

The Spirit

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From the Archbishop

The Most Reverend
Daniel Gincig



Lectio Divina & Centering Prayer

Keys to Deeper Communion with God

By the Most Reverend Michael Milner

Our planet is waking up, the struggle for liberation is on, and a new world order is emerging which yearns to be free from the political,

ideological and religious constraints of the past. In Christ there is power, wisdom and grace to make the dream a reality. But centuries of religious repression and dogmatism have blinded many people to the liberating power of Christ. They are turning to

non-Christian religions, the new age movement, and secular psychology for guidance.

Granted, the Church has no monopoly on wisdom, and there is much to learn outside of her walls. But we have a responsibility to provide adequate spiritual direction for those who seek it. Our failure to do so has caused many to turn away. Divine union is the root of true liberation, and if the Church does not point the

way, others will. To heal the breach and respond to the needs of modern seekers, we must

revive the Christian contemplative tradition, offering it as a Christ-centered mysticism for all who seek direct communion with God.



Resting in God

Contemplative prayer is simply resting in God, silently absorbed in the Divine Pres-

ence, beyond thoughts, words, and images. Immersed in Divine Love, we forget ourselves, and a process of interior transformation begins, which leads, if we consent, to an abiding state of divine union. In this process, a total restructuring of consciousness occurs. We come to recognize God within us, as the very ground of our being, and simultaneously,

(Continued, page 2)

Grace and Peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

We are very blessed to finally get the first American Old Catholic Church newsletter to the presses. Through both the prosperous times and the recent trials and tragedies of our nation the American Old Catholic Church continues to steadily develop in its mission and scope, for which we give all the thanks and glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A prayer for our times

In these times, my prayer for the bishops, clergy and parishioners of the AOCC is strength, peace and steadfastness in the face of the trial that has beset our nation since September 11. The effects of the war against terrorism will be pervasive, multifaceted and long term. My prayer is that while many of these effects will indeed be negative in character, that the potential positive effects of this confrontation with evil in the world will also be profound and enduring. I pray that any stupor that material prosperity and blind self-confidence has woven into America will be shaken off; and that she will awaken to play the role God has created, empowered and called her to, in this generation, with compassion, fortitude, humility, repentance and clear vision.

Even as we applied ourselves
(Continued, page 3)

(Lectio Divina, continued...)

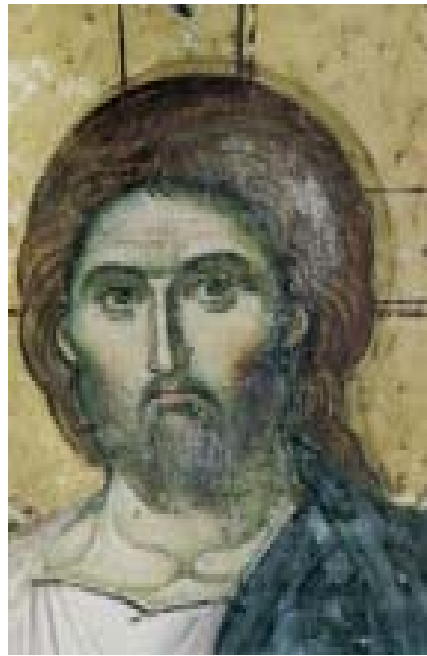
we begin to see God everywhere, in, through, and beyond all that exists. We even discover God's presence in the people we have felt most alienated from, and we find the ability to love and to serve them. Thus, contemplation works to bring healing to a world torn by prejudice, hatred, and greed.

A gift of God

Contemplative prayer is a gift of God, a spontaneous unfolding of the grace of Christ within us, and no technique can produce it. But there are things we can do to prepare ourselves for the gift, instead of waiting for God to do it all. For instance, certain Eastern methods can help lay the groundwork for contemplation by calming the mind and harmonizing the body with the spirit (a possibility long ignored in the West). They can also help us channel and integrate the spiritual energy released in contemplation.

But while eastern methods may prove helpful, contemplation is the fruit of our relationship with Christ, and cultivating that relationship must be our primary focus. One of the best ways to do this is the practice of *lectio divina*, literally "divine reading," a way of prayer used first by both monks and lay people in the first Christian centuries. It begins with reading a passage of scripture ("lectio"), followed by reflection on the text ("meditatio"), leading to spontaneous prayer as we talk to God about what we have read ("oratio"), and finally to interior silence of resting in the presence of God ("contemplatio").

Initially, viewed as the normal experience of anyone practicing *lectio*, by the sixteenth century, contemplation came to be re-



garded as something for only extraordinary souls, and the contemplative tradition was suppressed. This persisted into the twentieth century, when widespread interest in Eastern meditation and other forms of mysticism sparked a contemplative renewal in the Church. From this emerged "centering prayer," a contemporary presentation of an ancient method used by the Desert Fathers to move from the first three phases of *lectio* to the final one of resting in God. It is especially helpful for Western people whose tendency to be too analytical makes it difficult to move from reflection to spontaneous prayer, and from spontaneous prayer to interior silence.

To practice centering prayer:

1. Choose a sacred word of one or two syllables which symbolizes your intention to open and to surrender to the presence of God within. (The word could be Jesus, Yahweh, Abba, Spirit, Peace, Silence, etc.).
2. Sit comfortably, with eyes closed. Silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of

your consent to the presence and action of God within. (You need not repeat it continually, it may fade out, become vague or disappear).

3. If you are caught up in any thought, feeling or perception, very gently release it, and return to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer time, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes, before resuming activity.

You will probably be aware of a continual stream of thoughts and images. This is not an obstacle to centering prayer. Make no attempt to repress them. Just let them go and rest in the presence of God, by returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

Before you decide if centering prayer works, commit yourself to do it twenty minutes, twice a day, for at least a month. Contemplative grace is very subtle, and you may not perceive what is happening during the time of prayer. So do not measure it by the experiences you have in prayer, but by the fruit it bears in your life, the fruit of peace which comes from yielding daily to God's presence at the deepest core of your being.

If we balance the practice of *lectio divina* and centering prayer with faithful participation in the liturgy and Sacraments of the Church, and a life of loving service to others, we will be transformed and become healers of the Church and of the world.

Recommended reading:

Hall, Thelma. *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988)

Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1986). The most excellent book I know of on centering prayer!

From Around the Dioceses...

St. Mary, Queen of Angels Priory, Orthodox City Monks of St. Andrew

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The Order of the City Monks of St. Andrew was established at Ghent, Belgium in 1998. Bishop Hans Berkes was at that time auxiliary to Archbishop Ivo Verbeeck, whose seat is in Breda, Holland. Shortly afterward a completely amicable and pragmatic separation occurred largely over geographical considerations. Bishop Hans still holds jurisdiction in Ghent, as well as warm and valued partnership with the Archbishop.

You may notice that the Order's abbreviation i.e. O.S.M.A. does not have a "C" for City. This is due to the fact that the Flemish word stad was used as the Charter and title was written in that language. The Order was well suited to the already existing human service work that Bishop Hans has been engaged in.

Getting a start

In June of 1980 then "Rev." Hans began a unique program "Teaching, Reaching, and Involving" (TRI Group Corp.). The work which provides parenting classes, counseling support and case management for persons with developmental difficulties and intensive services for at risk youth serves two counties in upstate New York. It has been lifted up as a national model for services to this population. In 1987 it was awarded the Governor's prestigious "Year of the Child" Recognition. At present we serve some one hundred and fifty persons with a staff of 15.

Lay of the Land

In Rochester, "the Priory" is a large building located in an urban setting. It houses offices, meeting rooms. The Priory Shop, and the Chapel of St. Bathildis. In Mount Morris, New York which is 40 miles away, is a large building owned by us. This building houses our offices and meeting rooms. Next door is "Miriam House," a three bedroom home that provides transitional housing for client families. Our programs are funded by state, federal, and county contract sources.

From the Archbishop...

to the stabilization of Europe and Asia following WWII to ensure peace and long health even for our enemies, I pray that America's mission now reaches beyond her use of terrible might against the black evil of terrorism, and pours forth in real, substantive compassion and help for a starving, impoverished world that now turns for hope to hatred and extremism - a world that may one day find its hope in God. I pray that the clergy and parishioners of the AOCC will rise to play its own role in the awakening of our land in our generation to our high calling in Christ, offering a message of hope to all those who long for the fullness of the manifest presence of God in our days, and the appearing of Our Lord in the time to come.

Steady progress

As I said, the work of the AOCC continues steadily. The work has been established for some time in a number of states. Following our first annual conference, Catholic

In 1994, "Rev" Hans was ordained to the priesthood of the Old Catholic Church after sixteen years in the Congregational Ministry (this included thirteen years as a Protestant Chaplain at a Roman Catholic children's home). On February 27th 1998, Father Hans was elevated to the Episcopate at St. Luke's in Breda, Holland.

Another blessing occurred in 1999 when our jurisdiction was incardinated to the American Old Catholic Church under his Grace Archbishop Daniel Gincig.

Convergence 2001, held in Denver, we established two new works in Nashville, Tennessee and Placentia, California. Since then, we have incardinated St. Augustine Catholic Church in Ft. Worth Texas and a new work, Church of the Risen Christ and Holy Spirit, in Cambridge, Wisconsin.

Conference scheduled

We have also scheduled the next Catholic Convergence 2002 for May 15-17 next year. Simultaneous with the conference the College of Bishops will meet. On that occasion, we plan to consecrate Fr. Jim Johnson of Nashville, Tennessee to the Episcopate. Fr. Jim is currently the pastor at Christ Our King Church in Nashville.

In future newsletters we hope to share with you articles on various topics of interest by the various bishops, clergy and parishioners of the AOCC. We also hope to keep you updated and informed of events and happenings in our dioceses and parishes.

**Diocese of St. Thomas,
St. Thomas Catholic
Church**

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Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is doing wonderful things in our community. We have been in our new location one year this month which has provided for continued growth.

Ordinations/graduations

We celebrated the recent ordinations of David and Aurore St. John to the Holy Order of Deacon on Oct 16th and look forward to David's ordination to the priesthood sometime in February or March 2002. Both

David and Aurore received their Masters of Divinity degrees from Sanctus Theological Institute on the day of the ordination, so it was a double blessing. Bishop Bob also received his D. Min. Degree for work submitted and was also made an honorary Fellow of the institute by Sanctus Theological Institute.

Deacon Aurore has been conducting Grief Support Groups on Monday and Tuesday nights, and at the same time on Monday David teaches a bible survey class. Bishop Bob is currently teaching the book of Revelation on Wednesday evenings.

Additional Mass

We are enjoying a good attendance on Saturday evening Mass

which averages between 40-50 people, and Sunday Mass remains pretty constant at 112 but then rises to 120 or more on occasion. This gets pretty tight for us, so on November 4th we are moving to two Mass's on Sunday morning, one 9 a.m. and one at 11 a.m.

Spirit moving

We have been blessed to see the Holy Spirit move after Mass as we have prayed for healing and anointed with oil with really wonderful results taking place in many peoples lives. So we give God the praise, and ask for more.

Blessing to all,

Bishop Bob Burgess

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