

Father Thomas Keating

U.S.A. 1923-2018



Father Thomas Keating was a Cistercian monk and former abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts USA, who founded the *Centering Prayer* movement. In his later years he resided in St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, from where he was active with *Contemplative Outreach*, an organization that encourages contemplative prayer.

He wrote a number of books on that issue like: *Open mind, open heart; The mystery of faith; Intimacy with God; Awakenings; Reawakenings...* He was invited to speak at the LITES congress in Cleveland 1998, where he gave an inspiring speech on prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in the context of post-Vatican-II theology. He died in 2018 at the age of 98.

Will and Intention in Centering Prayer

original in English

St. John of the Cross wrote: "The Father spoke one word from all eternity and he spoke it in silence, and it is in silence that we hear it". This suggests that silence is God's first language and that all other languages are poor translations.

Waiting on God in the practice of Centering Prayer strengthens our capacity for interior silence and makes us sensitive to the delicate movements of the Spirit in daily life that lead to purification and holiness.

Centering Prayer is not a concentrative practice, nor an exercise of *attention*. It is an exercise of *intention*. It is our will, our faculty of choice, that we are cultivating.

The will is developing the habit of surrender to God's increasing presence and action.

As the Spirit becomes predominant in our prayer, the use of the sacred word or sacred symbol during the time of Centering Prayer becomes less and less necessary or important. As long as we find that we are attracted to thoughts or feelings going by on the level of our memory or imagination, we freely make use of the sacred word not to push the thoughts away, but to reaffirm our original intention of consenting to God's presence.

But again, note that in Centering Prayer one does not pay attention *to* these symbols (sacred word, sacred symbol), but uses them only as the expression of our intention. As with the sacred word, they are used to focus *intention*, not as objects of attention and still less of *concentration*.

It is not our attention that needs adjusting, because attention is secondary in Centering Prayer. We are not tending to a particular thought or object, or even to the sacred word as would be the case in a mantric kind of prayer. Our attention is a general and loving awareness of the presence of God. The actual work of Centering Prayer is consenting to God's presence and in doing so letting go of the present moment with its psychological content.

With time, patience, and many failures, we develop the habit of letting go of thoughts promptly – not by thinking about the fact that we are thinking, but simply by returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

In Centering Prayer, then, purity of intention is the ordinary focus of the practice. It is a matter of love. That is why it moves us away from our former dependance (conscious or unconscious) on thinking about God and on making acts of devotion to feel that we are doing something when we pray.

*selection and title by the editors, extract from:
Intimacy with God. New York, Crossroad, 1998, p. 55-63; 124.*

NOTE: **Centering Prayer** is a receptive method of silent Christian prayer, designed to deepen one's relationship with God through the acceptance of His presence and inner workings. It goes beyond vocal prayer or meditation, using a "sacred word" to gently abandon thoughts and rest in inner silence...

*Pope Francis has strongly promoted contemplative and silent prayer, emphasizing the importance of a "gaze of faith" fixed on Jesus, in line with the spirit of **Centering Prayer**. He encourages a silent and loving communion with God that purifies the heart and transcends mere vocal prayer, often describing it as "I look at Him and He looks at me".*

Suggestions in order to make a fruitful use of this text

Instead of 'Centering Prayer' read: 'adoration', 'prayer before the Blessed Sacrament'.

And read for the 'sacred word' and the 'sacred symbol': the Four Ends and the Monstrance.

Also note the important switch from 'attention' to 'intention'.

As well as the key-role of 'presence' in these quotations: presence of God – my presence to God's presence – in God's presence.