

Centering Prayer and the Mystical Imagination

Prayers

Divine Love, Divine Creator, You invite us into the shoreless sea of your deep silence. You initiate us into wisdom and knowing that we cannot express. You call us to share your love and compassion with one another. Guide us so that we may truly be icons of your sacred presence.



O Holy Trinity, we come to you in silent prayer, seeking only to love you and adore you beyond all words and thought. Grant us the grace to long for you with such humble desire that we return to the fountain of your mercy, each and every day. Foster in our hearts quiet confidence, that we may know you and follow your will, and trust you in steadfast hope. Lead us to the vast haven of interior silence, that our distracted minds and anxious hearts may be calm, and rest in your boundless compassion. Most of all, inspire us to love you fully, and to love all our neighbors as we love ourselves, so that in us you may truly be praised and glorified. Make us one with you, for truly your beauty is our joy, your heart is our life, and your silence is our peace. All this we ask in the name of Christ, our savior, healer, and friend. Amen.



By the grace of God: I am still; I am calm; I am quiet; I am whole; I am loving; I am gentle; I am earthy; I am serene; I am faithful; I am blessed; I am relaxed; I am trusting; I am humble; I am beloved; I am forgiven; I am mystical; I am merciful; I am prayerful; I am visionary; I am conscious; I am embodied; I am meditative; I am undistracted; I am contemplative; I am compassionate.

By the grace of God: I am Presence. I am Wisdom. I am Delight. I am Silence. I am Peace. I am Love. I am Joy.

By the grace of God: I am.



A prayer of Julian of Norwich (translated by Carl McColman):

God, of your goodness, give me yourself, for you are enough for me. I may ask nothing less that is fully to your worship, and if I do ask anything less, ever shall I be in want. Only in you I have all.

Quotations

Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.

— Albert Einstein, *Cosmic Religion and Other Opinions and Aphorisms*

Love, not knowledge, can help us reach God.

— Anonymous, *The Cloud of Unknowing*

The fundamental job of the imagination in ordinary life, then, is to produce, out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in.

— Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*

The prophet seeks only to spark the imagination of this people, and that in itself turns despair to energy.

— Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*

So what could bridge that gap between what we perceive with our senses and the reality far greater than our rational minds? For me the answer is imagination... When I use my imagination in prayer and reflection, I glimpse a deeper reality beneath my everyday experience.

— Margaret Silf, www.ignatianspirituality.com

The real work of imagination is to make contact with the strange world in which we live and to serve as both guide and inspiration for our development within it. It is the way we evolve. Imagination presents us with possible, potential realities that it is our job to actualise. It also presents us with a world that would not be complete without our help.

— Gary Lachman, *Lost Knowledge of the Imagination*

Images of the imagination are not always 'imaginary' or untrue, but 'imaginal,' presenting truths of a different, inner kind... The psyche or soul is the imagination.

— Stephen Larsen, *The Mythic Imagination*

The mystical imagination can show us something that science, wonderful though it is, cannot, namely, it can show us the many grace-drenched and spirit-laden layers of reality that are not perceived by our physical senses. The mystical imagination can show us how the Holy Spirit isn't just inside our churches, but is also inside the law of gravity.

— Ronald Rolheiser, *"The Mystical Imagination"*

What is now proved was once only imagined.

— William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Imagination is your interior sense. When you say imagination, you get into something pretty deep. . . . What normally people think of as imagination is simply fantasy . . . but imagination is not fantasy, imagination is creative. . . . The artist makes you an artist, whether you like it or not, or else you don't connect . . . what is the deepest part of yourself, your heart or your whole self. . . . It gets right into the depths of you.

— Thomas Merton, "God Speaks to Each of Us: The Poetry and Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke" (audio recording), quoted in Carl McColman's *Eternal Heart*

I perceived that God's continual working in every kind of thing is so beautifully done—so wise and so powerful—that it surpasses our greatest imagination. God's goodness transcends all thought, all comprehension. At that point, all we can do is contemplate God and rejoice. We allow ourselves to be filled with the overwhelming desire for union with our Beloved, to listen deeply for the divine call. We delight in God's goodness and revel in God's love.

— Julian of Norwich, *The Showings* (translated by Mirabai Starr)

Here, in this spark or "part of the soul" where the spirit, as religion says, "rests in God who made it," is the fountain alike of the creative imagination and the mystic life.

— Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*

A layered reality is part of the [Christian] imagination. To possess this imagination is to dwell in a universe inhabited by unseen presences — the presence of God, the presence of saints, the presence of one another. There are no isolated individuals but rather unique beings whose deepest life is discovered in and through one another. This life transcends the confines of space and time.

— Wendy M. Wright, *Sacred Heart: Gateway to God*

The fourteenth revelation is that the Lord God is the ground of our praying. Arising from this, we are shown true prayer and steady trust and God wants us to be generous in both alike. In this way our prayer is pleasing to him and in his goodness he fulfills it.

— Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*
(translated by Halcyon Backhouse and Rhona Pipe)



Images

The Parts of the Engagement Ring



1. **The Diamond: the Silence which is God's first language.**
2. **The shank/ring: the story of our life, our faith journey**
3. **The prongs: the methods of prayer that we use to bring God's silence and our faith journey together.**

The "Four Prongs" of Contemplative Practice

1. **Centering Prayer (or some other method of intentional silence)**
2. **Lectio Divina (or some other discipline for being nurtured by the Word)**
3. **Community Life: liturgy, service, family, work, etc.**
4. **The Mystical Imagination: trusting our heart and mind to foster ever deepening intimacy with God**



Meditation

- Imagine you are with the disciples, and one morning as everyone sleeps, Jesus leaves the gathering and retreats into the wilderness to pray.
- Something inspires you to follow him. You keep a respectful distance, but you walk carefully in the early morning light as he heads for a deserted place.
- Watch Jesus as he begins to pray. What do you see?
- As Jesus prays, consider what is on your heart. What prayer do *you* want to offer to God?
- Notice what the environment is like. Is it quiet? Are there bird or animal sounds? Can you hear the sounds of people or of the village in the distance?
- Notice the expression on Jesus's face as he prays. What is it like? What insights do you get from watching Jesus pray?
- When Jesus is finished praying, he opens his eyes and he notices you. He smiles at you. He is not angry that you followed him. Instead, he beckons you to come near him.
- Walk up to Jesus. Notice the expression on his face. Look into his eyes.
- What does Jesus say to you? Does he ask you a question?
- Do you have a question for Jesus? Or anything else you'd like to ask him?
- Take some time now to simply be present with Jesus. If no words come, then rest in the silence.
- Eventually, Jesus will smile at you and indicate that it is time to return to the rest of the disciples. Walk with Jesus as you both return to the community.
- Reflect on your experience.



Imagining Your Mystical Life

- Imagine God's infinite love for you.
- Imagine God's love poured into your heart through the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5)
- Imagine God's yearning for your love.
- Imagine how you are already One with God.
- Imagine how through God all things are possible for you.
- Imagine your limitless capacity to embody joy, peace, hope and love.
- Imagine shining God's light on everyone you love.
- Imagine beholding God's loving presence in all people.
- Imagine being Christ for others.
- Imagine sharing God's creativity with the people you love.
- Imagine bringing God's healing love to all who suffer.
- Imagine helping to create God's beloved community for all.

For Further Reading

- Timothy M. Gallagher, [*An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer: Scriptural Reflections According to the Spiritual Exercises*](#)
- Carl McColman, [*Eternal Heart: The Mystical Path to a Joyful Life*](#)
- Margaret Silf, [*Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*](#)



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