

Meditatio Talks

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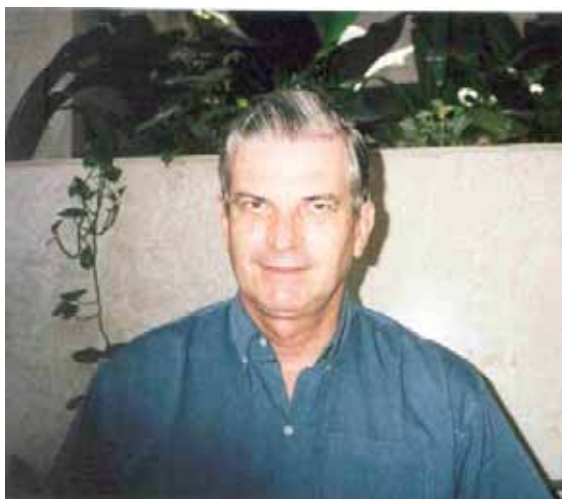
The Prayer that Jesus Taught

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FR GERRY PIERSE (1940-1999) was a Redemptorist priest who came from County Kerry in Ireland. He went to the Philippines in 1961 as a seminarian at the age of 21 and was ordained there in 1964. In the early years of his ministry, he served mainly in the rural missions. Later he was parish priest in three Redemptorist city parishes before he became prefect of the major seminary.

In later years, he specialised in giving retreats. This apostolate coincided with his moving deeper into contemplative prayer. He was greatly inspired by the teaching of Benedictine monk John Main, a fellow Irishman. From his own experience in the practice of Christian Meditation, he formed and led meditation groups in his parishes and in the provincial prison.

Gerry Pierse had a gift with words that made his teaching always simple, clear and effective. In a short period of time, he produced five books to help others tread and persevere on the path of Christian Meditation. When he gave talks on meditation, he had the extraordinary gift of illuminating the teaching with engaging stories, amusing anecdotes, and self-deprecating humour. The meditation communities in the Philippines, Ireland, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia and Mauritius benefited greatly from his teaching. This series of the *Meditatio Talks* is compiled from recordings of his talks to meditation groups in those regions.

Gerry Pierse died on 12 July 1999 from a swimming accident in Queensland, Australia. His body was found on the rocks of the Gold Coast. There is something that inspires awe in the way he returned to the Lord. For Gerry, the Sea and the Rock was home. The sea and the rocks were the place where the Celtic monks of old found silence and God. This was particularly true of those living near Skelligs in the South of Kerry. We pray that he rests now with God, his Rock and his strength.

1. Introduction

I would like to reflect with you on the way of Christian Meditation. It is the way re-discovered and taught by Dom John Main and which I have found to be very helpful.

It is a discipline to be followed, not a technique to be mastered. It is a way to be followed, a journey to be set out on, not a destination to be reached once and for all.

I suggest that you listen to one of these reflections before your twice-daily meditation.

Having listened, let go of all thought, and just be in silence, saying your prayer word.



2. The Main Points of John Main's Teaching

During the past forty years many Christians have been looking for a deeper dimension, a more spiritual, a more interior dimension to their lives. Because of this many have flocked from different parts of the world to listen to spiritual masters in India. Many have attended classes on Transcendental Meditation and on Zen. During this period one man has stood out as a Christian teacher of meditation. That is John Main. To him goes the credit for re-discovering and re-teaching the rich Christian tradition for meditation and interiority that have existed since apostolic times. He believed that the beginning of all renewal in the Church should be a contemplative renewal. According to Bede Griffiths, John Main is the best spiritual guide in the Church today.

What were the main points of the tradition that John Main picked up and reformulated for us today?

The first of these concerns ourselves. Each of us is disunited within ourselves. St Paul was aware of this disunity when he said, "I cannot explain what is happening to me, because I do not do what I want, but on the contrary, the very things I hate." (Romans 7:15) This lack of silence and interior harmony is all the more evident in today's world of radio, television, and consumerism. We are given little opportunity to live within ourselves or to be silent. We seldom live in the present moment. We are worried about the past, or planning for the future. We are distracted by our desires and illusions. St Augustine said "Man must first be restored to himself that, making in himself as it were a stepping-stone, he may rise thence and be borne up to God." So a quiet period each day in which we do not try to do anything but be aware of God's unfolding presence is essential to restore us to ourselves. It is important for us to "be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46)

Second, our God is a God of love who so loved the world that he sent his only son, not to condemn the world, but to give it life (John 3:16) Our God is a Father/Mother who loves us 'no matter what'. This is clearly shown in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Faced with this God we need to accept creatureliness. It is interesting that our First Parents in the Garden of Eden were tempted by Satan to "become like God", to reject their creatureliness. The Devil also tempted Jesus in the desert to work miracles and so reject humanness or creatureliness.

Creatureliness is accepting that God and not ourselves, our ego, is the centre of reality. We do this by the poverty of the single word, the prayer word, the mantra. By continuing to say the mantra we take the search light of consciousness off ourselves. As we remove ourselves from the centre of the stage God finds his true place there.

Third, God loved us especially in Christ his beloved son. Each time we meditate we enter into the death and resurrection of Christ. He gave himself over to the will of his Father even unto death. In meditation we let go of all, we die. As we die to the self, the ego, we are reborn into Christ.

God's life is already ours. We are temples of his Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is already praying in our hearts, crying "Abba Father" (Romans 8). Apart from this

Spirit we do not know how to pray. When we are present at our own centre through the mantra we are into the flow of communication between the Father and the Spirit, we are in the prayer of Christ himself, pure prayer. We do not have to seek God's presence, he is already within us, we must just realise it. "The Kingdom of God is within you."

The process of transformation is gradual, it needs perseverance. It takes time and discipline to unhook the ego. It needs saying the mantra twice a day everyday for the rest of our lives. It is a pilgrimage, a journey. The important thing is to begin; to begin soon and then to begin each time you sit down to meditate; to begin again each time you become distracted.

There is no argument to convince one of the validity of the claims of meditation. Talking about it only delays the process. Experience is the great convincer. When you have tried it for some time you will find a rightness about it that will make you know that it is really prayer. Possessiveness is our great weakness. This can even be *spiritual possessiveness*. When we pray with images and thoughts we are trying to grasp God who is beyond grasp. We may be giving ourselves nice feelings or satisfying thoughts. In meditation we grasp nothing, we want nothing. If something extraordinary happens in meditation put it aside, it is a distraction. We apply the words of the Lord, "Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me." (Mark 8:34). The tradition that has come down from apostolic times is that praying the mantra is one of the best ways of carrying out this command.

3. The Essence of John Main's Teaching

These are some essentials of John Main's teaching:

- Modern people are very alienated within themselves. Through meditation, they take the focus of attention off themselves and become restored to their own centres.
- At our centres, we become present to the never ending prayer of the Holy Spirit dwelling within each one of us.
- This puts us in touch with great energy and leads to fullness of life.
- Meditation can only be learned by doing it. Talking or reading about it too much can delay the process. Only personal experience will convince one of the validity of the claims made about meditation.

When you come to meditate, I would suggest that you first take a few moments to be aware of the feelings in your body. Do you have pains or aches, tensions or worries? Just acknowledge what is there, do not try to change it. Through Christian Meditation, as John Main teaches it, we try to be "be at home" with God who is at our very centres. To be there we must first be at home in our own bodies accepting them as they are.

In his teaching, there is only one thing that is ESSENTIAL: to continue to try to say your Prayer-word or mantra during the whole of two daily meditation periods. Everything else, like how you sit or dress or eat, is just HELPFUL.

In Meditation, we just try to be present to the here and now. We try to let go of all that is not God, so as to be at home with God in a totally uncluttered way.

One of the great obstacles to prayer is our obsession with success. In all walks of life we are under pressure to be successful. We tend to be the same in prayer and we tend to judge our success or failure by the presence or absence of other thoughts, usually called distractions. But we do not pray to be successful. We pray to be faithful! The more often we come back to our prayer word in fidelity, the more faithful we have been. This vital truth is summed up beautifully by T.S. Elliot in *East Coker* when he says,

*For us, there is only the trying.
The rest is not our business.*

John Main not only re-discovered the Way of Christian Meditation but he gave us a simple explanation of how to do it. Do not assume that simple is the same as easy. Meditation is so simple that the most unlettered person can do it; yet, after years, one is still a beginner in the discipline.

In meditation you try to create a space for God. Thoughts and images come. You just ask them gently to go out again, and replace them with the prayer word. The thoughts and images are quite legitimate in themselves, but they're not appropriate at this time. But there's no need to get angry with them.

My favourite image for this is perhaps now obsolete. You remember the old gramophone turntable record player. You would put the needle on it, and sometimes it would reject the needle, and you had to put it back again. But, no matter how irritated

you were, you had to put it back gently, because if you put it back roughly, you would damage the needle or the record. So in the same way, gently but perseveringly, when you notice the monkeys have come in, or those videos are going on in your mind, just turn them off and come back to the prayer word. Just do it, persistently but gently.

And that's all you have to do during the 20 or 30 minutes of the meditation. Just keep returning your attention, with humility and simplicity, to saying your word from the beginning to the end of your meditation.

4. Ways of Prayer

There are hundreds of ways of praying, but basically they can be boiled down to three: talking, listening, and being.

When we perceive God as outside of us – out there in Heaven – we use words to talk to him, to praise him, to thank him and especially to ask his help. The view of God as in Heaven has been the traditional one, almost the only one, in the Catholic Church for centuries. This view of God was very clearly expressed when the priest used to say mass in Latin with his back to the people.

Today, however, the priest faces the people and uses the vernacular. This simple change indicates a growth in the perception of where God is primarily to be found. The Church, the sacrament or sign of God's presence in the world, now calls itself the *People of God*. The place, where God is to be encountered and responded to, is not just "up there" but it is also "around here." So, if we are to know God we must listen. We must listen to him in the words of Scripture and in the lives of people, in their poverty and aspirations. We must listen to the movements of the present day such as the effort to find right relationship between men and women, between races, between rich and poor. We must be able to see God in the present concern about the integrity of the earth in the face of the destruction of the ecology that our generation is perpetrating. This is the prayer of listening.

But God is not only a "Father in Heaven" or one whose Kingdom is "around us". Jesus also taught us that his Kingdom is "within us" and that he and the Father came to dwell in us. St Paul tells us that we are all temples of the Holy Spirit and that we do not know how to pray. From this perspective, prayer is the prayer of the Spirit praying within us. In this way, prayer is simply a matter of silently *being* with his presence within us.

Now, which of these ways of prayer is the most important? Wrong question! This is like asking which is the most important: your brain or your heart or your stomach. One is not much use to you without the other. So, too, if we are to be in touch with God fully we need to pray to him in *words*, but also by *listening* and by *being*. In the past the emphasis has been on the prayer of talking. This is the prayer of our liturgy and our devotions, and it has its place and its importance. But there has been a shift taking place towards the prayer of listening: listening especially through the words of Scripture. Also, today, there is a growing interest and awareness of the need and value of the prayer of *being*, of silent meditation.

Pope John Paul II, in his 1992 post synodal decree *Pastores Dabo Vobis* wrote:

A necessary training in prayer, in a context of noise and agitation like that of our society, is an education in the deep human and religious value of SILENCE as the spiritual atmosphere vital for perceiving God's presence and for allowing oneself to be won over by it. (#47).

Note here that silence is where God is perceived and where we become open to responding to him.

In these talks we emphasise the importance of meditation in an effort to restore balance. In meditation, we try to be silent – silent in our bodies, our minds and our emotions.

Remember that in prayer what is important is the desire. The desire to be silent is what is important. It is up to God whether or not he gives you the gift to actually find silence.

5. Models of Prayer

Spirituality is “the way in which this person, with his or her unique faith history, perceives and responds to what is beyond our senses, to mystery, to what many call God.” All perceptions are limited and inadequate. So we have to be very humble about our own spirituality and very respectful of that of others. A very important part of this unique faith history will be the models of spirituality and prayer to which the person has been exposed.

In general there have been two models. The kataphatic tradition is one where words and images are used in prayer and it is generally associated with the West. The apophatic tradition is a way of prayer, of being present without images or words, generally associated with the East. St Ignatius and the Spiritual Exercise would be a great example of kataphatic prayer. As one meditates through the Gospel scenes and makes colloquies with Our Lord and Our Lady one comes into deeper union with God.

One of St Teresa’s ways of explaining prayer, again in the kataphatic tradition, is in terms of the four ways of drawing water. At the beginning prayer is like drawing water with a bucket, there is a lot of effort and little result. The next stage is using the windlass – today, we might say a hand pump – less effort gives more results. Then there is the irrigation system which, once it has been set up, delivers the water without too much effort on our part. Finally there is the rain when God does everything and we do nothing. So in Teresa there is a progression from reasoning and thinking to a state where the senses are suspended and there is pure presence to God. There is a movement from the kataphatic to the apophatic.

St John of the Cross would basically insist on the same progression. For him, and those who follow him, one would have to have acquired certain habits of virtue before moving on to a higher stage of prayer.

This has generally been the model for progress in prayer in the Western Church for centuries. As one moves from one stage to the other there is a growing detachment from sin and growth in virtue. Any effort to accelerate this process is to be seen as pride. This model of prayer has produced great stains through the centuries and is to be much respected. Spiritual Directors in this tradition are justifiably very suspicious of techniques of meditation or anything that would give instant experiences. They would be even more apprehensive about commercialised meditation or “solve your problem by meditation” (at a fee) groups.

However, there is an entirely different tradition in the Church, the tradition of Christian Meditation as re-discovered by Fr John Main in his own experience and in the writings of John Cassian in the fourth Century. This is the tradition of praying the prayer-word, the mantra. By praying the mantra one takes the focus of attention off oneself. One is following the call of Christ to leave self behind and follow him. It is a totally simple method but not an easy one.

To those trained in the kataphatic tradition the claims made for the mantra seem far-fetched and ridiculous. That is why John Main insists that these claims can only be

verified by experience. Start saying the mantra and you will know in a short time if it is right for you. Personal verification is essential. Nobody who has not made a serious effort to pray the mantra for at least a few months has the right to question the value and authenticity of this way of prayer.

The idea that holiness is the domain of specialists, monks and nuns, is partly due to the kataphatic tradition. It's insistence that it would be pride to seek to advance from one stage to another without having first attained a certain level of virtue sets a barrier to growth for the more timid who abandon the effort to "professionals". The division of growth into mansions or stages on a ladder may tend to play to our obsession with success even in spiritual things. It may indeed lead to pride at being "worthy" to advance and hinder that very advance.

In praying the mantra we are not concerned about success. We are concerned only about being faithful to a discipline – a discipline that detaches us from our self centredness. This is a constant process that has no stages by which it can be measured. It is only what we notice in our daily lives that assure us that something has been happening.

Sometimes those of one tradition seem not to be able to see the point of view of the other, somewhat like many Western trained doctors cannot accept the merits of acupuncture.

So, there is also a tradition and a proven practice of beginning with apophatic prayer in Christianity. Anybody who makes the decision to start saying the mantra will, of course, have made this decision out of some knowledge of the scriptures and the teachings of the Church, and a desire to live a more Christian life. Then as they continue to say the mantra and experience the freedom and grace that it brings, they will be drawn to greater study of the scriptures and to a more simple virtuous life.

6. Beyond Words

We have two ways of talking about God: the kataphatic way when we say what God is like, and the apophatic way when we say that we can really say nothing about God.

The first way is found mostly in the West which likes exact definitions and formulas. The other is found mostly in the East which is more accepting of mystery. There they would say, "When the wise man points to the moon, the fool sees the finger" The fool can think that the finger is the moon when it is only a few inches pointing to the moon that is almost 400,000 km away from us.

What we say about God tells us as much about the Divinity, as a finger does about the moon. Some of our theological arguments are as foolish as arguing about the length of a finger in relation to the moon.

Our images of God are images, and therefore not God.

Our feelings about God are feelings about God, and therefore not God himself.

Our words about God are words, and therefore not God.

Again they say in the East "A wave becomes enlightened when it knows it is born of water."

Some of our positions and arguments are like a big wave looking down sneeringly on a small one. Ultimately both are water.

Our Words and images are like fistfuls of a mountain. We sometimes think we have the mountain in our pockets but we only have an insignificant fistful of it there. If we are attached to anything, even our words or theories about God, they can keep us from God.

The western logical mind wants to choose either/or but the more intuitive eastern mind can embrace the truth of both approaches.

Great saints have favoured both approaches. Teresa of Avila and Ignatius of Loyola would have us find God in all things. For them God dances creation. Look at the dance and you will have to see the dancer.

But according to St Augustine "If you can say it, it is not God". The true God is always like a glimpse of something in the rear view mirror. When you look around you can no longer see it. It is a Tabor happening that cannot be put in a tabernacle. A recognition like that at Emmaus that disappears at once. It is just a glimpse.

John of the Cross would say that any image or thought about God is an obstacle to knowing or being present to God. He says,

*To reach satisfaction in all,
Desire its possession in nothing.
To come to knowledge of all,
Desire the knowledge of nothing.
To come to possess all,
Desire the possession of nothing
To arrive at being all,
Desire to be nothing.*

For John of the Cross we must hold on to "Nothing, nothing, nothing" in order to get "All, all, all".

The only thing big enough to hold God then is SILENCE . John Main, following the approach of John of the Cross, is ruthless in his demand that in meditation we let go of all thoughts words and images that block us from openness to the vastness of God. His ever repeated advice is "Say your mantra". Only Silence then is big enough for God.

To pray is to be open to this vastness. To pray is to know that ultimately only God can pray. When asked by Moses, God defined himself as, "I AM". To pray is to be in our own I AM ness which is to be in the I AM ness of God.

I think we get a hint of this when Jesus is in agony in the Garden. He asks the disciples, "You watch while I pray". He does not ask them to pray, but only to watch while he prays. To pray is to watch while the Trinity prays. To be still in silence is to be where the Trinity is in prayer.

Strangely, this way of prayer that gives the merest glimpse of God also gives us a glimpse of ourselves and this is most transformative. According to the wisdom of the East, you cannot be in silence and continue to be dishonest. We can be busy saying prayers and doing things and ignore the inconsistencies in our behaviour. But we cannot be silent and still hold grudges or hatred in our hearts, or be involved in unhealthy relationships. Silence will challenge the lies in our lives. It challenges us to know ourselves in all honesty, and it will make us give up what is inconsistent or to give up the silence.

Lao Tse, the Chinese Philosopher who lived 500 years before the time of Christ, said

*To know others is to be wise
To know self is to be enlightened
To conquer others is to have physical strength,
To conquer self is to be strong*

The twice daily practice of meditation is the best road I know to this enlightenment and strength.

7. The Kingdom

The concept of the "Kingdom of God", or the "Reign of God", is mentioned in the Bible about 150 times. If you want one single answer to the question "Why did Jesus come on earth?" it is that "He came to preach the Kingdom." He never clearly defined the Kingdom because it is more an attitude of heart than anything else. It's a God oriented way of being, a convergence of God's plan and human activity. The nearest thing we have to a definition of it is in Romans 14:7 where St Paul says the Kingdom is not a matter of whether you get what you like, especially of what you like to eat and drink, but the Kingdom is a matter of justice, peace and joy.

One essential of the Kingdom is that it is not something that we can earn; the Kingdom is not something either that we can lose. This is a very, very important insight. Our Father in heaven—cannot be captured by our goodness or lost by our badness.

This came to me in a very personal way. I was reflecting on my life. There were times when I had a lot of turmoil and a lot of struggle, maybe sexual and other kinds of struggle. I wasn't too pleased with myself or with how I was dealing with it. I felt I was bad. And there have been other times in my life when I felt a great serenity and felt that I was good. The thing that struck me was this—that God loved me as much when I felt I was bad as when I felt I was good. God loves the saint and the sinner equally. The only difference is: the saint knows it and the sinner does not. The sin of Judas and the sin of Peter were almost the same. But the difference was that Peter could still believe that Jesus loved him; Judas could not, so he literally committed suicide. There's only one thing that can keep the love of God out of our lives, and that is the belief that we are not loved.

In that marvellous story of the prodigal son, the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. He leaves the father. He goes off and he squanders it on wine, women and song. And then when he's at the very bottom, he comes to his senses. Very important: come to your senses. He comes back to his own centre, his feelings, his body. He comes to his senses, and he says, "I will go back. I don't deserve to be my father's son. I'll ask to be a servant." But he underestimates his father, because his father just loves him and welcomes him back because of his son-ship and not because of his behaviour.

His being loved by the father did not depend on his performance. He was loved because he was a child. We are loved just because we are the children of God. We are not loved because we are holy, because we are good or so on. So whatever you have done, the Father cannot *not* love you. Now this is a very, very important message. There are so many people who hate themselves, so many people who are not at home in themselves because they believe they are bad and unlovable. And if you believe you are unlovable, you also believe that God is condemning you. If you believe that you are unloved, and God is condemning you, the self-image and the God-image reinforce one another.

Accepting the Kingdom, that you are loved by God unconditionally will change your attitude to almost everything in life. In particular it will change our attitude to:

- Status
- Success.
- Possessions
- Power

It will give us the power to forgive. It is only when we know that we are loved that we can accept our own and then other's sinfulness.

I believe that even though Jesus came to establish the Kingdom, much of our prayer is counter to the Kingdom. It is seeking the very things that we are asked to transcend, to go beyond the kingdom.

Meditation leads to the Kingdom because it helps us to just be still and know that God is God, God is Gift, God is.

To know that the gift is there sets us free.

One of our meditation group members shared that, before she started to meditate, she used spend half of her salary on makeup, manicure, pedicure and the like. Recently she had noticed that these things were no longer important to her and that she was no longer buying them. What was happening? I think that through her meditating she was coming to discover the gift of the Kingdom within her. Knowing that she was loved, she could appreciate the gift of her inner beauty, and this was setting her free from the need to wear masks that her earlier self-perceptions had caused in her.

8. The "Our Father"

In what has come down to us as the "Our Father" prayer, Jesus summarises his teaching on the Kingdom.

Jesus was a very good teacher and he knew that there is no use in answering a question until it is first asked. Jesus allowed the disciples to see him in prayer, and then they asked, "Lord teach us to pray." Jesus said, according to St Matthew: "When you pray go into your inner room." The inner room could be a quiet place. The inner room for prayer is even more the inner room of our hearts, where the Spirit dwells and we are empowered for transcendence.

Then Jesus goes on to declare the essential elements of his teaching on prayer. It is generally believed that the "Our Father" was originally a collection of sayings of Jesus regarding our attitudes to prayer rather than a formula to be recited.

Our Father in heaven

Jesus tells us about his own inner life. It is a life that centres in "Abba," his heavenly Papa or Daddy. It was shocking for the people of his time that Jesus would refer to God in such endearing terms. Most people in our times also cannot accept this first basic truth that we have a loving heavenly father. When we accept this we have a sense of gratitude and abundance within us which reduces insecurity and allows generosity. When we know that we come from this affectionate Father the task of life becomes:

Holy be your name

We are called to glorify God. The big obstacle in this is our ego which leads us to seek glory for ourselves rather than God's Glory.

Your Kingdom come

Our fears make us possessive and make us seek our own kingdoms rather than his.

Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven

Whose will are we usually seeking? If we were really honest, we would have to admit that what we are usually saying in prayer is "Holy be *my* name; *my* kingdom come; *my* will be done on earth." Our prayers are often an effort to twist God's arm so that he will give us our will, instead of being a disposing of ourselves to surrender to his will and to transcend our own. His will is the final goal of life, and when we seek this we find happiness.

After setting an exalted goal Jesus comes back to the nitty-gritty of life:

Give us today our daily bread.

Each of us has insecurities that energise us to seek our needs. This is very important because if our needs are not fulfilled we cannot live or grow. But the answering of our insecurities, can easily get out of hand and lead us to seek things, or prestige, or power just for their own sakes. It will also lead us to infringe on others, to hurt and be hurt, and so the community will always need forgiveness.

Jesus links forgiveness by God to our forgiveness of each other.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

The teaching on forgiveness is probably the toughest teaching of Christianity. It is the most basic and highest transcendence that we are called to. The command to love our enemies is the one that we most often want exemption from. Yet this is precisely what being perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect means. It means loving the imperfect – those who have sinned.

The "Our Father" calls us to transcendence. This cuts us to the core, as well as giving us wings with which to fly.

Supposing you were at a song contest, and your daughter was one, of the contestants; Who would you like to win? Your daughter, most likely. So your daughter's winning will give you pleasure and her not winning will give you non-pleasure. This is if you are looking at the matter from a personal point of view. But if you can become more objective, more transcendent, if, for example, you can say "I want the best candidate to win" then you can be happy even if your daughter does not win.

We see this struggle between the personal and the objective; the self centred and the transcendent in Christ's struggle in the Garden. "Father may this chalice pass from me" this is the personal, self-centred Jesus expressing his honest fear and preference. "But not my will but yours be done" This is the more objective self transcending Jesus going beyond any attachment, even to his own life.

True prayer will bring us to face and deal with our personal and real needs, and also when the occasion arises, to be able to transcend them.

The "Our Father" is a beautiful guide to relationship. It gives us the value of having God at the centre of our lives. It invites us to deal realistically with ourselves and our own needs. It tells us that the attitude of forgiveness and transcendence is essential if we are to live in community with others.

It finally asks God not to tempt us beyond our strength. As we look back on our lives we see that many difficult things happened to us. Yet, it was these trials that really made us into the people that we are. These happenings could also have broken and destroyed us. This is an appeal then that the struggles in life will strengthen us rather than destroy us.

St. Teresa of Avila said that meditation on the "Our Father" alone could bring us into the deepest prayer and union with God. One could spend a lifetime reflecting on it, and then savouring its richness in silence.

In Christian meditation you are asked to savour the word, and then let it go with you into the silence of meditation for twenty to thirty minutes each morning and each evening. Being with Our Father in undemanding silence empowers us a little to glorify His name, to seek his Kingdom and to do His will.

9. The Ego

The wonderful Genesis story that begins our Bible tells us that God created us in his image and likeness. What does this mean? I think it means that we human beings were made with a centre of organisation similar to that of God. We are the only creatures that can reflect on our own behaviour and determine what we do apart from what our instincts tell us to do. We are the only creatures that can say I AM, that have an ego. Our ego then is the greatest gift given to us; it is what makes us like God.

But then our ego also puts us in opposition to God. Adam and Eve who get this great gift of being like God, began to resist God and his central position. So, ego became E G O: EDGING GOD OUT. They wanted to be at the centre. And this is what happens to us too. When we're too successful and everything is going hunky-dory, we think we don't really need God at all. So we want to edge God out. This is basically what we used to call original sin.

God is our creator and we are His creatures. If we keep that balance right there's no problem. To put it another way; Anyone of us that does not have a strong ego is useless -like a car without an engine. But if we are driven by our egos, we can be very destructive - like a car without a steering wheel.

The job of life then is not to disown or suppress the ego. It is rather to harness and use it constructively. If we let it take control, we hurt others and we do a lot of harm. If we just observe it, we can grow. Listen to the ego. It is your friend and tells you who you are. For example, I have learned a lot about myself by listening to the times and places that I have felt inclined to lie. Why do I feel like lying here? My ego is threatened? As I face the fear more and more I get free from it and get to know myself better.

The ego is what makes divisions. There is me (the ego) and other objects. It is observing, fragmenting, comparing and measuring everything in terms of what is in it for me. The true Self on the other hand is whole; it seeks to integrate, to be one with the other, to love without strings attached. The ego makes us love things and use people; the true Self challenges us to love people and use things. Our ego makes us desire to be great and, if not transcended, will stop at nothing to achieve that greatness. It makes us slaves to the opinions and approval of others. The consumer society thrives on the ego. It makes us fear not having the right car, or smell or gadget. The ego loves shooting others down. It thinks, in some neurotic way, that it lifts itself up by putting others down. It makes us jealous and competitive. It makes us feel threatened by the success of others.

Fr Laurence Freeman tells a story about an Indian king who was given a totally dutiful servant. The servant would perform, indeed anticipate, all of his wishes, and when not given a task would be restlessly demanding things to do. At first the king was delighted. After some time, however, he found that providing chores for the servant was becoming more exhausting than the chores themselves. Then he got an idea. He had the servant erect a forty foot pole in the garden and instructed him to climb up and down when there was nothing else to do. In this way the king got his freedom back.

This is what we do when we meditate. Our spine is the pole standing up straight. When we meditate – *maranatha, maranatha* – we sit there and go up and down that pole gently with our breathing. When we stay there we keep our ego disciplined during that time. Then afterwards we can call on it, when we want it, or we can put it going up and down the pole when we don't want it. We have control of the ego.

John Main tells us that the purpose of meditation is to leave self behind which, paradoxically, leads us to fullness of life. As we meditate, we become more aware of the ego. It is such a subtle and all pervasive little demon. It is active even during prayer. John of the Cross says: "When you think that you are doing well, especially if you think that you are praying well, be very careful when you go before the Lord that you're not there to glorify yourself instead of glorifying the Lord."

Perhaps the greatest thing that Christian Meditation does for us is that it helps us to deal with the ego. You may notice for example that you are getting angry. Anger is an ego energy that is needed in emergencies but which can be very destructive if not controlled. If you allow yourself to get angry, you're actually allowing another person to control your life. Before this, anger was just a reaction. It happened to you. What was repressed just squirted out at an unexpected moment. For the one who has been meditating, there is a moment of realisation. With this new awareness you have a moment in which you can choose to give in to the anger or you can set it aside. You do not scold yourself. Just notice it. You can decide: "I'm not going to let that person or situation control my life." You can be mastered or you can be master.

As you meditate, you find that you master the ego and come to a greater fullness of life.



10. Become as Little Children

“People were bringing their children to him to have him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when he noticed it and said to them? ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them. It is to just such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs. I assure you that whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it.’ Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.” (Mark 10:13-16)

The supreme lie in all of our lives is to think or feel that we are the centre of the world. As long as we live out of that assumption we will exert every effort to defend it. We will build a wall of protection around ourselves and fight off any one that threatens us. So we accumulate goods, prestige and power. We get sucked more and more into protecting our position. The ego is at the centre of life. In traditional theological terms this is called Original Sin.

The supreme truth on the other hand is that God is the centre of the world. When we learn this we let go of the compulsive grasping for the false gods in which we tend to find refuge. When we let go of these we find not loss but freedom. We find that our lives become more simple, more transparent, freed from anxiety.

I think this is what Jesus meant when he said, “Unless you become as little children you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven.”

First of all, children have no problem accepting dependence. They know that Mom and Dad are big and strong and that’s just the way it is, that’s Okay. It does not mean that they are unaware of their own power to influence and irritate Mom and Dad but they do recognise and accept that their parents are the source of all power for them. So, too, we need to recognise and accept that we are children of God and that all that we have is his gratuitous gift to us.

Children trust and are trusting. They are transparent before we adults teach them intrigue. They believe what is told to them and say what they believe. Children do not think, do not analyze. They accept the world presented to them in its totality and in complete faith. They have no knowledge other than that which is presented to them. If they are told about a world of snakes or fairy men they believe it totally.

Children have great powers of concentration. When they are watching something that catches their attention or playing a game, they do it with great single-mindedness.

Now, the Gospel tells us that, if we are to enter the Kingdom we must change and become as little children. I believe that one of the best ways to change is to start saying the mantra. When we say the mantra we take the focus of attention off ourselves. We are no longer concerned with the false gods that we have to build around our ego as we try to defend it. As we take the focus off ourselves we come to sit calmly at our own centres. That is where Christ is, too. We find ourselves comfortable there with him. We can look out at the world through his eyes. It is a strange thing that we can easily, joyfully, cohabit in our own centres with Christ but

he can never move in with us. If we persist in keeping our false selves, or ego's, dominating our centres, we keep his presence submerged and unrecognised.

The child lives in a transparent world. Through saying the mantra we will also learn transparency.

The Zen Master had a disciple called Banki. Banki was blind but, because he was blind, he could see many things that others could not see. When his Master died Banki said, "When other people express grief I often hear joy. When others express joy I often hear jealousy. But when my master expressed joy it was joy and when he expressed grief it was grief." Through praying the mantra we too come to a more genuine child-like alignment of our feelings and responses.

Children do not think. They accept holistically in faith. When we are saying the mantra we are not thinking of anything, not even of God. We are not grasping. We are just being with the totality – the God who dwells within us. It is only when we become as little children that we can do this. And the way to it is the way of the mantra.
