Reflection on Seven Sacred Pauses from Macrina Wiederkehr: 8th September 2021 Sr Marie

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in the Wisdom Centre. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: *Eternal God,* through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB, was a Benedictine monastic of St. Scholastica Monastery in the USA. She died in 2020, at the age of 81. An author and spiritual guide, Macrina traveled throughout the United States and Canada as a retreat director. She guided seekers through experiences of silence, contemplation, and faith sharing. She also drew extensively from literature and poetry and enjoyed creating rituals. Macrina was a master of everyday spirituality. She took the Benedictine tradition of Lectio Divina and expanded it into new fields of wonder. To her, sacred texts are all around us. She discerned evidence of God's presence in nature, relationships, and the daily rounds of life. As a skilled and creative devotional writer, Macrina could always be depended upon for images or personal anecdotes brimming with beauty and insight. She wove these together into books that combined observations with prayers and suggested passages to read — making them perfect for personal and group retreats.

I am going to use her book entitled *sevensacredpauses* written by Macrina in 2008. In 2019 I had used a mediation from this book for prayer as the sun was going down. Since we always pray together at this time, it was difficult to use one of the other hours instead as it seemed unreal. In order not to lose this wonderful material, I decided to give the general overview of all the hours from her book.



She begins by quoting Jim Wallis: 'More and more people find themselves drinking at the wells of each other's spiritual traditions, and engaging in a deep and common quest.' Then she goes on to say 'These words have found a nesting place in my heart, and the beautiful truth they contain is like a prayer shawl that I keep wrapping around my great longing for spiritual communion with all beings.. I am steeped in the spirituality of Jesus, deeply rooted in Christianity. This is where my home is. I believe that when roots go deep enough, eventually they entangle with other roots. This entangling ought to bring us joy but often fill us with fear. I want to give up my fear of other religious traditions. I want to wrap my prayer shawl around our entangled and entwined roots in the lovely gesture of a blessing so that we may continue our spiritual quest together and learn from each other's sacred practices.'



Macrina continues: 'As a member of a Benedictine community I have been blessed by the practice of honouring 'the hours' through conscious pausing for prayer at specific times of the day. When I speak of the hours I am referring to those times of the day that the earth's turning offers us: midnight, dawn, midmorning, noon, afternoon, evening and night. Although every hour is sacred, these special times have been hallowed by centuries of devotion and prayer. These are the hours the monastics have remained faithful to through the ages. It is meant to be a guide for those who would like to move through their day with greater mindfulness.' She is thinking of those of us who don't live in monastic communities yet are searching for ways to be more attuned to the present moment. Macrina goes on to say: 'Living in harmony with the hours requires faithful practice in the art of mindfulness. Surely the reason monastic orders of all religious traditions have adopted the practice of pausing at specific hours of the day is for the purpose of practicing mindfulness. Living mindfully is the art of living awake and ready to embrace the gift of the present moment.'

In the Gospels we see that Jesus lived mindfully, praying in certain place, at certain times, before certain events yet he always returns to his ministry with the people. After the resurrection we see the birth of house churches as it says in Acts 2:42 *"These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers."* The monastic hours grew out of the spirit of this early church. These hours have been revised and expanded over the ages. Macrina says of her earlier years, 'As I began to reflect on the value of pausing for prayer throughout the day, I was taken by surprise at the beauty of the hours and the immeasurable wisdom of moving to the natural rhythm of the days and nights. The daily and nightly dance of the hours is a universal way of honouring the earth's turning as well as the sacred mysteries that flow out of our Christian heritage. This ancient tradition of inviting people to move through the day remembering their Source of Life is not a practice that has died. It is alive and well in many traditions.

St Benedict wanted his monks to pray through the entire psalter, all 150 psalms, in a week! Macrina gives us the *spirit* of the hours as well as the historical *text.*

- **Matins**: traditionally this hour was prayed in the heart of the night however in many communities Matins has been moved to the early morning when it is still dark. It has been a pre-dawn prayer. The theme for this hour is vigilance. Those who keep vigil are sentinels of the night. Macrina calls it the '*night watch'*.
- **Lauds** or Morning Prayer is ideally prayer at sunrise. It is the first of the day hours and had praise and resurrection as its central themes. The dawn too has sentinels. Rising early they watch for the coming of the light, the '*awakening hour'*.
- **Terce, Sext and None** are referred to as the 'little hours' because they are shorter and come right in the heart of the workday. They are simple efforts to turn our thoughts ever so briefly back to God, to the dance of life, to mindfulness of the present moment. And as Pius Parsch calls them 'breathing spells for the soul,' a little oasis for one's spirit in the midst of work. If we remember to pause at midmorning for **Terce**, we may experience a holy presence emanating from within. The blessing we seek is already in us. This brief pause opens the heart to receive the Spirit's gift. We invite the Spirit into our work as we pause to remember the noble nature of work. '*The Blessing Hour'*. **Sext** is the hour of light. The sun having reached its peak in the heavens, illuminates all things. This is the hour of courage, recommitment and passion. It is a good hour to practice, believing that peace in the world is possible. *'The hour of illumination'*. As the day moves towards evening with wisdom in its wings, **None** is the hour to reflect on impermanence, aging, death and transition. The dance steps may be slower, but there is also a keen insightfulness in those steps, along with a wise knowing of what is most important in life. *'The Wisdom Hour'*.
- **Vespers or Evensong** is the twilight hour, it is time to move from the tumult of the day into the quiet of the evening. However, due to the busy lifestyle of modern-day people, finding their own Vespers path will be necessary. Vespers is the hour that is most often prayed festively and publicly. '*The twilight hour'*.
- **Compline or Night Prayer** This is the last hour of the day and is often prayed privately or in small groups. In this night hour we are a bit more subjective, turning our thoughts inward. It is time to

review your day by means of a gentle evaluation of your faithfulness as a pilgrim of the hours. Trust in God and personal sorrow for failures are partners in this last dance in the seasons of the day. This is the hour of intimacy. It is love rather than guilt that ought to enrobe us as we enter into what the monastics call '*the Great Silence'* of the night.

These hours are important archetypal images of the rhythm and movement of the day. The wisdom of pausing at these sacred times is a treasure that ought not to be lost.

Macrina goes on to emphasise the importance of honouring the hours: 'For Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all Abrahamic religious – bells, chimes or tonal sounds are important for calling people to prayer. For all these religions, the call to prayer is announced at specific hours. Special hours of the day are honoured. For Islam, the five daily rituals of prayer are pre-dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset and night. The three times of gathering for prayer in Judaism are morning, afternoon and night. In the Jewish tradition the oldest fixed daily prayer is the beautiful *Shema*: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength*. (Deut 6:4-5)

The *Shema*, as assertion of faith in One God, is recited when rising in the morning and upon retiring at night. It is the first prayer a Jewish child is taught, the last words spoken prior to death. The faithful recitation of the Shema brings about an experiential awareness of the Eternal One.

When early Christians began to detach themselves from Judaism, they kept the practice of praying at fixed times of the day. As Monastic communities began to form, other hours of the day were eventually added to the monastic day.

Indigenous peoples of varied ethnic groups have honoured creation's mysterious and sacred rhythms of the seasons of the day and night for ages upon ages. There is something in the cycle of the earth that speaks to the restless human heart. When we truly listen to the call of the seasons of the day and the year, our listening is transformed into what many people call prayer.

No matter what faith tradition we follow, we are pilgrims together on each day's journey. We all have to get up in the morning and move through the day with as much grace as we can gather. Why not make this pilgrimage through the day with a heart for one another, pausing through the day whether this be for two, five or ten minutes? If we do this someone will be pausing every minute of the day, standing still for the remembrance of our God. Our *being* is often crowded out by our *doing*. Each day we are summoned to be creators of the present moment. Artists know the value of the white space. Sometimes what isn't there enables us to see what is. Perhaps you are being called to the spiritual practice of bringing a little of the white space into your workday. There in the white space you will find your soul waiting for you. Allow the anointing rhythm of the hours to touch and teach you each day.

Each morning
Night's curtain
Opens a new day.
You are invited
To join the great opening.
Open your ears.
Open your heart.

Open your eye
To the sacred path
You travel every day,
The path of the hours

Greet the hours
With joyful awareness.
Greet the hours
With faithful presence.
Greet the hours
With reverential bow.
Greet the hours
With a sacred pause.
Reverence each hour

As a small stepping stone
On your pilgrimage
Through the day.
Receive the gift
Of seven sacred pauses.
Practice waking up
seven times a day.

Beginning Meditation:

You are invited to take up a position that you usually use for prayer. Bring a compassionate attention to how you sit so that your body can be alert, yet comfortable and ready to listen to the Lord. After taking a couple of deeper settling breaths, let your breath find its own soothing rhythm. Encourage your mind to slow down and settle as you prepare to pray. 'Think of the different rhythms of the universe, the seasons, of the days, of your body. Become part of the rhythm that stands out for you. God is speaking through it. Be united with the rhythms of other faiths, wrap your prayer shawl around our entangled and entwined roots in the lovely gesture of a blessing so that we may continue our spiritual quest together and learn from each other's sacred practices.'

25-minute meditation begins

Post meditation:
Today, Sept 8th, we honour the birthday of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. I would like to end with a modern day version of her Magnificat from Luke chap2 and which itself is based on the Song of Hannah**,** from the 1st book of Samuel (2:1–10), giving thanks to God for the birth of her son, Samuel. The sentiments are also echoed in Psalm 113 .



My soul glorifies the Lord, My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,
For He has blessed me lavishly and makes me ready to respond.
He shatters my little world and lets me be poor before Him.
He takes from me all my plans and gives me more that I can hope for or ask.
He gives me opportunities and the ability to become free and to burst thru my boundaries.
He gives me comfort to be daring to build on Him alone, for He shows Himself as the ever greater One in my life.
He has made know to me this: it is in my being servant that it becomes possible for God's kingdom to break through here and now. Amen

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Take some time for your personal prayer …**Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon.

Resources: https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/explorations/teachers/view/138/macrina-wiederkehr

Wiederkehr. Macrina OSB, *sevensacredpause* Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day. Sorin Books, ND Indiana
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Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.