

Notes on Parts I and II of
“Living in the Presence of God Day after Day”
Video by Fr. Thomas Keating
On YouTube [here](#)
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Fr. Thomas wants to open us to a few aspects of
The mystery of God’s presence all the time now, now, now.

It’s misleading to think it is daily. It is a moment to moment basis.

He wants to lead us to living in the presence of God without effort.
Some people try too hard to do this and get discouraged.

God doesn’t respond to effort. It’s a gift to slide into, to let go of obstacles preventing us
from the presence of God, which is **thinking God is absent**. God is always present!

The whole discipline of Centering Prayer is learning the greatest reality about us is the
presence of God. It is not a thought. It is a fact.

You don’t have to go anywhere or do anything to find God. Just stop doing whatever
you’re doing and stop thinking and you will arrive at the knowledge that God is always
present and always available. (not asking us to do anything)

Letting go of any ideas, feelings, thoughts of the absence of God leads to the truth: of a
marvelous existence where God has placed us. Make it more habitual.

It doesn’t take away suffering. It takes away the fear of suffering. Our attitude toward
suffering is what really causes pain and suffering.

You don’t have to think about God to be in God’s presence.
We have learned to think about God and identify that idea of God that is wrong: not the
same thing at all.

God gently and relentlessly undermines any thought we have of God. Sometimes it can
be very uncomfortable or charged with childhood trauma.

We are always in the arms of a loving God (parent or grandparent). Nothing we can do
to earn it. It is pure gift. It only gives us more confidence. The problem with us is our
idea of God.

God is not just the source of our being (creative presence and sustains all, extraordinary expression of love).

We are all interconnected. 15 billion years for a cup of coffee. A triumph of creation, why concentrate on what we don't approve of?

If we go from doubt to the goodness of God in our creating.
Never before has it been so important to emphasize our unity instead of setting up boundaries.

The most important thing about us is God's presence in us is manifesting the tremendous love of God in a tenderness where God is experiencing what it's like to be human in humans. It is God's greatest pleasure.

If we mess up, we don't have to go to confession. As soon as you're sorry, God has forgotten whatever our faults were and would be very happy if we would forget it too.

If you have guilt feelings for more than 10 or 15 seconds, it's neurotic. It's nothing to do with contrition, it's the sadness that comes from pride in recognizing we're not a big shot or as perfect as we thought we would be.

We now know from psychology there is a certain temperamental disposition toward negative feelings about ourselves. Perfectionistic personality: whatever they do, it's never enough, constantly harried by "should" or "have to."

Here's a good principle for daily life: whatever you feel you **have** to do, don't do it. Whatever you feel you **should** do, avoid it, and whatever you feel you **must** do, go in the opposite direction. If you feel you shouldn't do that, then you should do it!

Should, must, have to are tempermental dispositions, and they have nothing to do with the love of God. They are rather self-centered or self-serving concerns that are rooted in our security needs that are always exaggerated.

It's very simple to figure out what's wrong with us. If you look at any baby, you can see what motivates them: security needs (survival), affection and esteem and approval needs, and power and control needs. If you withdraw any of these from the child, it develops overcompensatory programs to get what it wants.

When we grow and reach the age of reason we are meant to evaluate our feelings and our needs and to moderate them appropriately. Because it is the unlimited desire for security, approval, and control is basically the source of all our afflicted emotions. When the body is so upset, it pours suitable hormones into the bloodstream to deal

with the crisis, most of it being artificial. The result is, your poor arteries are squeezed by the tension in your muscles, and you're on the way to a heart attack or other diseases if you live long enough.

Whatever you think, whatever your belief system is, that's what your feelings respond to because in everyday life, you're constantly experiencing the frustration from the programs for happiness circulating around control, affection, and security. It's fantastic. Everybody is practicing the same stupid project so you're in competition with 6 and a half billion other people trying to do the same thing. The body is being tortured by these afflictive emotions to deal with difficulties that don't normally come that fast.

When you are confronted by people who are upset. Don't be disturbed. The worst thing they can do is shoot you or something. Then you go to heaven. Death is not a disaster, it's simply the next stage of the spiritual journey. Have a friendly attitude toward it. It's a promotion, not a demolition.

Creation is not a one-time event. It is going on all the time every trillionth of a trillionth of a second. The Buddhists have an intriguing idea that we come into and go out of existence 68 times a second. Modern machinery has found out we go into and out of existence perhaps a trillion times a second. It looks like one because of the speed of the frames of a movie. Our life is really a continuous stream of events going by so fast that you actually don't notice you are dying every trillionth of a second and coming back.

Besides this creative force as evidence of God's love for us, and a manifestation of God's love for us, what Jesus reveals is that this is just not any old father, but a father whom he calls Abba, a loving, very present, very close, and very nurturing daddy, constantly picking it up in his arms, playing with it, kissing it, hugging it, caressing it, and taking care of all of its needs. Not patriarchal, more like a mother.

This is what a contemplative attitude toward daily life comprises. Centering Prayer is only a laboratory, or the office of Divine Therapy where our wounds and our difficulties in recognizing reality as it actually is are gradually cured. It's a treatment center, only it is a private place within us where we leave behind our ordinary concerns and make ourselves totally vulnerable to this Presence.

If you're scared of Presence, it doesn't feel all that comfortable. What is making you afraid? Your belief system and ideas. After awhile in Centering Prayer God can introduce himself as he is, not as a preconceived idea or belief system that may be good in itself but you may have misinterpreted or misinterpreted for you by well-intentioned, psychologically, totally unenlightened people.

The idea we need to get into our heads should emphasize God's love for us, the unity of the human family, letting go of fear in any form (opposite of love—remember that when you are afraid!)... as we love more, fear will disappear (Jn)—throws it out. Can't love greatly and have fear—no room for it. Never would have fear at few days old resting in arms of grandparent or mama's heartbeat. How important physical affection is to the infant. Two newborns, one with arm around weaker, made him better. What we need is not sophisticated equipment but the feeling of being loved. All of us are only brought into fullness of human health by the feeling being loved and the security of human love by somebody else and by God himself. Nothing is more reassuring than to feel oneself loved by God.

In Centering Prayer this is part of the therapy. It's the sense that wells up in one when one is silent from the thoughts that usually disturb us or doubts or judgmental or evaluative. All of those goals are left behind in Centering Prayer: no desire to have a mind that is blank, no desire for an experience of God, no desire for intensive peace, no expectation for any particular kind of experience. Rather, it is making ourselves vulnerable to the presence of God just as God is, beyond thoughts, thinking, experiences. Nothing could be easier. It's just that we think it could be hard because we've never done it or never done it much.

Once you start doing this, this is the paradigm for daily life. In daily life we make an effort to let go of afflictive feelings and thoughts by turning ourselves to the presence of God and remaining in it. John of the Cross said human health consists in the conscious awareness of God. In that presence all the exaggerations that were prompted by a search for happiness, that we didn't know how to find, are taken away because one is beginning to taste however inchoate (not fully formed, rudimentary) or beginning away, we're beginning to sense or taste what happiness really is.

This is the reassurance of God's love for us. It takes many forms and is adapted to each one of our particular needs, whether you've had oppression or rejection or heavy loss of loved ones in early life, God will give you what you need, namely the sense that someone more loving than any possible good person could be is infolding you, holding you up, pressing you to the mysterious heart of God which is not as hard as we know it, but is all the connotations or meanings or overtones of a love that we sometimes symbolize by speaking of heart. God is so close that there's no bodily organ that is a symbol of him.

So, this idea of God as present, as loving as the dearest of parents is precisely the first experience, or some people are a little slow in getting to this point. It's going to happen, I mean most people who do the prayer regularly in the course of the first few weeks, months, or for some reason God alone knows, it may be better for us not to have that feeling right away. But it usually comes then better than ever. While everybody else is

enjoying the first fruits of Centering Prayer, you may be wondering “what the hell (excuse me) what they’re talking about.” But just wait and year and then if you’re in a prayer group and they start moaning and bemoaning that God has forgotten them and left them. Meanwhile, you’re in the life of this incredible affection that you’ve been waiting for a year. You know what they’re talking about. So, for everybody, God adjusts himself to each of us and this you can be sure of: whatever you need, you’ll get.

So, if you’ve suffered rejection, you’re likely to get the most consolation during the first year of a practice like Centering Prayer. This is also why we stuck up or something because we have a lot of spiritual consolation. Some people have more than others. The reason some people, maybe even the saints have these wonderful mystical experience that they usually were told by their confessors to write about, it’s not because they’re better than we are, they were in tougher shape than we are. So, they needed more consolation or more reassurance. So, for all we know, you might as well feel sorry for them rather than envy them.

Now, I’ve been at this journey a long time and still haven’t made much progress as you can see, but I have outgrown certain attitudes that I now recognize were a little childish or immature in my spiritual life. So, I no longer look for any consolation. I would be kind of embarrassed if I had it and would say, “Oh, this is a distraction.” It really is. At some point any experience is not as close as a communion with God as no experience at all. Is this bad news? Maybe for some, but my question is well, then why are you in this journey? Is it to yourself or is it for God? If it is for God, then whatever you receive psychologically you trust God that this is what you need psychologically. But on the level of reality, you know that in secret God is giving you everything you need and more than you need, and greater gifts than if you experience them.

Now this is a hard thing to understand right away. But what freedom you’d have, folks, if you had no expectation of spiritual consolation or reassurance and just assume that God is giving you everything you need moment by moment. Every moment has within it everything you need to be completely happy.

Intermission

God is reality. If that’s true, since you’re usually in contact with reality I presume, even if you’re in a mental institution with all kinds of illusions, you’re in the institution and that’s reality. So, you can never get away from God, no place to go because God is already here. We say in theology God is infinite, meaning business without any limitation whatsoever.

The famous saying that God gave his name to Moses, remember, it was “I am,” and said it twice instead of saying “I am Thomas,” he said, “I am I am.” So, “I am” is God’s

name and how did he get there? By being “I am.” So, it means **isness** in every direction up, down, or no direction, wherever you go God is there. God is beyond being and beyond non-being. He’s both personal and impersonal. There’s no gender in God because God is total unity. But at the same time, and this is why it’s so impossible to grasp who God really is. God is also infinite diversity and infinite possibility at the same time. In our case, we experience diversity as divisive under most circumstances. We’re experiencing that now in the global attitudes of religions and belief systems and nationalities throughout the world. Diversity means boundaries, protection, and defenses and all the other things that preoccupy people. But, in actual fact, where there is unity, diversity becomes complementarity, and it’s no longer divisive but enriching. This is the insight that is missing in the human now and in the process of globalization that seems to be happening whether we like it or not. But as Christians and as contemplatives the energy that you are receiving from God is more powerful than all the negativity in the world. So, as you grow in your spiritual journey, everybody is growing. You can’t help but affect everything in the universe moment by moment by your activities, or even by your thoughts. If this sounds a little mystical, it is backed up by astrophysics or quantum mechanics theory in which it’s proven now, asserted by cutting-edge physicists, that you can’t have a thought without affecting everything else in the universe instantaneously. The living cell is so constructed that it’s basically the same in every living thing. So between us and a mouse, as yourselves go, this is not much different, a couple of extra genes in there somewhere maybe, but not much. The difference between races or colors of people is so infinitesimal, it’s absolutely ridiculous to make any division based on color or ethnicity. In other words, it’s our wrong ideas of people or reality or based on our need to be defensive, are sometimes reasonable, defenses are in order because the human family as a whole emphasizes its diversity hence its divisiveness without the community which would transform divisiveness into a common feeling of accountability for everyone on earth and indeed everyone who ever lived or will live. We have a oneness with them that is part of the reality of the universe that we can’t change. But we can deny to our great misfortune, as individuals but also as a family as the human race.

Now it seems from the Gospel the invitation to be transformed is extended to everyone on earth, no exception. The parables are so clear, in the great banquet for instance, which all exegetes (*expounders or textual interpreters, especially of Scripture*) recognized as a symbol of who gets into heaven or who enters the kingdom of God. The householder, remember, first invites his peers and they decline; then because the household is not filled, he invites the poor and the lame and the maimed whom the prophets of Israel foresaw were God’s favorites. The hero of the psalms, for instance, is obviously the one afflicted or suffers poverty in some form—mental, spiritual or physical--this is the apple of God’s eye, as the psalm says, is those in need. So, the greater the need, the greater is the love that God wants to give. Well, in this situation then the future is right now and all that God has to give us that can possibly be

communicated, short of the transformation that takes place after death, the last veil between us and God, is the body. When that passes away, then the reality of God's presence becomes all pervasive, all delightful, and eternally present since in the next life there is no time as we understand it, everything is now.

Thus, this movement into the presence of God is crucial for our own well-being but not just for ourselves. As soon as you seek the kingdom primarily to yourself, you're on the wrong road because the kingdom is not just for you and I. Unless everyone else is saved too, you can't be perfectly happy. That is the mystery of the unity of the human family that has not been fully understood or preached up till now. But it sure is present in the Gospel. You just have to concentrate on it a bit.

One of the things Paul says for instance is that as the spiritual journey grows within and the fruits of the Spirit manifest themselves spontaneously—charity, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control, patience, and the others—these are things that appear **without effort**, that they're the normal releasing of the divine energy that we received in baptism but perhaps may have received at the moment of birth. We don't really know. Baptism is a commitment to accept the invitation that is extended in the Gospel. But that extension is extended to all the human family as a kind of remote call to divine union symbolized by the coming of the Magi in the infancy narratives. These were people who were not Jews. They were not men of a religious faith that was known in Israel. Maybe they were Zoroastrians. I don't know. But they're symbols of seekers of God of all time. They were able to find the infant in the crib, meaning that the extension to of divine union is given to everybody from the beginning of time until now. One of the things that is sometimes forgotten in our religious instruction is that God didn't just create the new covenant. The new covenant of course suggests that there was an old one. But, in actual fact, there were several covenants before the old one. These were identified by some of the great predecessors theologically of the Second Vatican Council. One is the pre-Noah covenant that God had. Then there was the post-Noah covenant symbolized by the rainbow if you remember your scripture. Then there was the covenant apparently with Melchizedek, then there was the Abrahamic covenant. So, God has been reaching out all through human history, and his covenants have simply been getting better and more comprehensive. But that doesn't mean that the covenant which really means "salvation" was withdrawn from the previous covenant. So, there are people in the world today I'm sure in primitive cultures around the world who were still in those covenants, and God is saving them through those means, so much so, and it is good to repeat this often enough, because so much of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council hasn't filtered down far enough to you folks in the pews. It needs to be repeated again and again.

The church's, Catholic church at least, position is that the Spirit is at work in all the other Christian denominations. **When you think of it, baptism is so much more**

important than any other kind of doctrinal difference that it's incredible and a scandal, really, that the churches are not unified. If they were unified, it would give an enormous surge of importance to the realization throughout the human family of its basic unity. The marvelous teaching now of the churches Oh, I felt so good. You know, I had a grandma who is not a Catholic. My mother was not a Catholic. Oh, it was such a wonderful relief to realize--I was brought up in non-Catholic schools--that my friends and buddies were not going to hell after all! What a minute! I worried about grandma. I worried about my mother and my father—he stopped going to church. So, I can't tell you how much as a youngster with the sensitive heart I worried about everybody. I should have worried more about myself, I think, be realistic. Anyway, we can now love the Protestant. We now can admire and love people of other religions because the later documents from the present Holy Father suggest that grace is working in other world religions and that some of their rituals (the Holy See is not their place to decide which one are salvific)—they're like sacraments.

This doesn't mean that all the religions are the same, but that they're in a sense complementary. Maybe certain religions that have come out of different cultures are necessary for the cultural conditioning of those people at least until the world becomes thoroughly globalized and becomes one village which may not be the best thing on earth because diversity is very enriching.

So there is a value to other religions that needs to be respected. This is the time then to develop our understanding of the other religions and our respect for them. This is especially incarnated in the Algerian martyrs who happened to be Trappists who lived in Algeria surrounded totally by Islamic society, who shared the poverty of their neighbors and simply bore witness, a Christian witness, a Christian presence. Movie: ["Of Gods and Men" 2010](#) What they have discovered is that missionary work is primarily to bring the presence of Christ into the culture and live identified with the local people and to share their respect for their religion and so on. These people became martyrs because the extremists in that part of the world couldn't endure having their presence there.

This is one of the signs of the times. Many missionary orders are rethinking what their approach to the missions might be in the light of that witness of those people who laid down their lives, not so much for a cause, but to make the face of Christ visible through presence, a presence that was not out to convert the Islamic people, but simply to share their life together and be present. So, what this is saying is a new understanding of what it means to go into the whole world and preach the gospel.

What it has been understood a certain way up until now, but now we're invited to realize **it's you who are a missionary in your inmost being in the degree that**

you enshrine the presence of God. That presence doesn't necessarily have to go anywhere, but to go there is a powerful witness. **But it's who you are: it's your being that invisibly is pouring positive energy into the universe, overcoming the negativity of generations of false selves to put it in that terminology.** You have no idea of what empowerment is communicated to you in contemplative prayer, except that, little by little, you can't help but do good and love other people. You can't sit on divine love. You'll be... it'll begin to spread and will expand appropriately in your circumstances according to your vocation.

So, this is the sense, I think, in which Paul says "God is all in all." Come back to that idea: if God is infinite, then it means there's no room for anything else, unless you recognize that everything, even that's created, is in God. If you recognize that you're in God, then you have the right idea translated into images like you're in the arms of God - that's very good. But even suffering is in God. All pain is in God. **Everything that exists is somehow in God. So, there's no place to go to get away from God but rather to accept the reality of God's presence is the greatest wisdom. This presence transcends any experience you can have.** This is what is meant by pure faith, pure faith believes that God is present without any human evidence at all.

This is what is the great work of the dark nights that St. John talks about. It's the purification of faith, hope, and charity, so that your faith is not dependent upon other people or belief systems, learned in early childhood, but rather on your certitude in God's presence without any human props or evidence to support it. Obviously, it can only climb up to that degree of inner freedom slowly. But that means as you get up and go out of here for lunch, you're not really going anywhere. You're just moving from one spot to another in God.

God is the ground of your being whether you're asleep or awake or moving or still, always in God. Hence, the psalmist says, "Be still, and you will know that I am God." This was probably the best advice that was ever offered for all time. Even Ramana Maharshi, the great Hindu pundit of the last century said, "You don't need any more advice than that in the psalm. Be still. It's thinking, dear folks, that activates our belief system. It's out of your belief system that you work, that you act. Hence, if your action or if circumstances contradict your belief system, you're constantly experiencing emotional affliction: grief, anger, discouragement and so on. That's why I singled out "I should do this." **If you feel you should do something that means you're almost certainly going to fail*(see note below),** and the feeling arises of depression. It's just automatic. **Why have the belief system that you "should" do anything? Do everything out of the love of God and under the movement of the Spirit, which becomes clearer and clearer as contemplative prayer grows. In spite of tragedy or disaster, you will always be happy at some deeper level because**

your wisdom tells you that everything happens according to God's universal plan. If we can surrender ourselves to that plan freely, you would be perfectly happy, even if you lose your life because our life is not an end in itself. Like the martyrs of Algeria, losing it for the love of God, you make true life and love available for an enormous proportion of the human family. The bottom line is **accountability for everyone else.**

*Fr. Thomas is referring to “should” behavior that has the motivation of 1)pleasing someone to get their approval or esteem, 2)manipulating others and circumstances to feel personally safe and secure at their loss, and 3)using power and control methods for personal feeling of empowerment at others' loss. These motivations behind “should” behavior are based on the false programs for happiness and do not bring true happiness. When the motivations of our behavior are out of love, sometimes as a sacrifice, they will bring true happiness.

So, if those of you who are on the Centering Prayer path and have moved into the night of sense, which happens rather soon, then a couple of years usually for those who do for the practice faithfully, you begin to see the dark side of your personality and the obstacles that the divine therapist points to in the course of your twice-daily interviews in the inner room, as Jesus calls the spiritual level of our being at the level beyond thinking and beyond conversation. It's a movement from conversation to communion, from activity to receptivity. It's not an end in itself, but it prepares us to for action saturated with the values of the inner room which are peace, inner freedom, love, appropriate concern for everyone, on everything that is a certain openness and vulnerability to God's healing process.

Infinite love means that God is all in all. That's a quote from Paul. Or, as he puts it in another place, Christ is everything in everyone. What that really means is that the goodness that is in each of us is God's presence in us. Our service of others is God's presence in others so that in actual fact, although we experience ourselves as doing things, what's really happening is that God present in us is serving God in others, or greeting God in others, or loving God in others. In that sense, God is all in all. According to Jesus' revelation, God is love. I think St. John clarifies it even more when he says God **IS** love, that is to say, he doesn't just show love as we do, but **IS** love. So the spiritual journey is a movement to do what God does, or to become like God. That is that our destiny is not just to show love—this is an important start—the works of mercy, concern for others and accountability that is even willing to bear the sufferings of other people for the love of God and the love of them. But above all, it means that God is calling us to manifest his love, or to BE love the way God is.

The extraordinary nature of love as St. John of the Cross understands it, is that divine love tries to make you equal. In other words, God isn't just satisfied with loving you, he

wants us to love him back equally. How can that be? Only if we receive the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit loves in us. Where does that leave the false self? Dead as a doornail. You have to let the false self go. Where did that leave the ego? Of no account whatsoever. So our over attachment to our identity doesn't mean we become nothing at all or lose our uniqueness. It means that we **finally found out WHO we actually are, which is as God is, unconditional love.** In other words, our life: our God in God finally penetrates through and through thus making us capable of being God with God. You can only pass through the eye of a needle without the baggage of ego or any possessive attitude towards anything. Everything is at our service. As soon as you try to hang on to it, you've lost it. **It's not that anything changes except our attitude, which is to let go of our possessive attitude that ultimately is seeking happiness in something other than God.** It can't work. So, as God draws us away from our over-attachments to our emotional programs for happiness—our desire for control, excessive security and approval—this freedom grows to love to love to love, so that at some point we become aware that the secret of the universe is love. **The consequence of that is the meaning of the universe is sacrifice because divine love is always giving itself away.** That's its very nature.

So, once you've been through all the dark night, purified your soul, which St. John of the Cross says is the equivalent of purgatory, the worst is still to come. We might as well be honest because now that you are able to love, you're ready to take on as Jesus did the sufferings of the whole world. I don't guarantee for those of you approaching the transforming have no more troubles. It's not a magic carpet to bliss. It's a direct route to reality. **Reality is total self-sacrifice.** To be in heaven with any selfishness is to be very uncomfortable. To let go of our over-attachments: this is the therapy. God lovingly is always helping us. He went through this with his disciples. We see it over and over and over again in the Gospel. Without a word of blame or recrimination, he just points the truth to them, like Martha, "Why are you anxious?" He doesn't say, "You're really not serving me at all. You're just looking for praise in this meal." No, there's no attack. It's just the invitation to look at the truth about ourselves so that they can be healed. This loving, loving, healing process is only painful if you are closed in on yourself and afraid. Fear closes us in ourselves. Love opens and finds room in our hearts for everyone.

So, having reached a certain degree of love, we may be invited by God to enter in the little ups and downs of everyday sufferings and concerns of daily life, these are not ours anymore. They are part of our participation in the Paschal mystery, in the salvation of the world. Instead of being overwhelmed by our crosses, we realize that at a certain level this is the greatest privilege we could have, because now we're doing what God does all the time, namely giving ourselves away. It's this humility of God that we were invited to participate in, a humility that, in the case of God, seems to suggest that God's desire is to cease to be God. He has everything. Why should he care? It's infinite

freedom that, and our participation in it, that enables us to be free to love, and free to suffer, free to sacrifice, just to be free. This is the movement of contemplative prayer into divine union and unity and whatever is beyond that. Our destiny is only known by God. But as Paul says, “No one, no one, has ever had the closest imagination regarding what God has in store for those who love him.”

