

Contemplative Outreach

Spiritual Journey with Thomas Keating

Part 5 Tape 27(b)



When we lose interest in thoughts we begin to enter contemplation and total receptivity. We enter into the secrecy and silence of God. We are attracted, as it is put, by the perfume of God.

Next comes the **prayer of quiet** when the will is aware of being united to God in a deep way even when the barrage of thoughts still persists. We could sit in this delight a long time if we could. Then the Spirit may temporarily suspend the imagination and the memory as we sit in God's presence. It may only be for a few seconds but nothing compares with this. This is the **prayer of union**. If the prayer of **full union** is granted our sense of self, of an individual self is suspended.

All of these are affirmations of our goodness but healing is also taking place, loosening up and drawing us out of the trauma of a lifetime. Sometimes we have to visit at a deeper level material that we may have thought we had left behind.

The **Night of Sense** is a realisation that we desperately want happiness and that it can only be found in God. All else becomes relative for us and we develop a great inner freedom towards what used to be important. A period of grieving for what we have left behind, however, may result and our hearts may sink. We may even project our grief onto God and feel we are rejected. The ultimate goal of the Night of Sense is the death of the false self. However, that really only takes place during the **Night of the Spirit** which is a growth of faith that comes through an experience of God's absence and the diminishment of our long established support systems. The essence of contemplative prayer, so, is not in wonderful experiences but in the purification of the unconscious.

We must **let the false self die** and with it our exaggerated sense of separation from God and from others. They are an illusion. It is a great gift when we come to a place where our role and even our identity are no longer a source of importance to use, rather, ***"it's to be what God wants us to be in the present moment and to be able to manifest God's goodness and tenderness in whatever the 'now moment' seems to require, suggest or inspire."***

Ironically, transformation often leads us into the ordinary in life, which masks the enormous work of grace that is going on, as it were, "in secret". The evidence that this is happening is in the fruits of the Spirit which are joy, peace, love, gentleness etc. The life we have is the **life of the true self** rather than the life of the false self. The Night of the Spirit completes what was not completed in the Night of Sense which means that the Night of Spirit is a participation in the Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ.