

# Prayer of the Heart

Different styles of contemplative prayer have the same intention. They are to help you move away from years of trying to pray correctly, to a deeper awareness of God.

(1 Cor. 13:11) When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me.

The invitation here is to grow in our relationship with God. The child like way of prayer may no longer fit a maturing faith.

Immature religion can limit a growing relationship with God. We can become very rigid, misuse the gospel and think we have all the answers. We then feel the need to convince everyone else that we are right.

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God but it is important to keep in mind that it is not we who do the lifting. In every kind of prayer, the raising of the mind and heart to God can be the work only of the Spirit. In prayer inspired by the Spirit, we let ourselves flow into God's abiding presence.

Richard Rohr is a Franciscan priest and an international speaker and author of many books. He is also the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico. His emphasis is always on allowing God to mature our faith and transform us. He speaks about our belief systems, which are necessary to form us. A conservative approach is a good place to start and will give us a faith tradition, but we can become very rigid in our beliefs. We can all recognize what happens when churches of all denominations and other religions become so caught up in trying to prove who is right and who is wrong.

Belief systems don't ask anything of us. Our behaviour doesn't have to change. What changes us is when we begin to know things to be real and true for ourselves.

This inner knowing is helped by the practice of contemplative prayer. In contemplative prayer we are moving away from the thinking mind and the feelings that go with them. It is said that 90% of our thinking is repetitive. The Buddhists call it monkey mind. We jump from thought to thought and going around and around and back. Most people do not **have** thoughts and feelings. The thoughts and feelings **have** them. It is what the ancients called 'being possessed'.

When we enter contemplative prayer we are moving away from our thoughts.

We become more like the objective observer, letting our thoughts come and go but not engaging in them. As we practice this way of praying, our thoughts become less. We stop judging ourselves with questions like 'Am I good?' "Am I holy?" "Is my technique proper?" Those thoughts gradually fall away. The self-conscious watcher, preoccupied with doing it right, just forgets the self (Mark 10:18) Prayer then becomes less about self – observation and more about 'falling into the hands of the living God.' (Heb 10:31)

p. 105 "Everything belongs" Richard Rohr

To enter into a time of quiet believe that you are received by God just as you are. The Prayer of the Heart helps us to recognize that our heartbeat becomes one with the heartbeat of God. And in a mystical way we are all connected to this heartbeat. When we enter prayer in this way, we are held together in love. And we experience God's love for us and our love for God and each other.

So begin by sitting comfortably, gently closing your eyes and focusing on your breathing. Breathe in deeply and as you exhale, breathe out the tension you are holding in your body. Breathe in, letting go of your stress as you exhale.

Gradually feel your body relax, feel the beat of your heart and feel the Presence of the universal heartbeat!

– Margaret Loftus