

Quiet Day 9 November 2024

“Think on These Things . . . the Contemplation of Beauty”

9:30 - 9:40	<u>Introduction</u>
9:40 - 10:40	<u>First Conference</u>
9:40 - 10:00	First session of reflections on the theme of the day
10:00 - 10:20	First session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church grounds. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
10:20 - 10:40	First session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 10:18 to 10:20. At 10:20 we will intone the bell and begin silent prayer.]
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10:40 - 11:40	<u>Second Conference</u>
10:40 - 10:55	Second session of reflections on the theme of the day
10:55 - 11:18	Second session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
11:20 - 11:40	Second session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 11:18 to 11:20. At 11:20 we will intone the bell and begin praying.]
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11:40 - 12:00	<u>Third Conference</u>
11:40 - 11:55	Third session of reflections on the theme of the day
11:55 - 12:18	Third session for thoughtful, conversational prayer: Restrooms, refreshments, stroll the grounds, reflect in the church. The entire campus is open to us. Please maintain quiet. Please keep talking to a minimum and please talk quietly. Thank you!
12:20 - 12:40	Third session of Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary. (Or thoughtful meditation in the Music Center.) [Enter silently from 12:18 to 12:20. At 12:20 we will intone the bell and begin praying.]
12:40 - 1:00	<u>Eucharist. All are welcome.</u>

That We May Know God . . .

St. Paul, writes his “letter of joy” from prison to the church in Philippi. His encouragement to “think on these things: all that is true, noble, right . . .” teaches us that even in the midst of the greatest challenges our hearts and minds find deepest rest in contemplation. Celtic poet John O’Donohue opens the gift of contemplation through a recognition of these virtues as named by Paul as ultimately stemming from *beauty* – and unfolds our understanding of God as Beauty. We will prayerfully consider together the active work of God in calling us to Godself through beauty in its many forms.

God as Beauty

First Conference - Beauty as Presence

*May the touch of your skin register the beauty of the otherness that surrounds you.
May your listening be attuned to the deeper silence where sound is honed to bring distance home.
May the fragrance of a breathing meadow refresh your heart and remind you that you are a child of the earth.
And when you partake of food and drink, may your taste quicken to the gift and sweetness that flows from the earth.
May your inner eye see through the surfaces and glean the real presence of everything that meets you.
And may your soul beautify the desire of your eyes that you may glimpse the infinity that hides in the simple sights
that seem worn to your usual eyes.*

From Benedictus, by John O'Donohue

Second Conference – Attending to Beauty through the Landscape of Earth and Soul

“I know that it makes a huge difference, when you wake in the morning and come out of your house, whether you believe you are walking into dead geographical location, which is used to get to a destination, or whether you are emerging out into a landscape that is just as much, if not more, alive than you – but in a totally different form! If you go towards it with an open heart and a real, watchful reverence, you will be absolutely amazed at what it will reveal to you.”

“If you take time not as calendar product, but as actually the parent or mother of presence, then you see that in the world of spirit, time behaves differently. There are huge gestations and fermentations going on in us that we are not even aware of.”

From Beauty by John O'Donohue

Third Conference – “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust” – Finding Beauty in Life and in Death

*If we could see time as a circle, we might be better able to see how birth and death belong within the one embrace. Could it be that where we come from at birth is where we return to at death? If the light and beauty of who we are was dreamed and created in that realm before birth, then death is surely bringing us home to the house of our eternal belonging. If everything we are is a gift from that home of dream, then our return will be a celebration of all we have awakened, realized and lived. Perhaps, deep within us, there will be no great surprise at our return, for there may be a silent dimension of the heart which through all the years has never forgotten where it came from. **Perhaps this is why beauty touches us so deeply. When beauty touches us, we remember who we are. We realize that we have come from the homeland of beauty . . . this is the unseen gift that death will bring – death is a refinement that transfigures us in order that we may dwell completely in eternal presence. Resurrection means that the intimacy and mystery of the individual life continues in transfigured form. We will be ourselves. We will recognize each other and we will be together, reunited for eternity.***

From Beauty by John O'Donohue

Nothing could be more down to earth or more humbling than this Boundless Presence, which just is. It doesn't have to prove itself. It doesn't have to acquire anything. It just is

The essence of Centering Prayer is consenting to God's presence and action within. The seven stages of Centering Prayer outlined below dispose us towards ever-deepening self-surrender. These seven stages might be called the process of Centering Prayer. I summarize them as follows:

1. **Silence** is consenting to God's presence – what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God – within and among us. External silence supports this movement.
2. **Solitude** flows from interior silence. Disregarding our interior dialogue leads to “resting in God” (St Gregory the Great) and to consciousness without particular content.
3. **Solidarity** is the awareness of increasing oneness with God, with the whole human family, and with all of creation.
4. **Service** is following the ever-present inspirations of the Spirit not only during the time of formal prayer, but in the details of everyday life. It is a spontaneous expression of solidarity: God in us serving God in others.
5. **Stillness** is what Jesus called “prayer in secret” (Matt. 6:6). This is the experience of God's presence beyond rational concepts, beyond preoccupation with one's personal thoughts and desires.
6. **Simplicity** is the integration of contemplation and action, a growing capacity to live in the midst of duality – the ups and downs of daily life – without losing the non-dual perspective. Contemplation is not the same as action. They are distinct but they are not separate.
7. **Surrender** is the total gift of self to God, a movement from union to unity. It marks the beginning of what Jesus calls “eternal life” as an abiding state.

As we are moved through the stages of grace, our perspective changes in regard to Centering Prayer, the contemplative life, and God. In between the steps there may be delightful plateaus as well as dark nights, all of which have physical, mental, and spiritual consequences. The most transforming dark nights seem to be primarily psychological states, and the darkest of all is the purely spiritual suffering that arises from just being a creature, apparently unequipped for the hazards and trials of this life, but going through them with invincible confidence in God's love.
