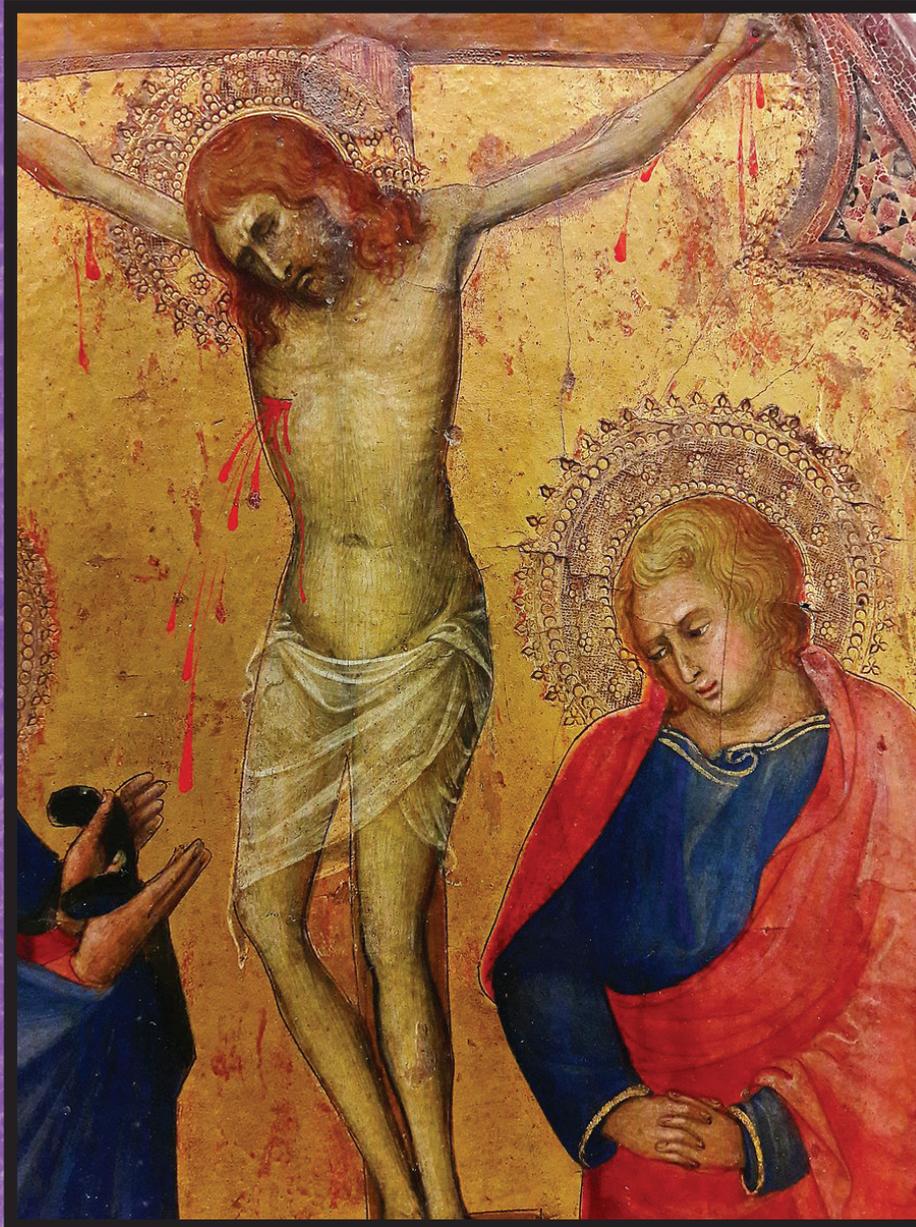
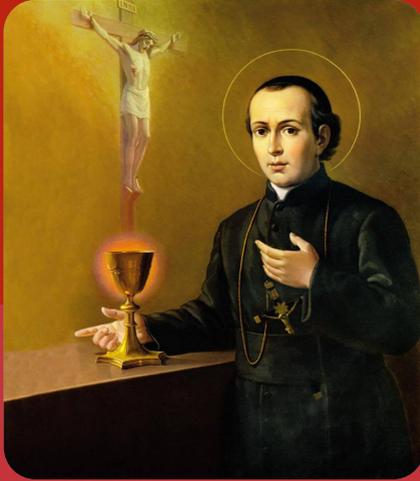


# Lent-Easter



*"God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his Son's cross." (Colossians 1:20)*

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY



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## EDITORIAL

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**T**his issue of *The Precious Blood Family* will likely reach you well into the Lenten season. I trust this has been a time for deepening your prayer life and thereby entering more fully into the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Prayer, of course, admits of all phases of the mystery: in times of pain, discouragement, loss or just plain boredom we will find ourselves praying from our own share in the Lord's cross; and when we are hopeful, consoled, renewed or just plain content with life, we will find ourselves basking in the light of his resurrection. Perhaps most challenging of all are times when we feel abandoned by God or others and we are led into the darkened tomb before the wrappings are unfurled from what seems to be a corpse-like existence. Whatever your experience of prayer might be at the present time, there is something for you in this series of articles written from a variety of perspectives.

On January 21 Pope Francis announced a Year of Prayer in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025 which will begin on Christmas Eve, so this issue's theme has added relevance. In making the announcement, the Holy Father called this "a year dedicated to rediscovering the great value and absolute need for prayer in one's personal life, in the life of the Church, and in the world." May this issue help us all to "intensify" our prayer.

At times, the Paschal Mystery is also found external to our spiritual journey in the commitments and activities that make up our day-to-day lives. This magazine has been published by the Atlantic Province of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood for the past 30 years in a variety of formats and iterations. The difficult decision was made recently by the leadership of the province to discontinue publication at the end of this anniversary year with two more issues planned for 2024. Declining readership and prohibitive costs are, as you might imagine, responsible for the decision. The rhythms of dying and rising are central to the spirituality of the Precious Blood which this magazine has faithfully promoted over three decades and so while some disappointment accompanies this decision, other resources are available in its stead. More on that in the remaining issues.

Meanwhile, in gratitude for the support we have received over the years from our volunteers, contributors and benefactors, I will be offering Mass on the first Friday of every month in 2024 for their intentions.

A blessed Lenten season and joyous Eastertide to all!

*Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S.*

# Spirit in Nature: A Pilgrimage

**Sharon Miller**

We need not travel anywhere to know God. Take notice, however, when a hearkened call for a spiritual retreat inspires true insight from silence and focuses attention on God.

I was drawn to such a retreat held on a remote island named Iona — located in northern Scotland. I immediately registered for the fortuitous offering related to Celtic Christianity — sacred soul, sacred earth. Retreat participants convened for the first time at a restaurant in Edinburgh, Scotland, on the historic Royal Mile, the "spine" of Edinburgh's Old Town. Following convivial introductions and lunch, we boarded the steep steps of a streamlined bus. I slipped into silence and the present moment.

We progressed to the outlying countryside and I noted rolling hills devoid of forest — a nakedness that revealed the natural contours of the topography, draped by an emerald-green ground cover. Similarly, my transient thoughts and distractions ceased with an accompanying emptying — exposing the light and shadow of being.

Bus-ferry-bus-ferry transport led finally to our Iona destination — a small and peaceful island. We deeply inhaled the scent of fresh air and entered a sublime atmosphere. The now familiar undulating terrain was dotted with sheep, brown cows, and scattered residences. Bucolic. The coastline water was turquoise and lapped gently onto the shore and receded with a repeated ebb and flow. I cherished the refined welcome.

Walking was our mode of transportation which greatly contributed to emotional cleansing and clarity. Walking fostered a significant connection with nature and the Holy Spirit. "Be still and know I am God" resonated as a mantra in my heart. Linear perceptions and rambling thoughts dissipated cultivating instead, an awareness of contemplative spaciousness and the "poet" within. I frequently walked and listened to the wind, and deepened relationship with the Divine and natural surroundings. Hildegard of Bingen, Benedictine abbess and patron saint as well as writer, poet, and composer, also responded passionately to the shimmering Light within nature as One Reality.

Exiting from an early morning meditation in the abbey's chapel, several individuals engaged in an animated exchange. Treasuring inner silence, I walked ahead alone until my walking rhythm approached another. Our walking cadences corresponded with a non-verbal appeal for silence. We savored the soothing morning air and the stillness that carried our prayers. Suddenly, I heard a soft weeping but did not interrupt my companion with words or touch. We proceeded and continued to walk in effulgent peace. After breakfast, she conveyed the sacredness of our meditative stroll, breathing in the Holy Spirit with prayerful concentration: Sacred colloquy.

An arduous seven mile holy walk was a scheduled option. Due to a chronic back issue, my discernment was required. "Should I or should I not participate?" My decision vacillated until I gradually shifted to a prayerful attitude and

spiritual yearning. Surrender to God. Spiritual imagination spurred an action related to natural beauty and love of the Divine. My heart uttered, "Yes" to a walk with God. The primal beauty of land and sea stirred relationship with the earth. Grace flowed and carried us, "What," I asked, "is filling me with such lightness of being?"

Our silent walk culminated at the Bay of Columba where we greeted the sea and carefully walked on a stretch of stone covered beach. We dispersed and created personal ceremonies — devoted offerings to God and gratitude for the pristine and stark beauty of the natural environment.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the Jesuit priest and scientist, examined the heart of matter. He explored the potential of living deeply from the heart's essence, remembering that ego serves but is not the center of life. Teilhard proclaimed an evolution of growth toward an ultimate union of Spirit and matter for realizing truth, beauty, and goodness. Might we eventually truly understand the Mystery and the Christ of the Cross. In his words,

*"A sense of the universe,  
a sense of the all,  
the nostalgia that seizes  
when confronted by nature...  
and awareness of the Great Presence."*

The gift of breath. Step by step, we breathed in the essence of God's Love and exhaled offerings of gratitude. Involuntary cycles of respiration nourished purity of heart and the circulation of blood throughout our beingness. I was filled with quiet joy and spaciousness. While silently walking, the sound of breathing and the heart's pulsing rhythm guided alignment with the Divine.

*Sharon Miller is a member of the Rochester Mission House. In 563 AD, an Irish abbot named Columba founded several Irish monasteries. He and twelve companions left Ireland to settle eventually on the Isle of Iona. Columba was known for his writing, prophecy, evangelical style, and agricultural miracles and served as the abbot of the monastic island community for many years. His feast day is June 9th.*



# Moving into Contemplative Prayer

**Shirley Bessette**

My experience of prayer actually began in a very restrictive environment. I was born into a religiously conservative, lower-middle class family, in a small Midwestern town during the summer of the famous D-Day invasion of Normandy—the beginning of the end of World War II. It was a time of solid family values, strong patriotism that acknowledged belief in God, and strict conformity to cultural norms. As a young child and then a teenager, I took for granted the blessing prayers offered at our family table and the words addressed to God by my Sunday school teachers and the pastor of the Southern Baptist church I attended. I heard words that complimented God—words like powerful, great, and holy—words that asked God for things such as the healing of ills, success in undertakings, forgiveness of sins, and especially for the salvation of “souls” (a concept I never quite grasped) so that heaven (whatever and wherever that was) would be assured and, finally, words that thanked God for prayers answered, people healed, and souls “saved.”

This strongly Protestant environment did encourage me to form my own prayers, so I actually began to talk to God in words that were truly mine. In my growing-up years, I felt so alienated and different from my peers—I envied them their wealth, their self-confidence, and all the opportunities of travel and learning that I never had. My parents were strong introverts who had brought their own “baggage” to their marriage; I suffered from a lack of the kind of “mirroring” that would have conveyed in words the message of unconditional affirmation and love I longed to hear. My older, self-confident

sister (my only sibling) seemed not to experience this lack. So I was jealous of her, along with all the others, and was convinced my parents loved her more. I was indeed a lonely child, lost in my fears and insecurities. In this state, I grabbed on to Jesus, pleading for help and protection from the only real friend I felt I had. This Jesus became my confidante—He to whom I entrusted my feelings, my neediness, my insecurities, my wishes that my life would somehow be safe and more like the others whom I envied and admired. I don’t recall that listening was a part of my prayer during those years. Rather, it was mostly a one-sided conversation that was focused on me and my needs. There was only a smaller part of me, less intense, that petitioned for others the good things I asked for myself.

My prayer life flowed from my personality which is “head”-centered. I am an intellectual, having discovered in my grade-school successes that I could receive much-desired affirmation by being a good student, studying hard, and making excellent grades. I graduated co-valedictorian of my high school class and summa cum laude from college. Although I am a “five” on the Enneagram (lover of books and intellectual challenges, objective observer, hider in my cave of thoughts and emotions), I am a strong feeler according to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I think this MBTI preference provides a good rationale for the reason my prayers contained so much feeling, even if the feelings were me-centered. Eventually, though, these feelings for self expanded to include empathy and compassion for others, even those others I didn’t like.

The next movement in my prayer pilgrimage was the step-by-step awareness that I could not grow in my spirituality without listening to what Jesus as God had to say back to me. Indeed, I became aware that God was actually asking something of me! Something was coming toward me as God—some kind of Being—and this Being, this Presence, was asking me to let go of the control which I thought I had over my life, plus all the worrisome anxiety about the future for which I felt so inadequately prepared. I remember walking down a back street in my hometown just before I left for college, uttering the words, "Lord, I give my whole life to you, without reservation, without any strings attached. Do with me what you will." Those words are so sealed in my mind and heart that I have never forgotten them nor the place where I prayed them. True, it would take decades of journeying through a few celebratory events and many desolate places of disillusionment before I would take in and fully integrate the implications of the self-offering I had made. It would take victories of sorts, but mostly it would require vocational struggles, illnesses (both physical and emotional), the loss of my professional identity, the death of two spouses and my best friend, a recovery from a near-fatal car accident, and even the loss of what I thought was my faith, to begin to become the person I was meant to be—the one whose prayer unfolds in the mystery of God and becomes one with that prayer. However, it was those few words uttered on a small back street in a small neighborhood that launched me light years into the journey that would change my life entirely.

It took an actual aha! event to really propel me forward. I remember being the tired mother of two small children (one a newborn with chronic colic) when one day I opened a book by Thomas Merton. This took place after I had converted to Roman Catholicism, having hit "the glass ceiling" of the you-only-have-to-be-saved message that had been imprinted in me from an early age. The book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, contained Merton's own prayer: "Let me seek, then, the gift of silence, and poverty, and solitude, where everything I touch is turned into a prayer: where the sky is my prayer, the birds are my prayer, the wind in the trees is my prayer, for God is all in all." Seriously? Everything could be one's prayer? I had yet to experience prayer as anything other than mostly words. Amazingly, with the words in that book, a seed was sown and the treasure in the field laid bare. I was firmly on course to experiencing prayer as something more.

Time passed. My children grew to adulthood and I retired from my vocation of service as a marriage and family therapist. During this time, my surrendered self encountered Centering Prayer. Day after day, week after week, I began with an hour of this method of prayer, first realizing the frustration that comes from feeling that nothing is happening and that real silence was unobtainable. Gradually, I began to understand that the thoughts that came and went during this time were prayer itself—that God was giving me a way to see myself in a way I could never have accepted before. And what I saw was how judgmental I was, how impatient, how self-centered! Yet, at the same time, I beheld myself entirely in the heart of God. Later I finally came to know that I was loved unconditionally and accepted exactly the way I was. I finally completely belonged! There was nothing I had to achieve, nothing I had to do to merit what God was offering me. Furthermore, there was nothing that separated me from God, not anything or anyone at all. Prayer had at last become that Oneness that Merton had mentioned.

Only with this expansive awareness could I reach out to others with enduring compassion during all the twists and turns of my life. Only with this new joy could I reach the stilling of all my struggles so that there was room for deep silence. So I continued this kind of prayer. After my retirement, when I had joined the Precious Blood family and had become an ASC Associate and Sojourner, I kept in mind the image of St. Maria de Mattias in prayer—even as I myself “centered” each morning in my own room. Experiencing another aha! revelation, I came to picture Christ’s shedding of blood as the act of giving life to the universe. I was beginning to comprehend the absolute oneness of everything through the lens of Precious Blood

spirituality. Although I have not abandoned the practice of verbal prayer, especially that of offering my petitions and thanks to God, and I still regularly participate in community prayer, I have also discovered the treasure. In a way I cannot adequately articulate, I have come to know that I and all others are God’s prayer, and that somehow my breath and God’s breath are one and the same. It is out of the stillness of this rich awareness and sense of united Presence that prayer has become both word and silence for me.

*Shirley Bessette lives in Wichita and is an inter-congregational associate of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, the Sisters of St. Joseph as well as a Sojourner*



# Voice from Tradition

## From her Autobiography

### Teresa of Avila

Of those who are beginners in prayer, we may say, that they are those who draw the water up out of the well--a process which, as I have said, is very laborious; for they must be wearied in keeping the senses recollected, and this is a great labour, because the senses have been hitherto accustomed to distractions. It is necessary for beginners to accustom themselves to disregard what they hear or see, and to put it away from them during the time of prayer; they must be alone, and in retirement think over their past life. Though all must do this many times, beginners as well as those more advanced; all, however, must not do so equally, as I shall show hereafter. Beginners at first suffer much, because they are not convinced that they are penitent for their sins; and yet they are, because they are so sincerely resolved on serving God. They must strive to meditate on the life of Christ, and the understanding is wearied thereby. Thus far we can advance of ourselves--that is, by the grace of God--for without that, as every one knows, we never can have one good thought.

This is beginning to draw water up out of the well. God grant there may be water in it! That, however, does not depend on us; we are drawing it, and doing what we can towards watering the flowers. So good is God, that when, for reasons known to His Majesty--perhaps for our greater good--it is His will the well should be dry, He Himself preserves the flowers without water--we, like good gardeners, doing what lies in our power--and makes our virtues grow. By water here I mean tears, and if there be none, then tenderness and an inward feeling of devotion.

What, then, will he do here who sees that, for many days, he is conscious only of aridity, disgust, dislike, and so great an unwillingness to go to the well for water, that he would give it up altogether, if he did not remember that he has to please and serve the Lord of the garden; if he did not trust that his service was not in vain, and did not hope for some gain by a labour so great as that of lowering the bucket into the well so often, and drawing it up without water in it? It will happen that he is often unable to move his arms for that purpose, or to have one good thought: working with the understanding is drawing water out of the well.

What, then, once more, will the gardener do now? He must rejoice and take comfort, and consider it as the greatest favour to labour in the garden of so great an Emperor; and as he knows that he is pleasing Him in the matter--and his purpose must not be to please himself, but Him--let him praise Him greatly for the trust He has in him--for He sees that, without any recompense, he is taking so much care of that which has been confided to him; let him help Him to carry the Cross, and let him think how He carried it all His life long; let him not seek his kingdom here, nor ever intermit his prayer; and so let him resolve, if this aridity should last even his whole life long, never to let Christ fall down beneath the Cross.

The time will come when he shall be paid once for all. Let him have no fear that his labour is in vain: he serves a good Master, Whose eyes are upon him. Let him make no account of evil thoughts, but remember that Satan suggested



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them to St. Jerome also in the desert. These labours have their reward, I know it; for I am one who underwent them for many years. When I drew but one drop of water out of this blessed well, I considered it was a mercy of God. I know these labours are very great, and require, I think, greater courage than many others in this world; but I have seen clearly that God does not leave them without a great recompense, even in this life; for it is very certain that in one hour, during which our Lord gave me to taste His sweetness, all the anxieties which I had to bear when persevering in prayer seem to me ever afterwards perfectly rewarded.

*St. Teresa of Avila (+1582) was a Spanish Carmelite mystic and reformer. She is known as the "Doctor of Prayer" having been named a doctor of the Church in 1970 by Pope Paul VI. Her feast day is October 15.*

# YOU

## Antonio Selvaggi

I believe in you Lord  
I believe in your blessed peace

I have wiped your face  
With the fabric of my soul

I have carried your cross  
Upon these shoulders of stone

I have held your healing hands  
With a contrite heart

I have put my hand  
Into your spear-torn side

I have cleansed your feet  
With my sorrowful tears

I have coated your bodily wounds  
With the ointment of charity

For your crown of thorns have  
Mercifully pierced my heart O Lord

Forever blessed are we  
In You

*Antonio Selvaggi resides in Toronto, Canada.*

# Scenes from a Dark Night: Entries from a Journal

## Katherine Cappuccio

The spiritual practices and familiar rituals that previously brought peace and fed my soul no longer do so. Everything brings only desolation. I simply cannot read or listen to anything spiritual. So many times, I pulled a book from the shelf, only to return it unopened. There may as well be empty pages inside those covers. Hearing music I previously found prayerful makes me feel separated from God even more. If purgatory is the suffering/pain due to separation from God, then I am there. I know I'm not separated, only that I feel deeply isolated. I can do nothing. The advice of John of the Cross is to be patient and wait upon God. I trust in God's mercy and love. God always meets me right where I am, just as I am, with gentle powerful love. I don't know that I'm truly in a dark night of the soul, but if so, God is in control and good will come of it.

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The fact that I can journal again seems to give me hope. I continue to say yes to God. Another invitation to go deeper. Another dying and rising with Christ. I will persevere because I so believe in the Paschal mystery. My experience consoles me and gives me hope as I wait to be reborn. Great expectations of God as I allow myself to be carried.

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The dark tomb is a place of resurrection. Risen Christ, come! Your presence changes everything. I can imagine what Mary Magdalene felt when she couldn't find you on Easter morning. I feel anxiety and a bewildering unknowing. Like her, I long just to be with you, to gaze into your eyes and hear you call my name. It used to be so simple. Praying by holding up my brokenness. Only you can bring me peace, healing, and wholeness.

\*\*\*

I'm starving for too long. Feed me God. My whole being feels anguish, confusion, utter helplessness. Psalm 63 has been my prayer every day for the past month. "Oh God, you are my God. It is you I seek! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts..., for your love is better than life. My lips shall ever praise you." I believe in God's steadfast love. I believe nothing can ever separate me from God (Rom 8: 38-39).

\*\*\*

Even my prayer feels separated from you. I desire to pray unceasingly with you again. Holy Spirit, who prays in me through Jesus, I desire to participate in your life, to be in the flow of your love, and to go to the world actively loving in response to that living love. Is it true that I'm still praying with you? The awareness of

the flow of God's love is absent, but I trust its presence. Today and as long as the tomb time lasts, I know the flow of God's love is carrying me.

\*\*\*

I am feeling vulnerable. I choose to hold my vulnerability up to God. It opens me to growth and grace. Another day of withdrawal, waiting in silence, yearning for your presence. "Where have you hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning?"

\*\*\*

I feel something is surely changing. I'm feeling almost constantly drawn to pray, drawn to stillness, drawn to praise, drawn to seek you and to be with you. Fr. John told me to trust the liturgical seasons and I do. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, I visualized keeping vigil at the tomb of Jesus, the liminal space between death and resurrection, where spiritually I seem to dwell in the present moment.

\*\*\*

Each of us was sprinkled with the holy water as we renewed our baptismal promises during the Easter Mass. With each "I do", my heartbeat seemed to grow louder and stronger. I bowed my head and closed my eyes, baptized into the death of Christ Jesus. If baptized into his death, then also baptized into his life, his resurrection. I have never experienced a renewal of baptismal promises like this before. The rite remains the same, but I am changed. Trust the liturgical seasons.

\*\*\*

Light bulb moment! Just remembered that *noche oscura* is OBSCURE night. Many spiritual things so obvious to me before have been wiped out like amnesia. Meanings/insights have faded. Memories of spiritual gifts and graces, so evocative before, have also become more obscure. It seems like much more than just the passage of time. Is this part of God's process to free me from attachments and bring a greater freedom for desiring and loving God? Now it just feels like another loss, another layer of the onion that is me stripped away.

It's unclear, obscure, but evidenced by all this writing, God is giving me a respite! Upon awakening, I felt no anxiety at all about anything. I just waited to rest in God's presence silently, in total stillness. Even tonight I will fall asleep with only "being with" this loving presence in my consciousness, without sensing, without imagining. Just me, here, now, open to your Spirit.

\*\*\*

My mind is still wanting to understand, although there is a knowing in my heart that this *noche oscura* is not for me to understand, but rather to undergo. It feels right that at some point I will apprehend, not comprehend, all of this. Sometimes my mind is on a treadmill going nowhere fast. My mind judges and concludes the dark night of the spirit can't be happening to me. But then my



heart firmly exhorts, STOP! Don't try to fix this. Don't interfere in what God is doing. Simplify. Relinquish. Take away. Leave behind. Empty out. Open up. God is making space for God in God's time to fill me. This is a vast, unknowable, hidden, sacred mystery, and I desire to participate in it.

\*\*\*

My breath prayer: breathing in ...more of you and breathing out ...less of me. More of you, less of me (Jn 3:30). May it be done to me.

Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." Jn 20: 22. Attraction to, drawn to the breathing of the Spirit. Breath unseen, vital for life; Breathe, Breathe on me, in me, through me. Breathe with me until it is one breath.

\*\*\*

My grandchildren were delighted to learn the autumn colors have been in the leaves all along – hidden under the green of the chlorophyll. In the fall, the green pigment breaks down. This loss reveals the flaming reds, oranges, and yellows we see. The breaking down and clearing out of the dark night similarly reveals a luminous truth. God is present and has been present all along. We have always been together. My belief has become an unwavering certitude of the indwelling of God in each of our souls. We are living tabernacles.

*Katherine Cappuccio is a member of the Rochester Mission House.*

# Making Space

**Craig Bullock**

If we are honest with ourselves, we will readily admit that we become easily infatuated with things other than God which leave very little space in our minds and hearts. These infatuations include politics, people, and our own personalities. When there is no space for God, our egos, prejudices, and distortions dominate the landscape of our lives and we suffer unnecessarily.

Spiritually speaking, our goal is to develop a degree of interior space. Interior space is noticing the space between objects, the enveloping space between our thoughts and feelings. To the degree that we notice and inhabit this interior space, we are free from our conditioning, destructive patterns, the tortuous voice of the ego, limiting self-images, and so forth. Living from this interior space helps to dissolve the imaginary boundaries between God, ourselves, and our fellow human beings and brings us into the experience of sacred spaciousness, God's unbounded presence.

Making space for God's presence in our day-to-day lives is really very simple; it is about offering everything that we do—even our most mundane activities—to God as an offering of love. Luke's Gospel tells us, "Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites (pennies), So He said, "Truly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had."

Make everything that you do today, and I do mean everything, an offering to God: your work, chores, interactions with people, and family relationships. Offer them all to God with the purity of a child's heart. If you do this, everything you do becomes sacred, and your mind and heart become a temple of the living God. In this way, we make space for God in the affairs of our everyday lives.

Spiritual maturity necessarily involves making space for God, even within our so-called imperfections. Our failures and our feelings of shame comprise one of our greatest challenges in making space for God. We all have failures in our lives, and these failures tend to constrict our heart's spaciousness and cause us to lose the sense of God's presence.

Rather than hiding in shame, which only keeps us stuck, we would be wise to offer our failings to God and our confessor. Sincerity is essential. We must approach God with childlike simplicity, saying, "Lord, I offer this failure to you just as I offer my successes, with nothing but heartfelt love and detachment.

All the great mystics of the world testify to God's existence. In various ways, they say that God manifests in creation as the organizing energy of truth, beauty, and goodness, and that the essence of these manifestations is infinite love. Furthermore, these very same mystics tell us that we are meant to live our lives in conscious communion with God because we only reach our full potential as human beings when our lives are married to the Divine. In other words, we have been created in

God's image and are capable of downloading heaven's purest grace and highest wisdom. Such a life is good, creative, meaningful, joyous, loving, and enlightened.

However, because of the reality of free will, God cannot force Himself/Herself on us. We must aspire to living a life of loving communion with God. We will only experience such a life to the extent that we aspire to do so. I do not say this in a judgmental spirit, but as a statement of truth. We have all had many lives wherein we were enamored with God's toys; this is just part of the process of our spiritual evolution. But sooner or later, we grow weary of the toys

and we desire the Toymaker. Only then do we make the profound and loving choice to come home to God. When we make this choice, heaven takes notice. In fact, Jesus tells us that heaven rejoices. Then, help from the unseen world comes to us in myriad ways. God's saints, sages, and angels come to our aid, and we never walk alone!

*Craig Bullock is the Spiritual Director of the Assisi Institute in Rochester NY.*



# Prayer in a Difficult Time

## Philip Smith C.P.P.S.

*My son, if you aspire to serve the Lord,  
prepare yourself for an ordeal.  
Be sincere of heart, be steadfast,  
and do not be alarmed when disaster comes.  
Cling to him and do not leave him,  
So that you may be honoured at the end of your days.  
Whatever happens to you, accept it,  
and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient,  
since gold is tested in the fire,  
and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation.  
(Ecclesiasticus 2:1-5; Jerusalem Bible)*

On the evening of 1 February 1976, at First Vespers for the Feast of the Presentation, at the chapel of Precious Blood Seminary in Liberty, Missouri, two of us were definitively incorporated as Missionaries of the Precious Blood. Jack McClure and I had been preparing for this event for months. We chose as our first reading the entire second chapter from the Book of Ecclesiasticus, all 23 verses.

As I sat that evening listening to the reading, it never occurred to me how true those words were. In all my years since 1976, I never imagined that I would be in the position I am in now. Though living in a very wonderful place, Niagara Falls, and with some wonderful people, I have quit trying to “figure it all out.” None of this is clear and sometimes this is the best way. Leave it as it is.

In my ponderings I have remembered that in the seventies, Dr. Elizabeth Kübler Ross, MD wrote a

book entitled *On Death and Dying* in which she described various stages that one experiences in facing death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. They may all appear mixed up and sometimes appear together. For example, anger and depression, denial and acceptance. God does not want me to be unhappy.

In 1976 I told God that I wanted to be a happy priest or no priest. Every community house in which I dwelt has been wonderful. I made connections, established relationships, contacts, was happy and enthused. Without those connections, how could I pray, how could I dialogue with a God? Would God have abandoned and left me? What would I say to this God when I knew that God knew what was happening, anyway? “In God alone be at rest my soul, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock, my salvation, my fortress, never shall I falter.” (Ps 62, 6-7, Revised Grail Psalms)

This is the season of Lent, a time of letting go, a time of purging, a time in which I am to clean not only the boxes that contain the story of my life, but my own soul. As difficult as it is to purge the boxes which contain photos, (and each photo has a story), it is far more difficult to cleanse the soul. With each photo I stop, reflect, and meditate upon what the photo captures. I make it into a type of prayer. Is this enough? Of course not!

Though I pray on a daily basis, Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Night Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, I miss the extra readings that the Office of Readings provides. But I am not yet there. I hope I will be some day in the near future. St. Thomas Aquinas said that “wonder is the desire for knowledge.” Can I not apply this to my own spiritual life and state as I wonder? “O God, you are my God, at dawn I seek you, for you my soul is thirsting.” (Ps 63, 2) The spiritual life is not the end, but a journey and each incident, each facet of that life, has meaning and gives me depth and I am renewed.

Lent also has this sense of renewal. Without the renewal, what use is all my purging, what sense does it make? We need the Holy Spirit to perfect and renew us... make us into a new person. As Didymus of Alexandria once said, “Since we are vessels of clay, we must first be cleansed in water and then hardened by spiritual fire.”

Perhaps it is time for me to state what prompted all this. In February 2023, I noticed heart palpitations and so I immediately got out of bed, took an aspirin and smeared myself in

Vick’s, made a mental note to call the doctor in the morning, then went back to bed. The next day, I was able to see the doctor who prescribed a series of tests, gave me some medication and since then I have been on medications that have restored my life. I have regained some of my vitality. I have lost over 50 pounds. I am fine but, of course, needed a new wardrobe. It was thought best for me to have some “rest and relaxation” here in Niagara. I have been here now for over 6 months.

As I mentioned in the opening passage:

*Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation.*  
(Ecclesiasticus 2: 4-5; Jerusalem Bible)

*Fr. Philip Smith is a Missionary of the Precious Blood, Atlantic Province.*



# Liturgical and Devotional Prayer: Similarities, Differences, Relationship

## Joyce Ann Zimmerman C.P.P.S.

St. Teresa of Avila wrote in *The Book of Her Life* that "... prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends" (8,5). What an inviting thought: that we enjoy an intimate enough friendship with God to want to share. There are many, many ways we can share with others, among them might be to have a conversation, sit in silence together, ask for help, work out our worries, or share a good laugh. This is no less true of our relationship with God. Prayer helps us consciously to let God into our hearts, to develop an intimate friendship with God, to open ourselves to God in all our strengths and weaknesses. We can have no relationship with God without prayer. Prayer allows us and God to be present to each other in familiar, intimate friendship.

The two kinds of prayer we want specifically to consider in these brief remarks are liturgical prayer and devotional prayer. Liturgical prayer is the celebration of the seven Sacraments and the Liturgy of the Hours (the Divine Office or Breviary). It is a structured prayer given to us by the Church and regulated by the Church. Liturgical prayer in its very celebration makes present the Paschal Mystery, the whole saving mystery of Christ. For this reason it is the most important prayer; it is the "summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; it is also

the fount from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 10).

Devotional prayer, on the other hand, is much broader and allows us many choices with respect to format and style. Examples would be recited prayers such as the Rosary or various litanies, meditation or mindfulness, contemplation, *lectio divina* (divine reading, usually of Sacred Scripture), centering prayer, shared prayer, or simply talking with God. Devotional prayer is about as open-ended as prayer can get. As we grow spiritually, our devotional prayer will probably adjust and change to reflect a new closeness to God.

While all prayer is addressed to God, not all prayer is the same. Liturgical and devotional prayer are similar in some ways and very different in other ways; yet the two are nevertheless related to each other.

### *Similarities*

Liturgical and devotional prayer share two important similarities. First, both are very personal. That is, they arise from the hearts of human beings. They express our distinct individuality, needs, and sentiments. Neither prayer can be impersonal or cold; that is not how friends relate to each other. We bring to both kinds of prayer our very lives: our personal

needs, our private aspirations, our deepest longings. Our prayer reflects who we are and where we are in life. Both kinds of prayer are grounded in the reality in which we live.

Second, both are essential. Some people are very faithful about attending Sunday Mass, but don't pray often enough at other times of the week. In fact, if we seldom think about and raise our hearts to God during the week, then it will be very challenging to encounter the Presence of God during Liturgy. Devotional prayer helps us condition ourselves to God's abiding Presence. That divine Presence is celebrated in a special way during liturgical prayer, where we immerse ourselves in the saving mystery of Christ in order to live it every day.

### *Differences*

There are a number of significant differences between liturgical and devotional prayer. The most important difference is that only liturgical prayer makes present the Paschal Mystery in its fullness. Each time we celebrate Liturgy, we enter into the dying and rising, self-emptying and Life-receiving saving mystery that captures the very reason Jesus came to dwell with us. We are first plunged into this mystery at Baptism (see Romans 6:3-4). Each liturgical celebration—especially the celebration of the Eucharist—draws us deeper into this mystery which shapes our very Christian identity. This is why the Church is so exacting about how Liturgy is celebrated. Within the very structure and flow of Liturgy, the Paschal Mystery is made present. Not

so with devotional prayer, which is why the Church's regulation of it is not so strict. Obviously, if some devotional prayer is not theologically sound, we ought not to use it. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* offers these criteria:

Popular devotions are to be highly endorsed, provided they accord with the laws and norms of the Church ... But these devotions are to be so fashioned that they harmonize with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since, in fact, the liturgy by its very nature far surpasses any of them (no. 13).

In contrast, while devotional prayer may help us meditate on the Paschal Mystery, evaluate our living of it, and help us to appreciate how the Paschal Mystery is central to our own daily living, devotional prayer in itself does not plunge us into this mystery. This assists devotional prayer to express individual affectivity with greater ease.

Another difference is that while Liturgy is the source and summit of Christian living in its very celebration, devotional prayer simply flows to and from it. Devotional prayer, then, helps us to hunger for the celebration of Liturgy, especially Sunday's weekly celebration of the Resurrection at Mass. It follows from this that Liturgy is always communal, because it is the whole Body of Christ united with Christ the Head who celebrates Liturgy. While devotional prayer may be communal, in most people's lives it is usually private prayer when alone.

By its very nature Liturgy is rhythmic and familiar, ritually unfolding in the same way at each celebration. For example, at Sunday Mass, although the music varies, the presidential prayers change, readings change, the homily is different from celebration to celebration, and there are choices for the Eucharistic Prayer, nonetheless the basic rhythmic structure of the Liturgy remains the same. Not so with devotional prayer, which may be sporadic, responding to our busy daily schedules. Both the time and place of devotional prayer can change. We can pray anywhere and at any time.

### ***Relationship***

Neither Liturgy nor devotional prayer can be very fruitful if either one is missing or weak. Without liturgical prayer drawing us more deeply into the saving mystery of Christ, devotional prayer runs the risk of shifting us away from Liturgy, the very core of our faith. Although liturgical prayer is shaped by the Church as an enactment of the saving Mystery of Christ, we ourselves are free to shape our devotional prayer to suit our distinct spiritual needs. At the same time we must be careful that we don't shape our devotional prayer to be so spiritually satisfying that we no longer hunger for liturgical prayer.

As we know from our human friendships, there are many different ways to relate to each other. So it is with our friendship with God. Liturgical and devotional prayer offer us a diversity of ways to pray. The communal requirement for liturgical prayer offers us community support

that can draw us into Liturgy's Paschal Mystery rhythm even when we are worried or upset, exhausted or distracted, frustrated with life or overwhelmed by demands. The solitude and silence that devotional prayer offer us can draw us to surrender to God's pervading Presence simply to be with our Beloved.

We might think of devotional prayer as our "practice" in opening ourselves to God's Presence so that we are better able to celebrate Liturgy with total surrender to God's transforming action. The more we condition ourselves to live in God's Presence, the more are we able to encounter God not only in devotional prayer, but especially in liturgical prayer. Liturgical and devotional prayer are necessarily related to each other. We need both kinds for a healthy spiritual life that reflects the satisfying, loving, and intimate friendship we are called to have with God.

*Sr. Joyce Ann Zimmerman is a Sister of the Precious Blood and director of the Institute for Liturgical Ministry in Dayton, Ohio.*



## OUR APOSTOLATE



## C.P.P.S. MISSION PROJECTS

C.P.P.S Mission Projects is a charity founded by the congregation of Missionaries of the Precious Blood, Atlantic Province. Its mission is to spread the Good News that Christ has redeemed us all through the shedding of his Most Precious Blood, by helping those in need.

Since 1976, C.P.P.S. Mission Projects has focused working toward the uplifting of human dignity, and toward better living conditions of Tanzanians. Our missions in Africa support 2.5 million people a year. We help the people and communities we serve lift themselves and their families out of poverty. We partner with donors and the local people to develop solutions to tackle challenges facing them like poverty, lack of access to clean water and education, climate change, economic empowerment, and food security.

We are based in Dodoma-Tanzania and our approach to tackling problems is inspired by the flavor of the Gospel and the Spirituality of the Precious Blood. Our missions give priority to the poor, children, girls and women. May we always be ready to help the poor and the vulnerable. Find us at [cppsmissionprojects.ngo](http://cppsmissionprojects.ngo)

*A Lenten Recipe from St. Gaspar del Bufalo*

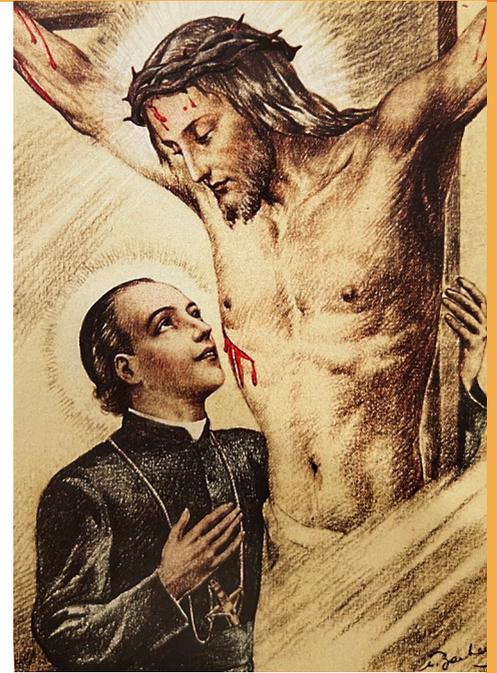
**Take the root of faith  
the leaves of hope  
the rose of charity  
the violet of humility  
the lily of purity  
the absinthe of contrition  
the myrrh of mortification  
the wood of the Cross  
tie them all together in a small packet  
with the thread of resignation,  
put them on to boil by the fire of divine love  
held in the urn of prayer,  
with the mystic wine of holy joy,  
and mineral water of temperance,  
securely covered with the lid of silence;  
let it stand thus for the morning in the serenity  
of meditation;  
take a cup of it in the morning and in the evening,  
and you will enjoy spiritual health.**

*(Letters; June 19, 1825)*



## UNIO SANGUIS CHRISTI

Founded in 1851 by the Ven. Giovanni Merlini, third Moderator General of the Missionaries of the Precious Blood, and approved by Pope Pius IX, the Union serves to promote the spirituality of the Blood of Christ through a variety of activities.



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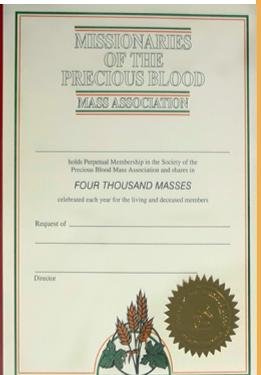
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at 416-653-4486 or through the Atlantic Province website. The suggested offering is \$25.00 plus \$4.00 postage if the certificate is mailed.

You may also access the website - [preciousbloodatlantic.org](http://preciousbloodatlantic.org) - click on Donations for more choices, like requesting a single Mass, a Mass Association or make a donation for spreading the spirituality of the Precious Blood

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For information, contact Precious Blood Vocations at 416-829-6717 or e-mail [alareyab@yahoo.ca](mailto:alareyab@yahoo.ca).



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