

ARCHIVES PRACTICES

AWAKENING TO UNCONDITIONAL LOVE:
A Meditation using Gentle Awareness

God loves you unconditionally - already, right now.

These are just platitudes until we find their truth as our own. As long as they remain abstract they are irrelevant and cannot affect who we are, how we live or the quality of our living.

We are already loved unconditionally by God. Since God's love energizes us to respond by loving we experience that love when we love others. God's love expresses itself in us. We can become aware of this as our reality through gentle awareness.

God's love for you is the basis of your being alive and you can know its reality by gently being present to yourself. This naturally unfolding process begins by being present to who you are right now. The awareness your presence brings is like sunlight on a garden. It warms and nurtures the ground from which the flowers will grow. Your gentle presence encourages the love within you to sprout.

Begin by calling to your awareness the highest qualities of love.

Love is Patient	Kind	Gracious
Confident	Humble	Courteous
Generous	Forgiving	Compassionate
Truth	Trusting	Divine
Unconditional		

These are familiar qualities and some are familiar to your experience. Choose one of the qualities that you would like to spend some time with, such as "Patient". Breathe deeply a few times and pay attention to the memories, visual images, emotions and people who come to mind as you focus your awareness of this quality. Stay with these associations as they weave further memories, images and feelings.

As you pay attention you are gently allowing your awareness to form new patterns of patience within your body and spirit. Each time you take a few moments to pay attention to one of these qualities you are giving unconditional love a chance to flesh itself out in your life. Like flowers growing in a garden the reality of unconditional love becomes more and more visible over a natural period of time.

This kind of gentle awareness works by allowing unconditional love to grow deeper roots over time. Spending a few moments of awareness each day allows it to naturally express itself in your living. At times you will remember moments when love seemed distant and difficult. Accepting these memories and feelings without judging, rejecting or analyzing them allows the unconditional quality of your love to develop. As it develops it will weed out the expressions of love that distort or inhibit its full expression.

The development of spiritual qualities thrives on the relaxed and welcoming ecology of your gentle awareness.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS / Stillpoint

INNER VIEWS
A Meditation on Mercy

"Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?"

The lawyer said, "The one who showed mercy."

Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:37)

The point of spirituality is realized understanding and illumined acting. Realized understanding comes from our own experience of our self. We can say that "everything is a grace" but until we've experienced the frustration of trying to live a spiritual life and falling short, we'll never know the need and experience of grace.

The Gospels are meant to point us to the deeper reality, inner experience of finding the personal meaning of their wisdom in our lives. The Gospels point, we need to act and look for the grace that inspires our acting from the deep inner source of our own motivations. This is an inner experience that comes from dealing with our external lives. Too often we are distracted by believing that we are living what we think is right. Inner and outer must be combined for gospel living.

To show mercy, as Jesus points us to in today's Gospel, means that we have connected to the inner experience of God's mercy in our personal life. Here is a meditation that will help you become sensitive to the reality of mercy in your life. The profound simplicity of God loving us cannot be explained; it can only be received and experienced

At this moment, every moment, we are being loved into existence by Trinity. Because Trinity is love and we are created in love, our deepest motivation is to be loved and to be loving. This is not merely a psychological desire, it is our essence as Trinity's beloved, expressing itself in our awareness. Trinity's mercy is Trinity tenderly reminding us that we are known for all of who we are and loved.

Mercy is just the way Trinity is towards us. We can't grab it, nor do we need to merit it. All we have to do is to accept it. For those of us who are used to working for our keep, attaining our place in life, and trying to get what we deserve, this can be a humbling experience. At the same time, accepting Trinity's mercy helps us let go of our accumulated self-expectations. It returns us to the true ground of our dignity, worth and meaning as manifestations of our Father's love. This meditation can help us accept the graciousness of Trinity loving us for all of who we are.

Meditation: This form of prayerful meditation is very simple. Take a couple of slow, deep breaths and let yourself relax into Trinity's gift of the moment. Then ask this simple question: "Who am I?" When a word or phrase or image comes into your awareness, simply affirm: "God is merciful." And then repeat the question: "Who am I?" Continue this for about ten minutes.

Ask the question:

"Who am I?"

When a word, phrase or image comes into awareness, simply affirm:

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“God is merciful.”

And then repeat the question: “Who am I?”

After 10 minutes allow yourself three or four minutes to rest silently in your deep identity in God.

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Inner Views Learning to Pray

Praying is so basic that it should be easy. But it becomes complicated because of the expectations we bring to our relationship with God. I'd like to offer some basic principles that I believe will help us focus on the heart of praying.

Prayer is a relationship with God who loves us for all of who we are.

In the 1st Letter of John we read “This is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us.” (1 John 4:10). St. Alphonsus Liguori, the Doctor of Prayer wrote: “For God, heaven is the human heart. Does God love you? Love Him. His delights are to be with you; let yours be to be with Him... accustom yourself to speak with Him alone, familiarly, with confidence and love, as to the dearest friend you have, and who loves you best.”

We have a basic desire to pray which actually comes from God's desire for us. Prayer in this sense is more than rituals. It is responding to God who has chosen to be personally present to us. But prayer is made difficult because we are wounded, our lives are driven by fear, anger and shame all of which make us feel separate from God. The truth is, these are the cracks in our armor that lets God's love in. But we must make a choice to accept God's gift, God's presence. We grow up thinking that we have to win God's love. Nothing is further from the truth. God loves us because that is God's choice. But God will not impose Himself on us. It's up to us to choose to let God into our lives. We will continue to relate to God out of fear until we decide to take a chance on God's love.

Prayer begins by being yourself with God: by learning to be transparent.

We begin by praying where we are, in our own words. God does not care about the person we want to be or think we should be. This person doesn't exist. God simply loves us as we already are. This is often uncomfortable for those of us who have been trained to try to win affection. But if we begin as we are we will mature into a trust that allows God to be the Source of our living. It will help us come to know ourselves for who we are and to respond to God's presence as we are. Love is the ability to be present to another as they are, without interference from our judgments and expectations, and to be oneself without pretense.

Prayer is not about changing God or changing God's mind or even alerting God to our needs.

In Matthew's Gospel we hear this from Jesus; "When you pray do not babble on as the pagans do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard... your Father knows what you need. (Matthew 6:7)

Since God loves us unconditionally and is already doing whatever is possible for us we don't need to let God know what we need. We may choose to share our hopes and dreams and desires with God. They are all a part of our life and sharing them helps us feel more connected. But God already is giving us all that is possible. And the best way that God answers prayers is through us.

Everything can be prayer.

The heart of prayer is intention. Our intention to let God into our lives and open our hearts to God creates the connection that we call prayer. We can pray by jogging if we intend to be aware of God's presence to us as we jog. We can pray by saying written prayers such as the Our Father or the rosary. We pray by attending Mass. But we can also pray by listening to our favorite music as a way of opening our hearts to God. We can pray just by being silent with God. The most important step is our intention. And the more time we spend with God the more we allow God to guide and mature our relationship.

Prayer and action are two complimentary sides of one coin. Our essence is to be Beloved, to receive love and to be loving, to give love through our unique self.

God loves us into existence at every moment. And the only way to hold onto that love is to give it away. This is one of Jesus' basic principles: we experience God's love for us by loving other people. We grow spiritually by emptying ourselves and making room for God to fill us.

Prayer is entering the Mystery of God.

"May they all be one Father, may they be one in me, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me, I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:21-23).

Our God, the Father that Jesus guides us to, is unlike anything a god is supposed to be. God doesn't answer our every desire. God's only method is to love us more intimately. And the more we fail, the more our woundedness shows itself the more God reaches out to us. Jesus leads us into a relationship with our Father that cannot be understood, defined, or captured in words, where the most sincere language is silence. God insists on being God and will not allow us to worship an idol made in our own image and likeness. Prayer teaches us to love God for God's sake. This is not something I can convince you of. It makes sense only by praying.

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“Lord, teach us to pray...: (Luke)

There was a time when I didn't like what Jesus taught us about praying. He said when you pray, pray like this “Our Father” I wanted my prayer to be more personal. I wanted to pray “My Father.” I didn't want to share God's attention. I want prayer to be about me and my agenda, not us and our needs.

Like most things in our life this attitude is changing for me. I still come to God first of all with my personal needs. But I am also aware of how much we function as a community and family. We are in this together and our lives are far richer and more meaningful because of each other. I think that part of this shift in my attitude has come from recognizing that I am not nearly as independent as I imagined.

Spiritual development often happens by becoming more aware of new dimensions of our cherished beliefs. We start off focused in one dimension of a reality and wake up to its opposite dimension. This is the way our mind works. It's only able to look at one side of a coin at a time. And we get so used to looking at that one side that we may not even think about the other – until we drop the coin. Or sometimes we meet somebody who has looked at the other side of the coin. If we don't get into an argument with them we may be persuaded to look at the other side. It sounds like a simple happening but if you pay attention to your point of view you'll see that it takes a lot of energy to become aware of other points and viewpoints. In the Gospels this coming to see through new eyes is called “conversion,” or “repentance.” We spend the time of Lent seeking and praying for this grace.

And this new seeing is what “Our Father” demands of me. It means that I no longer see myself as totally independent and separate from others; “this is me, I'm my own person; I live by MY beliefs.” This has been my experience for most of my life. I consider myself as independent. But now I'm beginning to see that the opposite is just as true about me – about us.

I grew up in a Catholic family and that's basically why I'm a Catholic. I made choices along the way to commit more deeply to my Catholic faith but those too were supported by being with Catholics. Catholics were “my people, my family, my tribe.” I knew that we were in this together and when I met other Catholics with points of view that were foreign to me I was more willing to pay attention to them because they were “Catholic” just like me. My faith has expanded not simply because of what happened in my head but also because differences in our shared faith.

“When you pray pray like this, ‘Our Father...’ is one of those awakenings that came from beyond me – this time from Jesus. In truth, one of the reasons I write is to influence your awareness. I've been incredibly blessed by living in a Redemptorists community. We sit around the dinner table and talk about a great variety of things; from a great variety of perspectives. And this has profoundly affected my life, my faith and my spirituality.

I'm also extremely grateful for being part of this faith community at St. Michael's. My faith has been supported, enlivened and broadened by the “faithful” I meet daily. And on an even more

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personal level by the people who have been so good to me and generous in helping me deal with dialysis week after week.

The quality of my life has been significantly increased because of the quality and diversity of people I get to know here at St. Michael's. We are made, in the image and likeness of the Trinity, to become fully alive through relationships to one another and with one another to the larger community.

Jesus' basic way of bringing about the Kingdom of God was to get people together. He gathered them around a table to share a meal together. Or he told the people to sit down and they began to share what they had. And this practice became the ultimate conversion experience in the sharing of the Last Supper – which we continue in our Mass. And when he taught us to pray he began with "Our Father."

Ken Sedlak - Stillpoint / PATHWAYS