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THE MARK

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The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

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The Rest of Life

by Tim Cook

I've just finished a rather dense book, titled *Leisure*, by a German philosopher-theologian, Josef Pieper. It was a difficult read, but I got so much personal insight into my attitudes around work and rest that I'm very glad to have persisted with it. Pieper makes the compelling argument that in recent centuries, Western culture's attitudes toward leisure, its purpose and propriety, have done a 180-degree flip-flop that has left us on an ungrounded, inhumane and inhuman treadmill.

Without going too deeply into his rich and scholarly documentation, his work reveals that from the earliest recorded philosophical thought, our Greek cultural fathers – Socrates, Plato and others – clearly stated what to them was obvious: work was solely a means to prepare us for and keep us able to participate in regular festivals and celebrations in honor and acknowledgment of the Divine Mystery that they knew as the source and fabric of their lives and of all the life surrounding them. For most of human history, work was intended to serve growth in

being our deepest, truest life.

That is a long way from our present cultural attitude toward life and living. We take our rest as breaks from work in order to enable us to work again. Productivity has replaced deep connectivity as the principal purpose of human life and the hours we are working are steadily increasing, as are the number of years we remain a part of the “workforce.” The inner stress we feel and the increasingly intense distractions we employ to avoid noticing it are the result of our true human needs going unmet. We were not created to just work to make more goods. We are spiritual beings with spiritual needs and our deep longings for meaning are telling us something important about our real human nature and its requirements.

We need something more than just breaks from the endless action if we are to thrive. We need rest in the truest sense of the word. We need to feel and be touched by the presence of God. That touch comes when we learn to rest in the silence and become

willing to surrender to its healing embrace. The very concept of contemplation refers to resting in God, both when we are still and when we are in motion. In contemplation we are aware of God's presence and action in our lives. And we are aware of ourselves in him as he lives us.

The idea of contemplation as rest does not, however, imply that we are idle or distracted. Far from it. Resting in God requires a heightened awareness to the moment. In contemplation we are simply present to the Presence, no matter what we are doing or not doing. But we are not likely to learn this disposition of rest while we are engaged in our usual activities. It takes time apart from our usual preoccupations to learn to sense and value this mostly unnoticed and unvalued way of truly living. To discover it requires us to do more than read about it or hope for it on some future day. We must “taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”

One tried and true way to learn to taste and thereby appreciate that restful goodness is to learn and adopt a twice-daily practice of

Centering Prayer. In this grace-filled time apart from our usual world of work and distraction we discover the unsuspected dimension of our true identity as spiritual beings. This surprising discovery is an experience of our personhood and God interpenetrating each other in a healing embrace. This deeper self is usually so hidden beneath the false-self's working and worrying that its discovery amazes us and opens us to an entirely new attitude toward the adventure of life and living.

Nurturing this newborn reality calls us to devoted attention to our daily practice, as well as to regular attendance at silent Centering Prayer retreats where we go deeper than we ever imagined was possible and find true rest and restoration for our world-weary souls. That won't happen without some effort and struggle, though, because our self-worth and sense of value may be solidly hooked into our "productivity." We may feel that we are stealing this time apart with God from the "real world" of culturally accepted

norms that does not value or acknowledge our lives as spiritual beings with an eternal purpose. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact it is only through these times of deep, silent rest that we discover the real world and the real beings that we are. All of creation emerges from this deep stillness at every moment. Each of us was born out of eternal silence and each of us will inevitably return to it. To discover it while we are in this world is the greatest of graces.

Our work-weary world has lost its meaning. It is desperately out of balance and it is sweeping our human species along, ever-faster, in its current of ceaseless doing and idle distraction. We have inherited false and superficial values that serve only to deepen our despair because they do not acknowledge and nourish our true spiritual nature. That nature is found and fed in the transforming wonder of God's stillness and silence where find our true selves and Christ in the rest of life.



The Church of Conscious Harmony
A Contemplative Christian Community

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
info@consciousharmony.org
www.consciousharmony.org

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Mimi Conroy, Manager
bookmgr@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER

JC Shakespeare, Editor
jshakespeare@austin.rr.com
Carol Hagar, Design
lifeisart@austin.rr.com

Abide in Me and I Will Abide in You

by Barbara Cook

Rest is a theological term meaning “to abide,” to live in God, the reality of the indwelling Holy Trinity. Rest, then, is the state of being in which, whether we are sitting or praying or working or sleeping, we know that we are united to the Beloved.

Before Centering Prayer came into my life through Father Thomas Keating, I thought that rest meant taking a break from labor, or having a vacation with time to “sit a spell” or to sleep. Father Keating taught me that to rest, I needed to consent to my relationship with God. I learned how to stop my ordinary, busy self, to simply sit down and intend to open to his presence and love by silently repeating a pre-selected sacred word as a symbol of my intent. By regularly, daily resting in this openness to God, I am becoming more aware of his love and presence even in my ordinary life, while doing life’s ordinary activities.

Father Thomas used to say that even if we are taking a vacation, our false self goes with us – so it is

not really such a vacation after all. The false self is our imaginary or worldly self that is formed to help get us by in the temporal world, the world that is passing with time. The false self is formed around the perception that our apparent needs weren’t satisfied when we were children. These needs center around issues of security and survival; affection, approval, esteem and pleasure; and power and control. These energy centers tend to be exaggerated and they keep us acting childish. They also addict us to worldly substitutes for true meaning and prevent us from loving service to God’s family and his plan for our eternal life – a real adventure of growth and the true destiny of all mankind.

We get tastes of God’s presence even at the beginning of this great adventure, but as we develop our relationship with him through our practice of twice-daily Centering Prayer, it becomes increasingly obvious and constant. And when we go apart with him on retreats, we discover that we are always resting in him, even when

we are not aware of it.

Those of us who have set out on this journey will recognize what I’m talking about. For those who are just beginning, you will find it if you persist. At times the journey will feel like rest, but sometimes it will feel difficult, like anything but rest. Those are the moments when we are being healed of our old selves. But as the unconscious obstacles to God’s love are healed and released, we find that more and more we actually experience ourselves at rest, abiding in God.

A bit of honest self-observation will reveal that our false self does not provide the security, the power or the pleasure that it promises. All we are seeking is found right where St. Paul said we would find it: “Christ in you, your hope of glory.” We find this liberating Truth for ourselves and in ourselves by taking refuge in him twice a day and learning to abide always in him.

Rest: The Couples' Retreat

by J. C. Shakespeare

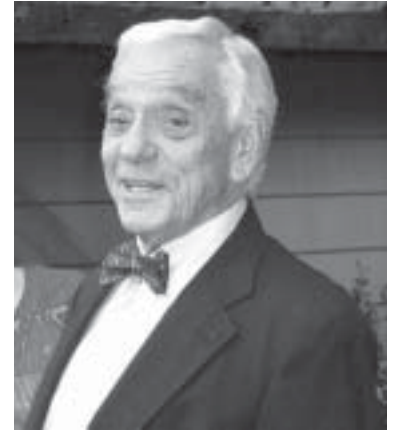


There was a moment one morning, as I sat on the back steps of the lodge at Cedar Brake waiting for breakfast to be served, when the theme song for one of the cruise lines popped into my head. Perhaps you've seen the commercial where gorgeous, happy people are climbing rock walls, kayaking through waves, soaring in helicopters and shopping in exotic markets amongst smiling natives as the incessant, throbbing beat of Iggy Pop's "Lust for Life" assaults your TV speakers. Contrast that with sipping coffee under a radiant blue sky, watching large, floppy yellow butterflies flit through the treetops, the only accompanying sound the hypnotic hum of cicadas, with nary a single human voice to be heard anywhere around. The dichotomy was striking: on the one hand, the lust for "life" with its frenzied activity and greed for new sensations and experience, and on the other, a gentle falling back into

the elemental silence from which all creation continually emerges. Which one of those sounds like rest to you?

My wife Dawn surprised me at Christmas last year by paying for the couples' retreat, and it was truly the greatest gift I've ever received. We were blessed to share silence and sacred space with 15 other couples and Tim and Barbara. Deep and frequent periods of Centering Prayer offered rest from our false selves; Grand Silence offered us rest from arguments, decisions, and the pressure to make small talk; sharing the silence in community offered rest from social pressures as we experienced the rare glimpse of true intimacy free from the distortions of culture-bound conversation. The openness and vulnerability expressed in our closing circle gave clear and conclusive evidence of the therapeutic power of silent prayer.

The thing about lust is that it's quickly exhausted and depleted, leaving one craving even more. That seems to be what pre-packaged vacations offer, and each company strives to outdo the next in terms of sensation and experience. Surely there is a time



William Niles Browder
1922-2006

Teacher
Friend
Brother
Gentleman
Board Member Emeritus
Son of God

We loved you in life.
We mourn you in death.

and a season for experiencing the excitement of novelty, but if it is real, healing, rejuvenating rest that your soul is craving, stay off the cruise ships and head for the next retreat. That way, you won't need another vacation just to recover from your vacation. There's nothing better than the rest.



Rest In Christ

by Judith Strassman

It was Father Keating who first told us that Centering Prayer was happening in Folsom State Prison. Mike Kelley, the group sponsor, had written Father Thomas the details of the unimaginable set of circumstances that had resulted in 400 inmates taking up this meditation. I was living in California at the time, only about 45 minutes away from Folsom. With Father's encouragement, I signed on as a volunteer, going into Folsom with Mike on Monday nights.

It's quite awesome stepping into that cold gray granite fortress for the first time. Folsom has been seriously dedicated to incarceration since 1888. It is very loud there. Great metal gates clang open and crash shut behind you. The deeper you get into the interior, the louder it gets. The narrow stone hallway suddenly opens into a five-story warehouse of cells, five floors layered on top of each other, each front wall made of iron bars partitioned into tiny two-man containers. They are shouting cell

to cell at one another, sometimes obscenities, sometimes loud laughter. Radios and TVs are competing with voices to be heard. You walk through that great room, past the armed guards, past the chow hall, and out onto the exercise yard where 1,000 men are gathered. You continue through the yard into a little stone sanctuary known as Greystone Chapel. Here for the first time it is quiet.

The men you meet are remarkable - convicted felons who have used prison time to turn their lives around. They will tell you that these profound changes were due almost entirely to Centering Prayer.

Prison life is so condensed, so concentrated, physically and psychically.

A man has so much time to think, to think about what he reads, about what he's heard, time to discuss these ideas in close and frequent conversation with other men he will know and live with for the foreseeable future. A visitor

from the outside is stunned to find that such deep and thoughtful minds reside here.

Because it is impossible to shut out the constant strident noise, a man learns not to fight it, but to make it integral to his practice. This takes his meditation deeper. And because during his lifetime he has seen every game, heard every hype, run every con - and here, for the first time in his life he has found what is true, real, and unassailable, his practice of Centering Prayer is something like ferocious. Certainly uncompromising.

When Centering is this deep, the healing it engenders borders on revolutionary - this by their own admission. When they spoke of what had happened to them since beginning their practice, it was in an awed voice - how the furious flood of hateful and revengeful thoughts had subsided; how the fuse on their anger had begun to lengthen; how, when they began to look back objectively on their lives, they could see how they got here. How for the first time they had access to an inner

quiet, a peace they never knew was possible. And how they had come to feel that they belonged to a brotherhood where, through love, they were healing one another.

Centering Prayer had become a daily practice for these men in their cells. How could this be possible given the constant barrage of noise and the lights that stay on 19 hours a day? At that time, my own Centering Prayer seemed to be nothing but a constant cacophony of thoughts that came in never ending waves – and this in a quiet peaceful meditation room. As a result, my practice had become sporadic and unenthusiastic. I asked one of the men who was a lifer. I'll never forget his answer.

“There is inside each of us a deep, interior silence. It is at the core of who we are, always accessible, as if waiting for us. When I go into Centering Prayer, no matter where I am, I remember this place and come to rest there. It is where God abides.”

I've never known a more profound stillness than in Centering Prayer with that group of contemplatives. They began every session the same way: Be still and know that I am God... Be still and know... Be still... Be.

After that beautiful sit, I told my lifer brother how deeply quiet I had felt.

“Great,” he said. “Now you can rest in peace.”



The Transfiguration

The Transfiguration reveals the basic pattern of the Christian path. Jesus, by His example and teaching, approaches from without in order to awaken us to His divine Presence within.

The Eternal Word of God has always been speaking to us interiorly, but we have not been able to hear.

When we are adequately prepared, the interior Word begins to be heard. The external word of scripture and the interior Word arising from the depths of our being become one.

Our inner experience is confirmed by what we hear in the liturgy and read in scripture . . . Awakening to the divine Presence emerges from what Meister Eckhardt called ‘the ground of being’ – that level of being which

in Christ is divine by nature

and which in us

is divine

by participation.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*





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The Gift of Rest

Leisure: The Basis of Culture

By Josef Pieper



Sabbath

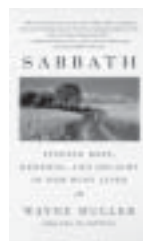
By Abraham Joshua Heschel

Permission to Nap

By Jill Murphy Long

Summer: A Spiritual Biography of the Season

An Anthology



Sabbath

By Wayne Muller

New Arrivals

15 Hour Votives

For Devotional & Home Use

12 Candle Pack

AUGUST Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Aug 5 8:30am-4:30pm

\$10 love offering, bring a potluck dish to share

1/2 Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Aug 12 8:30am-12:30pm

\$10 love offering

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Aug 19 8:30am-4:30pm

\$10 love offering, bring a potluck dish to share

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat

Aug 26 8:30am-4:30pm

\$10 love offering, bring a potluck dish to share

Monthly

Community Workday

Aug 19 9am-12noon

Weekly

Centering Prayer Group

Mondays 7:30-9pm

Wednesday 7:30-9pm

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30pm

Sacred Chanting Aug 1

Gurdjieff Music Aug 15

Prayer Circle

Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

Wednesdays 12noon-1pm

Mid-Week Communion Service

Wednesdays 6-7pm

Yoga

Thursdays 6-7pm

Intro to The Work Class

Thursdays 7:30-9pm

Daily

Daily Centering Prayer Service

M-F 7-7:35am