

The Prayer of Being

Resting Wordlessly in God's Presence, Letting Your Whole Being Stay Attentive and Open to God

PETER NG

The theme for this evening is The Prayer of Being. So I'd like you to understand just the significance of the word *being*, B-E-I-N-G. B-E is *be*. I-N is *in*. What is G? *God*. So the prayer of being is about *being in* God. This is the deepest level of prayer that we can come to. And that's why meditation is so important, because in meditation we go beyond thinking about God, we go beyond talking to God. In meditation, we want to *be in* God. Where is God? I want to share with you this evening that God is not difficult to find. God is not difficult to find, God is impossible to avoid. God is not difficult to find, God is impossible to avoid. If you want to know the reason, I now invite you to stand up and we sing this song, God Is Dwelling in My Heart.

Chorus

*God is dwelling in my heart,
He and I are one,
All the joy he gives to me
Through Christ his Son.
And with Jesus in my heart
What have I to fear,
For he is the Son of God
In my heart he is near.*

1. Christians who are baptised
Have you ever realised
The great mystery,
God dwells in you and me

2. This joy God gives to you,
Share it with others too,
Show them that God is love,
Lift their hearts above.

Thank you.

So God is not difficult to find, God is impossible to avoid. Why? Because God is dwelling in my heart. I think this is the key message which Jesus came to give us. This is the good news, that God dwells in our heart. God is present in our heart. And that is why when we pray, we need to move beyond the conventional forms of prayer that we are used to and enter into the prayer of being. We have to go beyond thinking about God, we have to go beyond talking to God. We want to *be in* God, with God.



Joseph asked me to put meditation in the context of Catholic prayer. And I think a good way of understanding the various forms of Catholic prayer is these four words: *lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplation* – four Latin words. They help us to categorise the various forms of prayer that we are all used to practising.

Lectio is basically reading a text, it could be a scriptural text, at a slow pace allowing the words to penetrate us, to fill us with wisdom and love. That's *lectio divina*, the meditative reading of scripture, and that is good because that's how we are formed in the faith, through the reading of scripture.

But you move beyond lectio to what is called meditatio. And this is where there's a lot of confusion, because the word meditatio here refers to engaging mentally, thinking – thinking about the words that you are reading. So most of us who are brought up with a Western form of education, when we use the word meditation, we say 'meditating about'; it means thinking. But in the Eastern context, in Asia, in India, or in China, when people use the word meditation, they don't refer to thinking. They refer to silence, silence and stillness. In this categorisation which I'm sharing with you, the word meditatio is used in the Western sense. It refers to us engaging mentally with the text, ruminating on it, chewing on it, listening for how the message relates to our life – a common form of prayer, moving from lectio and going on to meditatio. But remember, the word meditatio here refers to meditating upon, thinking about.

The next category is what you call oratio. And oratio refers to expressions of praise. When we sing a hymn, for example, that's oratio, praise and thanksgiving. But the final category of prayer that we are talking about, which I am referring to tonight when I speak about meditation, is contemplatio.

Contemplatio is what I'm referring to when I speak to you about meditation. And contemplatio is the prayer of *being*. That is the subject of our talk here tonight. In our Catholic prayer life, we have all these forms of prayer. A full Christian prayer life has all these forms of prayer.

I want to now talk to you about the theology of Christian meditation. Many Catholics, many Christians, when we share with them about meditation, one of the first questions they ask is, 'Is this prayer?' It's because they're so used to all the other forms of prayer that when you say, 'sit down, sit still, bring your mind to stillness by using a prayer word', they ask, 'Is this prayer?' So there is a certain lack of understanding, and what I'm trying to do tonight is to help you to come to this deeper understanding of prayer.

Now, to do so, I thought that one good way is to have all of you be mindful of what I would call the Trinitarian blessing, the blessing of the Trinity. What is the Trinity? The Trinity is a mystery, the mystery of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Spirit. At the Eucharistic celebration, every time you come to mass, how does the celebrant begin the Eucharistic celebration? The celebrant says: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.' And how do we respond? 'And with your spirit.'

That is the Trinitarian blessing, and the Trinity is our Christian experience of God. Different religions have different ways of understanding the reality of God. As Christians, our understanding and



in fact our experience of God should be the Trinity. So in order to understand the Trinity, something which is almost impossible to understand because it's a mystery, the wonderful thing is that it is possible to experience.

One way to understand the Trinity is to talk about the prayer of Christ. We are so used to talking about *we* praying – I pray, you pray. What about Jesus, the prayer of Christ? Now, I think you would agree with me that Jesus is the perfect person of prayer. Nobody prays better than Jesus. So in our Christian meditation community, we speak about the prayer of Christ. What is the prayer of Christ? The prayer of Christ refers to the indwelling Holy Spirit. God is dwelling in my heart. The hymn that we sang, *God Is Dwelling in My Heart*, has a resonance in the very powerful words of St Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians.

I'd like you to just spend a minute reflecting on these words of St Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians: 'Surely you know that you are God's temple where the spirit of God dwells (1 Cor 3:16)'. And as though that were not enough, St Paul repeats this later in chapter six. He says: 'Do you not know that your body is a shrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the spirit is God's gift to you (1 Cor 6:19)?' So what is St Paul trying to share with us? And when St Paul shares with us, he's sharing out of his own experience. The words of St Paul are very powerful because that is his own experience, that the spirit of God dwells in him. So the prayer of Christ is a reference to these words of St Paul.

One way for us to understand the prayer of Christ is that the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of Christ (here we are talking about the risen Christ) has sent his spirit into our hearts. So in the heart of each one of us dwells the spirit of the risen Christ. That is a reality. And what is the spirit of Christ doing within us? St Paul would also tell us that the spirit of Christ within us is constantly praying, 'Abba Father (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6)'. In other words, the spirit of Christ within us is constantly, unceasingly at prayer to the Father. And that's why Jesus tells us over and over again, 'I and my Father are one (Jn 10:30, Jn 17:11)'. So the prayer of Christ is the spirit of Christ within us constantly at prayer to the Father.

And of course, we all know that the Trinity is this phenomenon, this mystery of the love of God, of the Father and the Son. That's why Jesus says, 'My Father loves me and I love my Father (Jn 14:31)'. So the love that flows between Jesus and the Father is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the energy of love that flows between the Father and the Son. Now, if you understand this, can you imagine that in each one of us, in our heart, the Trinity is present because the Spirit of Christ within us is at prayer to the Father. Now, if we can understand that, then the next question is: how should we pray?

How should we pray? I would say that there's no better way for us to pray than for us to join in the prayer of Christ. To join in the prayer of Christ. The founding teacher of our community, Fr John Main liked to describe the prayer of Christ as a mighty ocean, the mighty ocean of love that flows between Jesus the Son, and the Father. That is the prayer. And Fr John Main says that what we should do is to leave our prayers behind and join in the mighty river of the prayer of Christ.

So in the tradition of Christian meditation, the ultimate prayer, the prayer that really matters is the prayer of Christ, because Jesus is the perfect person of prayer. And so when we meditate, we seek to join in the prayer of Christ. So meditation is about joining in the prayer of Christ.



Quite often when I share about meditation and I speak about Christian meditation, people ask me, 'What's the difference between your Christian meditation and Buddhist meditation, Hindu meditation?' I say, 'All these are very good forms of meditation based on your own understanding of God.' And we mustn't say, 'No, not so good.' Every religion has a practice of meditation because that is the deepest way to pray.

So even in the Christian religion, we have meditation, except that the Christianity that we were brought up in was a Christianity that was imported from the West, where they don't have the same tradition of silence and stillness that is the meditation, for example, in the Buddhist, in the Hindu, in the Taoist traditions. But we have our tradition of meditation and what Fr John Main, the founder of our community, discovered was that in the fourth and fifth century we had what is known as the Desert Fathers and the Desert Mothers, and they were practising a form of prayer that we now call meditation.

The understanding which the Desert Fathers and Mothers had about meditation, they understood it in terms of the Christian experience and the Christian experience is the Trinity, as I explained to you, the prayer of Christ. So when people ask us, 'What is Christian meditation? What's the difference between Christian meditation and other forms of meditation?' Our response is that our meditation is Christian because it is Christo-centric. It is Christo-centric because it is centred on the prayer of Christ constantly going on in our hearts – Jesus at prayer to the Father. It is very important for all of us to understand the stupendous significance of what we are talking about. That's what I call the theology.

Now I want to turn from theory and theology to practice because these are just words. What counts is not words. What counts is practice and experience. So now I want to share with you how to meditate, and I would then like you to meditate with me together for 10 minutes.

Meditation is the prayer of being, to be with God. Meditation is not talking to God, meditation is not thinking about God. Why do you want to talk to God when he's present within you? Why do you want to think about God if he's present within you? If God is present within you, you want to be with God, which is to say you want to pay attention to God. You want to pay attention with your whole heart, with your whole mind, and with your whole soul. That is worship at the deepest level. So meditation is the prayer of being. It is the prayer of attention.

Another way of understanding the practice of meditation is to appreciate that each of us as a human being is body, mind, and spirit. Body, mind, and spirit. When we say the human person is body, mind, and spirit, it's useful to reflect what is the body and what is the mind, and which part of the human person is real, which part of the human person is eternal. Now, you and I know that our body is temporary, our body changes every minute; this body was different when I was born, and now look at this body. It's mortal, so our body is not what is permanent in us. Neither is our mind. Our mind is our thoughts and our emotions. Your thoughts are endless, one thought after another; your emotions, one day you are happy, the next day you are sad. So the mind is constantly changing, it's temporary. But the spirit is what is eternal in us. In other words, when you look at yourself as a human person, what matters is the spirit. So when we speak about eternal life, eternal life is the life of the spirit.

Now, we sang, 'God is dwelling in my heart, he and I are one', in other words, he (his spirit) and I

(my spirit) are one. So the human person, body, mind, and spirit, when we meditate we want to enter into the experience of the spirit. And in order to do that, we have to bring the body to stillness, we have to bring the mind to stillness. And if we can bring the body and the mind to stillness, in that stillness of body and mind, we begin to experience our spirit.

So the practice of meditation, the way we meditate, comes down to: how do we bring our body to stillness? And how do we bring our mind to stillness?

When we meditate in a few moments, the first thing we have to learn to do is to bring the body to stillness, which means we must learn to sit still. Now, tonight you're all sitting on a chair. That's perfectly good, to be able to sit on a chair, but then you must learn how to sit still. What I recommend that you do is, if you're sitting on a chair, sit in a comfortable position. By comfortable, I mean sit in a relaxed but alert position. So the rule of posture, the way to sit is to sit with your back straight. This chair has got a fairly straight back, so you can lean back, it's okay, but the whole idea is to sit with your back straight. And then in order to sit still, rest your legs on the floor so that you are nicely anchored and you don't have to move. The whole idea is to find a position where your feet can rest nicely on the floor. Then put your hands on your lap, or if you like you can put one palm on top of the other. The whole idea is to have a position where we can sit still, where we can sit comfortably without moving.

And then the next thing to do is to close your eyes very lightly so that you're not distracted by what's going on around here. And then take a few moments to be aware of your breathing. Observe your breath coming in, going out. Normally, we don't pay attention to our breath, we just breathe automatically. But it's good before you meditate to take a few moments – my breath is coming out, my breath is going in. And you find that when you give your attention to your breathing, your mind slows down. So it brings you into a good preparation for meditation.

So that's all you have to do to sit still. You don't have to sit on the floor in a lotus position. Most of us at our age, we can give up trying to do that, but it's not necessary. The important thing is to sit still, and finding a good chair to sit is good enough. So that's how you bring the body to stillness, nothing complicated.

The next thing is how do we bring our mind to stillness? In meditation, we want to give our attention to the spirit within us, to the prayer of Christ going on within us. Now, when you want to pay attention to something, what's the problem? The problem is distracting thoughts. There are so many thoughts going through your mind, it's impossible to concentrate. So the way that we recommend to people who wish to meditate is to take one word, a prayer word, and then just to sound this word quietly in your heart over and over again. In other words, instead of your mind thinking of so many things, you take one word and you give your attention to sounding this word. By reciting this word over and over again, it helps us to let go of all the other thoughts that are constantly demanding our attention. You see, that's the power of that one prayer word.

The word that we recommend to our meditators is the Aramaic word *maranatha*. Maranatha. Maranatha is in the Aramaic language; that's the language that Jesus spoke. And the word Maranatha

means 'come Lord'. Come Lord. But the importance of the word is not the meaning. The importance is that if you can learn to sound this word, it helps you to let go of all other thoughts. That's the purpose of the prayer word. So when you use this word maranatha for the meditation, sound it like this, ma-ra-na-tha. You sound the word clearly – four syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. You sound it gently and then you sound it continuously. You sound it clearly, you sound it gently, and you sound it continuously, maranatha. So by focusing on this one word, it helps you to let go of all the other distracting thoughts. But that's not good enough. What is important is, in order for your attention to be sustained, as you sound this word listen to the sound. Listen to the sound as you sound it, maranatha. So the way to come to stillness of mind is to sound this word and then to listen to it as you sound it.

Now we're going to meditate for 10 minutes. It's not easy to be able to just sound this word continuously. You will find that during the 10 minutes there'll be many times where you stop saying the word and some other thoughts come into your mind. When that happens, no problem. No matter how often you are distracted during the 10 minutes, just come back and sound the prayer word over and over again. That is what we call faithfulness. Faithfulness. Everyone is going to be distracted. The important thing is to do your best. Learn to sound the prayer word, maranatha, and then listen to the sound, as you say it. So let's now practise this for 10 minutes.

I meditate every morning and every evening. And whenever I can find some time during the day, I also meditate. So I meditate 25 minutes in the morning, 25 minutes in the evening. And I also try to find every opportunity I have during the day to meditate. Why do I do that? I do that because prayer is about being aware of the presence of God. And where is God? God is dwelling in my heart. So the purpose of meditating, and in fact, the purpose of all forms of prayer is to constantly remind us of the presence of God.

So prayer should be about the practice of the presence of God. And God is present in our heart. God is not difficult to find, God is impossible to avoid. So please understand that the purpose of all prayer is that we are constantly aware of the presence of God in us, and the times of meditation in the morning and the evening, these are practise sessions. They are practise sessions so that as often as possible during the day I can be aware, I cannot forget about God. You see? So it's not just about morning and evening and that's all. The whole purpose is to practise the constant presence of God.

Now, this presence of God within us is something which I think is very important for us to understand and to experience and then to help other people to appreciate. And I think this is particularly important for those of you who are communion ministers. This event is about extraordinary ministers of holy communion. What is your responsibility as ministers of holy communion? As Catholics, we believe that Jesus is present in the consecrated bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ.

Jesus says, 'Take my body and eat of it. Take my blood and drink of it.' Why? So that by eating his body and drinking his blood, we might be transformed. We might be transformed into his likeness, to be like Christ. That's the whole purpose. Jesus is saying, 'I'm sharing my life with you. I share my life with you. Take my life into you and share it.' That is the deep significance of holy communion. Now, the life that Jesus wants to share with us, that life is present within us in his spirit. He has sent his spirit into us,



so he's present within us. My understanding of holy communion is that in the consecrated bread and wine, Jesus is present, but he is present under a sign. It's an external sign, but it's an external sign pointing to an inner reality. And that inner reality is his spirit present within us.

So I think this is very important for communion ministers to realise, and it's very important for us to be able to share with the faithful that this is something very sacred. When we leave the church and we leave the tabernacle, we carry Jesus with us in our heart. So the celebration of the Eucharist and the receiving of holy communion is to help us to understand the deep significance of the presence of Jesus within us. I think once we understand that, the way we give communion and the way you receive communion becomes such an important event.

God is not difficult to find, God is impossible to avoid, because God is dwelling in your heart and in my heart. And when we pray, we want to be present. We want to be with God who is present within us. And as often as possible in our life, during the course of our day's work or whatever we do, we want to constantly be aware of this presence within us. And that is the reason why we pray. And that's the reason why I recommend that whatever you are now doing in your prayer life, try to make some time, maybe 10 minutes a day, to learn to meditate. It has helped me a lot in my own life, and I wanted to share that with you tonight. Thank you.

*Transcript of talk to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) & Guests,
Church of the Holy Cross, Singapore, 31 March 2026*