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An Unpublished Meditation . . .

by **Henri Nouwen**

page two
Ongoing Opportunities

page four
One-Time Opportunities

page six
Reading Opportunities

page eight
Afterwords

An ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, published by the Spiritual Growth Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church

I want to share with you some thoughts, some feelings, some experiences from the world of prayer. But I don't think we should start speaking about prayer without reading in the Scriptures. [He reads St. Luke's account of The Transfiguration, Luke 9:28-36.]

Jesus went up to the mountain to pray. And we will never understand the nature of Jesus' ministry if we do not understand how central his prayer is in his life. Jesus went out to pray alone by himself. Early in the morning, long before dawn, he went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Jesus went out to pray in the synagogue and the temple to join in public prayer. And once in a while on very special occasions he took his most intimate friends with him. He took them with him up to the mountain to pray, where they could see his ecstasy. But he took the same friends with him into the garden where they could see his agony.

And when we lose sight of this continuous prayer of the Lord, we will not understand his mission. And we will never fully understand the meaning of his servanthood. Because it was in his prayer that he affirmed that he was sent by the Father. It was in his prayer that he started to realize more and more that the words which he spoke were not his words but the words that his Father had given him, that the works he was doing were not his works but the works that his Father [set for him]. . . .

And what does it mean, what does it mean for you and for me as we gather to reflect on prayer? What it means is that if anything important happens in our life—in teaching or in healing or in helping or in organizing or in planning—if anything happens that is important, we can never claim it as our own. We can never hold on to it as a property, as a result that is ours. But we can only receive it as a gift.

Jesus himself never claimed anything for himself. He always pointed to the Father who had sent him: "not my works, not my words, not my glory but the glory of the Father who sent me." And if we do ministry, we are part of that mission.

And it is in prayer that we become aware that if anything happens at all, it is always the work of God in us. A work that we can never claim as our little success or our great achievement which we can be proud of. We have to work, we have to be involved, we have to be engaged. But at the end of the day we have to say, "It's the Lord who works and not me."

An Unpublished Meditation . . . continues on page 2



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Look for *Thin Places* at: www.thinplaces.us or www.ewestminster.org/thinplaces.asp

And I am wondering if a lot of depression, a lot of disappointment, a lot of sadness in our lives is not related to the fact that somewhere we think that we have to do it, that we have to find the right words to say, that we have to make it happen. And if it doesn't happen as we felt it should happen, then we say, "I'm no good"—or—"things are not well."

And a lot of priests, and a lot of sisters, and a lot of ministers, and a lot of lay men and women who work in ministry in different ways often become depressed, often suffer from failure. But maybe we have to unmask that type of suffering as suffering for the wrong reason. Wrong because we suffer because of our clinginess, of our holding on to our own results and not realizing that if anything happens at all, we can never claim it as our own.

To pray is to say, "not my will but Yours—not my words but Yours—not my works but Yours—not my glory but Yours—not in my name but in Your name."

And therefore prayer is the affirmation of life: not as a property to be conquered, but as a gift to be shared. And therefore prayer really (in the deepest sense of the word) reveals to us the nature of things. It reveals to us how things are really hanging together. Or as Merton would say (who was always more down to earth), "what the scoop is!" [Said with a smile and a twinkle audible in his voice.]

Because the nature of things is not that they are properties that we have to conquer, but that they are gifts to be received. And it is exactly in prayer that that comes into our awareness. And slowly our life can become a

Eucharistic life, a life of thanksgiving, a life of gratitude.

And, therefore, for those who pray and for those who pray continuously the illusion of possessiveness . . . is continuously unmasked. And therefore, for those who pray the world no longer is a dark world. But the world becomes a new earth, speaks a new language.

And to say it differently, for those who pray the world loses its opaqueness and becomes transparent.

And starts pointing beyond itself.

And to be Christian, and to be ministers, is to continuously want to dispel the opaqueness and bring about some transparency in the midst of this world.

Now let me try to explain this a little more . . . *

*Note: This is the opening portion of a tape recorded talk—which seems never to have been published—given by Nouwen to a group of clergy and church lay leaders while he was a faculty member at Yale. It is used here with permission from Credence Communications.

The complete talk—heard in Nouwen's voice, with his cadences and his inflections and his emphases—is even more powerful, exploring in more detail the ways in which prayer "unmasks the illusion of possessiveness" . . . in which prayer "lifts the veil" . . . in which prayer leads to a "transparent life, on many levels."

A cassette [product # AA0261] of the entire talk may be ordered at: www.credencecommunications.com [\$10].

ON-GOING OPPORTUNITIES

The Hermitage at Clearwater

Now in its second year, the Clearwater Hermitage is making real the hope with which it was created: offering a very special 'sacred' space for solitude and prayer, for reflection and writing, for relaxation and renewal.

Deep in the woods at Clearwater Forest, the Hermitage has a large picture window and a screened porch for nature watching. Inside you will find simple comforts, an extra-long bed, a comfortable chair, and a

Do you know of anyone who might like to receive *Thin Places*? It's sent free to all who request it.

Or do you know of an up-coming "Opportunity" that might be of interest to others?

If so, please contact Kathy Fisher:

kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

broad writing table. For your convenience there is electricity for lighting, a coffee maker, a microwave, and a small refrigerator. A propane fireplace provides warmth in cooler weather.

We especially recognize the need for church pastors and professionals to have a chance for personal renewal. Accordingly, **the Hermitage is available at NO COST** to all full-time ordained clergy and religious—of every denomination—and to Christian Educators and Youth Directors.

If you are a church professional, please consider coming to this place of peace.

If you are a lay person, please come to a place where one may heal the body and nourish the soul and restore the spirit. And please also share this Opportunity with your pastor or other church professionals so that they

might know of its special welcome for them.

**'In the morning, O Lord, Thou will hear my voice;
in the morning, I will order my prayer to Thee
and eagerly watch.'** Psalm 5:3

**The Clearwater Hermitage is available 7 days a week,
year around.**

Presbyterian Clearwater Forest, Deerwood, MN

To reserve the Hermitage, contact the office at
218.678.2325.

Two New Hermitages

The Sisters of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph are now celebrating the Sesquicentennial of their arrival in Minnesota. As part of that celebration, the Community has chosen to build two hermitages as a living memorial to their 150th year and as an extension into the next 150 years. The hermitages are expected to be ready for their first retreatants sometime this summer.

For information and updates: dmanuel@csbsju.edu or
www.sbm.osb.org.

The Pacem in Terris Hermitage

Another cluster of hermitages—which have been available for many years, and which have previously been described in detail in *Thin Places*—each one set well apart on the 180-acre beautifully wooded site, is to be found at Pacem in Terris 20 miles north of Anoka.

For information or registration: 763.444.6408 or
www.paceminterris.org.

Taizé Evening Prayer

Beautiful music, silence, and Scripture are the sustaining elements of this unique, peaceful, and inviting Prayer. If you've never experienced this way of praying before, or even if you have, you're in for a special experience using the songs and prayers from the Taizé ecumenical monastery in France.

First Wednesday every month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Christ the King Retreat Center, in the Chapel
621 First Avenue South, Buffalo

For information: 763.682.1394 or
christheking@kingshouse.com.

The Practice of Sabbath

These retreat days—at a place of rest and quiet within the city (accessible by city bus routes 21 & 11)—continue to be popular.

Led by Franciscan Sisters, each is a day apart, a day set aside to learn about and to experience the ancient and proven practice of Sabbath Keeping. Sabbath can restore us, giving us time to enjoy being alive, to savor the gifts of

creation, to give thanks. Sabbath can also be a time to challenge the violence of overwork, or of the accumulation of things, or of the multiplication of desires, responsibilities and accomplishments. Sabbath, in short, is a time to remember who we are and where our true center is.

**Friday, July 20; Saturday, September 15; Saturday,
October 20, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Avenue South, Mpls.

For information: 612.822.2623 or sabbathhouse@fslf.org

Minnesota Contemplative Outreach News

The Easter edition of *Minnesota Contemplative Outreach News*, will be the last—the realities of increasing printing and postage cost having to be faced.

But the website is alive and well. Visit the site, www.minnesotacomtemplativeoutreach.org, for information on Centering Prayer, on the National organization and much more. Click on 'Contact Us' to get the name and number of a key person in your area to learn about upcoming Centering Prayer retreats such as:

**Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat at St. Benedict's
in St. Joseph, July 29- August 7**

For information: 320.363.7115 or rbudig@csbsju.edu

**Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina Retreat at The
Benedictine Center in Maplewood, August 3-8**

For information: 651.777.7251 or
benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org

The still, small voice of Love

"Many voices ask for our attention. There is a voice that says, 'Prove that you are a good person.' Another voice says, . . . 'Nobody really cares about you,' and one that says, 'Be sure to become successful, popular, and powerful.' But underneath all these often very noisy voices is a still, small voice that says, 'You are my Beloved, my favor rests on you.'

That's the voice we need most of all to hear. To hear that voice, however, requires special effort; it requires solitude, silence, and a strong determination to listen.

And that's what prayer is. It is listening to the voice that calls us 'my Beloved.'"

Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*

Labyrinth Festival: Changing Lives, Celebrating Spirit

The Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress—who was one of the first and one of the most influential leaders in the resurgence of interest in the Labyrinth as a spiritual practice—will be the Keynote Speaker and a workshop presenter at this very important conference, which will also include Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion and other national leaders. The Festival schedule is rich and full—get details and complete information as indicated below.

Friday, June 15, at 7:00 p.m. through Sunday, June 17, at 4:30 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.696.2788 or

www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

NOTE: on June 18 and 19, Dr. Artress will lead a two-day Veriditas Labyrinth Facilitator Training workshop at the Carondelet Center.

For information: robertas@veriditas.net or

www.veriditas.net.

Men as Learners and Elders

After two years, the “Men’s Rites of Passage Retreat,” led by Richard Rohr is returning to Minnesota. As those who filled it full in 2005 discovered, this five-day, four-night retreat is a deeply prayerful experience that builds on the classic patterns of male initiation through teaching and rituals that will be both simple and moving. Each day includes group prayer, major teachings on central masculine spirituality themes, quiet time for reflection, and sharing in the context of the “home group.”

The five days offer insight into masculine spirituality, a time to savor the healing and awesome power of nature, an opportunity to examine life’s priorities and to ask questions about the ‘next step,’ an invitation to listen to the ‘quiet voice of God.’

Wednesday, June 20 to Sunday, June 24

Audubon Center of the North Woods, near Sandstone, MN

Interiorly Free

“When you are interiorly free you call others to freedom, whether you know it or not. . . . A free man or a free woman creates a space where others feel safe and want to dwell. Our world is so full of conditions, demands, requirements, and obligations that we often wonder what is expected of us. But when we meet a truly free person there are no expectations, only an invitation to reach into ourselves and discover there our own freedom. Where true inner freedom is, there God is.”

Henri Nouwen (with thanks to James Dolson)

For information or an application: 505.242.9588, ext. 111 or menswork@cacradicalgrace.org.

Or visit: www.malespirituality.org.

Loyola’s 30th Birthday Party

The Loyola Spirituality Center happily invites you to a birthday party at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, close to Loyola’s first home at St. Joseph’s Hospital. There will be cake and musical entertainment by David Haas and toasts by special guests.

What was that “something” Loyola set out to do in 1977? It was a time when people were searching for meaning in their lives, hungering for spirituality and reaching out in service, building community. Ordinary people were recognizing their invitation to holiness, their call to ministry in their world, their desire for companionship to help them integrate these aspects of their lives.

Since then, thousands of people (of all ages, religious persuasions, orientations and economic backgrounds) have come and have been accompanied on their spiritual journeys through Loyola, some for rather short periods, some for many, many years. Please come and help us celebrate.

Sunday, June 24, 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Landmark Center

75 West 5th Street, St. Paul

For information about the party: 651.614.0008 or

terry@loyolasrr.org

For information about the many services and retreat opportunities at Loyola: www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

“A School of Contemplative Wisdom, Week One”

From time immemorial there have been Wisdom schools to raise human consciousness, thereby transforming society. Concerned with life lived in the fullness of human being and consciousness, Wisdom has been transmitted across time as a treasury of theory and practice to teach us how to awaken.

Cynthia Bourgeault and Lynn Bauman will once again direct an academy where participants will gather to learn, transform their way of living, and be raised to higher levels of understanding.

Lynn (**Ancient Songs Sung Anew**, and much more) and Cynthia (**Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening**, and much more) are notable authors and experienced retreat leaders. One could legitimately say, “back by popular demand,” since their School has been particularly well-received in previous years.

Sunday, July 22, at 6:00 p.m. with supper to Saturday, July 28, after lunch

The House of Prayer, Collegetown

For information or registration: 320.363.3293 or houseprayer@cbsju.edu or www.houseofprayer.org.

Also at The House of Prayer this summer:

“A School of Contemplative Wisdom, Week Two”

Sunday, August 12, through Saturday, August 18

**“Healing: Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace,”
with Fr. Matt Linn**

The Prayer of St. Francis has become a powerful prayer for peace, in a world often permeated by conflict and polarization, in a world too often seeking Prozac in a quest for inner peace. This healing retreat experiences the Prayer of St. Francis to help heal our wounds and to transform us into peacemakers, offering a path towards inner and outer peace. Fr. Matt has led retreats in 50 countries and written 21 books and is an outstanding retreat leader.

**Friday, July 27, at 7:00 p.m. to Sunday, July 29,
at 12:45 p.m.**

Christ the King Retreat Center, in the Chapel
621 First Avenue South, Buffalo

For information: 763.682.1394 or christtheking@kingshouse.com.

Manna Fest

Led again by Dean J. Seal—who was the Executive Director of the Minnesota Fringe Festival and who last year organized the Spiritual Fringe—Manna Fest will offer 23 different shows, exploring ethical and spiritual matters; from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and non-denominational perspectives; through drama, story-telling and the performing arts. Full information, listings, and times and places available as indicated below

Saturday, August 2, through Sunday, August 12

Augsburg College, in various settings
2211 Riverside Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: www.augsburg.edu/mannafest or sealtotal@aol.com or 612.823.6005.

Tickets: Augsburg Atrium Lobby or www.CommunityTix.com.

**In the High Desert: Four Workshop Retreats
“Capturing Images of Sacredness”**

Monday through Sunday, August 6-12.

The desert pilgrimage offers the opportunity to experience a unique sort of holiness. This retreat will give particular attention to the way in which desert space impacts our spirit, and to how the capturing of visual, photographic images and the opportunity to memorialize such sacred space can give us a lasting touchstone for accessing sacredness in our ordinary days. Your album will tell the story of sacred places at Ghost Ranch in photos and words, rein-

forcing and enhancing your connectedness to this special desert place.

“The Desert as Thin Place”

Sunday through Friday, September 9-14.

You are invited to join a pilgrimage in the high desert: a “thin place,” where the distinction between secular and holy, earth and heaven, ordinary and sacred come together in such a way as to be “at one” in a unique and powerful confluence. The High Desert is a place where the landscape’s powerful majesty opens up our interior world for examination in an extraordinary way.

Ghost Ranch Retreat Center, Abiquiu, NM

For information or registration: 505.685.4333 or Abiquiu@ghostranch.org or www.ghostranch.org.
also available:

“A Celebration of Labyrinths”

Sunday through Friday, August 26-31.

and

“Bread for the Desert Journey”

Sunday through Friday, September 2-7.

Prayer Retreat: “Be Still and Know”

“Be Still and Know” offers a special opportunity since it will be led by the Rev. Joan Gray, the national Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Come for this prayer retreat amidst the woods and water, “up north” in Minnesota. And visit the Clearwater Hermitage.

Sunday, September 16, through Tuesday, September 18

Clearwater Forest Retreat Center, near Deerwood

For information or registration: 320.235.7910 or prsmn-vly@willmarnet.com.

The Welcoming Prayer: A Contemplative Prayer Practice

A central message in all spiritual traditions is the practice and experience of “letting go.” The act of surrendering our well-developed and over-protected egos or false self is a difficult task for everyone on the spiritual quest. The Welcoming Prayer is a simple and practical way to let go, a subtle yet effective way to truly experience the peace of saying, “Not my will but Thine be done.”

Terry Shaughnessy will present this workshop over two nights in early October. You will be introduced to the Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice the first evening. Then you’ll have the intervening week to experience the practice before returning to explore even further the movements of the Welcoming Prayer in your life.

Two Thursday Evenings, October 4 and 11

Loyola Center for Spirituality, 389 N. Oxford St., St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.641.0008 or tnessy@comcast.net or www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

Iona: A Celtic Journey
“Listening for the heartbeat of God,”
with J. Philip Newell

The Celtic tradition of Christian spirituality over the centuries has been characterized by a listening for the presence of God at the heart of each moment and of each created thing. A recurring symbol of spirituality in the Celtic world was the image of John the Beloved Disciple leaning against Jesus at the Last Supper. It was said that John thus heard the heartbeat of God. And he became an icon of spiritual practice, listening for the beat of God’s presence in the whole of life.

This pilgrimage, sponsored by Ghost Ranch and led by J. Philip Newell, offers time together on Iona, the historic birthplace of Christianity in Scotland and now the home of the modern-day, ecumenical Iona Community. We will listen within Scripture, within creation, and within the shared life and worship of our time together for the new beginnings that God is calling us to as individuals and as a nation. Our days will be shaped by the rhythm of morning and evening prayer in Iona Abbey, by participating in the life and work of the Iona Community on the island, and by workshops on the themes and music of the Celtic tradition for today.

October 13-19, 2007

Information on transportation to Iona available upon request.

For information or registration: 505.982.8539.or
 santafe@ghostranch.org.

Afterwords, continued from page 8

Welcome, welcome, welcome,

**I welcome everything that comes to me in this moment
 because I know it is for my healing.**

**I welcome all thoughts,
 feelings, emotions, persons,
 situations and conclusions.**

**I let go of my desire for security.
 I let go of my desire for approval.
 I let go of my desire for control.
 I let go of my desire to change any
 situation, condition,
 person, or myself.**

**I open to the
 love and presence of God
 and to
 the healing action and grace within.**

Open to the love and presence of God in each part of every day . . . and to the healing action and grace within.

Speaking of Faith
by Krista Tippett

Available in the Lowe Library or online [\$20].

Some months ago an ecumenical spiritual formation gathering got to talking about how liberal/conservative issues are dividing (sometimes deeply) most of the major denominations and (to some extent) the members of this group itself. Conversation moved on to wondering how issues which divide might be bridged. Memories stirred, and someone suggested that—instead of a theological discussion (friendly and respectful, of course)—people might begin by telling their own stories, saying: “Here are some of the ideas, experiences, people who have helped me to come to the point of understanding where I am now.” This way it would not be about My Truth or Your Truth but about our journeys.

The idea seemed both simple and insightful. One can disagree with another person’s theology, but one cannot easily disagree with her or his story. It seemed that the practice might be more likely to lead to dialogue and less likely to confrontation. And perhaps telling my story might help me to see that my faith journey is a journey . . . and that it might not now be at its final point. And perhaps hearing others’ stories might help me to see that my journey can be enriched and enlightened through openness to the best ideas and practices in my own and other faith traditions.

Not long after that discussion, *Speaking of Faith* was published, and—lo and behold—this remembered process has a name . . . and a distinguished heritage . . . and a current incarnation!

Many of us have probably listened to Public Radio’s *Speaking of Faith*—Krista Tippett’s weekly conversations about religion, meaning, ethics, and ideas. With beginnings in 1999, the program was launched as a monthly broadcast series on Minnesota Public Radio in 2001. But it was soon picked up nationally, experienced the most rapidly growing audience of any program on NPR, and is now carried weekly by 192 stations across the land. *Speaking of Faith*, the book, tells Krista’s own story, the story of her journey of faith, and the entwined story of *Speaking of Faith*.

There is much to find and much to like in this book. Here are some samples that caught one reader’s eye (but there is much more):

- Krista remembers that when she arrived in divided Berlin in the early 1980s as a young journalist, “the wall running through Berlin—a material symbol of the ideological ‘Iron Curtain’ that cut through the

heart of the ancient continent—appeared as the shape of forever, and unshakable truth of our lifetime.” And she then explains, “I hold on to these memories now as a reminder that there is at any given moment much reality we do not see, and more change possible than we can begin to imagine. . . .”

- In the early 1990s she returned from Europe and enrolled at Yale Divinity School (where Nouwen had taught, 1971-81), entering a notable time of mind and spirit stretching. While in New Haven she worked as a chaplain on the Alzheimer’s and dementia floor of a home and hospital for the elderly (perhaps a place something like L’Arch Daybreak Community where Nouwen served as chaplain beginning in 1986): “The people there reversed all the rules of social discourse of the life I had led up to then. They would ask my name but never remember it. They were not interested in my background and education, the places I’d seen, the titles I’d held—the credentials with which I had presented and positioned myself in the world. They would only know whether I was kind, gentle, patient, a good listener. . . .”

- Thomas Merton, she writes, “embodied the dual journey inward / journey outward that is followed by religious people and communities I admire the most. . . . I began to find my way to do this at a Benedictine monastery, Saint John’s Abbey, and its sister community, Saint Benedict’s, down the road in central Minnesota. . . . I had emerged from divinity school with a sense of the vastness and relevance of the theological enterprise—the human search for words about God, and lives crafted in their resonance. But I could not find a way to trace [this resonance] until I fell down Colledgeville’s contemplative rabbit hole. . . .”

- Later, conducting an oral history project for the Ecumenical Institute, she began to learn “the secrets of the Colledgeville approach to conversation that had changed so many lives and was about to change mine. They call it the ‘first-person’ approach— . . . There is a term, *narrative theology*, that describes what the first-person approach elicits. St Augustine’s *Confessions*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Sr. Helen Prejean’s *Dead Man Walking*, [Anne Lamott, Roberta Bondi]—these are vivid and persuasive theological tracts, because they present religious ideas forged and expressed in the language of life, . . . [drawn from] what they knew of the world, the work they did, who and what they loved. . . .”

- And Krista began to use this approach in the conversations she was recording, finding herself “most surprised at first by how listenable these conversations were. . . . [realizing that] there is a profound difference between hearing someone say this is the truth, and hearing someone say this is my truth. You can disagree with another person’s opinions; you can disagree with his doctrines; you can’t disagree with his experience. What I heard invariably shed some light on some experience of mine, or lit up some corner of another faith that had been closed to me. . . .”

So there it was. The “first-person” approach, or “narrative theology,” or “remembering forward” . . . Colledgeville . . . *Speaking of Faith* . . . exploring the best ideas and life practices in our own and other faith traditions . . . and doing it in a way that invited openness and learning and understanding.

As noted, this is only the smallest of samples. Look into Chapter Three, “Rethinking Religious Truth,” or Chapter Five, “Exposing Virtue,” or Chapter Six, “Confessing Mystery.” No other book recently read seems as likely to appeal to most *Thin Places* readers as does *Speaking of Faith*.

Reading it will almost certainly make listening to *Speaking of Faith* both richer and more nuanced.

Dressed in Gentleness

“Once in a while we meet a gentle person. . . . Gentle is the one who does “not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick” (Matthew 12:20). Gentle is the one who is attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of the other and enjoys being together more than accomplishing something. A gentle person treads lightly, listens carefully, looks tenderly, and touches with reverence. A gentle person knows that true growth requires nurture, not force. Let’s dress ourselves with gentleness. In our tough and often unbending world, our gentleness can be a vivid reminder of the presence of God among us.”

Henri Nouwen
Bread for the Journey



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An unpublished meditation
... by Henri Nouwen
"Speaking of Faith ..."



AFTERWORDS: Letting Go

The "Afterwords" last time began with Rumi's poem, "The Guest House," which ends:

**Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.**

And it briefly introduced The Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice, as the discipline of seeking to say "welcome" to each moment, each experience, each feeling as it arises. Or in Rumi's words: "Every morning a new arrival. / A joy, a depression, a meanness, / Some momentary awareness comes / As an unexpected visitor. / Welcome and entertain them all."

As a spiritual practice, the second half of The Welcoming Prayer—and probably for most of us the harder half—is the letting go. And it may be harder because it calls on us to be welcoming and accepting at a deeper level. Thomas Keating and others teach that at an early age we humans begin to develop largely unconscious programs for happiness . . . largely unconscious strategies which we think will bring us security/survival, affection/esteem, power/control . . . deeply ingrained responses to feelings and persons and situations which arise from the (primarily defensive) false self part of us . . . rather than our true self, which Keating and others describe as that in us which is "most open to the presence of God."

Being truly open and welcoming means passing through the experience—be it a joy, a depression, a meanness—and not around it, not running away from it or stuffing it back into the unconscious, not seeking to hold on to it or to possess it, letting it go, surrendering it to God.

There is much to be said and learned about the practice (see the references noticed last time, and the up-coming Welcoming Prayer retreat noticed on Page 5 above). Yet, understanding it and growing through it ultimately come from experiencing it. One might find some quiet time each day . . . gently becoming aware of one's interior state . . . slowly beginning to pray **The Welcoming Prayer**, starting and stopping as one feels led:

Afterwords, continues on page 6