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*"Christ caring for People
through People"*

Sept. 27, 2009

Greetings and Blessings,

As we look back over our lives there are some very special moments that stand always in bold highlights. As Luke said of Mary at the end of the account of Jesus' birth and childhood, we "treasure these things in our hearts." One such moment in my life was the birth of our daughter for which I was privileged to be fully present. (I am especially reminded of this as her birthday was earlier this week.) Words fail to describe the moment, but I believe that this is the kind of deep experience that builds faith in God in a manner like no other. It certainly leads to thankful prayer.

Christians through the centuries have sought to follow the Biblical direction to pray without ceasing. One of the fundamental experiences that grew from this effort is called in Eastern Christian hesychastic tradition, "**Breath Prayer.**" Rooted also in the Psalms it begins with one particularly meaningful expression which is then repeated silently with each breath. For example "O LORD, you have searched me and known me." By repeating this with each breath for a period of time one finds a certain calmness and peaceful relaxation in the truth associated with it. As other thoughts enter our mind we accept them and allow them to pass, refocusing our mind on the breath prayer we are making. Quakers refer to such prayer as "Centering Prayer" as it allows us to put aside all other thoughts and concerns and become centered in the prayer experience.

The most famous of the breath prayers is the Jesus Prayer.

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,
Have mercy on me, A sinner."

I often pray this by repeating the first phrase while inhaling, the second while exhaling etc. In The Way of a Pilgrim, by Helen Bacovein, (Doubleday, 1979) the story is told of a peasant and his search for a way to "Pray Without Ceasing." After learning this prayer he prayed it continuously until the prayer moved from his mind into his heart and finally throughout his whole body – becoming so internalized that it was present with him at all times, whether awake or asleep.

This is by no means the only phrase that can be used as Breath Prayer. Others could be so simple as, "Jesus loves me, this I know," or "Lord, Teach me to pray." One that I myself developed during my own prayer I call the Trinity Prayer. Like the Jesus Prayer it consists of several phrases following one another with each inhaled or exhaled breath... "Wondrous Father. Loving Lord Jesus. Transforming Spirit, Draw Near. (or Come in)"

Amen.

(Rev.) John McGurrin

P.S. For those for whom Breath Prayer is a new experience.

Be aware, the repetition of such prayers can actually have the healthy effect of lowering the blood pressure and the heart rate. While this is very healing in nature it can also leave you unsteady if you decide to move quickly after such a time of prayer. (On the positive side, if you have difficulty sleeping it can also be a help. And you haven't somehow failed if you do doze off.)