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Catholic Spirituality in Practice

BY COLLEEN M. GRIFFITH

“Spirituality” is a buzzword in our time, one that generates much positive reception. Spiritual seekers abound, and there are myriad resources available to draw upon that bear the name “spiritual practice.” Spiritual materials in bookstores and on the Internet continue to multiply at a staggering pace, as people from all walks of life and religious persuasions identify “becoming spiritual” as a primary life goal.

The term “spirituality” may carry star power at the start of the twenty-first century, but there is much confusion about what it means. People find it perplexing to sort through everything that presents itself as spiritual practice. How does one decide about a spiritual practice? The task becomes all the more challenging when set against the back-drop of a growing popular assumption that spirituality and religion are separate entities.

Scholars in the study of spirituality raise substantial concern about a widening gulf perceived between spirituality and religion. They wonder if spirituality is becoming a big commodity in this consumerist culture of ours. Sadly, it seems so. Too often, spirituality is being presented or sold as the new and improved substitute for religion. A split between spirituality and religion ensues, one rife with dangers.

Spirituality and Religion

Walk across any college campus these days and you are likely to hear some version of the comment, “I’m spiritual, but not religious.” The utterance suggests more than unfamiliarity with or indifference toward one’s religious tradition of origin. It points often to dissatisfaction or frustration with a particular expression of religious institution. Sometimes it

signals a limiting perception of religion as anemic and staid, as being concerned more with right beliefs than with life-orienting practices.

Claims for being “spiritual” but “not religious” deserve probing. Without doubt, religious institutions, ever hu-

man, need to engage in more substantive dialogue, self-critique, renewal, and reform. And yes, more attention must be placed on spiritual practices as central to the “content” of the faith handed down. But one ought not conclude that spirituality is a substitute for religion.



Georges Rouault, *Christ And the Poor*, 1935. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ADAGP, Paris

A spirituality that is disconnected from religion is bereft of both community and tradition; it has no recourse to the benefits of a larger body of discourse and practice, and it lacks accountability. Such spirituality quickly becomes privatistic and rootless, something directly opposite to the Christian understanding of “life in the Spirit.”

Christian Spirituality

From a Christian perspective, spirituality gets traced back to the letters of Paul in which he uses the Greek term *pneuma* to signal a life lived in alignment with God’s Spirit. Christian spirituality presumes, through God’s grace, a human desire and capacity for growing in union with the Triune God. It encompasses the dynamic character of human life lived in conscious relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit, as experienced within a community of believers. To live a Christian spirituality is to attend to what is of God and to deepen in a life of conversion that has discipleship as its goal.

Christian spirituality gets expressed most authentically in the living out of our Christian baptismal promises. At the heart of these promises stands the rejection of everything that is not of God and the decision to live in accord with the energies and ways of the Triune God. Renewed commitment to our baptismal promises is made possible by God’s grace, sustained by Christian community, and supported through engagement in meaningful spiritual practices.

This issue of *C21 Resources* seeks to explore an array of Christian spiritual practices that has served to nurture the lives of whole generations of Catholic Christians past and present. The practices presented here have long roots in the Catholic tradition; they have stood the test of time and have traveled well,

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Catholic Spirituality in Practice

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demonstrating adaptability in multiple sociocultural contexts. The practices highlighted reflect a Catholic understanding of the person, of revelation, and a Catholic sense of sacramentality. The essays gathered provide a rich sampling of both “practices of prayer” and “practices of care,” as Catholic Christian spirituality insists on keeping strong the connection between prayer and praxis. By “drawing from the storeroom both the old and the new” (Mt. 13: 52), one is able to catch sight of the shape and character of Catholic spirituality in practice in our time.

Eucharist remains “the source and summit” of Catholic Christian faith, and participation in the sacraments is arguably the most well known spiritual practice of Catholic Christianity. But what additional and lesser known practices form the spiritualities of Catholic Christians? This is our focus, and we examine precisely these practices, with an eye toward understanding better how they bring day-to-day meaning, coherence, and commitment to Catholic lives.

The Nature and Purpose of Spiritual Practice

Spiritual practices are concrete and specific. They are consciously chosen, intentional actions that give practical purpose to faith. Situated between life as we know it and life in its hoped-for fullness, practices are imbued with a sense of our relatedness to God, others, and the earth. Influencing our dispositions and outlooks on the world, spiritual practices render us more open and responsive to the dynamic activity of God’s grace, and move us toward greater spiritual maturity.

The “how to” question regarding spiritual practices is usually everyone’s first interest. Authors in this issue directly address the “how to” question, making it possible for readers to experience a spiritual practice for the first time. Ultimately, however, the “why” question proves more significant than the “how,” particularly over the long haul in maintaining the discipline

of spiritual practice. What are we practicing for?

We engage in spiritual practices because we seek a *way of life* rather than just a conglomeration of doctrines or a set of moral principles. Desiring an embodied faith that touches us and changes us, we opt in spiritual practice for a “knowing” that springs from the heart’s core, the *lev*, spoken about in the Hebrew Scriptures as the center of our affections (Ps. 4:7), the source of our reflection (Is. 6:10), and the foundation of our will (1 Sam. 24:5). The point of such practice is never mastery, but deeper relational life, a kind of living that makes appropriation of one’s faith all the more possible.

Catholic Christianity is indeed a tradition rich in practice. It is this editor’s hope that readers will find in the essays that follow entry into practices that nurture their spiritual lives, practices to be received, lived into, and reshaped in time and place for generations to come.

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Lectio Divina

Transformative Engagement with Scripture

BY SANDRA M. SCHNEIDERS, IHM

A rich practice of biblical spirituality, or transformative engagement with the Word, that is ancient but is enjoying a renaissance in our own time is *lectio divina*.¹ The practice is described in the episode in Acts 8:26–39 in which the Ethiopian court official of Queen Candace is reading and meditating on the Servant Song of Isaiah (cf. 53: 7–8), which he does not understand. He appeals to Philip for enlightenment. Philip’s teaching results in the official’s conversion and subsequent baptism.

The origin of the practice of *lectio divina* among Christians can be traced back to the desert fathers and mothers whose spirituality consisted primarily of prayerful rumination on biblical texts. Later, in the Benedictine monasteries organized around the Rule of St. Benedict (c. 540), the practice was both legislated and to some extent formalized. The Carthusian Guigo II (d. ca. 1188) finally supplied a carefully articulated “method” for the practice of *lectio divina*

in his spiritual classic, *Ladder of Monks*, which has been adapted by contemporary spiritual teachers for our own times.

Lectio divina is a four-step process that begins with the slow, leisurely, attentive reading (*lectio*) and re-reading of a biblical text. Often the text is committed to memory in the process. By internalizing the text in its verbal form, one passes on to a rumination or meditation on its meaning (*meditatio*). The medieval commentaries on scripture bear witness to both the spiritual depth and the imaginative breadth to which this process could lead.

Today this second step might involve study of the text through consultation of commentaries, or reading of the text in the context of the liturgy and thus of other biblical texts from both testaments that the church sees as related, or other forms of study that open the mind to the meaning of the passage. The purpose of *meditatio* is deepened understanding of the text’s meaning in the context of the person’s own life and experience.

Because the text is engaged in

experiential terms, the meditation gives rise to prayer (*oratio*) or response to God, who speaks in and through the text. Prayer of thanksgiving, adoration, praise, sorrow, repentance, resolve, petition, indeed all the kinds of prayer one experiences in the Psalms, are elicited as response to the Word. Finally, fervent prayer may reach that degree of interiority and union with God that the great masters of the spiritual life have called contemplation (*contemplatio*). Contemplation has acquired many meanings in the history of Christian spirituality, but in this context it indicates the full flowering of prayer in imageless and wordless union with God in the Spirit.

Lectio divina is a form of biblical spirituality in practice that, over time, can transform a person into the image of Christ encountered in scripture. I have found that many people who have never heard of *lectio divina* practice this kind of prayer on a daily basis using the New Testament, the daily lectionary, a collection of biblical texts, the Psalms, or even biblically based music. In other

words, even though the term “biblical spirituality” may be unfamiliar to many people, the reality of biblical spirituality as a practice is not.

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Endnotes

¹ A brief article on *lectio divina* with bibliography is K.W. Irwin, “Lectio Divina,” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. M. Downey (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1993) 596.

The Morning Offering

A “Morning Offering” of Gratitude

BY MARY JO LEDDY

There is a moment each day when it is morning before it is morning. Darkness still hovers over the deep. Those who wait for the dawn can hear it even before they see it.

At first there are only the slight sounds of attunement as a chorus of birds assembles. Slowly they gather into one great concerted song of supplication: Let it begin! Let us begin! May it begin again!

The birds are of one accord. They do not take the dawn for granted. When it bursts upon them, once again, as on the first day of creation, they give thanks once again for this once only day, to begin.

A “Morning Offering”

How we begin a day affects how we will live that day. Many of us start the day in a rather mechanical way, jarred into motion by the ring of an alarm clock or the sound of coffee dripping. We have set the time to begin, or so we believe, and thus we take the possibility of each new day for granted. All the gadgets of technology leave us with the illusion that we are, or should be, in control of how our day begins, proceeds, and ends. Automatically we move, in the presumption of life.

In this culture, it is not easy to awaken to the marvelous gift of each day and to recognize that it is not necessarily so. We tend to take this ordinary beginning for granted, just as we take ourselves,

and others, and the world—life itself—for granted. What we take for granted easily becomes just another thing in our lives, something else to be worked on, managed, or consumed. The realities we take for granted can no longer be recognized as amazing grace; they rarely astonish us into life and will never set us free. What we overlook begins to waste away. Will clean air and food come to us as a matter of course if we take the earth for granted? Can any relationships endure if they are merely taken for granted?

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The Ignatian Examen

Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards Through Your Day

BY DENNIS HAMM, S.J.

The Biblical phrase, “If today you hear his voice,” implies that the divine voice must somehow be accessible in our daily experience, for this verse expresses a conviction central to Hebrew and Christian faith, that we live a life in dialogue with God. We are creatures who live one day at a time. If God wants to communicate with us, it has to happen in the course of a 24-hour day, for we live in no other time. And how do we go about this kind of listening? Long tradition has provided a helpful tool, which we call the examination of consciousness today. “Rummaging for God” is an expression that suggests going through a drawer full of stuff, feeling around, looking for something that you are sure must be in there somewhere. I think that image catches some of the feel of what is classically known in church language as the prayer of “examen.”

The examen, or examination, of conscience is an ancient practice in the church. In fact, even before Christianity, the Pythagoreans and the Stoics promoted a version of the practice. It is what most of us Catholics were taught to do to prepare for confession. In that form, the examen was a matter of examining one’s life in terms of the Ten Commandments to see how daily behavior stacked up against those divine criteria. St. Ignatius includes it as one of the exercises in his manual, *The Spiritual Exercises*.

It is still a salutary thing to do but wears thin as a lifelong, daily practice. It is hard to motivate yourself to keep searching your experience for how you sinned. In recent decades, spiritual writers have worked with the implication that conscience in Romance languages like French (*conscience*) and Spanish (*conciencia*) means more than our English word “conscience,” in the sense of moral awareness and judgment; it also means “consciousness.”

Now prayer that deals with the full contents of your consciousness lets you cast your net much more broadly than prayer that limits itself to the contents

of conscience, or moral awareness. A number of people—most famously, George Aschenbrenner, S.J., in a classic article for *Review for Religious* in 1971—have developed this idea in profoundly practical ways. I wish to propose a way of doing the examen, as an approach in five steps:

1. *Pray for light.* Since we are not simply daydreaming or reminiscing but rather looking for some sense of how the Spirit of God is leading us, it only makes sense to pray for some illumination. The goal is not simply memory but graced understanding. That’s a gift from God devoutly to be begged. “Lord, help me understand this blooming, buzzing confusion.”

2. *Review the day in thanksgiving.* Note how different this is from looking immediately for your sins. Nobody likes to poke around in the memory bank to uncover smallness, weakness, lack of generosity. But everybody likes to savor beautiful gifts, and that is precisely what the past 24 hours contain—gifts of existence, work, relationships, food, challenges. Gratitude is the foundation of our whole relationship with God. So use whatever cues help you to walk through the day from the moment of awakening—even the dreams you recall upon awakening. Walk through the past 24 hours, from hour to hour, from place to place, task to task, person to person, thanking the Lord for every gift you encounter.

3. *Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.* Our feelings, positive and negative, the painful and the pleasing, are clear signals of where the action was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all of those feelings as they surface, the whole range: delight, boredom, fear, anticipation, resentment, anger, peace, contentment, impatience, desire, hope, regret, shame, uncertainty, compassion, disgust, gratitude, pride, rage, doubt, confidence, admiration, shyness—whatever was there. Some of us may be hesitant to focus on feelings in this over-psychologized age, but I believe that these feelings are the liveliest index to

what is happening in our lives. This leads us to the fourth moment.

4. *Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.* That is, choose the remembered feeling that most caught your attention. The feeling is a sign that something important was going on. Now simply express spontaneously the prayer that surfaces as you attend to the source of the feeling—praise, petition, contrition, cry for help or healing, whatever.

5. *Look toward tomorrow.* Using your appointment calendar if that helps, face your immediate future. What feelings surface as you look at the tasks, meetings, and appointments that face you? Fear? Delighted anticipation? Self-doubt? Temptation to procrastinate? Zestful planning? Regret? Weakness? Whatever it is, turn it into prayer—for help, for healing,

whatever comes spontaneously. To round off the examen, say the Lord’s Prayer.

If we are to listen for the God who creates and sustains us, we need to take seriously and prayerfully the meeting between the creatures we are and all else that God holds lovingly in existence. That “interface” is the felt experience of our days. It deserves prayerful attention. It is a big part of how we know and respond to God.

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Intercessory Prayer

A Practice of Praying for Others

BY ANN AND BARRY ULANOV

All prayer is social. We discover this when we pray for others. Whom do we pray for? What is this zone of mutuality we share with others, on which our being depends? Who intercedes for whom? The whole society of persons who make up our world comes quickly to mind, their hurts and hopes, their causes and failures. We speak of them to God; we lift them up to God; we entrust them to God, and often enough they do the same for us.

We pray for those we love because we must. We know that our love is not powerful enough to protect them from all harm, from all illness, from all evil, from death. Our love is not omnipotent. Our care for them, our insistence that they must have a good life, a full life, a life lived from the center of themselves, forces us to intercede with God on their behalf. By ourselves we cannot guarantee them much. We cannot even prevent our own faults from hurting them. We cannot restrain our own strong hopes and pressures so that they can find and live their own idea of the good life instead of the one we have ordained for them. When we recognize these limiting effects of our love, it is that very love for our children, our dear friends, our husband or wife that impels us beyond ourselves to confide their souls into God's keeping. Praying for them changes our love from a closed to an open hand, from a hand that tightly holds them under rein to one that holds them loosely. Praying for them makes us supple and flexible in our love for them.

We learn to pray for those we dislike and avoid as well, for those we hate and fear, for our enemies. Such prayer shifts our attention from all the things others have done to us or neglected to do that so wounded or enraged us, to focus on what it is in ourselves that permits others to acquire such power over us, the power to put us, in effect, in the hell of anger, or dismay, or insecurity, or fear. Prayer for them directs us to the antecedent attitudes or condi-

tions of personality in ourselves that deliver us over into others' power.

Praying for our enemies changes our attitudes toward them. Enemies make us bring light into painful hidden corners of ourselves that we would prefer to leave dark. By trying to put ourselves in another person's shoes, we may discover what we do that so irritates others and makes them dislike us. We hear new voices in our prayer that usually we tune out. We see ourselves from a different angle, one we could not find either by ourselves or with the help of friends. Only enemies can help us here. In this way they are priceless.

Intercession leads us to pray also for the dead. We pray for a father, a mother, a grandmother, or an aunt who loved us and helped us be by really seeing us as we were and rejoicing in our own special personhood, not because it was so superior or gifted, not because it caused such worry or fear, but simply because it was. They were glad in us, glad for what we were, and communicated to us their grateful joy of acceptance at the most basic level. This kind of acceptance makes life exciting because when we are met and greeted in this way we feel real, alive, and delighted to be our very own self. Praying for the souls of such persons, in death as in life, releases into life a fullness of gratitude for their existence. We pray for their joy, their salvation, their immediacy to divine presence, their being-at-the-core in whatever form of resurrected life exists for them.

In praying for those already dead, we open to our own dying, to the undoing of our life in its present forms. We give over control and we unravel the cares of this life, quieting down to admit the fears of letting go into the unknown. Praying for the dead makes a bridge in us to the death that awaits us and makes room for our uncertainties and fears. And contemplating death curiously enough calls us into life more fully, to live it right up to the end because we free our energies from the fear of death to the devotion to life.

We further pray for those we meet who are suffering or will suffer, that we may be attentive, neither interfering with hasty solutions that really only cut off other persons' displaying to us how deeply they suffer, nor quitting the scene because we cannot stand their pain. Such prayers open un-lived parts of ourselves, interceding for easier access for them to our consciousness and thus to our development. We open the windows wide to see what will come in from the outside and what will come out from the inside.

Prayer enters the non-space, non-time zone, that part of our life that knows no boundaries and partakes of the timelessness of God's eternity. There, each moment exists in a permanent "now," standing out from other moments as all there is. Thus we can pray across the limitations of time and space.

Intercessory prayer pulls us into the tow of God's connectedness to everything. We are pulled into a current that shows us nothing is separated from anything else, no one from everyone else. Not only do we discover the hungry parts of ourselves that we need to feed when we pray for the hungry persons of the world, but we discover the neglected parts of the world through praying into being the neglected parts of ourselves.

As we pray for those who concretely come across our path, into our road—those within our immediate world and those without, those of the past and those of the future—the whole question of whether our prayers change other people rearranges itself. When we try to pray for others, we are clear we are changed ourselves. We open up, we soften, we put into perspective hurts they have dealt us. We enter their lives now from their point of view instead of exclusively from our own, and as a result we are introduced increasingly to God's point of view, a remarkable vantage point from which to see their lives and our own. The question of causality (did our prayer do this for them?) dissolves in this increasing current of God's interconnectedness with all of us and our intensified awareness of it in all the parts of our lives.

We live the meaning of the mystical body of Christ in this interconnectedness of intercession, where our pleas for others become pleas for ourselves and their pleas for themselves become pleas for us. We know by direct experience that we are, as St. Paul says, members one of another. One further confirmation of this extraordinary fact comes to us if in our development of intercessory prayer, we move into the prayer of free association. In it, we bring together whatever names and concerns come to our minds—or to our hearts or souls—as soon as we have selected our first name, our first person, for whom to pray. Others follow in remarkably fast order in a rich, gladdening discourse with the Spirit, each name suggesting another, and another, and another, directly connected or loosely connected or not connected at all except in our prayer. We do not have to hunt for people, or worry about what may be bothering them, or work at it with any degree of intensity. They will come to us, the people who should be filling our prayers, the needs they have or have had or are likely to have. Some of them may have been absent from our thoughts for years or even decades. Many of them we may have forgotten we ever knew. We will be surprised and occasionally disturbed, but we will almost always feel filled up, enlarged, and supported in ourselves by the experience. Our past and present and future come together here in this procession of the Spirit engendered by our prayers.

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Fasting

Not So Fast: Revisiting the Practice of Fasting

BY JOAN CHITTISTER, O.S.B.

If Ireland is a bellwether of anything today, it is surely of the Catholic consciousness. The Angelus still plays on public TV and radio at noon and 6 p.m. every day. “Stations”—house Masses that developed during penal times when the practice of Catholicism was forbidden by British law—are still practiced in rural areas. St. Brigid’s Day is even more of a celebration in some ways than St. Patrick’s Day.

But don’t be deceived. All is not traditional anymore. When the waitress took our orders in a little village restaurant in the west of Ireland, for instance, she didn’t know how to respond to my request that the chef wrap a starter of goat cheese in something besides ham. “The meat,” I explained. “It’s Lent.” She looked puzzled, raised her eyebrows, and scurried away from the table, confused and embarrassed.

I was in Ireland in Lent 2006, and the Friday fast meant absolutely nothing. And why was I surprised?

The Challenge of Peace, the 1983 peace pastoral from the U.S. bishops’ conference, called on Catholics to return to the Friday fast as an act of penance for peace. They wrote: “We call upon our people voluntarily to do penance on Friday by eating less food and by abstaining from meat. This return to a traditional practice of penance, once well observed in the U.S. church, should be accompanied by works of charity and service toward our neighbors. Every Friday should be a day significantly devoted to prayer, penance, and almsgiving for peace.”

Almost no one I know is doing it. The question is: Should we? And if we should, why aren’t we?

Fasting had a greater effect on me in my childhood than something as significant as “tran-sub-stan-ti-a-tion.” Transubstantiation, they told me, was the changing of the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. But that I took for granted. Fasting, on the other hand, this foreign way of going about

life, was something that called for real change in the way I lived.

In the Eucharist, Jesus changed for my sake. In fasting, I was being called to change for something far beyond my own sake. Fasting made a kind of demand on me that few other things ever did.

What it was and why anyone would do it became an even more important question as the years went by. Most of all, if the practice of fasting was so good, why had it disappeared?

When a practice strays far from its original intentions, it often must disappear so that it can be rediscovered for the right reasons. Fasting is certainly one of those practices.

I remember as a youngster dining in a convent during Lent and being curious about the small set of brass scales between every four place settings. “That’s for weighing our food during Lent,” the nun showing us the house explained.

Years later I entered a monastery myself. But there were no scales on the tables. The Rule of Benedict taught that we were to fast during Lent, true, but added that we were also to “add to the usual measure of our service something by way of private prayer” and “holy reading and almsgiving.”

Now there was a twist. Clearly fasting was about something more than simple deprivation. Obviously fasting was supposed to add something to our lives as well as to take something away. It was meant to sensitize us to life more than it was to deprive us of it.

But when failing to fast was no longer defined as a “mortal sin,” it disappeared overnight. Fasting for my generation became more burden than blessing, more an attempt to punish the body than an invitation to strengthen the soul. We managed to concentrate on beating the body down rather than showing the value of emptying ourselves of clutter so we could concentrate on something besides ourselves.

Fasting over the centuries became a kind of mathematical legerdemain of

the soul. Meals had times, lengths, and quantities attached to them. The scales kept portions under 4 ounces; the distinction between juices and soups and solids kept us paranoid about the differences between them. If heaven and hell depend on it, a person can get very nervous. No wonder modern psychology found fasting suspect. It had lost all semblance of sense for the heart or gift for the soul.

When Vatican II came along with its emphasis more on spirit than rules, people put down some rules immediately. Fasting, for obvious reasons, was one of them.

But the practice of fasting cannot be easily dismissed. Fasting is the unfinished chapter in post-Vatican II spirituality because the reasons for it abound.

The place of fasting in the lives of all the great spiritual figures in history brings no small amount of weight to the subject. Time, too, recommends we revisit the subject, as fasting has been a constant tradition in the church for twenty centuries. Finally, the presence of fasting in all spiritual traditions, not just Catholicism, makes a person pause. In all places and times, fasting has been a hallmark of the person on a serious search for the spiritual dimensions of life.

How do we explain the meaning of fasting in our time? The answers ring with the kind of simplicity and depth common only to the holiest of disciplines. The fact is that the values of fasting strike to the heart of a person, sharpen the soul to the presence of God, and energize the spirit in a way engorgement never can.

Fasting calls a person to authenticity. It empties us, literally, of all the nonessentials in our lives so we have room for God. It lifts our spirits beyond the mundane.

Fasting confronts our consumer mentality with a reminder of what it is to be dependent on God. It reminds us that we are not here simply to pamper ourselves. We are, indeed, expected to be our brother and sister’s keeper. We know why we are hungry. We voluntarily gave up the food we could have had. But why are

they hungry? Where is the food they should be eating? And what can we do to fill them now that we are done filling only ourselves?

Fasting opens us to the truth. It makes space in us to hear others, to ask the right questions, to ingest the answers we have been too comfortable to care about for far too long. It makes room for adding “to our service a bit more prayer and reading and almsgiving,” as the Rule of Benedict says.

Fasting requires us to develop a sense of limits. No, we may not have it all, do it all, and demand it all. Our needs do not exceed the needs of others, and our needs may never become more important than theirs.

Fasting teaches us to say no to ourselves in small things so that we may have the strength to say no to those people and systems and governments who want to use us to shore up their own power and profit despite the needs of others.

When we fast, we become voluntarily poor and so understand the needs of the poor.

When we fast, we say yes to the Spirit and no to the lusts within us that drive us to live for money and power and profit and the kind of engorgement that renders the rest of the world destitute.

No doubt about it: Fasting surely has something to do with peacemaking. It puts us in touch with the Creator. It puts us in touch with ourselves. It puts us in touch with the prophet Jesus who, fasting in the desert, gave up power, wealth, comfort, and self-centeredness, and teaches us to do the same. It puts us in touch with the rest of the creation whose needs now cry out in our own.

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Praying with Images

On What Meets the Eye: Praying with Visual Images

BY COLLEEN M. GRIFFITH

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” So the saying goes, and historical Christians were quick to grasp this. They recognized the formative power of visual images, particularly the way that images gathered the energy and affect of worshippers, stimulating their desire to deepen in a Christian way of life.

orienting us to events of our world and forming our attitudes and desires at conscious and unconscious levels. But are our spiritual selves formed by these images? What critical and faith perspectives are we bringing to the media images to which we’ve become habituated? And what visual images are we intentionally choosing to contemplate precisely for their formative influence on our lives of faith?

mediate a rich encounter with God. In beholding an image over time, we come into a new sense of perspective and catch sight of fresh points of direction. Visual images give us powerful access to feelings that operate below the surface and can become the stuff of prayer.

Images that carry spiritual meaning do not all fall under the heading “religious art,” understood in a traditional sense. Iconic art, representational images, impressionistic works, and non-representational abstract works have all proven formative in orienting persons’ spiritual lives. What matters most, it seems, is choosing an image that attracts and invites contemplation.

Praying with Visual Images

How does one utilize visual images in prayer? To begin, choose an image with which to spend time, preferably one with strong expressive power to which you can respond effectively. Second, do your best to avoid any premature fixing of interpretation of your image. Instead, contemplate it with a spirit of openness and expectancy. Third, notice the memories, associations, and longings to which your image gives rise. In doing so, allow the effective dimensions of your image full sway. Pray then out of the full engagement of your senses and the feelings evoked by your image.

We can’t expect visual images to clarify points or supply us with decisions; they won’t. We can, however, expect that having a regular practice of praying with visual images will form and inform our discipleship, training our religious affections. Latino/a Catholic communities have taken a strong lead in underscoring the material mediation of the sacred in visual terms and demonstrating how in parish and home settings, religious images can play a crucial role. It is time now for all of us to reclaim the historic Christian understanding of the spiritually formative function of images. By developing a repertoire of images with which we can pray, images that nurture our spirits and beckon us to live more authentic lives, we, in a consumerist media-driven culture, catch sight of an alternative to the uncritical

acceptance of all that passes in front of our eyes.

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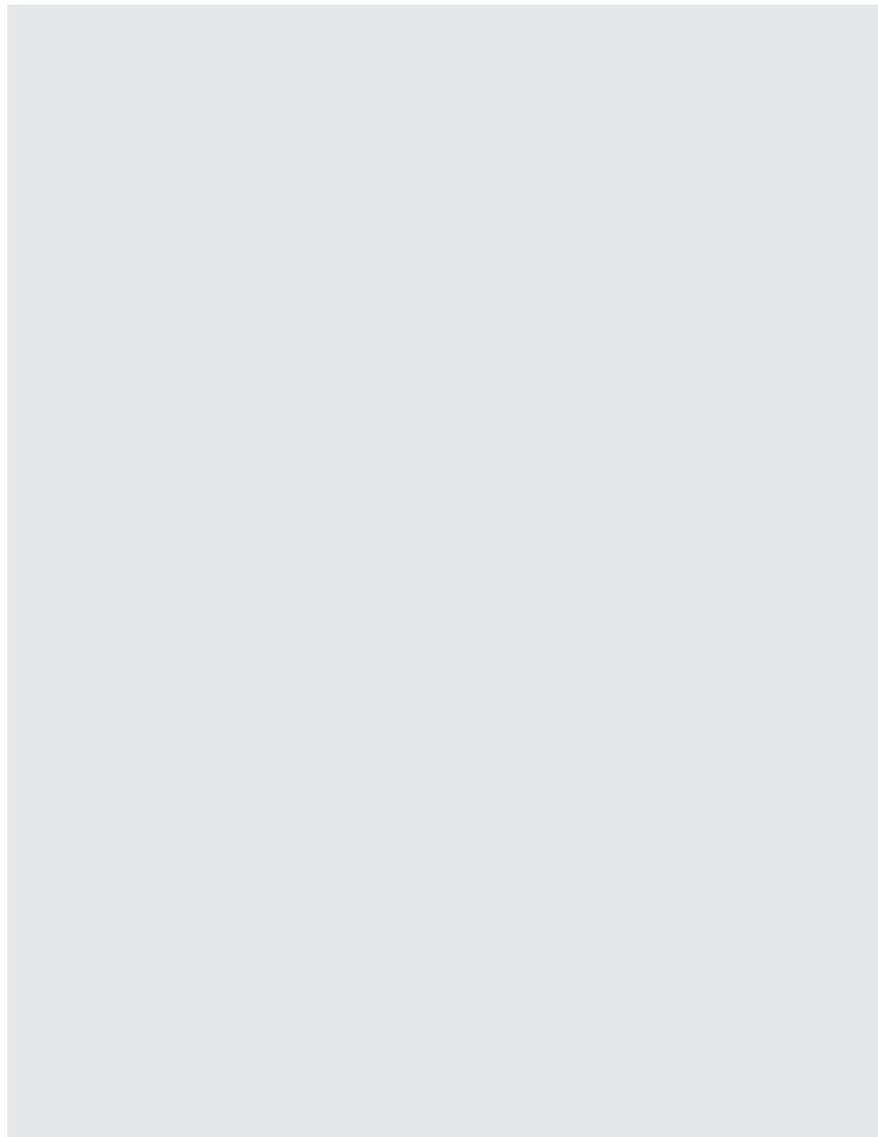
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THE POWER OF ICONS

Icons are a particular type of visual image with which Christians pray. Visual images bearing the name “icon” are painted in a distinctive style and from an accompanying posture of prayer and reflection. Manuals of iconography from the second millennium offer detailed instructions regarding the writing of icons, precise guidelines pertaining to particular forms, features, and colors of Christ and the saints.

Icons are not decorations but holders of sacred history that serve a sacramental function. Through icons, persons in prayer enter sacred time and place moving toward communion with the mystery signified. This is holy practice. In praying with icons, one comes to fresh insight and perception into reality. The world of icons discloses the eternal dimension present in the realm of sense and experience. The icon bespeaks an inner vision where the material and the spiritual meet, where creation and divinity are one.

Being thick signifiers with many layers of meaning, icons remind us that we are living in a Spirit-filled world and are formed by God’s love in Christ. These powerful examples of sacred imagery affirm the mystery of the Incarnation, reminding us of the grace-filled dimensions of Christ’s bodiliness and our own. Iconography remains a longstanding constitutive dimension of the theology, worship, and spirituality of Eastern Orthodox Christians.



Georges Rouault, *Christ and Disciples*, 1936. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ADAGP, Paris

Twenty-first century Christians have less experience utilizing visual images as a spiritual resource. It’s not that we are image starved. We’re barraged by massive doses of media images and we’ve grown accustomed to this. Press photographs and advertising images surround us on a daily basis,

Image as Spiritual Resource

Visual images are evocative because with directness and brevity, they “speak” volumes in their expressiveness. Images appeal to emotions and exert influence on the viewer. The prayerful contemplation of a religious image can

Labyrinth Meditation

Walking a Prayerful Path

BY HEIDI SCHLUMPF

Life has a way of disrupting our inner peace and sense of direction. But walking the labyrinth remains a time-honored way to slow down and encounter God.

My life was starting to sound like that insurance company list of most stressful life changes—a divorce, a new job, a return to graduate school. With each transition, I took it to prayer, seeking meaning and a sense of direction. Where was my life's path headed? What was the next step?

I found some answers by literally walking in circles.

A labyrinth program at a local women's spirituality center piqued my curiosity. I had heard of this ancient prayer tool but never actually experienced it. It turns out those medieval monks were onto something: the simple process of prayerful walking was meditative for me, prompting a sense of inner peace and surfacing spiritual insights.

With the labyrinth, everything operates on the level of metaphor. The path symbolizes our life's journey. The circle

represents wholeness, and the design leads us to our center. The labyrinth's twists and turns feel like the twists and turns of our lives. And when we walk it with other people, we are reminded that no one makes this journey alone.

Although walking the labyrinth is definitely meant to facilitate individual introspection, it can also be a powerful experience of community. As I brushed shoulders with people who were passing me and observed those both behind and in front of me, I realized we're all on the same path, though some of us are at different points on the journey.

Unlike a maze, which has dizzying decisions and tricky dead ends, the labyrinth has only one path that leads into the center and back out. Some describe walking the labyrinth as a three-fold path: a process of emptying and surrender as they enter, illumination at the center, and moving back into the world empowered and refreshed on the way out.

The labyrinth, like many Christian symbols, predates Christianity yet has distinctive Christian roots. The design can be found in many European churches, the most famous being the eleven-circuit

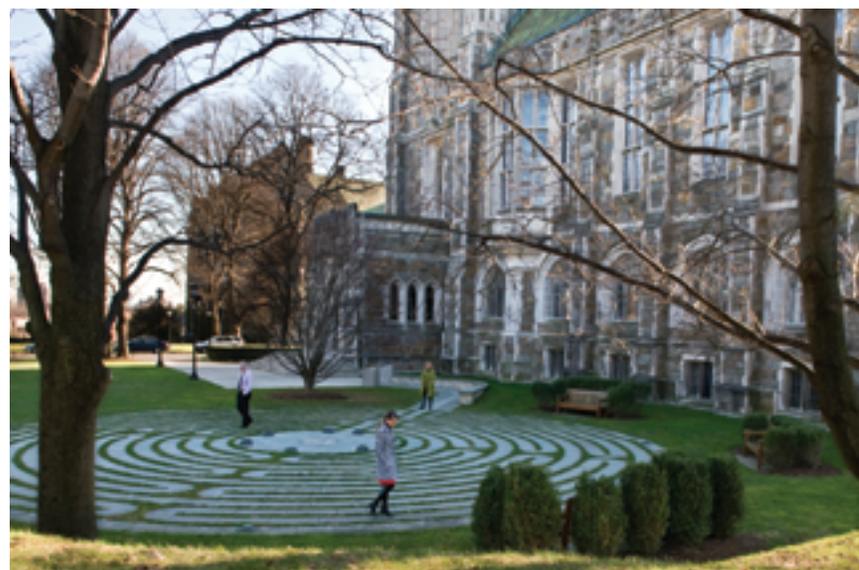
labyrinth with rosette center laid in the floor at Chartres Cathedral near Paris, which dates to about 1200.

Like any meditative practice, walking the labyrinth is a way to quiet our busy minds in order to listen to the inner voice of God. At a time when many Catholics—especially younger ones—seem to be dusting off traditions from the past, the labyrinth can be a good stepping-off

point for modern-day pilgrims trying to walk a spiritual path.

Heidi Schlumpf is managing editor at *U.S. Catholic* magazine.

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The labyrinth at Boston College is approximately 70 feet in diameter and is a copy of the 13th-century labyrinth laid in stone on the floor of the nave of Chartres Cathedral. The Labyrinth was placed in memory of alumni who died 9/11/2001.

Living the Sacramental Principle

Finding the Extraordinary in the Ordinary

BY ESTHER DE WAAL

A woman kneels on the hard earth floor in her small hut in the Outer Hebrides, those harsh and inhospitable islands lying off the west coast of Scotland. She has already washed by splashing her face with three palmfuls of water (for this is in the nineteenth century), and as she did so she invoked the name of the Trinity.

*The palmful of the God of Life
The palmful of the Christ of Love
The palmful of the Spirit of Peace
Triune
Of grace.*

Now, at daybreak, and before the rest of her family is awake, she starts to do what is her daily chore: to stir into life the fire banked down the night before. Nothing could be more mundane, more prosaic, than this essential household obligation, performed day by day and year by year. Yet by her gestures and her words, she transforms it and brings to the action a deeper meaning. As she works, she says aloud in a quiet crooning to herself:

*I will kindle my fire this morning
In the presence of the holy
angels of heaven.*

And as the embers burst into flame, that fire becomes symbolic of the flame of love that we should keep burning for the whole family of humankind.

*God, kindle thou in my heart within
A flame of love to my neighbor,
To my foe, to my friend,
to my kindred all,
To the brave, to the knave, to the thrall,
O Son of the loveliest Mary,
From the lowliest thing that liveth
To the name that is highest of all.*

She has made the mundane the edge of glory. She has allowed the extraordinary to break in on the ordinary.

As “lifting” the peats had been the first duty of the day, so smothering, or “smoothing,” them is the last. This too becomes a symbolic action, one performed with a sense of a world beyond that with which she is dealing, so that as she handles the peats she is touching something that has its significance at a far deeper level. She divides the peats into three sections, one for each member of the Trinity. Then she lays down the first in the name of the God of Life, the second in the name of the God of Peace, and the third in the name of the God of Grace. She next covers the circle of peat with ashes, enough to subdue

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Eucharistic Adoration

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament

BY BRIAN E. DALEY, S.J.

In the current practice of the Catholic Church in the United States, people are free to receive Communion either in the open hand or on the tongue. Although I have not conducted a survey, my impression from presiding at both student and parish liturgies is that the practice tends to vary largely along lines of age: most of the people to whom I give Communion on the tongue, at least here at Notre Dame, seem to be under 35. And while I have never attempted to find out why so many young Catholics seem to prefer this practice, I suspect it is part of a more general desire on the part of their generation to find physical, not merely verbal, ways of expressing and deepening a reverent awareness of the mystery of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

The subject of how best to express reverence for what we Catholics so dryly call the eucharistic "species" has become a contentious one in the church. It touches on church architecture and inner arrangement—for instance, where to place the tabernacle in which the host is reserved, and how to coordinate the placement of the tabernacle with the lectern where Scripture is read. It also includes a variety of traditional practices some would like to revive among the faithful: keeping a reverent silence in church, even outside times of liturgical celebration; genuflecting when passing in front of the tabernacle; making a profound bow before receiving Communion. Many who promote these practices feel that the liturgical changes instituted since the Second Vatican Council have unintentionally communicated to Catholics a secular spirit, in which the church building has become more a meeting place, a place for human conversation, than a sacred place where the transcendent God encounters us in human gestures and things.

One Catholic practice on which these changing sensibilities have been focused is eucharistic adoration, a period of quiet prayer in a space primarily intended for liturgical worship—prayer focused on the sacramental bread, either reserved in

a locked tabernacle or exposed to view in a monstrance. When I was growing up, this kind of devotion to the Eucharist outside the Mass was central to my developing faith, my sense of the real possibility of finding God in the life of a New Jersey parish. When Catholics in the 1950s or 1960s passed a church, it was common practice to stop in for a brief "visit" to the Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. In that quiet place, the darkness punctuated only by a few flickering vigil lights, one had a sense that God was suddenly close, a hidden spring of life just under the surface of daily routine. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a 15-minute service involving the exposition of the eucharistic bread, a few familiar Latin hymns, prayers, incense, and a multitude of candles, was the normal conclusion to services other than the Mass—to novenas, vespers, and the programmatic preaching of the Catholic equivalent of a revival: the parish mission. Likewise, Holy Thursday included not only a solemn liturgy and procession, commemorating the institution of the Eucharist at Jesus' Last Supper, but also long periods of silent prayer afterward before the sacrament itself, now moved from its normal place in the tabernacle to an altar of "repose" in some other part of the church.

Once a year, each parish celebrated the Forty Hours Devotion, too, in honor of the Blessed Sacrament—a kind of three-day community marathon of silent prayer before the exposed host, now raised high over the altar and surrounded with banks of flowers and shimmering candles. For me as a child and a teenager, these forms of eucharistic devotion were an introduction to a peculiarly Catholic form of contemplative prayer—a prayer not so much of withdrawal from things of the senses as of kneeling and gazing, of awe-struck adoration in the midst of a throng of other worshippers. With a bit of imagination, one easily felt the words of the hymn had become real: as "all mortal flesh kept silence," the "heavenly vanguard" of angels and saints joined us in this act of ecclesial reverence. It was something richly sensual, yet pointing—through the focal point of a

small white wafer—to the fullness of the church, to the heavenly liturgy, and to Jesus the eternal priest.

As in so many other aspects of Catholic life, eucharistic devotion of this sort largely disappeared from the church's normal agenda in the late 1960s. The Eucharist, it was often pointed out, is a ritual meal, in which the whole community, gathered under the representative headship of a bishop or a priest, worships God as one body and is nourished by the word of Scripture and the signs of Jesus' sacrifice. The purpose of the eucharistic species, then, is not to be the object of adoration, but the daily food of God's "pilgrim people." The Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* stated that "devotions" practiced in the church, important as they are, must be "controlled so that they cohere with the sacred liturgy, in some way derive from it, and lead the people to it" (No. 13). It also emphasized the central importance in the Mass of Scripture and the homily (No. 24), and stressed that liturgy is by its nature not a time for private prayer, but the community's public celebration (Nos. 26-28). In a famous passage, the same document explicitly broadened the notion of Christ's "presence" in liturgical celebration to include not only his presence in the eucharistic species (where he is found "most fully"—maxime), but also in the other sacraments, in the person of the presider, in the word of Scripture, and in the whole congregation gathered in Christ's name (No. 7).

All of this doubtless came as a needed correction of post-Reformation imbalances in the Catholic Church's life of worship. Yet it has led to some new imbalances as well: to a new emphasis on words in Catholic worship, with a corresponding de-emphasis of concrete, time-hallowed symbols; to a rationalistic barrenness in some modern church architecture and decoration; to an emphasis on community formation rather than adoration of God as the implied goal of some Sunday assemblies; to a bland moralism in a good deal of contemporary Catholic preaching; and

a tendency to self-celebration in some contemporary liturgical music. So a new reaction has been underway since at least the early 1990s, as the young seek to find contact again with the church's symbolic world and with the divine, living presence it embodies, while their elders seek to discern between healthy impulse and Baroque excess in the devotional life of the church of their youth.

In this context, eucharistic adoration seems to be exerting a renewed attraction on young Catholics who seek to draw wisdom from the riches of the church's tradition. Renewed official guidelines for this devotion now offer a variety of forms that services of eucharistic adoration might take, incorporating readings, a homily, and a variety of prayers, as well as quiet contemplation, hymns, and the climactic blessing of the congregation with the eucharistic body of Christ (see *Eucharistic Worship and Devotion Outside Mass*, N.C.C.B., 1987). If used with imagination, these guidelines promise a way of reviving eucharistic adoration within the framework of the liturgical year and the liturgical day, not as a substitute for the Mass, but as an occasion to let the heart of the Mass—our encounter with the risen Jesus in the sacramental signs of bread and wine, and in the sacramental narrative of God's saving history—become the continuing object of our thought and gaze, and invite us to deeper, more conscious participation in the eucharistic meal.

Praying before the sacred host continues to play an important part in my own life. Although the opportunities for formal eucharistic adoration are fewer now than when I was young, I still find the practice moving and nurturing, understated yet strangely grand. I find, too, that my routine of morning prayer, carried out in our small Jesuit community chapel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle, seems decidedly more focused, more personal, more consoling than prayer in my own room. Prayer before the Eucharist also has an inescapable

Eucharistic Adoration

Continued from Page 9

churchly dimension that other forms of private prayer may lack. This is the sign, after all, around which the church gathers, to discover and nourish its authentic self as the collective body of Christ. As St. Augustine remarks in an Easter homily, “If you are the Body and the members of Christ, your own Mystery is placed on the table of the Lord—you receive your own Mystery” (*Sermon* 272). The attraction of eucharistic devotion, for me at least, is that it enables us to spend time simply trying to encounter that multifaceted body as something immediate and visibly real. Prayer is always an encounter with Mystery, but it seems more obvious to me, as I pray before the Blessed Sacrament, that the Lord is there, and that in the stillness of a little room I am somehow at the heart of the church.

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ADDITIONAL READING ON SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

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Liturgy of the Hours

Giving Rhythm to Our Days

BY ELIZABETH COLLIER

Having spent the past 15 years at various Jesuit institutions, I have probably logged more hours on retreats, in spiritual direction, in prayer groups, discussing or teaching theological topics, and doing or organizing service work than your average 30-something. But despite all of the above, I am embarrassed to say that for the past few years I have not spent much time praying, and when I have it has not been as fruitful as I would like. This is due, in large part, to the pace of my life. As with many people I know, I am over-committed, juggle too much responsibility, and collapse at night very much aware of all I was not able to accomplish during the day.

To fill the void of my poor prayer life, I have often browsed through the many meditation books and resources for “busy people,” but nothing I have tried has satisfied more than a feeling of fulfilling an obligation. My search was more for something with the depth and beauty that so many other aspects of our faith can offer. But how to find a middle ground among my spiritual desires, the scriptural call to “pray ceaselessly,” and the constraints on my time and energy?

Last spring, the U.S. Cistercian novice directors asked my husband and me to meet with them in Snowmass, Colo., to help them better understand Generation X. Having no experience with cloistered religious, I arrived at the meeting somewhat skeptical, even suspicious, of their vocation. The Jesuit charism surrounding social justice and phrases like “contemplatives in action” were what encapsulated my ideals of Christian service. I did not understand how a cloistered life was a “ministry” to the church or the world, or how monastic men and women were “bringing about the kingdom of God.” But after several days of meetings, meals, and late-night conversations, I came to admire the Cistercian life and saw many more connections between our two vocations than I would have imagined. These were healthy,

interesting, intelligent, and deeply spiritual people, whose time living in a community of work and prayer had given them insights into their own talents as well as the challenges they faced within their communities.

Cistercian time is punctuated by praying the Liturgy of the Hours and by practicing mindfulness during the day’s work. And although I am not called to their particular vocation, I longed for a way of marking my own days with similar rhythms of prayer.

After returning to Chicago, I committed myself to more regular prayer. In my home library, I found a two-volume set of books that I had bought several years before but had never used: a layperson’s guide to the Liturgy of the Hours. I decided to take up the texts on my own terms, adapting them to my vocation and lifestyle without learning the rubrics or even much

*I longed for a way
of marking my own days
with similar rhythms
of prayer.*

of the history. I did not want to get caught up in “shoulds,” but wanted to explore how God might be able to break into my contemporary life through this age-old tradition. Morning and evening prayers include several psalms, a brief reading from a saint, theologian, or spiritual writer, a responsorial psalm, the canticle of Zechariah or of Mary, prayer petitions, and a short prayer to begin or end the day.

After spending time with these prayers and, later, learning more about the history of the Liturgy of the Hours, I found many aspects of the office particularly suited to much of what I had been seeking. With its roots in ancient Jewish rituals, its later adapta-

tion by the early Christian community, and its continued use daily throughout Christian history, I felt a profound historical connection with the countless generations who have punctuated their days in similar ways. Especially valuable for me is the prayer experience offered by the particular version I use. It combines ancient psalms and canticles, readings from the church fathers, medieval saints, and modern women, and intercessions that relate to the challenges of contemporary socioeconomic structures and environmental concerns.

The development of the devotion over time also exemplified the adaptability and flexibility for which I had been searching. From as early as the fourth and fifth centuries, attempts by the laity to integrate regular prayer times with their urban lives resulted in the flowering of different traditions for praying the Liturgy of the Hours. A monastic lifestyle allowed for a more frequent and time-intensive focus on the psalms and prayer periods throughout the day and night. In turn, an urban cathedral tradition developed for the laity, which called people to pray as a community in the morning and the evening and included shorter meditations and fewer psalms. This tradition accommodated the workaday life of the average person. But from the 12th century on, outside of monasteries, the practice became primarily a private, clerical devotion. The laity focused on shorter prayers and devotions like the rosary, which could be done either privately or within the church community. Today, priests and deacons are still required to pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily, and the Second Vatican Council called for the devotion to be incorporated more into parish life.

In addition to the historical tradition of the devotion, it moves me deeply to think that people throughout the world, from all walks of life, are praying with similar texts each day. This provides an almost tangible connectedness that inspires me in the solitude of my home office. When I am able to pray in the morning, it brings a mindfulness to the gift of the day, which often stays with me after

I walk out the door. The text itself provides not only the comforting repetition found in the Mass, but also enough variety that I have less of a tendency to “go through the motions,” as I do with other forms of prayer. By following the liturgical year, I feel connected to the seasons of the church year in a way that I enjoyed when daily Mass was still an option for my schedule. And the readings for feast days allow me an opportunity to gain insight into the lives of inspiring men and women. Overall, the various types of prayers and readings touch upon the struggles and celebrations that occur in the lives of us all.

Admittedly, I do not pray the Liturgy of the Hours as diligently as I might, nor do I replicate the total commitment of the monastic communities. But the connectedness I feel to a larger praying community helps with this. If I can pray only once a day or miss prayer altogether, I know that thousands of others are carrying on this living tradition for the good of all creation. If I begin praying the office and discover an image or phrase that calls my attention, my Ignatian education kicks in and I realize that God is drawing me toward a more specific word to focus on that day. And on days when I actually pray the morning, afternoon, and evening hours, I know that I have taken up the call to prayer for those who did not have time or were for other reasons unable to pray.

It is ironic that a trip intended to offer a cloistered community insight into a generation that grew up in the midst of instant entertainment and constant activity would result in my incorporating an ancient contemplative practice into my Ignatian-influenced, action-oriented Christian life. It seems a special testament to a Spirit who brings forward elements of our tradition that have been life-giving for previous generations in ways that are fruitful and adaptable in the midst of contemporary challenges.

Elizabeth Collier, PhD, is Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at DePaul University in Chicago, IL.

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PRAYING THE LITURGY OF THE HOURS: THE MAGNIFICAT AND THE CANTICLE OF ZECHARIAH

The Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

He has mercy on those who fear him
in every generation.

He has shown the strength of his arm,
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of his servant Israel
for he has remembered his promise of mercy,
the promise he made to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his children forever.

—Luke 1:46-55

The Canticle of Zechariah

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;
he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty savior,
born of the house of his servant David.

Through his holy prophets he promised of old
that he would save us from our enemies,
from the hand of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers
and to remember his holy covenant.

This was the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,
free to worship him without fear,
holy and righteous in his sight
all the days of our life.

You, my child, shall be called the prophet of
the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,
to give his people knowledge of salvation
by the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our God
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and
the shadow of death
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

—Luke 1:68-79

Living the Sacramental Principle

Continued from Page 8

but not extinguish the fire, in the name of the Three of Light. The slightly raised heap in the center becomes the Hearth of the Three. When this is finished, she closes her eyes, stretches out her hand, and softly intones one of the many smooing prayers.

<i>The Sacred Three</i>	<i>The household</i>
<i>To save</i>	<i>This eve</i>
<i>To shield</i>	<i>This night</i>
<i>To surround</i>	<i>And every night</i>
<i>The hearth</i>	<i>Each single night.</i>
<i>The house</i>	<i>Amen.</i>

In doing all this, the woman has been following the Celtic practice handed down from generation to generation (and known to us because it was orally collected at the end of the last century). It was a practice in which ordinary people in their daily lives took the tasks that lay to hand but treated them sacramentally, as pointing to a greater reality that lay beyond them.

It is an approach to life that we have been in danger of losing, this sense of allowing the extraordinary to break in on the ordinary. Perhaps it is something that we can rediscover, something which Celtic spirituality can give to us if we would let it renew our vision by teaching our eyes to see again, our ears to hear, our hands to handle. Then, like the disciples on the way to Emmaus who trudged along feeling so disconsolate and let down, we shall discover that Christ was in fact alongside us all the time. The fault lay with us, for we had simply failed to notice.

The Celtic approach to God opens up a world in which nothing is too common to be exalted and nothing is so exalted that it cannot be made common. What a waste it is to be surrounded by heaven, by a sky “made white by angels’ wings,” and to be unaware of it. Perhaps the first step is that we really should want to

unearth God in our midst. For letting heaven break through will not happen automatically. It lies to hand, but it needs a determination on our part to find it. Yet, if we can rediscover this vision, then we too may be able to transform what lies to hand, let the mundane become the edge of glory, and find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Esther de Waal is a married laywoman and a distinguished scholar of Celtic spirituality. Since she wrote this article, Esther de Waal has followed up this theme in her writings, notably *The Celtic Way of Prayer* (Doubleday, 1996) and *Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness* (Liturgical Press, 2003).

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Practicing Hospitality

Extending Welcome to Those in Need

BY ANA MARÍA PINEDA, R.S.M.

For many decades, the Mission District of San Francisco has been a home and a welcome posada (shelter) for a diverse population of Hispanics and Latinos. Over the years, it has taken on the aged familiarity of the neighborhoods its inhabitants left behind in their Latin American countries of origin. Its streets bustle with activity as people attend to the daily needs of family and work and as children come and go to school. Throughout the day, the bells of St. Peter's announce the presence of the church. The Mission District teems with life, as the culture and customs of the Latino world fill its days with vitality.

On this December evening, children of every age process down Twenty-Fourth Street, some with lighted candles in hand and others carrying on their shoulders statues of Mary and Joseph. Each Advent, the young and the old reenact the story of Joseph seeking lodging for his young wife, Mary, who is weary from travel and heavy with child. For nine nights in a row, children and adults assume the identity of the weary couple or of the innkeepers, processing around the inside of the church or throughout the neighborhood, moving from one designated site to the next. This is the beloved ritual of *Las Posadas*.

At each station, an ancient exchange is repeated. Those playing the role of Joseph approach the inn, knock on the door, and say in a loud voice, *En nombre del cielo, buenos moradores, dad a unos viajeros posada esta noche*. From inside, a chorus of voices responds, *Aquí no es meson sigan adelante; yo no puedo abrir no sea algun tunante* (This is not an inn; move on—I cannot open lest you be a scoundrel). As Joseph moves from one inn to the next, the innkeepers grow angry and even threaten violence, while the night grows colder and the young couple's weariness turns to exhaustion. *Venimos rendidos desde Nazareth, yo soy carpintero de nombre José* (We are tired traveling from Nazareth; I am a carpenter named Joseph), the anxious husband implores. Finally, he even reveals his wife's true

identity, begging for posada for just one night for *la Reina del Cielo*, the Queen of Heaven—to no avail.

For eight days, the scene is reenacted. Finally, on the ninth day, the eve of Christmas, Joseph's request moves the heart of an innkeeper, who offers the young couple all that he has left—a stable. Yet the stable is enhanced by the love with which the innkeeper offers it, and this humble place becomes the birthplace of Jesus. In an outpouring of joy and festivity, those gathered on the final night celebrate the generosity of the innkeeper and *the posada* given to Mary and Joseph in song and dance, food and drink. Candy and treats from a piñata shower the children, and the community recalls anew how the stranger at one's door can be God in disguise.

Every December, Hispanic communities relive in their flesh the Gospel truth that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14). “He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him” (John 1:10-11). In *Las Posadas*, they ritually participate in being rejected and being welcomed, in slamming the door on the needy and opening it wide. They are in this way renewed in the Christian practice of hospitality, the practice of providing a space where the stranger is taken in and known as one who bears gifts.

Strangers in Our Midst

Although *Las Posadas* is a beautiful, engaging ritual, the reality it addresses is a painful one: the reality of human need and exclusion. When the ritual takes place in the Mission District of San Francisco, many of the participants—once refugees themselves—remember their own experience as strangers. Through the ritual, the community affirms the goodness of taking people in, and those who once needed posada are reminded to offer it to others.

This is a lesson that is needed in other communities as well. The need for shelter, for *posada*, is a fundamental human need.

None of us ever knows for sure when we might be uprooted and cast on the mercy of others. Throughout human history, there have been times when people were dislocated, becoming vulnerable as they journeyed far from home. Sometimes there have been people to take them in, and sometimes not.

Just as the human need for hospitality is a constant, so, it seems, is the human fear of the stranger. Unfortunately, the fear of “the strange one” has a long history in human societies. The stranger seems to portend danger—sometimes of physical harm, but also because the stranger represents the unknown, a challenge to the familiar constructs of our personal world. And so we human beings try to keep strangers at a distance; we avoid risky encounters or we try to neutralize the stranger's power in order to protect our own. Some societies try to appease strangers with gifts; others exclude or even destroy them.

These fundamental human needs and fears confront contemporary men and women intensely. As the world shrinks and mobility increases, we encounter strangers frequently. But this has only heightened our fears. Those who enjoy comfort and shelter edge their way around homeless strangers. Those whose health is presently strong turn away from the gaunt, blemished faces of those living with AIDS. The prosperous never enter the poverty-stricken neighborhoods that abound with gang violence, drug abuse, unemployment, and welfare dependency. “Strangers” do not belong in the world in which the “comfortable” move with relative ease. And so there is no room for those who do not conform to mainstream standards or speak the mainstream language. Access to borders and to basic resources—shelter, employment, education, and health care—is cut off, as the powerful respond to genuine human need with an inhospitality fueled by fear.

Ironically, it is not just hospitality to the “stranger” that is in peril in our society. We are short not only of tables that welcome strangers but even of tables that welcome friends. In a society

that prizes youthfulness, the elderly are often isolated from the affection and care of their own families. In many busy families, children find no after-school welcome home, and spouses find little time to host one another over supper. And when we become estranged—separated by grievances large or small, or simply crowded out of one another's lives—we all too often become “strangers” even to those we once loved. Can we move beyond strangeness and estrangement to learn the skills of welcoming one another and to claim the joy of homecoming?

In the traditions shaped by the Bible, offering hospitality is a moral imperative. The expectation that God's people are people who will welcome strangers and treat them justly runs throughout the Bible. This expectation is not based on any special immunity to the dangers unknown people might present—far from it. Rather, it emerges from knowing the hospitality God has shown to us.

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HOSPITALITY ENFLESHED: THE CHRISTIAN WORKS OF MERCY

The Corporal Works of Mercy

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Welcome the stranger
5. Visit the sick and imprisoned
6. Bury the dead

The Spiritual Works of Mercy

1. Counsel the doubtful
2. Instruct the ignorant
3. Admonish the sinner
4. Comfort the sorrowful
5. Bear wrongs patiently
6. Pray for the living and the dead

Discernment

On Choosing Wisely and Well

BY DAVID LONSDALE

Our choices are our responses to what life offers to us: taking this, accepting that; letting go of this, holding on to that; doing this rather than that; omitting or refusing to do one thing in favor of a better option. It is our choices, too, that shape our lives, and that shape reflects the kind of options we have chosen within the limits of the circumstances in which we are placed.

Choices are on a sliding scale of seriousness and it goes without saying that some have greater weight than others. At one end of the scale are the more trivial decisions which we make almost automatically, without thinking, in day-to-day living. Some everyday issues, however, do have great importance: questions about how I treat my colleagues at work, whether to make sure teenagers come home on time from the movies, or how much time I spend with my community can have consequences for ourselves and others that are far-reaching and far from trivial.

At the very serious end of the spectrum stand those decisions which are significant for us in that they represent truly crucial moments; turning points as a result of which our lives take a new shape and direction, are “changed utterly.” It is as though at the moment of making this kind of option we gather our whole lives in our hands and, for better or worse, give them a new shape. These more crucial moments may have to do with a job, a career, a vocation, a lifestyle; a decision to marry or not to marry a particular person; a choice of celibacy; a decision to seek a divorce; a decision to ask for baptism in the church; a decision to return to the church; and so on. Most of us probably make only a few of these choices in the course of a lifetime, and spend a certain amount of time and energy running away from making them.

Christian discernment is often taken to mean only those processes of careful, prayerful deliberation which we undertake when faced with a particularly important decision. Discernment as I

understand it, however, is not confined to these important moments alone. It has to do with acting in the power of the Spirit as sons and daughters of the Father and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. This relationship with God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is the context in which we, as disciples of Jesus, live day by day. It is not a separate compartment of daily life, but on the contrary, the ground on which everything else stands; the fundamental relationship which roots and feeds and gives shape to life as a whole and all that it contains.

Choices are on a sliding scale of seriousness and it goes without saying that some have greater weight than others.

A daily, living relationship with God is a precondition for good discernment. To attempt to “do discernment” in a vacuum, as it were, by simply following a set of instructions without the foundation of this living relationship with God is a misunderstanding of what discernment is and an impossible task. It is not a mental and practical process or system which, like a book of recipes, can be taken out and used on any suitable occasion when a very important decision has to be made. This would make discernment into something automatic or mechanical, which it is not.

There are two main settings in which discernment has a place: namely, the circumstances of everyday life and, on the other hand, those occasions in which we are faced with a major decision that gives a new shape and direction to the future. Discernment in everyday life is a matter of regular reflection on daily events, within a framework of prayer, in order to see where the Spirit is leading and to follow that lead. Discern-

ment with respect to a major decision is often a more prolonged and carefully structured process, proportionate to the seriousness of the decision itself. In each case, however, the main elements of discernment are the same. Continuing discernment in everyday life is a necessary foundation and support for discernment about major choices. If I have not practiced dancing in everyday life, I am liable to fall over on a big occasion.

The foundation of discernment in the present is recognition and awareness of the presence and action of a loving God in the past; that is, both in our personal histories and in the history of the faith community to which we belong.

Discernment also involves the practice of becoming aware of God as a day-to-day presence in our experience, not only in the past but in the present. This means recognizing the presence and action of God both in the world at large, and in the smaller, interlocking personal worlds which each of us inhabits. It requires regular prayerful reflection upon such questions as, “Where have I met God today/this week/this last month?” “Where is God meeting me and drawing me, in the events of my life and in the world around me?” “Where do I feel drawn away or cut off from God in these circumstances?”

The Components of Discernment

My aim here is not to give a step-by-step description of a particular process of discernment but rather to indicate briefly the essential components of such a process.

Assiduous prayer. The climate or atmosphere necessary for good discernment is regular and serious prayer in which those involved in the process attempt to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking in revelation and in the circumstances in which they are placed.

Adequate information. For any form of decision-making, it is imperative to have sufficient information about matters which are relevant to the choices available.

Reflection on affective responses in relation to God. This process involves noting, interpreting, and reflecting on the feelings and desires that we experience, particularly in direct or indirect response to the revelation of God.

Weighing the reasons. Being adequately informed about the circumstances surrounding each of the options available allows us to give due weight to the reasons for and against each option, which is also an essential part of the discernment process.

Confirmation. It is also to be expected that, once a decision has been made, we will experience in some form either confirmation of the decision or its opposite, unease or a sense of a need for further searching.

Christian discernment, whether in the course of daily living or in the context of a major decision, is a question of sifting through a number of different matters in turn: the circumstances and options about which choices are to be made; our feelings and thoughts about these circumstances and options within a framework of prayer and awareness of God; and the revelation of God, especially as given in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In this process, we gradually become aware of harmonies or disharmonies between the mystery of Christ and our own lives, and this awareness offers a guide and norm for the choices we make.

Discernment is more than a pragmatically effective way of making choices. It is rather a framework which enables us to join in partnership with God in making choices which will help to bring about the fulfillment of God’s generous hopes and desires for the world and for us.

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The Rosary

How the Rosary Teaches Us to Pray

BY THOMAS H. GROOME

Like many Catholics, I grew up in a family that recited the rosary every night. And we knew why we did; as Mom would often assure us, the most effective person to take our prayers to Jesus was his own mother. As a good son, how could he refuse her?

As children, we often came to the nightly rosary with protest—"in a minute, Ma"—but having settled on our knees, it was a lovely, quieting time, one that bonded our family of nine kids at the end of a day of the usual sibling tensions. Years later, when we gathered for our parents' wakes, and then for those of siblings, we prayed the rosary together and it bonded us still. The rosary crusader Father Paddy Peyton was right when he said, "The family that prays together, stays together."

The gentle drone of the Hail Marys helped introduce me to what I later knew as meditation. My mother would encourage us to "just think about the mysteries." How wise she was. In his lovely apostolic letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (RVM), Pope John Paul II called the rosary "a path of contemplation."

If one of us missed the family recitation, our mother's good night was always accompanied by "Be sure to say your rosary." We knew that she kept her own beads under her pillow for waking moments. And my grandmother loved to assure us that if you start the rosary and then fall asleep, "the angels and saints finish it for you."

From my childhood, then, I knew the rosary as both communal and personal prayer; as a quieting mantra-like mode of recitation and contemplation. It convinced me that we can go to Jesus through Mary, and that a great communion of saints prays with us. It taught me the responsibility of praying by myself as well as with others; it taught me that I could pray just about any time and any place.

The rosary can have all of these catechetical benefits for postmodern people, in addition to its powerful efficacy as a mode of prayer. Its widespread popularity fell off after Vatican II—an unintended outcome of the Council's efforts to refocus Catholics on Jesus, sacred Scripture, and the liturgy. But as Pope John Paul II noted in RVM, the rosary, "though clearly Marian in character, at heart is a Christocentric prayer" and "has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety."

What garnered attention for RVM was that Pope John Paul added five new mysteries to the rosary. For some 500 years, the full rosary consisted of fifteen decades, each one focused on some mystery from the life of Christ or Mary. Then, the fifteen decades were grouped into three sets of five—called a chaplet, meaning crown—designated as the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious mysteries, and focusing on the incarnation, passion, and glorification of Jesus Christ, respectively.

Prior to RVM, there were no mysteries designated for the public life and ministry

of Jesus—an enormous gap. I rejoiced when Pope John Paul II announced the addition of five new mysteries focused precisely on the life of Jesus. As Catholics pray these Mysteries of Light—or Luminous mysteries—we are likely to deepen our recognition of, and commitment to, living as disciples of Jesus now.

History of the Rosary

We cannot pinpoint how or when the rosary began as a popular devotion. The old tradition that it was personally delivered to St. Dominic by the Blessed Mother herself is now seriously questioned. On the other hand, the Dominicans certainly helped to standardize and popularize it throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Pope Pius V, a Dominican, instituted the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary (now celebrated on October 7); he credited the efficacy of the rosary with the defeat of the Turks at the battle of Lepanto in 1571.

Around the year 1000, ordinary people began to recite 150 Our Fathers, divided into three sets of 50 and counted on strings of beads called paternosters. This became known as "the poor man's Psalter" because they were copying the monks and nuns who recited the 150 psalms each day. As Marian devotion increased in the 12th century, the Carthusians and Cistercians helped develop and popularize a rosary of Hail Marys.

Historically, the rosary emerged from the instinct of ordinary Christians that they, too, were called to the practice of regular prayer and to sanctify their time

and work throughout the day. They knew the monks and nuns were doing so with their recitation of the Divine Office of the Church. But the peasant people didn't have the time to pause for choral reading. Their instinct was to insist on praying themselves. The rosary arose from the good sense of ordinary people that Baptism calls all to holiness of life, and this demands the regular practice of prayer.

The Rosary Today

What is the best way to say the rosary? The tradition is to meditate on the mystery of each decade rather than to focus on the words of each prayer. So, with the first Joyful mystery, the Annunciation, one can think about God's great initiative here, about Mary's openness to doing God's will, and so on. Or, more contemplatively, one can imagine and enter into the setting as the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary, listen in to the exchange between them, and so on. The purpose of all such contemplation is to take the mystery into daily life to encourage Christian discipleship. As Pope John Paul II wisely commented, we have in the rosary "a treasure to be rediscovered."

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HOW TO PRAY THE ROSARY

It is customary to assign each chaplet to a particular day of the week. *Rosarium Virginis Mariae (RVM)* suggests that the Joyful mysteries be prayed on Monday and Saturday, the Luminous on Thursday, the Sorrowful on Tuesday and Friday, and the Glorious on Wednesday and Sunday.

One popular opening prayer is the first verse of Psalm 70, “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord make haste to help me.” A variation of the opening prayer is to say the Apostles Creed.

This is followed by an Our Father, three Hail Marys, and a Glory Be. Then announce the chaplet and the first mystery, for example, “The five Joyful mysteries, the first mystery, the Annunciation.”

After announcing each mystery, pause for the proclamation of a related biblical passage, and silence for meditation. Then follow with the Our Father, the decade of Hail Marys, and the Glory Be for each of the five mysteries.

The Joyful Mysteries

- 1) Annunciation by Gabriel to the Virgin Mary
- 2) Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth
- 3) Birth of the Savior of the world
- 4) Presentation of Jesus in the temple
- 5) Finding of 12-year-old Jesus in the temple

The Luminous Mysteries

- 1) Baptism of Jesus
- 2) Jesus at the wedding of Cana
- 3) Jesus proclaims the Kingdom of God
- 4) Jesus’ transfiguration
- 5) Jesus institutes the Eucharist

The Sorrowful Mysteries

- 1) Anguish of Jesus in Gethsemane
- 2) Jesus is scourged
- 3) Jesus is crowned with thorns
- 4) Jesus carries his cross
- 5) Jesus dies on the cross

The Glorious Mysteries

- 1) Resurrection of Jesus from the dead
- 2) Jesus ascends into glory
- 3) The Spirit outpours upon Mary and the disciples at Pentecost
- 4) Mary is assumed into Heaven
- 5) Mary shines forth as Queen of the Angels and Saints

There are different ways to conclude. Typical, however, is to end with the Hail Holy Queen or Memorare.

Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!
Our life, our sweetness, and our hope!
To thee do we cry, poor banished
children of Eve, to thee do we send
up our sighs, mourning
and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,
thine eyes of mercy toward us.
And after this our exile, show unto us
The blessed, fruit of thy womb Jesus;
O clement, O loving, O sweet
virgin Mary
Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the
promises of Christ.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious
Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to your
protection,
implored your help or sought your
intercession
was left unaided.
Inspired with this confidence, I
fly to you,
O virgin of virgins, my Mother.
To you I come, before you I kneel,
sinful and sorrowful.
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions;
but in your mercy, hear and answer
me. Amen.

The Lord’s Prayer

Praying the “Our Father”

BY N.T. WRIGHT

Simple yet profound, ancient yet always fresh; deeply Jewish yet available to all, the Lord’s Prayer offers the central message of Jesus in the form best suited to its appropriation. Jesus did not come, after all, merely to teach true doctrine and ethics, but to bring about God’s kingdom; within that sovereign and saving rule, human beings are caught up with the challenge and invitation to corporate and personal renewal, as deep as the human heart, as wide as the world. To pray this prayer with full attention and intention is to partake in this renewal.

The prayer occurs in Matt. 6.9-13, within the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke 11.2-4, answering the disciples’ request for a prayer; and in Didache 8.2, which instructs that the prayer be used three times daily. Luke’s text is shorter, with some changes in the Greek; Matthew’s is the one that has become widespread in the church, with some traditions also adding Didache 10.5 (“remember, Lord, your church...”). The doxology (“yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever”) is probably not original, but became part of the prayer very early on in the life of the church. The prayer clearly stems from an Aramaic original, and it is virtually certain that it represents what Jesus taught.

The prayer is rooted, in shape and content, in older Jewish traditions. But the particular combination of elements marks it out as belonging within Jesus’ aim of inaugurating God’s kingdom, and his invitation to live by this kingdom in advance of its full appearing. It divides into two parts, the first (in the longer form) containing three petitions about God’s purposes and glory, and the second three petitions for human need.

The address, “Our Father,” expresses the intimate trust which characterizes Christian prayer. It evokes the Jewish belief that Israel, God’s people, was his firstborn son (Ex. 4.22; Isa. 63.16; 64.8). The Aramaic word *Abba*, “Father,” expresses Jesus’ own intimate sense of sonship (e.g., Mark 14.36) and the early church’s

sense of sharing that sonship through the Spirit (Rom. 8.16; Gal 4.6, where the Lord’s Prayer may well be in mind).

The first three petitions pray that God’s glory and purpose may come to birth throughout creation. God’s name is sanctified, held in honor, when his world is ruled by his wisdom and power, and his image-bearing human creatures worship him and reflect his glory in the world. His kingdom comes through Jesus’ death and resurrection and his final victory over death itself (1 Cor. 15.24-28), and through every intermediate victory of his love over the powers of the world. The prayer for God’s will to be done on earth as in heaven indicates, despite centuries of misunderstanding, that Christianity is not about escaping earth and going to heaven instead, but rather that God wills to renew both heaven and earth and bring them into ultimate unity (Rev. 21).

Emboldened by this trust in God and his kingdom, the last three petitions express the basic needs of those who live between Jesus’ initial victory and his final triumph. Bread for today (Matthew) and every day (Luke) symbolizes our constant dependence on the creator. Forgiveness, both of sin and of material debt, is the central blessing of the new covenant (Jer. 31.34; Matt. 26.28), obtained through Jesus’ death. The church here commits itself in turn to forgive (emphasized in Matt. 6.15; 18.21-35). Those who claim the new covenant blessing must live as new covenant people; the heart renewed by God’s forgiveness cannot but offer forgiveness to others. The final petition for rescue from danger and evil has two branches. First, we pray to be spared the ultimate test, whether that of fierce temptation or, more specifically, the “tribulation”, the “time of trial,” which in early Judaism was believed to be coming upon the world (compare Matt 26.41, where it seems that Jesus will face this “tribulation” alone). Then we pray to be delivered both from evil in general and from “the evil one”; the original wording could be taken either way, and both may be in view.

Continued on Page 22

Family Life as Spiritual Practice

Spiritual Disciplines of the Domestic Church

BY WENDY M. WRIGHT

It is an error...to wish to banish the devout life from the regiment of soldiers, the mechanic's shop, the court of princes, or the home of married persons. True devotion...not only does no injury to one's vocation or occupation, but on the contrary adorns and beautifies it" (Saint Francis de Sales).

For most of us, family life is a busy, bustling life filled with things to do and people to whom to attend. After the birth of our first daughter, I attended a new-mother's support group sponsored by the local hospital. Women whose infants had been born at the hospital between six and twelve weeks previous were invited to join. We met on Wednesday mornings at the home of a facilitator to share our experiences. What I remember most about the meetings (besides the carpet full of wiggling, squealing infants) was the common exasperation felt at being so busy. One wide-eyed young matron with twin daughters laughed as she described the highlight of a typical day: finding the time to get outside to the mailbox and bring in the mail. Even a daily shower was an accomplishment. Forget trying to blow-dry hair. Of course, what seems at first to be the all-consuming activity of infant care soon gives away to the ever-vigilant watchfulness of the toddler parent; the bedtime reading sessions of preschool days; the initiation into what will be decades of carpooling; school sports coaching; overseeing homework; keeping doctor, dentist, and orthodontist appointments; and attending parent-teacher conferences. Then there are the high school booster clubs, after-prom committees, math contests, dance recitals, piano lessons, summer soccer leagues, birthday parties, swimming lessons, the never-ending cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping (for me an almost daily necessity with a teenaged male). Top this off with headaches about insurance premiums, mortgage rates, tuition payments, money for new shoes—the list is endless—and it all adds up to a busy, busy life.

Yet in the midst of the busyness is a strange, wonderful stillness and a silence so full it dwarfs the chatter with which we fill our days. We sense that stillness

as snapshot moments: we peer into the nursery of a sleeping infant, or attend the kindergarten class Christmas rendition of "The Friendly Beasts," or watch our high school senior parade across the stage and receive her diploma. In fact, it has been my experience that the very destabilizing of the self-preoccupied "me," the three-hundred-and-sixty-degree rotation in orientation that marriage and parenting bring with them, is in itself an initiation into a realm of being and loving that inches us, if we consciously allow it, into the deep ground of Being and Love that sustains us all. Again, it is in those brief snapshot moments—and I don't mean the cute photo-op moments—when the radical risk of genuinely loving another more than ourselves comes suddenly clear.

For me, the spiritual art of negotiating the busyness of family life has been twofold. First, I have in some sense surrendered to the fact that my life is essentially one of availability. When our children were young, I felt this most intensely in the twenty-four-hour-a-day, mom-on-call experience. This availability is still the key virtue of my family life, experienced chiefly now as an unexpected midnight phone call from a distraught college-aged offspring or a family get-together orchestrated around the vision, hearing, and mobility limitations of elderly parents. However, I must make one vigorous disclaimer. Such availability must genuinely form us, not violate us. There will, no doubt, be for each of us critical times when we are stretched almost beyond our breaking points—times of serious family illness, financial distress, or unavoidable conflict. But availability does not mean being everything for everybody. It does not mean volunteering for every church, school, and civic project while you work full time. It does not mean letting family members take undue advantage of you. Husbands can pick up their own clothes; teenagers can fix their own lunches; even small children can be taught to respect another family member's need for privacy or time alone. The availability I'm talking about is not the doormat variety; it is a more profound willingness, in things essential, to be present to others in the family, to carry their deepest interests always in your mind, to attend

thoughtfully to their genuine needs, and to have the contours of your own heart stretched by the unexpected, inexplicable particularity of each of those persons you have been given to love. In this lies the beginning of our being able to love *as God has loved us*.

The crucial discipline to be exercised, and the one I am constantly called to practice again and again, is found in distinguishing true availability from all the demands that claim us. Americans today live in what is perhaps the most speeded-up society ever to exist on earth. We are barraged by multitudinous, simultaneous instant messages about all the things we must have and must do. We overschedule our children so that they might be the best soccer, baseball, or football players, the most outstanding ballerinas, pianists, computer programmers, rocket scientists—or whatever. We overschedule ourselves so that we might have the best career, house, wardrobe, muscle tone, garden, or résumé. In our drive to have and do everything—immediately—we often seem to have forgotten that frenetic busyness is not synonymous with conscious and attentive care for each other.

The second spiritual art of a busy family life, next to genuine availability, is the art of cultivating our sense of the silence that undergirds it all. One might call this art Sabbath keeping. The idea of Sabbath keeping is, of course, embedded in the Jewish and Christian faiths. And where a family's religious observance encourages it to honor the Sabbath in traditional ways, it can be wonderful. The traditional Jewish Sabbath takes place from just before sundown Friday to just after sundown Saturday. Prohibitions from work and travel allow family relationships to become the center of focus for this most holy of days. Similarly, some Christian denominations have held Sunday (not simply the Sunday service) as a day set apart, during which faith and family are emphasized. But Sabbath keeping is not only the observance of a day. It is also about the cultivation of a certain quality of time. Sabbath time is gracious and still. It is spacious and restorative. It is not merely "time off" to refuel or run errands and is certainly not

to be confused with noisy entertainment or frantic recreational activity.

Any time can be Sabbath time if it allows deep, rhythmic rest and rejuvenation to occur. Time set aside for gentle prayer or retreats, walks by the seashore, in a garden, or through the woods, quiet afternoon moments sipping a cup of tea or reading a poem before a warming fire—all these and many more moments can be Sabbath time. They honor the stillness and silence that sustain our lives. When children are young, such moments may seem elusive, but afternoon naptime might provide a window of stillness. Or a spouse arriving home from work might offer to take over for a brief time so that the other can take a summer evening walk. What is perhaps most difficult for us is resisting the habit of automatically filling time with activity or filling space with noise. We race from commitment to commitment. Radios and televisions blare while we do housework and homework. We chat on our cell phones while we drive and walk. There are, of course, occasions on which such things are necessary. But I am convinced that the conscious cultivation of Sabbath time is essential to our being able to recognize those graced snapshot moments that continually occur in the midst of our busy family lives.

I am not suggesting that we must regularly schedule Sabbath time (although this might be ideal and might, for some, be possible) but that we must consciously and intentionally honor the need for such time. However we work that out in practice is for us to decide. One family I know has a practice of setting aside Monday evenings as "goof-off" night in which all members participate. As our own children have grown, my husband and I have found ourselves on temperate Saturday or Sunday afternoons headed either north of town to Neale Woods—a nature preserve with miles of hiking trails—or out of town to some other wildlife preservation site where we soak in air and sun and the silence and stillness that drench the prairie landscapes. Sabbath time allows us to enter the busy, cluttered parts of life with perspective and some equanimity.

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Practicing Forgiveness

Moving Toward Reconciliation

BY MARJORIE J. THOMPSON

We sometimes have trouble understanding the precise nature of forgiveness. I would like to begin by suggesting that forgiveness is not certain things with which we often confuse it. Forgiving does not mean denying our hurt. What on the surface appears to be a forgiving attitude may merely reveal that we have succeeded in suppressing our pain. If we bury our hurt or pretend it isn't real, we experience no sense of being wronged that would require our forgiveness. Forgiveness is a possibility only when we acknowledge the negative impact of a person's actions or attitudes on our lives. This holds true whether or not harm was intended by the offender. Until we are honest about our actual feelings, forgiveness has no meaning.

It is important to underscore that forgiveness bears no resemblance to resigned martyrdom. A person with a weak sense of self may too easily take on blame for the actions of others. A person who finds a unique sense of identity by appearing pitiable can learn to play the martyr with great effectiveness. In either case, resignation to the role of victim will prevent any genuine process of forgiveness. If we feel we deserve to be blamed, degraded, or abused, again we will have disguised the offense that needs forgiveness, not by denial but by

taking inappropriate responsibility for the offense. One spiritual writer has astutely pointed out that forgiveness does not mean "putting the other one on probation." We may think we have forgiven someone only to catch ourselves waiting impatiently for evidence that the person's behavior merits our clemency. If the offender doesn't measure up to our expectations, the "gift" of mercy is withdrawn: "To grant forgiveness at a moment of softening of the heart, in an emotional crisis, is comparatively easy; not to take it back is something that hardly anyone knows how to do."¹ To forgive is not to excuse an unjust behavior. There are evil and destructive behaviors that are inherently inexcusable: fraud, theft, emotional abuse, physical violence, economic exploitation, or any denial of human rights. Who could possibly claim that these are excusable? To excuse such behaviors—at least in the sense of winking and pretending not to notice, or of saying "Oh, that's all right," or even "I'll overlook it this time, just don't do it again"—is to tolerate and condone them. Evil actions are manifestly not "all right." They are sins.

Finally, to forgive is not necessarily to forget. Perhaps for small indignities that prick our pride we can simply excuse and forget. But for major assaults that leave us gasping with psychic pain, reeling with the sting of rejection, bowing under the weight of oppressive constraint, or aching

with personal loss and grief, we will find ourselves unable either to excuse or to forget. Moreover, there are situations in which it is not desirable to forget. It would be but another expression of arrogance for those of us with European roots to ask Native or African Americans, under the guise of forgiveness, to forget the way they and their ancestors have been treated by the cultural majority in this country. I understand why our Jewish friends insist that we never forget the horrors of the Holocaust. There are brutalities against body, mind, and spirit that must not be forgotten if we are to avoid replaying them. Blows intentionally rendered to crush the vulnerable cannot, humanly speaking, be forgotten. They can, nonetheless, be forgiven.

If we now have greater clarity concerning what forgiveness is not, what then is it? Let me characterize it this way: To forgive is to make a conscious choice to release the person who has wounded us from the sentence of our judgment, however justified that judgment may be. It represents a choice to leave behind our resentment and desire for retribution, however fair such punishment might seem. It is in this sense that one may speak of "forgetting"; not that the actual wound is ever completely forgotten, but that its power to hold us trapped in continual replay of the event, with all the resentment each remembrance makes fresh, is broken.

Moreover, without in any way mitigating the seriousness of the offense, forgiveness involves excusing persons from the punitive consequences they deserve to suffer for their behavior. The behavior remains condemned, but the offender is released from its effects as far as the forgiver is concerned. For the one who releases, such forgiveness is costly both emotionally and spiritually. I believe this reflects in a finite way both the manner in which God forgives us and the costliness of that infinite gift.

Forgiveness constitutes a decision to call forth and rebuild that love which is the only authentic ground of any human relationship. Such love forms the sole secure ground of our relationship with God as well. Indeed, it is only because God continually calls forth and rebuilds this love with us that we are capable of doing so with one another. Thus, to forgive is to participate in the mystery of God's love. Perhaps this is why the old adage rings true: "To err is human; to forgive, divine." Genuine forgiveness draws us right into the heart of divine life.

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Endnotes

¹ Anthony Bloom, *Living Prayer* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1966), p. 31.

The Jesus Prayer

A Way to Inner Stillness

BY JOSEPH WONG, O.S.B. CAM.

Today, one of the major challenges of trying to be a contemplative while living in a modern city is learning how to cultivate inner silence, or inner stillness, in the midst of the clamor and the hectic activities of a busy life. Yet I have known from childhood that the kind of recollectedness which can lead to inner stillness can in fact be maintained in an urban setting. I grew up in Hong Kong, and I used to hear my

grandmother, who was a devout Buddhist, reciting the Buddha's name throughout the day. Turning her prayer beads in her hand, she would chant "Nan-Mu E-Mi-To-Fo" (which means "Homage to the Buddha Amitabha"). When I greeted her, she would interrupt her recitation, exchange a few words with me, and then continue chanting "Nan-Mu E-Mi-To-Fo." Later I attended a Catholic school and became a Catholic. When I first learned about the Jesus Prayer, I was greatly struck by the similarities between

this prayer and my grandmother's recitation of the Buddha's name. In this essay, I shall present the Jesus Prayer as a way that can lead us to inner stillness and unceasing prayer, whether we are living in a city or in the countryside.

The Jesus Prayer—also known as the Prayer of the Heart—had its origin in the tradition of the desert monks in fourth-century Egypt. Later, having passed through Mount Sinai, the Jesus Prayer was introduced to Greece, where

it flourished on Mount Athos during the Middle Ages. From there it spread to Eastern Europe and became an important element of Eastern Orthodox spirituality. In the middle of the last century it entered the Western Church and is now widely known and practiced in the West as well.

Many Christians have learned about the Jesus Prayer through the nineteenth-

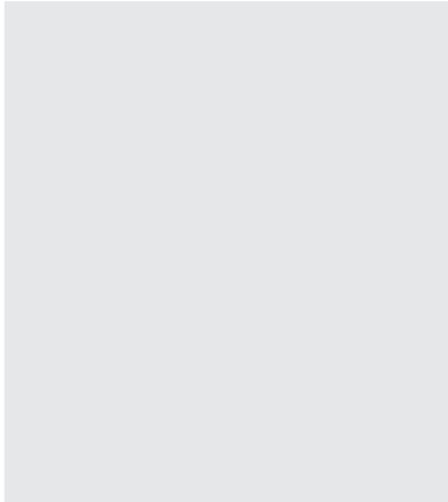
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Centering Prayer

A Treasure for the Soul

BY JOSEPH G. SANDMAN

Vatican II called for the revitalization of the path of contemplative prayer



Georges Rouault, *Old Faubourg (mother and children)*, 1951. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ADAGP, Paris

Who could have predicted twenty-five years ago, when three Trappist monks from a monastery in Massachusetts introduced contemplative prayer to a group of “non-contemplatives,” that its popularity would grow so dramatically? Today, thousands of believers from a variety of Christian denominations in every state and in dozens of countries practice contemplative prayer daily. In addition, an international network of dedicated volunteers teaches it around the world.

These monks dreamed of taking the church’s rich, centuries-old tradition of contemplative prayer and distilling it into a simple, easily learned prayer that ordinary people could practice. They believed that the daily practice of this prayer could lead to a more intimate union with God and a more powerful experience of God’s presence in our lives. This active presence heals, transforms, and offers freedom and peace. Today, many Christians throughout the world are deeply committed to the daily practice called “centering prayer,” which they experience as a cornerstone of their lives.

What Is Centering Prayer?

Centering prayer is a remarkably simple method that opens one to God’s

gift of contemplative prayer. Its practice expands one’s receptivity to the presence and activity of God in one’s life. It is a distillation of the practice of monastic spirituality into two relatively short periods of prayer each day.

The experience of thousands of practitioners has convinced most centering prayer teachers that two periods a day of twenty to thirty minutes each are necessary to enable the believer to benefit fully from the practice. At the start of a session, the practitioner has the intention to rest deeply in God in silence and to let go of the thoughts, emotions, memories, images, or sensations that will inevitably come into awareness during prayer. The fundamental dynamic of centering prayer is not to stop thinking or to combat thoughts as they arise, but rather to let them go gently so they can pass through one’s awareness. Thus the believer can return with his or her whole being to an awareness of God.

The Fruits of Centering Prayer

A growing body of literature describes the benefits of practicing centering prayer. Since the principal arena for living a spiritual life is not prayer but rather everyday life, the benefits of centering prayer reveal themselves not during periods of prayer, but over time in the way we live our lives.

The essence of centering prayer is consent to the presence and activity of God in one’s life. In response to our intention to become more deeply united with the divine presence, God acts within us to transform us, making us more like Christ. One’s intimacy with God deepens and one’s awareness of that intimacy expands.

Those who regularly practice centering prayer have identified its many benefits. These include: greater access to God’s own wisdom and energy; a significant increase in creativity; a decrease in compulsive behavior; a reduction of painful emotions and negative thoughts and greater freedom to respond positively to them when they do arise; a greater ability to ac-

cept difficult situations with peace and joy; an expanded capacity to accept others on their own terms without judging them or desiring them to change; an ability to love others more selflessly; and a greater awareness of the presence of God in every person and situation we encounter.

Leaders of Contemplative Outreach (www.centeringprayer.com), an organization dedicated to the practice of centering prayer, predict that this prayer form will continue to grow because it is a simple, effective, and powerful way to access a deeper relationship with God and because it addresses a hunger within the hearts and souls of individuals who long for peace and a deep experience of God in a fast-paced, impersonal, competitive, and often hostile world.

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CENTERING PRAYER

Guidelines for Practicing Centering Prayer

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently and introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

Family Life as Spiritual Practice

Continued from Page 16

Family life is not only busy but it is an intensely embodied life. Bodies jostling bodies for a place at the dinner table, bodies intermingling to create new bodies, which then inhabit one and then are held, carried, nursed, tended, bathed, and fed; bodies kissed for “boo-boos”; bodies patiently accommodated as they age and fail; bodies whose proximity one longs for and whose absence inflicts pain; bodies that keep one awake by crowding into bed on a stormy childhood winter night or keep one awake long past curfew in a sultry adolescent summer; bodies that arrive unannounced for a fortnight’s stay; bodies whose presence is required at holiday functions; bodies lithe and limber; bodies stiff and aching—the sacred realized in intense engagement with other bodies.

It is precisely in the fleshy encounter that those of us who marry and have children are called to experience God. God is not met in our lives solely in the solitary one-on-one encounter or in some disembodied arena clearly demarcated from the fierce, conflicting pressures of daily life. To put it in the language of Christian theology, the mystery of the incarnation itself—God becoming human—pushes us toward the insight that to encounter the infinite one must go through the finite—not around or below or above the finite—not by passing or eliminating the finite but going through it, in all its unique, unrepeatable particularity. The finite and the infinite are thus simultaneously encountered. The startling claim of the incarnation, fully human, fully divine, becomes a lens through which all created reality can be apprehended. The finite, fleshy world is the privileged place of encounter with God.

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Retreats

The Christian Practice of “Retreat”

BY ANNE LUTHER

The concept of a “retreat” has a long and varied history. In the Christian context the invitation of Jesus to “come away and rest awhile” (Mark 6.31) is often thought of as the first invitation to “make retreat.” The original inspiration for “retreat” can be traced to the notion of a “retreat of the whole Church” in the forty-day season of Lent as codified after the Council of Nicaea (325) and to the development of monasticism as a form of collective retreat.

Purpose of Retreat

The term “retreat” can be misleading in that it could easily conjure up the idea of “escape” from the world. The experience of “retreat” does include a “stepping aside” from ordinary routine for a time to reflect and to pray, to slow down, to be still, and to listen. This “coming apart” is meant to aid retreatants in integrating their relationship with the Divine, their spirituality, as that is experienced in the marketplace and home—in the world. Ideally, the experience of retreat motivates the individual to recognize the significance of prayer, quiet, and solitude in the everyday in order to be a more “balanced” participant in every

aspect of life. Spirituality concerns the whole of life and how all of life is lived in the presence of God. Retreat times, ideally, help us to wake up to the fact of the ever-present Reality in which “we live and move and have our being.” Service, in the world, ought to be one of the fruits of such spiritual awakening.

Types of Retreats

In the early days of the retreat movement, the “closed retreat” would be a common phenomenon. Retreats for men only, women only, girls only or boys only were held, consisting of conferences by a “retreat master,” time for the retreatant to reflect on input, celebration of Mass, and often Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament with exposition. During some of these closed retreats, there might be an opportunity for retreatants to speak privately with the retreat master but otherwise the general order of the day was silence.

Through the years, a great variety of retreat styles has emerged. It is still common to find many retreat centers offering some form of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in the “directed retreat experience”, lasting from a short retreat

of several days to the traditional four-week format. The Nineteenth Annotation retreat is also becoming more and more popular. This is a method of experiencing the Ignatian Exercises in the midst of daily life where retreatants commit themselves to a certain time of prayer each day with specific Scripture passages and then meet with a spiritual director at regular intervals, often weekly, to reflect upon what has happened in their prayer or meditation as it impacts on daily life.

Topical or thematic retreats have also become commonplace. A group of persons gather at a retreat center and spend time reflecting and praying around a specific theme such as “forgiveness,” “compassion,” or “the life of Jesus.” Usually there is a retreat leader who offers some thoughts and reflections, passages from Scripture, or other anecdotal material touching upon the chosen theme. Retreatants are then given time and space to pray with the material they have heard. Sometimes there are opportunities for conversation among the retreatants concerning what is happening for them in this process. At other times silence is maintained throughout. This type of approach is often referred to as a “guided retreat” and usually does include some type of

communal worship service depending upon the setting and the group.

Many persons opt for a “private retreat” experience where an individual retreatant takes some time for prayer, reflection, silence, and solitude at a chosen place. Many retreat centers have “hermitages” where private retreatants may stay if they choose. The hunger for a spirituality that both nourishes and challenges is being expressed everywhere by persons from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and religious affiliations. It is to retreat centers and houses of prayer and renewal that many of these persons go seeking a place of hospitality, safety, and peace—a place where conversations that matter may take place, where real questions may be voiced, and where some guidance is available.

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The Jesus Prayer

Continued from Page 17

century Russian classic *Way of a Pilgrim*, which has been translated into some forty languages. Its anonymous author teaches the Jesus Prayer by way of telling stories about himself. One day when he was in church, so the narrative begins, he heard the Scripture reading of Paul’s injunction to the Christians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17). Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the pilgrim felt that Paul’s words were addressed to him personally. He was determined to put the command into practice, but first he needed to learn how to cultivate unceasing prayer. He frequented a number of churches and listened to famous preachers for some time, but he was greatly disappointed because no one presented any practical instruction in how to pray unceasingly. Finally, by the

grace of God, he met an elderly monk in a small village who taught him the Jesus Prayer as a concrete way of praying continuously. The monk also gave him a copy of the *Philokalia*, which contained the teachings on the Jesus Prayer given by ancient spiritual masters. Thus, under the guidance of this spiritual father, the pilgrim read the *Philokalia* with great interest and thereafter recited the Jesus Prayer continuously as he pursued his path as a pilgrim. Then, after a period of time, due to his earnestness, and with the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, the pilgrim was able to obtain the gift of unceasing prayer.

The standard formula of the Jesus Prayer is: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” In practice,

various forms are used. For example, the designation “a sinner” may be added to the ending: “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” Some omit the title, “Son of God,” and say: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Or the prayer can be simply shortened to the following invocation: “Lord Jesus, have mercy.”

How to Pray the Jesus Prayer

The Jesus Prayer is normally practiced in two different ways: structured and spontaneous. The structured way of reciting the Jesus Prayer is to set aside a period of time every day, such as twenty or thirty minutes. The spontaneous way of reciting the Jesus Prayer is to freely repeat the prayer throughout the day. As the two ways complement each other, spiritual masters normally recommend adopting both ways, especially for beginners. After spending some set time every day in saying the Jesus Prayer, the

prayer will gradually accompany us in our daily living. That is, the holy name of Jesus will spontaneously appear on our lips and in our hearts at different times and on different occasions throughout the day.

The Jesus Prayer is a way, proven over the centuries, to achieve *hesychia*, or inner stillness and unceasing prayer. As a prayer of the heart, the Jesus Prayer is a concrete expression of the Holy Spirit praying continuously in the hearts of Christians, “with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26).

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Companionship with the Saints

Practices of Hopeful Remembrance

BY ELIZABETH A. JOHNSON

In its plenitude, the symbol of the communion of saints signifies that those who seek the face of the living God today belong to a great historical company, an intergenerational band of the friends of God and prophets that includes the living and the dead, joined in community with the cosmic world, all connected in the gracious, compassionate love of Holy Wisdom who, in the midst of historical struggle, sin, and defeat, continuously renews her gift of saving, healing grace. How does this doctrinal symbol appear concretely in prayer and piety to nourish the vitality of the *ekklesia*? One fire kindles another—but how are the sparks to fly? What practices can release the liberating power of the heritage of all saints to stir the affections and motivate action?

Under the traditional patronage model of the saints, a vast set of devotions grew up known collectively as the *cultus sanctorum*, or cult of the saints. Living persons established relations with the holy ones in heaven in numerous ways such as pilgrimages, novenas, veneration of relics, the use of medals, and many other devotional practices designed to facilitate protection and help in the trials of life. It is this pattern of veneration that has so diminished in postconciliar, postcritical culture, with its realignment of the counter-Reformation religious paradigm on the one hand and its anonymous social pressures that destroy society's feeling of community with the dead on the other. But as Scripture and the early age of the martyrs show, a patronage model is not the only possibility available for the practice of the communion of saints. A companionship model calls forth its own concrete expressions, many still in the process of being shaped in the current age as different groups devise forms of keeping memory.

“Remembering the dead,” writes theologian Karl Rahner, “becomes a prayer even if it does not contain a specific petition to the ‘saints,’ a plea for their intercession,” for it ultimately leads the

mind and heart into the mystery of God. In modern and postmodern culture, such prayer through acts of remembrance and hope awakens consciousness and revitalizes the spirit. It contributes to building the church into a living community of memory and hope with “habits of the heart” that make the life of discipleship an attractive option. In its cultural setting, hopeful remembrance in fact is an act of resistance to banality, to debasement of persons and the earth, to consumerism, to individual isolation, to personal drift and apathy, to hopelessness and resignation.

Prayer of Praise and Lament in a Companionship Model

Instead of the prayer of petition which has had pride of place in traditional devotion to the saints, the prayer of praise and thanks to God and the prayer of lament characterize a companionship model. It is not that explicit petition is never made, but such asking assumes a different character when set within a relationship of mutuality rather than a structure of elitism. Prayer for help also diminishes in importance in the context of the larger impulses of imbibing encouragement from the saints' witness and praying in profound gratitude for their lives and in lament over their destruction. While thanking God for the witness of the saints is part of the liturgical heritage, complaint to God over the historical treatment suffered by many of them has not customarily been associated with this symbol. Both forms flow today in practices of hopeful remembrance.

Thanks

With the belief that every good gift comes from the generous hand of the One who creates and saves the world, hearty thanks to the Giver characterizes Jewish and Christian prayer from the beginning. People bless God for the wonders of creation, the gift of a plentiful harvest, safe delivery in childbirth, relationships healed, peace established, justice attained, health recovered, and for the transforming gifts of divine

mercy and redeeming grace. Indeed, the whole orientation of liturgical prayer is in this direction. The subversive memory of the cloud of witnesses leads in this same direction of gratitude and praise when their historical reality is appreciated in light of its deepest truth, their ever so individual response to amazing grace. As an example of the prayer of thanks, the *Oxford Book of Prayer* cites the following:

We thank thee, O God, for the saints of all ages; for those who in times of darkness kept the lamp of faith burning; for the great souls who saw visions of larger truth and dared to declare it; for the multitude of quiet and gracious souls whose presence has purified and sanctified the world; and for those known and loved by us, who have passed from this earthly fellowship into the fuller light of life with thee.¹

Profound gratitude to God for these women and men who are our honor recognizes that what makes them remarkable, both those known and those unknown, stems from the power of the Spirit who has had a greening effect on their lives, to use Hildegard of Bingen's metaphor, keeping them from being dried out sticks and filling them with the juice of life. The prayer also implies that the community today is similarly gifted. People still keep faith burning in the darkness, speak truth to power, and live gracefully in this world; loved ones still die and go forth with our hope clinging to them. Thanking God for these lives is a theocentric way of expressing the phenomenon of connectedness in the Spirit.

Lament

Reclaiming the communion of saints as all saints brings yet another aspect to the fore: the senseless, terrified, anonymous, tragic deaths of too many whose destruction does not even have the saving grace of witnessing to a cause which they held dear. Human death by famine, torture, war, genocide, and one-on-one violence, and the death of living creatures and earth's life systems

by human cruelty and greed disrupt the harmony of one generation's witness to the next. Such victimization introduces unmitigated evil into the picture. It cries to heaven for justice, for relief, at least for explanation, which is never forthcoming. The ancient prayer of lament, flung in outrage and grief to God, arises from remembrance of these things. Well attested by the psalms, Hagar's complaint, Jeremiah's lamentations, the tears of the companions of the daughter of Jephthah, Job's challenge to heaven, and Jesus' god-forsaken cry from the cross, lament is curiously lacking from Christian practices of prayer, especially liturgical prayer. But the powerful memory of those who died senseless deaths deprived of dignity demands that the praise of God be suffused with their tragedy. In the process, as we gather them into our common memory and hope, they become something more than faceless, forgotten individuals but enter into a living history as an impetus to forge a different future for others.

Georges Rouault, *Veronica*, 1945. © 2008 Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York/ADAGP, Paris

Spiritual Direction

Seeking Guidance for the Journey

BY KATHLEEN FISCHER

When the tragically dead are remembered in the context of Christian faith, the cross of Jesus introduces a hope that transforms these raw depths of unreason and suffering into doxology, only now the praise is forever imbued with the knowledge of unimaginable pain and the darkness of hope against hope. That which is remembered in grief can be redeemed, made whole, through the promise of the Spirit's new creation. And so we affirm a future for all the nameless dead in the hands of the living God.

The challenge of the prayer of lament is not simply to commend the victims of murderous death to heavenly blessedness, however, but to give their memory a place in the making of a just society and a compassionate world here and now. The disorientation of lament has a critical edge. By the way the church remembers, it allows the past of all the dead to function as raw material for a future of promise. It commits itself to seeing, as theologian David Power writes, "that out of their lives on earth, out of the apparent absurdity of their death, a future comes that belongs to the realization of covenant justice here on earth."² The prayer of lament—unreserved protest, sadness, impassioned questioning, strong cry against suffering, and tenderness for the defeated—becomes a social force confronting unjust ideologies and structures. It calls us out of passivity into active engagement against all premature death caused by human beings. Along with the prayer of praise, it shifts our responsibility to praxis.

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Excerpted from *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints*, © 1999. Reprinted with the permission of the publisher, The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Endnotes

1 Anonymous, in *The Oxford Book of Prayer*, George Appleton, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 168.

2 David Power, "Calling Up the Dead," in *The Spectre of Mass Death* (Nijmegen, Netherlands: *Concilium International Journal of Theology*, 1993, No. 3) p. 114.

Spiritual direction is a conversation between a director and someone who wants to grow in the Christian life. Convinced that the Spirit lives in us, as well as in all creation, the director and directee (the person being directed) attend to God's many manifestations: Where is God in my desire to quit my job, or in my struggle with symptoms of Parkinson's disease? Am I being called to take a more courageous stand on justice issues? What is the meaning of this darkness I encounter in my prayer?

The term "direction" suggests that one person tells another what to believe or how to act, but a spiritual director helps others freely name what God is doing in their lives and shape their own response. Spiritual direction is an honored practice whose roots lie deep in the Catholic tradition. Scholars usually trace its beginnings to the fourth-century desert fathers and mothers. In the rugged setting of the Egyptian desert, both new and established Christians sought guidance from those considered more experienced or holy.

Throughout history, noted spiritual companions have offered diverse forms of this ministry, showing us what to look for in a spiritual friend. Teresa of Avila, for example, infused her guidance with common sense and a love of laughter. Jane Frances de Chantal reassured spiritual seekers who felt inadequate, encouraging them simply to redirect their hearts when they found themselves failing often. As practiced today, spiritual direction is especially indebted to Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. His *Spiritual Exercises* provides not only a detailed description of the director's role (he or she should be both gentle and prudent) but also a comprehensive handbook for spiritual direction.

This ancient Christian ministry has experienced a resurgence in recent decades, its remarkable growth fueled by widespread hunger for prayer and a desire for greater intimacy with God.

Though often considered a ministry of ordained clergy or vowed religious, spiritual direction embraces the gifts of the laity as well. In several of its documents, including the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), the Second Vatican Council affirmed that the vocation to holiness and ministry is universal to all the baptized. (See 33, 40.) The council's fruits can be seen in laypeople's serious attention to their spiritual lives, as well as in the growing number of laypeople serving as spiritual directors.

Who makes a good spiritual director?

Above all, we seek faith and wisdom in such a companion. But other considerations may also matter: Would you be more comfortable with a man or a woman? Why are you looking for spiritual direction at this time, and what do you hope to gain from it? Do you want an ordained minister or vowed religious, or would a married layperson better understand your life situation? How far are you willing to travel to meet with this person?

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Interview two or three qualified directors. Ask about their training and experience, how they administer spiritual direction, whether they charge a fee and how it is established, how they handle confidentiality, and any other concerns you have. Notice especially how comfortable you feel with a possible director. The quality of your relationship, especially your level of trust, will be among the most important aspects of your journey, for spiritual direction entails an open and honest sharing of your story.

During your first session, you and your director will determine the basic structure for your time together, including when and how often to meet. Sessions usually last about an hour and take place once a month, but their length and frequency depend on circumstances. For instance, some individuals find having a spiritual companion during life's significant moments—retreats, important decisions, major transitions, times of illness or grief—to be enough. Since spiritual direction is a voluntary commitment, a person can stop at any time, and it is also perfectly acceptable to say that the relationship is not working. After a certain number of meetings, you and your director will usually evaluate how things are going, and mutually decide whether or not to continue.

No two spiritual direction encounters look exactly alike, for directors have unique personalities and the people they see bring a variety of experiences. However, certain elements are usually present. A session typically includes prayer, either at the beginning and end or when it arises naturally. Persons seeking direction bring what is in their hearts and on their minds: difficulties or consolations in prayer; pending decisions and significant dreams; stories of struggle or success in living the gospel. The director listens closely, sometimes mirroring back what he or she has heard or asking a question to help clarify a point. He or she may offer a suggestion, a gentle challenge, a Scripture passage, or words of encouragement.

From the earliest centuries, countless Christians have searched out seasoned guides. Whether or not we choose spiritual direction for ourselves, its ongoing popularity testifies to a perennial truth about the pilgrimage of faith: We need the love, wisdom, and witness of other travelers.

Kathleen Fischer, PhD, is a counselor, spiritual director, and widely published author.

Excerpted from *Spiritual Directors International*, www.sdiworld.org/essays. Used with permission.

New Media and Catholic Spiritual Practice

Wired for Practice: Cyberspace Spirituality

BY BARBARA RADTKE

New media and Catholic spiritual practices? Is pairing these words like oil and water or hand in glove? Can my iPod help me pray? Can the Internet be a resource for a retreat?

In an age of technology, it may come as no surprise that Americans use new media to support and sustain spiritual activity. In "Faith Online," the Pew Internet and American Life Project's study published in 2004, we learn that almost two-thirds of those who had access to the Internet, about 82 million Americans, have used it for spiritual or religious reasons. And do not be fooled into thinking that this demographic has a strong bias toward youth. The Pew Study found almost half of what they called the online faithful were between the ages of 30 and 49. This online activity did not replace a faith community but was used mostly in addition to affiliation with a congregation.

Looking specifically at Catholic spirituality in practice, the Internet is used in three ways: 1) to introduce and inform people about a practice and its history, 2) to connect people who are interested in a practice so they can relate experiences and exchange resources, 3) to renew a practice in a new medium or to model the practice.

Before briefly examining example sites in these three categories, let's ask a general question that would apply to any Web site: How do we know the Web site which we are consulting is reliable? Fortunately, there is an established criteria to evaluate a Web site: authority, accuracy, currency,

purpose, audience, coverage, style, and functionality. The Boston College library has a handy Web page, available to the public, that gives specific questions to ask oneself when looking at a site for the first time. For example, under authority, it helps us frame some questions about authorship, credentials, and sponsorship of the site. Boston College library page: www.bc.edu/libraries/help/howdoi/howto/evaluateinternet.html.

An introduction to and information about a practice may be the most well known way the Internet has been used. Going back to the 2004 Pew study, almost a quarter of the respondents had used the Internet to gather information about the celebration of religious holidays or to find out where they could connect with religious services. The parish that places its weekly bulletin online may be providing such information. Identifying favorite "go to" sites is helpful for easy access when one has something specific in mind. One can bookmark their parish and diocesan site and the site of the U.S. Catholic bishops, www.usccb.org, and be confident of the information provided. The Franciscan site of St. Anthony's Press, www.americancatholic.org, has abundant resources. They archive a number of their publications. *Catholic Update*, which comes out monthly, is a popular source on many Catholic themes including spiritual practices. The authors are often well known, and, each *Update* issue has an imprimatur.

When people use the Internet so they can connect with others or share their own experiences, they are using the social networking aspects of the world wide

Web. Sometimes this is accomplished through an exchange on a blog on a public site or a discussion room. On www.ncrcafe.org, for example, there are numerous forums in which one can dialogue. A site on prayer provided by the Irish Jesuits, www.sacredspace.ie, follows a practice, also found on a number of other sites, by providing a place to post intentions and pray for the departed.

Possibilities for deeper reflection and more sustained conversation happen in discussion forums through password-protected sites. Several universities, including Boston College's C21 Online program (www.bc.edu/c21online), offer non-credit possibilities for people to focus on faith formation and spiritual renewal. While some of these opportunities are structured as a course with moderated discussion, others, such as the recent Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association's (www.pncea.org) event on evangelization, are designed like webinars or conferences. In all these experiences, people not only discover resources but have an opportunity to interact.

In the third way of using the Internet, someone models the practice in this new media. One might think that the Internet was an unfriendly medium for conveying the potential of prayer and retreat. Two favorite sites that dispel such a notion are artist Bob Gilroy, S.J.'s site, www.prayerwindows.com, which offers ways to pray with original art and structures a way to take an online retreat. The Irish Jesuits at www.sacredspace.ie suggest ways to use their site for daily prayer and offer guidance for different prayer. At this writing, there was a good page on how to

pray a novena; the specific practice featured was in honor of the Sacred Heart.

Although this article concentrates on the use of the Internet, we should not overlook how new media includes even more mobility by downloading podcasts or providing an email with a thought or prayer for the day. A podcast generally is a video or audio presentation. One can argue that it may model the kind of spiritual reading that some vowed communities did or do during a meal when one member reads while the others eat in silence. An online magazine for those in their 20s and 30s, www.bustedhalo.com, is one example of a site that offers podcasts. A well-known and well-respected podcast is the weekly "Speaking of Faith" program, www.speakingoffaith.org. Although not specifically Catholic in focus, this Web site brings the spiritual life and practices of people from all walks of life and many religions to the attention of its listeners. In addition, extensive background information can also be found on the site.

New media and spiritual practices. Oil and water? No. Hand in glove? Maybe not yet. But there is a role for new media in putting our spirituality into practice.

[The Pew "Faith Online" can be found at http://www.pewinternet.org/PPF/r/126/report_display.asp. It is a study of the Pew Internet and American Life Project: <http://www.pewinternet.org/index.asp>].

Barbara Radtke, PhD, is Program Manager for C21 Online, an online, adult enrichment initiative offered in collaboration with The Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry.

The Lord's Prayer

Continued from Page 15

From very early, the Lord's Prayer has been at the center of Christian devotion and liturgy, not least at the Eucharist. Most of the great spiritual writers have expounded it and drawn on it. Alongside its regular use as a straightforward prayer, some have employed it as a framework, allowing other concerns to cluster around

its various petitions. Others have used it, like the "Jesus prayer," as a steady, rhythmic subterranean flow, beneath the bustle of ordinary life. It is, above all, a prayer which unites Christians of every background and tradition. It could energize and sustain fresh growth in shared ecumenical witness and life.

N.T. Wright is a noted biblical scholar and Bishop of Durham for the Church of England.

Excerpted from *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Philip Sheldrake, ed., Westminster John Knox Press. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

EDITOR'S NOTE

I wish to acknowledge the exceptional research and technological work of Boston College doctoral student Therese Ratliff, who served as project assistant in the preparation of this issue. I also thank the C21 Center office and C21 Resources Advisory Board for their strong encouragement and support.

— C.M. Griffith

SPRING 2009

UPDATE

FEBRUARY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2009

PANEL

A More Evangelical Catholicism? ■ **Presenter:** Mark Massa, SJ, Gasson Visiting Professor, BC ■ **Respondents** Richard Lennan, Hosffman Ospino, STM ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 5:30–7:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM** and C21 Center*, ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** February 26th

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2009

WORKSHOP

(SNOW DATE: SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2009)

Christian Spiritual Practices: Drawing from the Storeroom Both the Old and the New ■ **Presenter:** Colleen Griffith, STM ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 9:00 am–2:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center, Fee \$15 ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** February 28th

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2009

LECTURE

Spiritual Practices and the Sacramental Worldview of Latino/a Catholicism ■ **Presenter:** Nancy Pineda-Madrid, STM ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** March 1st

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2009

LECTURE

Monastic Spiritual Practices Living in the 21st Century ■ **Presenter:** Abbot Christopher Jamison, OSB, Abbot of Worth; Sussex, England ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** March 9th

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2009

LECTURE

“As if you were in prison with them” (Hebrews 13:3): Learning About Prayer from the Poor ■ **Presenter:** William Reiser, SJ, Holy Cross College ■ **Location/Time:** Devlin Hall 101, 4:30–6:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Center for Ignatian Spirituality and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-1777 ■ **Webcast available:** March 12th

MARCH

TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2009

LECTURE

Old Gold: Reclaiming Some Traditional Spiritual Practices ■ **Presenter:** Thomas Groome, STM ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** March 24th

WEDNESDAYS, MARCH 11, 18, 25 & APRIL 1, 2009

COURSE

Roles & Relationships in Canon Law ■ **Presenter:** James Conn, SJ, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome, Italy ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 5:30–7:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2009

LECTURE

Adoration of the Eucharist Today ■ **Presenter:** John Baldovin, SJ, STM ■ **Location/Time:** Devlin 101, 5:30–7:30 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** March 26th

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2009

WORKSHOP

A Garden of Grace: Spiritual Practices for Family Life ■ **Presenter:** Kathy Hendricks ■ **Location:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 9:00 am–1:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center, Fee \$15 ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** March 31st

TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

LECTURE

The Jesus Prayer: A Pathway to Contemplation in the Eastern Christian Tradition ■ **Presenter:** Khaled Anatolios, STM ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 5:30–7:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center, Fee \$15 ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** April 7th

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2009

LECTURE

Discernment and Life Choices ■ **Presenter:** Clare Walsh, MSHS ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 12:00–2:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** April 9th

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2009

LECTURE

Ups, Downs, and Reinventions: American Catholics and the Practice of the Sacraments ■ **Presenter:** James O'Toole, BC History Department ■ **Location/Time:** TBA, 4:30–6:30 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** April 9th

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2009

LECTURE

Spiritual Practices & Psychological Health ■ **Presenter:** John McDargh, BC Theology Department ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30–7:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** April 13th

APRIL

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2009

LECTURE

Comforting Jesus Christ in Combating Hunger, Sickness, and Poverty ■ **Presenter:** Ken Hackett, Catholic Relief Services ■ **Location/Time:** Fulton Hall 511, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** April 16th

TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2009

PANEL DISCUSSION

What Can Happen on an Ignatian Retreat? ■ **Panelists:** James Carr, SJ, Ann Fowler, Gail O'Donnell, RSCJ, Richard Stanley, SJ ■ **Location:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Center for Ignatian Spirituality and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-1777 ■ **Webcast available:** April 28th

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2009

PANEL DISCUSSION

Women in the Church: North and South ■ **Presenters:** Maria Rosario Saavedra, Maria Clara Bingimer, Jill Ker Conway, Lisa Sowle Cahill ■ **Location/Time:** Shea Room, Conte Forum, 4:30–6:30 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Jesuit Institute and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-8290

THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 2009

BOOK LAUNCH EVENT

Prophetic Witness: Women's Strategies for Reform ■ **Presenter:** Colleen Griffith, STM ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 5:00–6:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** Women's Resource Center and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2009

BOOK LAUNCH EVENT

Two Centuries of Faith: The Influence of Catholicism on Boston, 1808-2008 ■ **Presenter:** Thomas O'Connor, BC University Historian ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 4:30–6:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470

THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2009

FILM

Scenes from a Parish ■ **Location/Time:** TBA, 6:00–8:30 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2009

WORKSHOP

Encountering Christ in Prayer ■ **Presenter:** Ignacio Larranaga, OFM ■ **Location/Time:** 129 Lake Street, 024, STM, 9:00 am–3:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center, Fee \$15 ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Presented in Spanish** ■ **Webcast available:** May 11th

TUESDAY, APRIL 28, 2009

PANEL DISCUSSION

Living Faith Together: Spiritual Practices in Marriage ■ **Presenters:** Timothy P. Muldoon; Suzanne Muldoon; Cynthia Dobrzynski; Daniel Leahy ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsor:** C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** May 12th

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2009

LECTURE

Meeting Jesus Christ in the Search for Peace ■ **Presenter:** Padraig O'Malley, UMass Boston ■ **Location/Time:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce ■ **Webcast available:** May 14th

MAY

TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2009

LECTURE

The Future as (Catholic) History: American Catholicism in Historical Perspective ■ **Presenter:** David O'Brien, Holy Cross College ■ **Location/Time:** Gasson Hall 100, 7:00–9:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** The Jesuit Institute and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-0470 ■ **Webcast available:** Tuesday, May 19th

SATURDAY, MAY 9, 2009

WORKSHOP

Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality ■ **Presenter:** Richard Rohr, OFM ■ **Location:** Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 9:00 am–4:00 pm ■ **Sponsors:** STM and C21 Center ■ **Information:** 617-552-6501 or www.bc.edu/stmce

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