awareness of Christian spirituality depend on personal efforts, but God's help is always needed for all we do.

The 4th Mansion: Prayer of Quiet

In its transition from activity and striving to quieter prayer the *Devout Soul becomes the Fervent Soul*. There is an increased desire to co-operate with God. The Christian spends more time reflecting on scripture and begins to spend more time in meditation.

Through deep humility and love of God there is greater submission and obedience to the will of God. Prayer brings great peace. It is the start of union with God.

The 5th Mansion: Prayer of Simple Union

At this stage there is a greater awareness of God within. Teresa uses the allegory of the silkworm which dies to become a white moth. In the same way our will dies to be reborn more completely in Jesus Christ. *It is now no longer me, she says, but Christ within that orders and sustains my life.*

The soul is now fully into meditation. It is stilled by God's stillness

The 6th Mansion: Prayer of Spiritual Betrothal, The place of Ecstatic Union

After numerous purifications that occur passively out of continued contemplative practice these heroic souls experience a greater sense of purity and union with God. While the pain of one's sins increases the closer one is to God, Christ is more present in a way that is both 'divine and human'. Teresa now felt closer and deeper in her union with God but she still sensed that her 'flame,' representing her inner self, remained separate from that of God's flame despite experiencing ecstatic sessions of the love of God for her.

The 7th and final Mansion: Prayer of Spiritual Marriage

Teresa testifies that in this mansion or level of prayer the Union of Will and Desire occurs:

'the soul dies and with great joy, because its life is now Christ'.

She quotes: *'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'.* (Gal.2:20; NIV)

Teresa's will is now more completely God's will.

The soul finds its rest and repose in God. Its activity arises out of love for God and each other. With Christ's love *'all will become easy for us and we shall accomplish great things quickly and without effort'.* In her own soul's spiritual journey Teresa had moved from fear to love.

Finally, in regard to your own soul's journey she says:

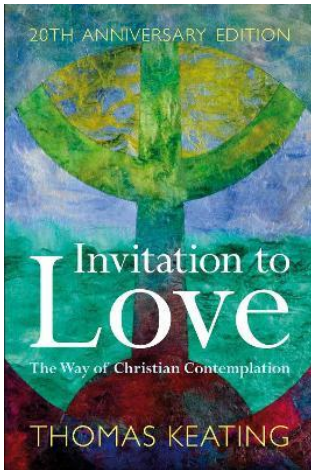
'Trust God that you are where you are meant to be'.

When someone asks who in the town could
build them a boat what do people say?

We Noah guy

Part Two - The Pathway to Healing in the Inner Room

by Vincent Maire



In the March issue of *Stillpoint*, I reported on a Community Day held last December in which Raymond Eberhard introduced us to the teachings of Fr Thomas Keating.

I recounted how in 2013 I was laid up with a broken ankle and used that time to read and journal Keating's book, *Invitation to Love – The Way of Christian Contemplation*. What follows below are quotes from that excellent book. I invite you to read and reflect on these quotes with a view to gaining greater insights into your own contemplative journey.

From Chapter 1:

“Once we start the spiritual journey, God is totally on our side. Everything works together for our good. If we can believe this, we can save ourselves an enormous amount of trouble.”

“The work of following Christ is like working with a psychotherapist who has a clear insight into what is wrong with us. With incredible accuracy, God put his finger on exactly the spot that needs attention at this precise time in our spiritual growth. If we are hanging on to one last shred of possessiveness, he comes along and says, often through some person or event, ‘Won’t you give this to me.’”

From Chapter 3 – The Afflictive Emotions:

“The clarity with which we see other people’s needs and respond to them is in direct proportion to our interior freedom.”

From Chapter 7 – The Four Consents:

“Consent 1: In childhood, God asks us to consent to the basic goodness our nature in all its parts. Consent 2: In early adolescence God asks us to accept the full development of our being by activating our talents and creative energies. Consent 3: In early adulthood God invites us to accept the fact of our non-being and the diminutions of self that occur through illness, old age and death.”

“The fourth consent to transforming union requires consent to the death of the false self, and the false self is the only self we know. Whatever its inconvenience, it is at least familiar. Some of us are more afraid of the death of the false self than of physical death.”

“By consenting to God’s creation, to our basic goodness as human beings, and to letting go of what we love in this world, we are brought to the final surrender which is for the false self to die and the true self to emerge.”

From Chapter 10 – The Night of Sense:

“To decide consciously to follow the values of the gospel is only the first step in our commitment to Christ. The values in the unconscious must then be confronted. When the springtime of the spiritual journey subsides, the old temptations surface once again with the same force than before our conversion.”

From Chapter 13 – The Fruits of the Night of Sense

“The night of the spirit is designed to free us from the residue of the false-self in the unconscious and thus prepare us for the transforming union.”

There are five significant fruits of the night of the spirit. (1) Freedom from the temptation to assume a glamorous role because of our spiritual gifts or charism. (2) Freedom from the domination of any emotion. (Emotions) are integrated into the rational and intuitive parts of our nature. (3) The purification of our idea of God. God reveals himself in a vastly superior way – as infinite, incomprehensible and ineffable. No one can describe the experience of pure faith. (4) The purification of what are traditionally known as the *theological virtues*; which are faith, hope and love. ... our ideas of our vocation, the Church, prayer, Jesus – even God himself – may be shattered.”

“The principal fruit of the night of sense is humility which enables us to assume our place as members of the human family. The night of sense also releases the energies of the unconscious. This is particularly true if our journey is grounded in the regular practice of contemplative prayer.”

“In the night of the sense, our primitive ideas of God are challenged. It enables us to face our distorted views of God and to lay them aside. Then we are free to relate to God as he is and to use the immense energy that this freedom releases to relate to other people with respect and love.”

“One way God deals with the limited ways we have of relating to him is by reducing our concepts of him to silence. We are meeting God at a deeper level – a being-to-being, presence-to-presence relationship, which is the knowledge of God in pure faith.”

From chapter 14 – The Stages of Contemplative Prayer

“The divine presence has always been with us, but we think it is absent. That thought is the monumental illusion of the human condition. The spiritual journey is designed to heal it.”

“Transforming union is a restructuring of consciousness, not an experience or set of experiences. In the course of this restructuring, the presence of God becomes a kind of fourth dimension to the three-dimensional world. In the light of transforming union, the most important element in contemplative prayer is the practice itself, not its psychological content.”

From chapter 16 - The Transforming Union

“The experience of the transforming union is a way of being in the world that enables us to live daily life with the invincible conviction of continuous union with God. It is a new way of being in the world, a way of transcending everything in the world without leaving it.”

“We are free to devote ourselves to the needs of others without becoming unduly absorbed in their emotional pain. We are present to people at the deepest level and perceive the presence of Christ suffering in them. We long to share with them something of the inner freedom we have been given, but without the anxiety and without trying to change them or obtain anything from them. We simply have the divine life as sheer gift and offer it to anyone who wants it. The risen life of Christ through the gifts of the Holy Spirit can then suggest what is to be done or not done in incredible detail.”

“If there is no obstacle in us, no false self, we become spiritual transmitters through whom the divine presence and boundless love and compassion communicates itself to others in ever-widening circles of influence.”

“In the transforming union, the energy of faith, trust and love is constantly being beamed to us whether we experience it or not. ... As soon as the false self is reduced to zero, transforming union occurs.”

Vincent Maire

Seven-day silent retreat in September 2023

The Seven-day Retreat is:

- A week-long residential intensive
- Suitable for people who have been meditating seriously for some time
- A time of silence and stillness with a daily flow of meditation, a short talk, and regular meetings with one of the retreat leaders
- A profound integrated experience of both sides of the spiritual journey of meditation – of solitude and fellowship
- An opportunity to go deeper by being present to ourselves and to God.

We are planning a seven-day Retreat **19-26 September 2023**. If you are interested in considering this and have not yet attended an Essential Teaching Workshop, we highly recommend you arrange to attend one. You can do this either on-line (contact Raymond Eberhard celebrantraymond@gmail.com) or, if there is a small group of meditators who would like a face-to-face workshop held over two days, then contact Linda Polaschek nandlpolaschek@gmail.com

If you would like to find out more about the September Silent Retreat, contact Linda Polaschek nandlpolaschek@gmail.com

The retreat will be held at Magnificat Retreat Centre, Featherston, an hour north of Wellington. NZCCM will arrange transport from Wellington airport, if needed, for those flying in. The cost is \$700 (approx). Please contact Linda if you are keen to come but this cost is unaffordable for you, as subsidies are available.

Weekend retreat in Auckland July 2023

Where: St Francis Retreat Centre, Hillsborough, Auckland

When: July 21-23, 2023

Topic: Omega Point – An introduction to the Spirituality of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin SJ**

Led by: Adriana Janus

- Early bird cost is \$290.00. Early bird ends June 30th after that the cost is \$330.00. Registrations close July 9th.
- The retreat starts Friday at 7pm, 21st July, with registrations from 6.00pm.
- If you wish to apply for financial assistance to attend, please email retreat@christianmeditationnz.org.nz before June 30th.
- For registration and payment details, download the retreat brochure at <https://christianmeditationnz.org.nz/auckland-retreat-july-2023/>
- For further information contact Vincent Maire on 027-276-6032 or email your questions to retreat@christianmeditationnz.org.nz

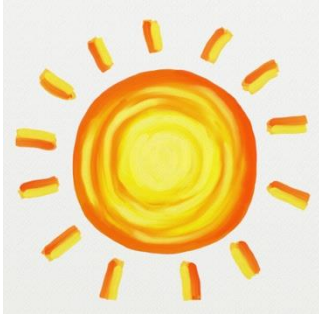
One-day introduction to Christian Meditation August 2023

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER PART ONE – An Introduction to Meditation in the Christian Tradition. *Are you or someone you know wishing to deepen your faith? Have you ever wondered what is meant by prayer of the heart? Does the call of the psalmist to 'be still and know and that I am God,' resonate within?* Spend a day exploring Christian mystics who have contributed to the development of the contemplative tradition and hear what they say about contemplative prayer. Date: Saturday August 12th at St Francis Retreat Centre, Hillsborough, Auckland. Presented by Vincent Maire and Mary McLister. Book online at www.stfrancisretreatcentre.org.nz. Early bird \$65, standard \$80.

PART TWO of this series will be on **Saturday October 7th** - more details in September's edition of Stillpoint.

Raumati Rangona - Savouring Summer

Quiet Day February 11th At Mandeville, North Canterbury



Jill Montgomery, at home in her beautiful rural garden, deftly guided this retreat, drawing on her training in the Ignatian Tradition and as a spiritual director. We were graciously welcomed into her lavish garden, and settled gently into the ambience of summer abundance and recognition of the generous work of Love within us. Jill asked us to recognise the 'movement' of God in our lives and through the lens of the First Principle and Foundation of Ignatian spirituality, to discern the ebb and flow of these gifts in our journey of faith. This day was awash with a sense of gratitude and the radical profusion of grace. God's grace, modelled and channelled by Jill, nourished our souls and reset our hearts.

Enormous thanks to the faithful organisers – Annette, Yvonne, Chrissie and others. And huge appreciation to Jill and her husband for their hospitality. There is great power in retreating from the everyday, in stillness framed with guided thoughts, and in being cradled by beauty. From the stillness new shoots burst forth and we are made new.

Arohanui

Helen Moran

Dunedin meditation community day

A community meditation day was held on Saturday 11 March in the hall beside Sacred Heart Catholic church in north Dunedin, the first such meeting in that area for some time.

Frank Meenan, the group leader who is the local liaison with NZCCM, coordinated and led the day. Moira Gallagher, who was formative in meditation in the area, attended in the afternoon. The day was an introduction to meditation and those present all contributed to the discussion, during the sessions and over lunch. Several interested people were able to link into local groups. Linda Polaschek, the national coordinator gave the group an update on activities in NZCCM.



Monastery Tours

by Vincent Maire

Here is an account of a recent pilgrimage I made to four monasteries in the USA. The tour took 30-minutes and while some were brief stopovers, at others I lingered and marvelled. Yes, it was a *virtual tour*, but one that enhanced my appreciation of the traditions we meditators share with these Benedictine monastics.

My first stopover was at the **New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur**, California. The community was established in 1958 by monks from Italy. The Hermitage is located on 880 acres in the Ventana Wilderness of the Santa Lucia Mountains. A virtual visit is all you can make as the Hermitage is currently closed due to storm damage to local roads. The Hermitage offers self-guided and preached retreats. The latter are directed by a monk and follow a spiritual theme. I was very much encouraged by these words, “Please be advised when visiting us that there is no cell phone coverage here, no radio or TV, no internet, and no telephones in the rooms.” Sounds like the perfect place for a retreat. The Big Sur community is one of three Camaldolese monasteries in California and together they embrace more than 600 oblates from around the world. The web page devoted to oblates has a good number of resources, books, and video links. WCCM oblates will find this part of the tour useful. The website has more information about the community with many wonderful photos of this remote and beautiful place. I came away from my visit to Big Sur much better informed on the rich history of the Camaldolese family that dates back to tenth century.



(Big Sur)

The Abbey of Our Lady of New Clairvaux lies in the heart of Californian wine country. These monks are Cistercians of the Strict Observance, better known as Trappists. The home page states: “With the ancient Rule of Saint Benedict as our guide, we offer hospitality to guests, serve in mutual charity, and live out our contemplative witness of silence, stillness and solitude in our often frenetic and busy world today.” I was very much taken with their description from the 12th century of why monks live in community “Because we are not yet ready for solitude; and because if one of us falls he will have others to lift him up and thus, brother aiding brother, will be built up on high like a strong, fortified city; finally, because it is good and pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity.” I think we can say the same thing about why we meditators meet weekly; *to lift one another up*. For me, a highlight of my visit was the *virtual tour* of the abbey. Using my mouse, I was able to wander about the chapel and the main building. I left with the feeling that the Abbey of Our Lady of New Clairvaux has some very generous benefactors.

There is something very endearing about a monastic community that makes fruitcake. Welcome to **Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey** located in Oregon’s Willamette Valley. Here is an abbey that boasts a hiking trail filled with *critters* or all types and sizes. Undirected retreats are offered although spiritual direction is

available on request. The guest house has a photo album of its own and the overall impression is one of peaceful nature. The abbey is home to 14 monks who take manual work seriously.

Along with fruitcake baking there is wine storage and 1300 acres of Douglas fir to manage. Here is what the monks say about the importance of manual work. “Primarily manual labour provides us monks with a much-needed balance in our life of prayer, as it promotes our spiritual, mental and physical well-being. According to the Rule of St Benedict and monastic tradition manual work is one important 'pillar' of a monk's life.” The Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey seems a homely place. I imagine a retreat that included hiking, wine, fruitcake and critters would be especially uplifting.



Christ in the Desert Abbey is located at the end of a 21 kms dirt road in the Chama River Wilderness, New Mexico. Founded in 1964, this Benedictine abbey is home to over 40 monks in various stages of formation. The monks primarily live from their bookstore and hospitality, but also grow hops which they sell to homebrewers. What caught my attention was their page devoted to Sustainable Stewardship. Here are the five primary objectives for the monastery's building projects:

1. use sustainable materials and techniques to safeguard the environment and the beauty of the Chama Canyon Wilderness,
2. energy production and consumption at the monastery must be clean, renewable, and cost effective,
3. the buildings must meet the needs of the monastic community, now and for the future,
4. the buildings must be beautiful,
5. construction costs must be minimized.

Yes, solar energy and water management are high priorities but did you note point 4 above? *Buildings must be beautiful*. The adobe style buildings offset against the Chama Canyon wilderness are lovingly displayed on their website.

I was very much taken with how the monks experienced *Ora* in their life. “Prayer is the primary occupation for life in the Monastery. While there is a conversational component with God, essentially prayer is listening to the Word of God. It requires an attitude of openness so that God can be present in the core of our being knowing what is needful for our own healing and that of those people we hold in our hearts. If one is really detached from everything and truly oriented towards God by desire, there is no need of words. God interprets the intensity of our love and the urgency of our thirst for the good of all others. The task of prayer includes offering ourselves and all persons to God. Monks must stay facing the Lord in an attitude of prayer throughout the course of the day and night.”



I hope this brief account of my virtual wanderings encourage you to set time aside to discover more about our Benedictine family and tradition.

Vincent Maire

Supporting Meditation through the Examen by Anne Cave

During Lent I was asked to lead a weekly parish group based on the ancient practice of the *Examen* (pronounced with a long 'a' to sound like exarmen). Developed by St Ignatius Loyola for his religious community, it is a daily discipline aimed at developing the spiritual life of an individual or community. As with St Ignatius's other practices, it is characterised by paying attention to the emotions and what they have to tell us. I had come across the *Examen* before, but had not previously followed it for more than a couple of days. Now, as leader, I was committed to doing the *Examen* daily and sharing my experiences with the group each week.

What I discovered was that this is a spiritual discipline that really supported my meditation practice. Doing the *Examen* each day wasn't difficult as I already had the discipline of meditating twice a day.

The Examen is quite a simple practice which I found takes only 10 minutes to do. Basically, it is reflecting on the events of the day, paying particular attention to the emotions that these events have triggered. It can be done either in the evening or early the next morning.

It consists of five steps:

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions, positive and negative.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward the new day.

Doing the *Examen* gives you a chance to sort the feelings arising from the events of the previous day and pray about them. It has been likened to rummaging through the stuff that happened, pinpointing the highs and lows, looking for and finding God there. I have found there's less interference from all this stuff in my meditation as a result.

As I did the *Examen* each day I started making brief notes on the things that had brought me joy or encouraged me, and those that drained, saddened or challenged me. I also jotted down the prayer that arose from this. As I looked back each week over Lent, I and the other group members quickly noticed that there were themes and patterns emerging. God's work in our lives, the ways in which we were being encouraged, and the point of challenge for each of us quickly became clearer.

As a result, when I sit to meditate each day, I find there is a lot less interference from residual emotions popping up, as I have spent some time naming and sorting these already. It also helps to be clear that what seems like a stress in my life is actually the point where God is working and challenging me. Rather than thinking *How can I get out of this?* when I'm supposed to be meditating, I can concentrate on taking strength from God's presence to deal with these points of growth and challenge. Meditation doesn't become easy as a result, but I find the *Examen* does clear away some of the undergrowth impeding my journey. During the six weeks of Lent I realised that my prayer arising from the *Examen* practice was increasingly sheer gratitude. During the day I started to feel challenged to let the small upsets go – I realised that if it's not negative enough to be recorded in my daily *Examen*, then I might as well let it go now!

Waikato and Bay of Plenty Community Day (NZCCM) 17 June 2023

Glimpses of God Through the Kitchen Window!

At this Community Day we will be guided by Raymond Eberhard, as we explore the writings of renowned author **James Finley on 'Experiencing the Presence of God'** and **Tim Roberts on 'Attuning Myself to God's Love More Closely'**.

The two topics blend beautifully together and draw our attention to 'experiencing the presence of God during the business of our daily lives'.

Raymond has been meditating in the Christian tradition for six years, and in other eastern traditions prior to that. He is facilitator for the Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions of NZCCM. He facilitates two activities for St Peter's Church in Katikati, chairing a committee enabling support for school children to cope with loss and grief, and also facilitating a monthly Men's' Breakfast. He and his wife Maureen lead a meditation group at St Peter's and an online group. Formerly he was General Manager for a Rudolf Steiner based residential care facility for intellectually disabled people for almost 25 years. Raymond is a Benedictine Oblate.

Saturday 17th June 2023, 10:00am to 2:30pm
St Mary's Catholic Church Hall, Corner Ranolf and Seddon Streets, Rotorua

Morning tea, coffee and biscuits available from 10am!
Meditators and people new to meditation are most welcome!

Please bring:

- Your lunch
- Koha (suggested \$10)
- \$2 for a book raffle raising funds for 'Friends', enabling the spread and resourcing of Christian Meditation world-wide.
- Credit card or cash if you would like to buy books from Pleroma Christian Supplies

Any queries, please contact Raymond Eberhard on 07 5495329 or
celebrantraymond@gmail.com

Auckland Community Day 8 July 2023

Centring the Self - Balancing the Fine Art of Mental Wellbeing for Self and Others

Auckland School of Philosophy, 268 West Tamaki Road, Glendowie, starting at 10am.

Jenny Wolf has worked in the field of mental health and addiction for over 30 years, in frontline and leadership roles within Australia and New Zealand. In this session, Jenny will incorporate insights from a health professional's journey and explore "What does mental wellbeing look like?" in light of how we might experience some of life's unexpected curve balls - and how we can support others. Tips and techniques will focus on how to recognise and respond to stress. Jenny will reflect on the intricate connection between mental wellbeing and the practice of Meditation in the Christian Tradition, and how mindfulness connects with the tradition. Jenny lives in Raglan and is on the Oblate journey with WCCM-NZ. Contact Vincent Maire on 027 276-6032 or vincentmaire12@gmail.com

River contemplation by Tim Roberts

It was raining. I thought I was going to enjoy the river, but I suspect I was being taught a lesson. The lesson was about letting go of my desire to control, and to trust. We live near the Otaki Gorge, where a river flows down from the Tararuas. My wife, Deborah and I parked on an overgrown track. The crickets and kereru were in full voice and the cicada chorus pulsed through the trees, the boulder strewn ground, and through us.

We had been warned about the track into the ravine and the steep drop down to the river. I was advised not to go – or to go extremely carefully because of Parkinson's. I like to test my limits — and yet I'm cautious. The tension between having your limits stretched and the care and consideration for yourself and others is a great way to sharpen attentiveness.

I recently listened to David Goggins, an ex- Navy SEAL. He is a motivational speaker on the subject of endurance. He explained that most people will begin a challenge and stop when they get tired. His advice is that you don't stop when you are tired, you stop when you are done. But when you first think you're done – exhausted – spent – with nothing left to give - you will probably have another 60% left in the tank. It's just that you don't know how to go through the discomfort to access it. He emphasized that if we learn to have faith in ourselves and in this resilience, we access more of this potential. He said that on the other side of pain there was silence and he equated this to a kind of meditation.



I'm trying to follow the oblate's path. I like the meditative silence – the kind of silence that is alive with presence and that knows us. But is there also a place for this kind of intense focus and effort? In a life with Parkinson's there definitely is.

As we approached the ravine and I could hear the river. I was reminded of that beautiful and yet confronting poem-prayer that became known as A Hopi Elder Speaks. It squarely confronts the small self's tendency to grasp and cling. It talks of the time we live in, which is full of challenge and difficulty...

"...Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, "This could be a good time! There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are torn apart and will suffer greatly. Know the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above water. And I say, see who is in there with you and celebrate. At this time in history, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt. The time for the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and your vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.

"We are the ones we've been waiting for."

Attributed to an unnamed Hopi elder, Hopi Nation, Oraibi, Arizona

Do I trust the river? Do I fully trust and have faith in the Divine....sometimes..

but often I don't. I'm clinging to the bank with so many others.

Zen teacher John Tarrant often writes about challenges in life being a bit like koans or gates and if we go through these gates something opens for us. Usually it's an expansion of some kind. He has also said that life continually surprises us with friends who seem to present themselves at just

the right moment and who help us through one of these many gates. John Tarrant says in the Zen approach friends can include the animate and inanimate. They can be people, creatures, even the landscape. Many cultures attribute consciousness to forests, rivers, rocks and as we went into the trees and as we started to inch down vertical rock faces it felt to me as though the ravine had an alertness, a knowing. Was this part of what St Benedict meant when he told us to listen?

After a deluge lasting the best part of three days the ground was sodden and slippery. As we climbed further down the song of the cicadas was gradually replaced by the roar of the water as the river forced its way through this part of the gorge.

It was harder than it looked. Deborah reached the bottom of the ravine first. She encouraged me by telling me how spectacular it was. I was 'done', as Goggins' puts it. I knew I had used more than half my energy up and depleted the movement time from the last medication and climbing back up was harder. I suddenly felt the weights of pride and despair hanging on the rope with me. It had been harder than I thought. I'd taken too long to climb down and I could see the bottom, only 10 metres further down. But I couldn't do it so I turned back. It sounds so ordinary a decision, but it was difficult because it required a surrendering and an acceptance of the level of Parkinson's that I'm facing.

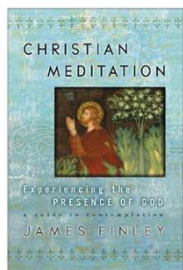
Before we went back to the car. I sat in the rain and got wet and meditated. At that moment in a gentle way the ravine seemed full of knowing and as I relaxed, I felt an expansion of consciousness, a letting go. Once more I felt we were part of Life. Surrender is so hard but yet so healing. Later I went back to the Hopi elder's words 'All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.' And, I would add, with gratefulness. Now the ongoing question is, can I live it? I feel so fortunate for the path St Benedict laid for this very purpose.

I wrote this poem as part of my reflection and my friend Alison provided a perfect prayer which I will take on my next walk in the ravine.

When all my efforts come up short

When all my efforts come up short
and pleading and howling
my hopes are reduced to naught
I am caught in the dark
lost beaten stripped naked
with every nerve wracked and fraught
then I go to the forest and sit in the rain letting
Life wash through me and purify me again
and drop by drop by drop
I become a living prayer
and I flow back into this world
trusting
and touching and caring
and knowing
that all my efforts will come up short
but doing it anyway again

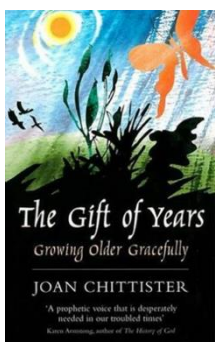
Tim Roberts



Christian Meditation: Experiencing the Presence of God by James Finley

This is one of the earlier classics of Christian Meditation which the author defines as the introduction of an ancient practice (contemplation) to a contemporary audience. The author, a former monk and student of Thomas Merton, provides simple, helpful instructions, as well as explaining the deeper connection with the divine that meditation can bring. Above all, he makes clear that the aim of meditation is to allow us to experience divine contemplation – the presence of God. Group Leaders will find the content very valuable for weekly teachings in the Christian Meditation group. 290pp. Paperback. \$43.99.

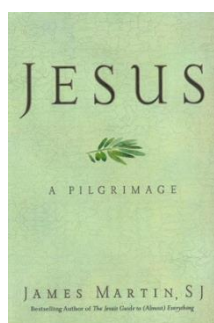
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The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully by Joan Chittister

Back in stock at Pleroma, this is essential reading for retirees or for any of us who bemoan that old age isn't for the faint-hearted. Yes, there are challenges and the author is clear-eyed and unsentimental about the reality of the ageing process. With great wisdom she encourages us to let go of both our fantasies of eternal youth and our fears about getting older. Our later years are a gift that we can be slow to accept and this book will help with the rethinking of attitudes necessary to make room to welcome that gift. 222pp. Paperback. \$39.99.

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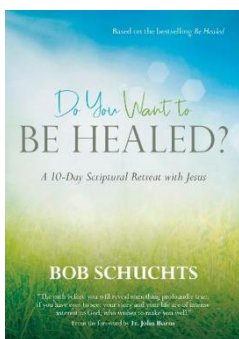


Jesus: A Pilgrimage by James Martin, SJ

The author is well-known for his best-selling **The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything**. This publication is a sizeable hardback that is such a pleasure to read as memoir, spiritual retreat, historical fact and travelogue are communicated in an effortless blending. Scott Hahn comments that “this book isn't about a pilgrimage. It is a pilgrimage and we make it in the company of a great raconteur.” A wonderful gift for both the fervent disciple and the questioning observer watching from the side lines. Endnotes and reference index. 526pp. Hardback. \$59.99.

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Do You Want to be Healed? A 10-Day Spiritual Retreat with Jesus Bob Schuchts



This book approaches the subject of expectant faith and if you are keen to grow your experience of Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) then you will find the step by step instructions very, very helpful. Basically it is a do-it-yourself retreat that engages you with a question Jesus asked his followers and gently through the Lectio Divina process takes you into a scriptural scene where Jesus heals the spiritually and physically sick. The author leads you into your own healing encounter with Jesus. “The path before you will reveal something profoundly true, if you have eyes to see: your story and your life are of intense interest to God, who wishes to make you well.” From the foreword by Fr. John Burns. 128pp. Paperback. \$36.99.

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NZCCM

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I would like to start a meditation group or have someone run an introductory course in my area yes no

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treasurer@christianmeditationnz.org.nz



Rotorua: 17 June - 10am to 2.30pm, *Glimpses of God Through the Kitchen Window!* Contact: Raymond Eberhard, 07 5495329 or celebrantraymond@gmail.com Details p. 11

Wellington/Kapiti Coast: 24 June - 9.30am for a cuppa, starting at 10:00, finishing at 3:00. Our Lady of Kapiti, 1 Presentation Way, off Kapiti Rd, Paraparaumu. *Meditation and Metanoia* with Nick & Linda Polaschek. Contact: Anne Cave annecave@gmail.com 022-097 2939.

Christchurch: 1 July - One day retreat from 9.30am to 3.30pm, New Brighton Union Church, 24 Union Street. *The theme of 'Ocean Deep, Ocean Wide' explores our connection to whenua and moana, the impacts of pollution, & listens for God's voice in the waves.* Contact- Annette Reinheimer 0212075122, annettere852@gmail.com

Auckland Community Day: 8 July – *Centring the Self.* Led by Jenny Wolf. Details p. 11

Auckland Retreat: 21 – 23 July - *An introduction to the Spirituality of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.* Led by Adriana Janus. Contact Vincent Maire vincentmaire12@gmail.com Details p. 6.

Auckland One Day Introduction to Christian Meditation: 12th August Details p. 6.

Auckland: 26 August - Vaughan Park Anglican Retreat Centre. *Introduction to Christian Meditation*, Vincent Maire. Contact Vincent Maire, vincentmaire12@gmail.com

Rotorua: 16 September - Retreat Day with Damian Robertson & Zita O' Neill. Contact Damian Robertson damian51950@gmail.com

7 day Silent Retreat: 19 – 26 September, Featherston, Wairarapa. Contact Linda Polaschek, nandlpolaschek@gmail.com Details p. 6.

Wellington: 14 October - Community Day. Home of Compassion, Island Bay. Contact: Anne Cave annecave@gmail.com, 022-097 2939.

Rotorua: 11 November - Community Day. Contact: Raymond 07 5495329, celebrantraymond@gmail.com

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