

## Prayer of the Heart

A good introduction to a contemplative prayer is called the Prayer of the Heart. The different styles of contemplative prayer all have the same intention. It is to move away from years of trying to pray correctly, trying to find the right words and even knowing what to pray. The invitation here is to enter into the mysterious presence of God, and gradually become aware that this presence already surrounds us and is within us, without our needing to do anything. We just need to awaken to it.

In the early stages of contemplation, we are learning to detach ourselves from the busy mind that is always thinking, planning and worrying. We need to find a compassionate position and observe our repetitive thoughts. We repeat a thought every 3 minutes! But if we can practice watching these thoughts like an observer, we can gradually develop an objective freedom from our thoughts and quiet down the thinking mind. We don't judge ourselves. Or get impatient that nothing is happening, or worry that we are not doing it right. In the prayer of the heart, we focus our thoughts on our breath, not trying to control our breathing, but just observing the gentle rhythm of our breath. As we become more settled, we will feel the beat of our heart. We then experience a deeper stillness where we are more able to be aware of God's presence.

Romans 8:14 says: ' For all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of sonship. It is the spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit.'

We are part of God and we see God from a new, united perspective.

So in contemplative prayer, we are finding our own inner witness to the already present spirit.

### The Practice

- It is helpful to find a time during the day to enter into a time of quiet. It's a good idea to sit comfortably with legs uncrossed and hands resting gently on your lap so that you are not distracted by needing to move your body. Consciously let go of the stress and tension that you feel in your body. Sometimes a good stretch first can help. Close your eyes gently.
- Breathe in and as you breathe out, relax your shoulders... arms... neck... stomach... face. Breathe in, now breathe out the stress and tension you are holding.
- Be aware of any sounds in the distance but don't think about them. Let them pass over you.
- Now be aware of your breathing, gently in and out.
- Now feel the gentle rhythm of your heart. Be present to this growing stillness within.
- Try practicing this technique for 10 minutes and observe how you begin to feel more relaxed and still. As you practice this more regularly, gradually increase the time to 20 minutes.

– Margaret Loftus