

Talk 2 – transcribed from Fr. Thomas’ presentation of an Intro:

. . . so, the infant is just a bundle of emotional needs that the parent fulfills the role as the vicars of God providing protection and love, and when these are somewhat withdrawn and sometimes they are very negatively withdrawn, but any sense of abandonment or rejection the child interprets as not being loved as having lost its security system, and this does a job on the emotions and the child has to seek to compensate for this pain or to repress it into the unconscious and this is the dynamic that gradually leads to the homemade self which is based on the instinctual needs for power, for approval, for affection and for security. And, when these become fantastic, as they do if they are withheld, that they become then the dominating influence in one’s life and become a kind of spirituality, that is to say an overarching purpose in all our actions that even our unconscious life is always looking for one or other of those three instinctual needs in life.

So, this needs healing, and this is in opposition to the free flow of grace and the development of this relationship with God which is based on truth and honesty and it’s not that the false self is the total enemy, rather it shows us our utter dependence on God. So, the work then of this silent place, this inner room, which is not so much a place as an attitude of moving from our ordinary psychological level of our existence to the spiritual level that takes a little time to cultivate and to become thoroughly aware and convinced of. And so, This vestibule then would consist of quieting the mind and above all quieting the body.

The first thing we have to do for those of you who are not familiar with the practice is to invite you choose a sacred symbol of your intention . . . to spend this time that is to say the actual parameters of the period of silence that we are going to enter into . . . to send this time in

consenting to God's presence and action within us. So, we need to choose a sacred word that is sacred, not so much because of its content but because of your IN-tent. In other words, you make the word sacred by choosing it as an expression of your intention to consent to God's presence and to enter into this deeper relationship with God within.

We suggest that this be a very short word of one or two syllables following the recommendation of the 14th century author of the Cloud of Unknowing that epitomize this kind of prayer: prayer in secret. So, I invite you, just for a moment and ask the Holy Spirit to suggest a word that you would feel comfortable with, that would express this intentionality to consent to God's presence and action within.

It could be the sacred name of God, or it could be some other word. Some people have such negative feelings towards their early religious education that God, faith, even Jesus Christ as a name has emotionally charged overtones that are unfortunately negative because of their early misguided, if good intentioned, religious education. Any idea of God a policeman, a tyrant or a judge, ready to bring down the verdict of guilty, are ideas of God that are for the birds and not for human beings. But there is an emotionally charged thought sometimes attached to the idea of God, and for people who have this background, Centering Prayer is very helpful because during the prayer. . . .

During the prayer we don't think of God as an idea at all; no devout thoughts; just consenting to a presence that is undifferentiated, that is not identified, that is not particular, but which simply is . . . that's simply God's definition of God; I am. So, he or she who is . . . is not contained in any thought . . . and so this enables God to reveal himself to us, as never before . . . when we stop thinking about God . . . during the time of this prayer. It's more important to be with God, than to

think about God. And this is a matter of will, . . . of choice . . . or . . . consent. Consent suggests accepting what is. Effort refers to the future. It's an effort to get what you don't have . . . the basis of this prayer is that you have all that you can possibly desire now; the whole of God 24 hours a day, totally available in sickness, in health, in joy, in sorrow, in life, in death . . . always waiting lovingly for our attentiveness.

I suggest a word like Lord, God, Father, or Abba (daddy, Papa) which suggest the intimacy we have with God and the closeness with God. So, there is no place to go to find God; no place to go not to find God . . . always present, available . . . everywhere, penetrating all things and embracing us with his loving gaze . . . from within as well as without. Another word that is helpful is "listen". Listen, is one of those key contemplative words that suggests the attitude or disposition that we are cultivating in this prayer. What do we do when we are listening? Nothing. But we are alert. For instance, if you are hearing a marvelous symphony, your whole attention is on that; *being* totally aware of that music. So that in listening, our whole bodies and minds and spirits are open and attentive to the *Presence*. Other words you might want to choose are: calm or peace, faith, trust, love . . . Abba . . . (long pause) if you feel attracted to one of these, then let's decide to use it, at least for this experience. It's alright to try one or two at different times, if you decide to continue with this practice

But, actually, it doesn't matter what you choose as long as you feel comfortable with it because it's only a gesture. There's no magic about the word. It's simply a way of expressing your intention to consent to God's presence and action within you; especially during this time of prayer.

OK, I presume now that everyone had chosen a word, or if you can't make up your mind choose Abba for this time. It suggests your personal relationship with the Ultimate Reality as infinite goodness and *tenderness*.

Now let's set about to deliberately relax our bodies. It's a good idea for this purpose to have two feet firmly on the ground and, ideally, we want to choose a chair that doesn't cut off the circulation under your thighs or legs. And allow your arms or hands to sit in your lap or by your side, not in a way to cut off circulation; that would be bring our attention back to our bodies. Start at the top of your head. Just think of letting go of the muscles, of your face or ears, especially around the mouth, move down to your throat . . . to your shoulders . . . your back . . . let your muscles relax all the way down the spine . . . let your arms go limp . . . let your thighs, legs, calves, ankles, feet relax. Let yourself sink into a very deep relaxation that is very calm . . . delightful. Now . . . breathe rhythmically, but normally . . . just a little more deeply than normal. With each exhalation let go of any tension anywhere in the body . . . sinking into deeper relaxation with each breath . . . let go of all thoughts, feelings, memories, plans, concerns . . . let God take care of the world for this half an hour, without your help . . . just be . . .

In that space of total relaxation, rest, free of stress, tension, anywhere, body or mind or spirit . . . introduce, ever-so-gently, the sacred word that you've chosen. You don't have to say it clearly, fast, repeatedly; just let it repeat itself . . . and as you consent to God's presence through this gesture, whenever any thought, perception, healing comes down the stream of consciousness, which is inevitable and normal . . . return ever-so gently to the sacred word you've chosen as the symbol of your consent in faith and love of God's presence and action within you. So let us continue praying in that way for these 20 minutes . . . resting, relaxing, quieting, stilling, consenting to be in God's presence . . . and

attentive only in the general and loving way to that presence . . . no words . . . no self-reflections . . . no commentaries about the experience of the prayer . . . just let it be as it is . . . the only action that we offer occurs when we notice that we are thinking some other thought . . . or are aware of anything else and then, ever-so-gently, return to the sacred word as the expression of our ongoing intention to give ourselves to God during the moments

Close your eyes . . . introduce the sacred word . . . sinking into your inmost being where God dwells and waits for you. Now, let us continue for these 20 minutes to rest in the divine presence; receiving God's grace, without commentary, self-reflection, when thoughts come as they normally do . . . return ever-so gently . . . those words suggesting the minimum of activity. The sacred word may disappear in the course of the prayer temporarily. Let it go. When you notice you are thinking about anything, any particular thing, imagining any particular object; this is the sign to return to your sacred word as the symbol of your intention to be with God at the depth of your being, beyond thinking, beyond thoughts, beyond feelings, beyond self-reflections. No movement within or without. Resting in God's presence. Opening to God's presence. Surrendering to God's presence. Just as we are; without reflecting on what that is. Silence. Stillness. Peace. Surrender. Love. Peace that surpasses any understanding of it; it just is. We are coming home to a place we should never have left. Returning to the experience of God's presence. At the end of this time . . . gong . . . as a means of returning to our ordinary thoughts.