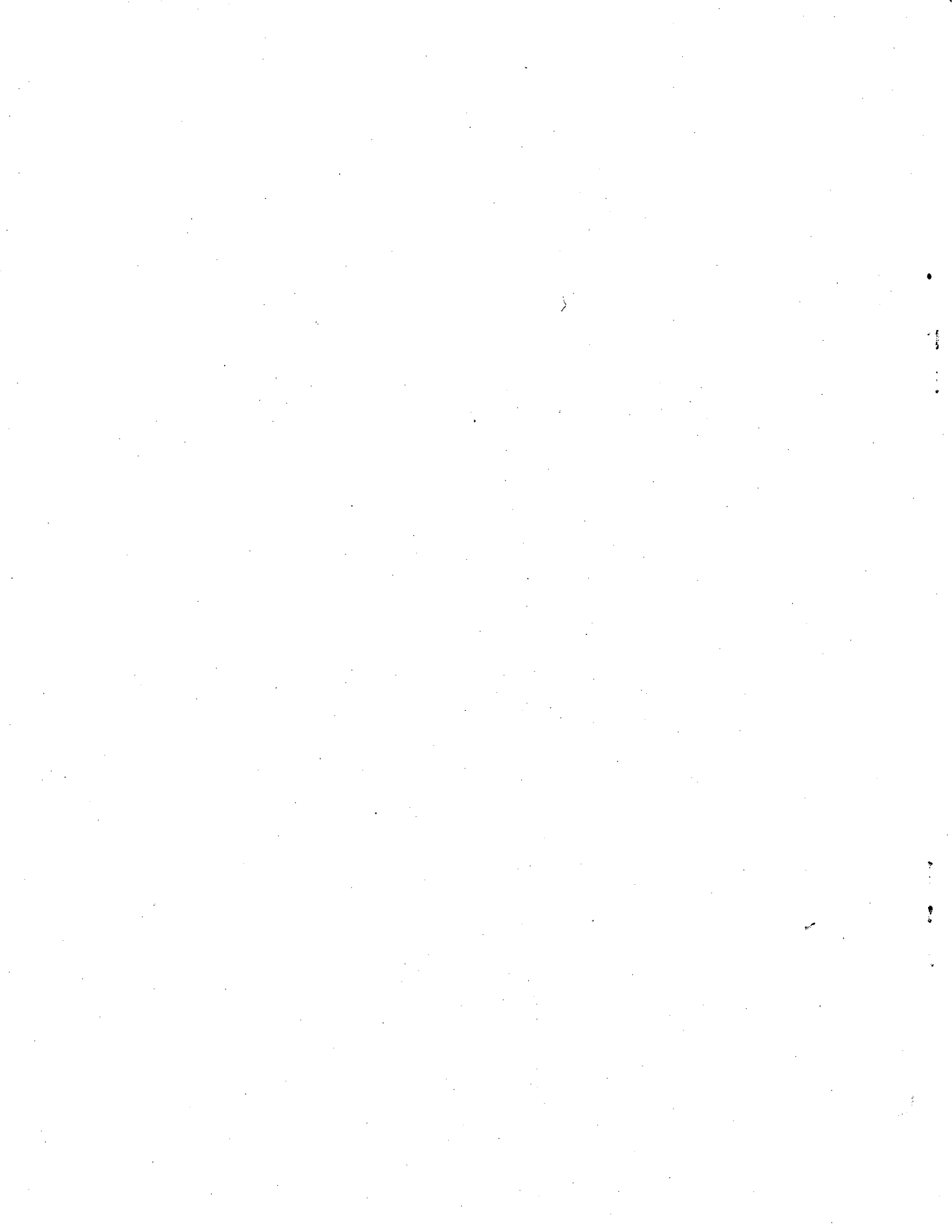


THE JESUS PRAYER

**DIOCESE OF NEWTON
OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES**

West Newton, MA 02165

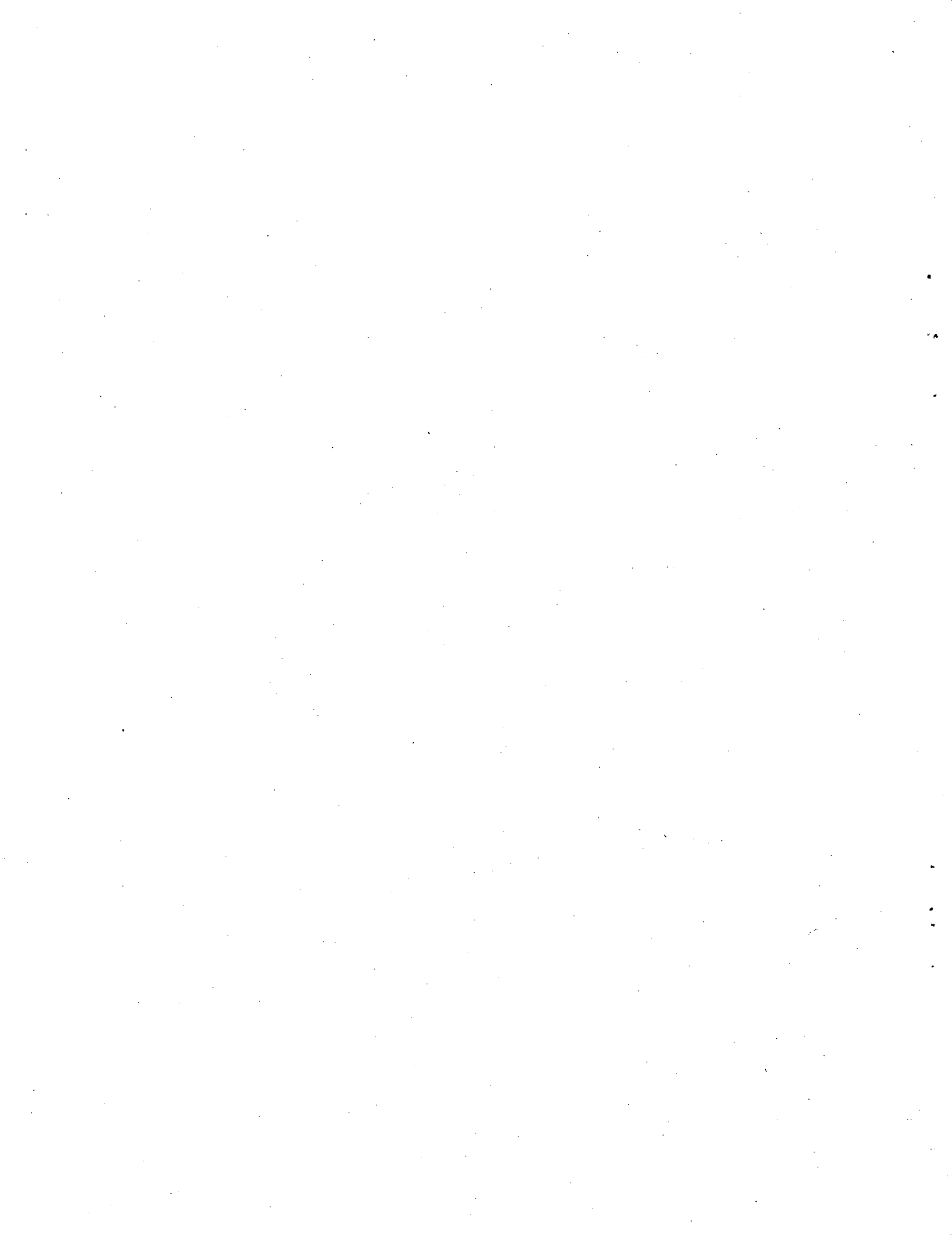


Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| General Aims and Objectives | 1 |
| Theology of the Jesus Prayer | 2 |
| Psychology and the Adolescent | 8 |
| Session One: Initiation into the Jesus Prayer | 10 |
| Session Two: Spirit and Spirituality * | 14 |
| Session Three: Introduction to Meditation | 18 |
| Session Four: Prayer of the Heart | 22 |
| Session Five: Breath Control and Posture | 26 |
| Session Six: Living Prayer | 29 |
| Bibliography | 33 |

*This lesson calls for the showing of a sound collage, *Neshama*, as part of the lesson dynamic. Plan to secure it from the beginning from a local denominational religious audio-visual service or from the publisher:

Franciscan Communications
1229 South Santee Street
Los Angeles, CA 90015



GENERAL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this program is to introduce the participants to one of the oldest and most beautiful methods of Byzantine worship: praying with the heart by the invocation of the name of Jesus. To help young people gain a sense of the reality of God—God within, the center of their being—is inherent to Christian development. The Church has long distinguished between knowledge about God and actually knowing God. Knowledge about God cannot transform us, whereas the person who experiences the reality of God within allows God to transform him. The Christian goes inward to encounter God “in the heart” before he moves outward in charity to others. The *Jesus Prayer* enables us to move in that direction.

The person who is not exposed to the presence of God within will easily accept the absence of God as real. Gradually what the person accepts psychologically becomes real for him. So helping the participants acquire a sense of the reality of God is the criterion for all the teaching methods, lessons and activities in this program.

More specifically, this program aims:

1. To increase the participants' awareness of their life in Christ.
2. To give the participants the means of a direct encounter with God, leading to a deep relationship within the confines of the heart.
3. To offer the participants the experience of God leading to transformation rather than offering the participants a formula about God which gives knowledge.
4. To offer the participants the opportunity of realizing they are being transformed from within by God so that they may go out to others in the Spirit.
5. To provide the means to allow the participants to lose their self-centeredness as they allow God to transform them.
6. To offer an appreciation of the human growth towards Christian maturity consistent with the principles of psychological maturity.
7. To offer the goal of fullness of one's infinite potential via the means of synergy (reciprocity between God and humankind).

This course may be used in any of the following ways:

- a. As a six-week mini course. The sessions would be held individually, with a one or two week interval between each session.
- b. As a two-day retreat. In this format the first session could be held the opening evening with sessions two, three and four held the morning, afternoon and evening following and sessions five and six on the final morning and afternoon.
- c. As supplemental material in a larger course.

Incorporated in this program is a cassette tape for the catechist. This recording demonstrates the *Jesus Prayer Experience* found on pages 11 and 12 which is used for the group prayer throughout the course. This is *not* provided so the catechist can play it during the meeting, but so the catechist can learn from it how to personally conduct the prayer session envisioned in this program. Prayer is a communication of living persons with the living God—it is not something which can be “canned”. Listen to the cassette and follow the outline on pages 11 and 12 until you are confident that you can conduct the prayer in the same manner. Then shelve the tape and pray.

THEOLOGY OF THE JESUS PRAYER

Modern man in all his religious searchings has been trying to discover a way of coming closer to God. It is probably for this reason that many people today, finding newer approaches inadequate, are rediscovering the *Jesus Prayer*. The Jesus Prayer is an ancient form of prayer used in the Eastern Churches, based on the repeated invocation of the name of Jesus. It has many different forms, such as "*Jesus, Jesus*" or—the most traditional one—"*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.*" But all of them have the same theological basis and meaning: to let us enter into the divine mystery, to experience the presence of Jesus in our everyday life.

The Jesus Prayer brings together two traditions of prayer inspired by the New Testament: the invocation of the name of Jesus and the call to pray unceasingly. In *1 Thessalonians 5: 17* St. Paul calls on believers to never stop praying. The Fathers had several understandings of how we could follow this call. Some Fathers made a distinction between explicit prayer, which should be done two or three times a day, and implicit prayer, in which living a Christian life is one's ceaseless prayer. As Origen said, "We have to envision the whole life of a pious Christian as one long prayer, and the exercise we commonly refer to as prayer as merely a part of this whole." (*On Prayer, 12*). By this they did not mean that everything a believer does is a prayer, but that what we do with remembrance of God can be called prayer because we are keeping the presence of God before us as we go about our affairs. As St. Maximus the Confessor pointed out, "Continual prayer means keeping the soul attentive to God with great reverence and love, constantly hoping in Him. It means entrusting ourselves to Him in everything that happens, whether in things we do or in events that occur" (*Ascetical Book, 25*).

Other Fathers tried to show how we could bring ourselves to this state of attentiveness. A number of them looked to the repetition of brief prayers which could easily hold our attention as a way of keeping the presence of God before our minds. As St. John Chrysostom told the people of Antioch, "Both Christ and St. Paul prescribed prayers that are short and repeated at frequent intervals. The reason is that if you prolong your discourse there will inevitably be moments of inattention which will give the devil an opportunity to get in close and trip you up and draw your mind far from the words you are pronouncing. But if you make use of frequent successive prayers which break up the time into brief intervals, it will be easy for you to keep alert and thus you will pray with much more presence of mind" (*Second Sermon on St. Hannah*). This kind of prayer could be done anywhere, no matter what you are doing. "You can be walking through the marketplace," he continues, "and be praying interiorly with great fervor. You can be with your friends or doing anything at all and still call upon God with an intense interior cry which cannot be detected by anyone present." And so the early Christians took up the practice of using one or two brief prayers - often verses from the Psalms - which they repeated often through the day.

The Name of Jesus

By the fifth or sixth century, Christians in the Middle East were coming to favor the Jesus Prayer over Psalm verses as the path to experiencing the presence of God in our lives, for Jesus is the divine Logos, the Word of God: the One who reveals God to us and the Principle behind all of creation.

Reverence for the name of God actually goes back to the Old Testament. Testifying to the sacredness of God's name, the ancient rabbinical practice prohibited the name of Yahweh from ever being used, except by the high priest on Yom Kippur.

Wherever the name of God was written, the word *Adonai* (Lord) was substituted. It is with the same sense of respect that many modern Jews will not even write the word *God*.

Like the name of God, the name of Jesus is above every other name. From the start, Christianity has shown respect for the name of Jesus. Three texts from the New Testament show the early Church's esteem for the name of Christ:

"Because of this, God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name above every other name, so that at Jesus' name every knee must bend in the heavens, on earth and under the earth." (*Philippians 2: 9-10*)

"There is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved." (*Acts 4: 12*)

Thus they showed their trust in the promise of Jesus Himself who said:

"I give you my assurance, whatever you ask the Father, he will give you in My name." (*John 16: 23*)

This reverence for the divine name has a basis in a more general human experience. A name is an expression of the whole and entire person. When we know a name, we are calling to mind the whole person. When we speak someone's name, we are bringing the presence of that person into our consciousness. When we call upon the name of God, we are consciously bringing Him into our life. What we express consciously becomes real for us. When we call upon the name of Jesus, our relationship with Him is activated by His Spirit working in our hearts.

Have Mercy on Me

Simply using the name of Jesus like a charm does not automatically guarantee that we are praying 'in His name'. *Acts 19: 13-16* tells the story of some Jewish exorcists who sought to use Jesus' name without living in Him. It had no effect. As Christ Himself said, "None of those who cry our 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven" (*Mt 7: 21*). And so the Jesus Prayer is not a magical incantation; by saying the Jesus Prayer occasionally, we cannot be assured of the experience of God. The experience of God is only found in an open relationship which develops in time.

Invoking the name of Jesus has meaning only when it expresses a total relationship with Jesus as Lord. That is why the classic form of the Jesus Prayer contains the cry of the publican in the temple, "have mercy on me, a sinner" (*Lk 18: 13*). In saying 'I am a sinner' the Christian expresses a critical dimension of our relationship with Christ: we are ungrateful recipients of His love. The closer a person comes to God, the more he sees himself as a sinner, in contrast to the holiness of the Holy One, and the only thing to do is to ask the Lord to 'have mercy'.

This phrase, so common in Eastern prayer, seems to have become part of the Jesus Prayer about the same time that it became popular in the Liturgy, in fourth century Syria. In English the word *mercy* makes us think of *pity*: someone who is merciful is a person who takes pity on an unfortunate. In the Scripture this word has a richer meaning. Mercy refers to God's loving concern for us: His willingness to become involved with us, to be with us in Christ despite our unworthiness. God's mercy stands in contrast to the righteousness of the pharisees' standoffish attitude to sinners. They would not 'defile themselves' by associating with sinners, but Jesus eats with them. In this he is merciful (*cf Mt 9: 10-13*). And so when we pray 'have mercy' we mean 'Show that kind of love: be with us even though we don't deserve your company.' It is a prayer that God's loving presence be evident in our lives.

Prayer of the Heart

From about the sixth century the Jesus prayer came to be associated with the form of spirituality called *hesychasm*, which developed in the monasteries of Egypt, especially that of Mount Sinai. Hesychasm refers to the inner tranquility of spirit needed for any deep communion with God. The monks who lived this hesychastic way of life attempted to achieve this inner rest and stillness by laying aside all earthly cares, by quieting the cravings of our fallen nature which get in the way of a deeper relationship with the Lord. In doing this they found the Jesus Prayer a useful ally.

The Fathers of Sinai taught that when we combine the Jesus Prayer with the regular flow of breath we find that our attention is more easily kept on the One to whom we are praying. By coordinating the Prayer with our bodily activity we help to drive out external distractions and the anxieties they produce so that we can reconcentrate our energies on our relationship with God. St. John Climacus, in his *Ladder of Perfection*, recounts how an elder told him, 'Let the memory of Jesus be combined with your breathing; then you will know the benefit of hesychia.' (*Rung 27*).

This coordination of the Prayer with the bodily activity of breathing became an important part of hesychast spirituality in the Middle East. Hesychasts would spend great amounts of time 'practicing the Prayer' so that it would go from being a conscious, vocal activity to a subconscious one. They wanted the Prayer to be literally unceasing. This is not something which happens over night, but rather in stages just like human love.

First, our relationship is external. We say words on our lips. In the Jesus Prayer, we say the prayer over and over again until...

Second, the prayer starts to become a part of us. We become conscious of saying the prayer when we aren't even thinking about it. We don't will it. It just happens. This stage can be frightening to some people because they always want to be in control. We are called upon to hand over control to God in order to move on to...

Third, the rhythm of the prayer is the rhythm of the heart. We find the peace, joy, and fulfillment of living in the overwhelming love of God.

For the hesychasts, the goal of the Jesus Prayer became to enable us to actually pray unceasingly by 'relocating' prayer into our inmost being, which they connected with the heart. In this way prayer would not be only a conscious or deliberated activity; it would go on in us in tune with our bodily activities. St. John Climacus went so far as to say that "One who is far advanced in this practice can maintain it without effort not only while awake but even during sleep" (*Rung 27*).

This practice — which the Fathers insisted should not be attempted except under the direction of a Spiritual Father or Guide — is connected with an understanding of the makeup of our human nature which is not common today. They saw us as made up of three aspects or 'parts': body, soul, and spirit.

Each of these *feels* or *knows* in different ways. The body knows through the senses. The soul knows through thought. The spirit knows through the mystical experience, in which we go beyond thought and senses, in which we transcend, go beyond the realm of nature. In the thought of the Fathers, these aspects are not separate—they are joined by the heart. In their understanding of man, the center of our person is not in our mind but rather in our heart. It is in our heart that we live. To this day we say that a person is broken-hearted, never broken-minded.

For the hesychasts, the heart meant the center of our being, the determining principle of activity. They saw the heart as that which determines who and what we are: the heart that moves our bodies and our minds and in which the Spirit of God dwells. This is why the populariser of this thought, Hesychius of Sinai, would write:

“Blessed is he who cleaves with his thought to the prayer of Jesus, constantly calling to Him in his heart, just as air cleaves to our bodies or the flame to the candle. The sun, passing over the earth produces daylight, and the holy worshipful name of our Lord Jesus, constantly shining in the mind, produces a measureless number of sunlike thoughts.”

(Centuries 2: 94)

The concept of the prayer of the heart speaks to our age which is often so concerned with wholeness. It says that of necessity our entire being must be involved in prayer. We all know how futile it is to go to church, for example, and be present in the body only. We fail to experience God in such situations because we are more than a body. However we often do not realize that the same thing happens when we try to have knowledge of God on a mental or intellectual level alone. We fail to experience God because we are more than just a mind. We can only know God if we experience Him in a relational way.

Comparing this with ordinary human experience, we realize that we may know the behavioral patterns of a person. We may know how a person will act at certain times, but we never really know the person. When we open our hearts to that person and truly give ourselves to him, then we come to know him on a deeper level, the level of experience. The same is true in respect to God. It is in opening our hearts to discover Him than we came to know Him. One part of us then is never enough. As Theophan the Recluse says, “You must pray not only with words, but with the mind, and not only with the mind, but with the heart, so that the mind understands and sees clearly what is said in words, and the heart feels what the mind is thinking. All these combined together constitute real prayer, and if any of them are absent your prayer is either not perfect, or is not a prayer at all.”

This is why the hesychasts understood the Jesus Prayer as also a ‘physical prayer’. It is a prayer of the whole person and so includes our bodies. After all, in discussing prayer of the heart, we must remember that the heart is a bodily organ. We use our bodies in praying through the techniques mentioned earlier, so our bodies can be effected. It has been recorded in history that some saints’ bodies were transfigured like Christ’s as they prayed. But, our concern is not how we should look. The physical occurrence is not harmful nor in a sense desirous. This is not the end of prayer. The end is the mystical encounter of God within our hearts.

The practice of the Jesus Prayer spread to other parts of the Christian East through the influence of monasticism. It received an especially strong emphasis on Mount Athos in the 14th century and again in the 18th century when Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain published a collection of excerpts from hesychast writers from the 4th to 14th centuries called the *Philokalia*. This became extremely popular, especially in Russia where an enlarged translation was published a few years later.

While all these teachers and advocates of the Jesus Prayer seem to be monks, it is actually an anonymous Russian layman who has drawn the attention of Christians today to the Jesus Prayer. *The Way of a Pilgrim*, published in Russia one hundred years ago, tells the story of a simple, self-styled vagrant who tried to find out what ‘Pray without ceasing’ could mean and came upon the Jesus Prayer. His story has touched countless believers in East and West and helped make the Prayer a viable source of spiritual strength for modern man.

A Way of Life

The Jesus Prayer is an ancient, yet modern, simple yet complex, plain yet beautiful means to living a life of constant prayer. It can lead to a completion and fulfillment which we could never imagine. Yet it is simple in that through it we become what we already truly are: a divine icon, the image of God. It is so beautiful to think that every single moment of our existence can be in relationship to God, a relationship that warms us to the very depth of our being. God became the center of reality for us in that we are no longer 'trying' to pray, but rather, without trying, pray unceasingly. We pray when we work, when we play, when we do anything and everything. We even pray when we sleep.

The Jesus Prayer, practiced meditatively, can help us to be filled with the peace which comes, not just from the technique that we are using, but from Christ. If we are so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the world, we cannot hear the voice of the Lord. We fail to sense the presence of the God who dwells within us because of our baptism. The Jesus Prayer can be a way of shutting out the anxieties and distractions of the hustle and bustle world so that we can experience the outpouring of God's life within us. We can use the techniques of hesychasm — becoming physically immobile, learning to control our breath — so that we can go deep within ourselves. We can concentrate on our hearts or, to use an older expression, fix our eyes on our hearts so that our minds are free to experience what is there within the heart. When the believer who is in Christ goes deep within the heart and encounters God, he is moved outward into the world to bring others to that peace. We can throw ourselves into the whirlwind of the modern world with the faith that God is working within us and through us.

Peace and Love: the Fruit of the Jesus Prayer

We can know if the Prayer is giving us a true experience of God by observing what Jesus taught us: 'By their fruit shall you know them' (*Mt 7: 16*). When, by going inward we encounter God, we find that our perceptions of the world around us are changing. We begin to see creation with 'new eyes', in the light of our relationship with God. When we are being filled with God in the depths of our being, we begin to experience Him everywhere.

This seems so far removed from our experience, but in fact the same thing happens in the realm of human love when a person's self-image is changed by the other, when life becomes incomplete without the other, and when the world is seen in view of the relationship with the other. This is why people in love are said to look at the world through rose-colored glasses. When we are conscious of the Spirit of God dwelling in our hearts, we should be able to look upon the world with the eyes of Christ, and see the hand of God in all things. This is what Jesus talks about when He says, "Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall see God" (*Mt 5: 8*).

Something similar should happen in our relationships with others. If we are being joined with God, we find that when we deal with others the love of God is surging through us. If, by going inward, we are encountering only ourselves, then our relationships are tinged by selfishness and worldliness. In an age which speaks about 'free love', we know that the love of Jesus for us which led to the joyful and glorious resurrection cost Him the great sacrifice of a painful death on the cross. The love of God is the love of selfless giving. We are called to love as Christ loved: "Love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn 15: 12*). How much did Christ love us? — "Greater love no man has than to lay down his life for his friends" (*Jn 15: 13*). The fruit of a serious practice of the Jesus Prayer should be that we see others as God sees them, as His images. If our experience of the Jesus Prayer is of God, then He will lead us to a life of love.

Can we realistically imagine that young people, or any of us for that matter, can attain this kind of union with God? The fact is that, because of our baptism this union has already been given us. What is often lacking to us is our conscious awareness that this union exists. If young people are not capable of this awareness, how is it that they are invited week after week to receive the Eucharist? The Jesus Prayer offers a simple and practicable way for any person, young or old, educated or not, to become aware of the union already given him sacramentally: a way attested by centuries of use in diverse cultures and circumstances. All believers can be invited to begin the practice of this Prayer as they are invited to begin the life in Christ at baptism. And we begin both with the same kind of assurance: that God who calls us to share in His life gives us as much of Himself as we can bear while continually striving to draw us closer to Him. As St. Arsenius has it, "If we seek God, He will manifest Himself to us; and if we hold to Him He will surely dwell with us." (*Sayings of the Fathers*).

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE ADOLESCENT

By calling the teacher a catechist, we are not just using a different term, rather we are expressing the role of the instructor in this program. Catechesis consists of the steps and the broad range of activities by which individuals and communities are initiated into and brought to Christian maturity in the Christian faith. This involves both instruction and conscience formation. A catechist is both an informer and a guide.

Success in both will depend largely upon how well the catechist relates to the participants. The most successful way of relating to the high school age participant is by *witnessing*. The participants will be able to spot phoniness immediately and turn that person off. If the catechist is sincere, even though not the most knowledgeable about the subject matter, the participants will respond. They will respond to who and what the catechist is and what he or she does know and they will assimilate some of his or her values.

Life is a pilgrimage that begins at conception and ends, hopefully, in what some have called the Beatific Vision, the face-to-face knowledge of God. It is helpful if the catechist can understand the needs, hopes, and goals of the participants and knows where they have been and where they are going. We go through different stages. The behavioral sciences have come to the aid of the catechist in outlining how the participants think and judge at different times in the pilgrimage of life. They also remind the catechist that these participants do not think and judge as adults.

Intensive research begun by the work of the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget is still being done in this area and may be applied to catechesis.

Abstract Operational Level

For the most part, a catechist dealing with high school age participants will find that this age group is capable of operating on the abstract level.

According to Piaget, people start out learning about themselves and about the world around them only through the senses. For something to be real, it has to be touched, tasted, and seen. When infants see a ball, they come to understand the ball by placing it in their mouths. Since infants have no knowledge of the realm of ideas, they cannot arrive at conclusions. This is why when children see their reflection in a mirror, they do not see themselves because they do not know what they look like. This is a difficult task of analysis which older children can handle because of their years of experience and growth.

High school age participants have just reached what is called abstract operational level. By junior high school age, they are beginning to interpret information and follow through with their interpretation by relating to life's realities, making comparisons and applications, etc.

In the Jesus Prayer Program, the participants are given readings from scripture. In discussions they are called upon to give interpretations and then illustrate how their conclusions can be carried out or followed through. If the program is done with younger participants, some may have difficulty if they have not yet reached this stage of development.

Readiness

Ronald Goldman used Piaget's work as the basis for his studies on how children matured in their religious development. Working in schools in Great Britain, which

include the study of scripture as part of their course of study, he found that the study of theological concepts through memorization did not correlate to the level of religious development in the student.

Goldman then concluded that the students, or in this program the participants, must be prepared for religious learning. Using the phrase "readiness for religion", he says that before people can understand religion and what it is, they need to have a certain background of experiences. They cannot know God as Father, for example, unless they have experienced an earthly father. They cannot but mouth the words "The Lord is my shepherd" without knowing how shepherds care for their flocks. The more such pertinent experiences that the participants have, the more able they will be to understand God and religion.

In the *Jesus Prayer Program*, each unit is centered around an experience which will increase the participant's self knowledge so that (s)he will be able to open him/herself to the divine presence. This program does not expect the participant to have any background experiences which will help them understand the message, so all the units are based upon so-called contrived experiences.

Erikson

Eric Erikson shows that people develop through crises and through interaction with significant persons. Adolescent participants are undergoing an identity crisis; they are trying to discover who and what they are without any loss of a sense of wholeness. They discover who and what they are in interaction with peer groups and models of leadership. They are subject to a great deal of pressure to be what the group perceives their membership to be. But do not take this to mean that the catechist plays an insignificant role. The catechist is a model of leadership upon which the adolescent participants can bounce off their ideas, values, and feelings. Young people will say things which are meant to shock; they are striving to discover what they can and cannot do.

Young adults having gotten through this stage strive for intimacy. They know who they are, or at least who they think they are. The most important person in their lives is one in whom they can lose and/or find themselves. Love and marriage examples are very popular for this group.

In the *Jesus Prayer Program*, the discussions with the guidance of the catechist, provide the opportunity for the development of an identity through peer group discussions. But the most important identity that will be picked up through this program is a Christian identity through an incorporation in Christ.

Session One

INITIATION INTO THE JESUS PRAYER

Objectives

1. To have the participants get in touch with themselves.
2. To have the participants begin to experience the Jesus Prayer as a Christian mystical experience.

Suggested Materials Needed

Icon, incense, vigil light, matches, pencils, paper, Bibles.

For the Catechist

This lesson deals with the indwelling of God within each believer and how we can be made conscious or aware of this reality. This will allow one to open oneself to God, one another and one's true self. This can only be done if all the worldly cares and distractions are removed. This is introduced through the process of the countdown exercise.

Additionally, in this lesson, the power of a name to make another present and personal to oneself is arrived at through discussion.

More learning takes place by doing than by hearing. One can only learn to pray by praying. It is for that reason that this lesson begins with the experience of the Jesus Prayer. For this prayer to be experienced fully, it is combined with a relaxation exercise.

Assuming that this may be the first time that this group comes together, there may be distractions, tensions due to the uneasiness of a new experience.

The focus is primarily on discussions, for this allows an opportunity for openness.

It is also recommended that special attention be given to the notes "*To the catechist*" found throughout the *Procedure* section in this lesson. The catechist should already have listened to the cassette tape to develop their familiarity with the conduct of the following exercise.

Procedure

A. Setting up of room environment and relaxation exercise.

1. A small informal room that is dimly lit is preferable. Have an icon displayed on a table or hanging on the wall so that all can see it. Place a lighted vigil before it along with burning incense.

This atmosphere contributes to the experience by providing an environmental enhancement for stillness and relaxation as a psychological preparation for inward prayer. The quiet, structured environment removes exterior distractions.

The use of the traditional icon corner builds on the Byzantine understanding of the use of icons in prayer. We pray before an icon because the icon manifests graphically the presence of God and serves as a "window to heaven", inviting us to personally recognize the presence of the One before whose image we stand.

2. Have the participants sit on the floor in a semi-circle in a lotus or other comfortable position. Remind them to be comfortable and not to move after they have found a comfortable position so as not to be distracted or to expend unnecessary energy.

3. Among the many countdown exercises commonly accepted is the following (to be said slowly):

Close your eyes. Imagine that you are in a very tall building on the 20th floor standing in the elevator and you are going down and you see each floor pass by... 20... going down deeper... 19... and deeper into yourself... 18... breathe deeply and go down... 17... 16... deeper... 15... 14... deeper... 13... continue to breathe deeply... 12... 11... going down deeper... 10... 9... 8... 7... deeper... 6... 5... 4... 3... 2... 1... now you are at the lowest level... deep into yourself.

Feel how relaxed you are. Feel your toes... relax them; feel your knees... relax them; feel your thighs... relax them; feel your abdomen... relax it; feel your midriff, your chest... relax them; feel your neck... relax it; your lips... relax them; your eyes... relax them; your forehead... relax it. You are now totally relaxed... you are deep within yourself.

Breathe deeply... inhale and push out with your diaphragm (repeat this several times).

Feel the breath in your body... put your hands on your stomach and feel your body breathing in and out.

We are breathing in God's life. Feel yourself breathing in God's life. Repeat these words to yourself, "Jesus Christ, come into my life"... "Jesus Christ, come into my life"... "Jesus Christ, come into my life."

As we exhale, let us ask God to have mercy on us... we are going to breathe in Jesus' life and exhale our sinfulness. Breathe in "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God"... exhale, and say to yourself, "Have mercy on me a sinner"; breathe in "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God"... exhale "Have mercy on me a sinner." Keep repeating this and silently close out all distractions. Continue to pray in your mind, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner." You are now very close to Jesus... feel Him in your heart... breathe in God's breath... push out your sinfulness.

You are very close to God. You are very relaxed. You are becoming renewed... you are refreshed... God loves you. You feel very united to Him... He is changing your life... you are very close to Him. Continue to breathe... if you feel yourself coming up, breathe deeply and start over again... "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

God will change your life... He will give you a fullness and He will help you to move out to others... continue to sit quietly while you breathe deeply... allow God to speak in your heart. In a few minutes you will open your eyes; you will be able to share this experience of God's love... (Pause for a few moments).

4. Have the participants open their eyes.

B. Discussion of this experience.

To the catechist:

Whatever is said by the participant should be accepted. A participant who has expressed that (s)he has experienced nothing is sharing a legitimate response.

1. Tell me... What did you feel? What did you experience?
2. Did you feel more relaxed? More rested? In touch with the Lord?
3. Did you hear your heart beat? Were you more conscious of your breathing?
4. Could your heart beat without breathing? Could you be alive without breathing?

C. Scripture reading, reflection and sharing.

To the catechist:

From the reading, reflection and discussion, it is hoped that the following be reached by the participants. As God breathed into man to give him life, we are to breathe in God to make him alive in us.

1. Have the participants find and read *Ezekiel 37: 1-13*.
2. As this passage is being read aloud, the participants are to reflect on the words as they are being read.
3. After the reading, give a few moments for silent reflection.
4. Discuss:
 - a. What happened in the reading?
 - b. What did God do?
 - c. Relate the story in your own words.
 - d. How does this reading relate to us?

D. Presentation on the power to the name of Jesus.

To the catechist:

A name brings a person to mind and a person brings a presence. When we bring a person present by calling on a name, we have a unique point of reference with that person. The following exercise attempts to bring this point out.

1. When I used the name *Ezekiel* before, what was the first thing that came into your mind? Share it.
2. The catechist should throw out names to different participants to get their responses. Use names with which the participants are familiar. Use both historical and current names (Brooke Shields, Benjamin Franklin, John Kennedy, King Tut, Ronald Reagan, Mother Teresa, etc.).
3. Now give to the group as a whole a particular person's name and ask them to write down their reaction to the name in two or three words. Pick out one name such as Prince Charles or James Morrison or else make up a name. Have them share their responses with the group.

To the catechist:

We can see that by the different reactions to the names, the responses are individual. We as individuals react and relate from who and what we are. When we respond to a name as persons, we are reacting to the power of a name. The power of the name is that it makes a person present, real to us. When a person is present and we are present, there is a relationship between us and the named person.

4. Have the participants find and read the following passages: Acts 16: 16-18 and Acts 3: 1-8. Discuss the readings using questions such as the following:
 - a. In each of these readings, a change takes place. What brings about this change?
 - b. What is the common expression spoken by the apostles in these two incidents?

In these readings other people (Ss. Peter and Paul) make Christ present in power as they call upon His name. When we call upon the name of Jesus, we focus our mind and heart on Him, leading us to live aware of His presence. Christ becomes present to us on a conscious level.

Wrap-Up

Conclude this session with the actual practice of the Jesus Prayer. Repeat the count-down exercise as noted under Procedure A. 3.

Assignment

Distribute the prayer leaflets to the participants. Direct them to practice the Jesus Prayer for five minutes a day before an icon of Christ. If they do not have an icon at home, instruct them to use the icon print on the cover of the prayer leaflet as the focus of their prayer time.

Session Two

SPIRIT AND SPIRITUALITY

Objective

1. To bring about an awareness of the spiritual dimension that permeates one's daily life and the lives of others.

Suggested Materials Needed

Sound collage *Neshama* from Teleketics (optional), Bible.

For the Catechist

As the psychologist Eric Erikson points out, growth occurs in and through interaction with significant others. No one is more significant than the Triune God. He dwells within us and with us He reaches out to others.

Since the participants are entering the abstract operational level of thinking, we are introducing them into the realm of the mysterious encounter with God. To do this, we start on the "real" level by introducing wind and breath as experiences that point beyond to a greater reality. Scripture uses wind as a sign of the presence of God.

These forces in nature have an intangible power and they are irreversible. The supernatural energies of God are intangible and irreversible. Breath is intangible and irreversible, for if reversed, we would die. Breath gives us life and God gave us this breath (*Genesis 2*).

Through our baptism, this Spirit of God dwells within us, and with Him the Father and the Son. But like the wind, we do not experience the whole, but only that which touches us. In the case of God, it is His divine energies which reach out to us, but we experience Him in relationship only insofar as we respond to His energies within us.

The Spirit moves us back to God and out to others. The Spirit is felt, yet untouched; sensed, yet intangible; a powerful mover, yet peaceful as a dove.

To not feel His presence in us is like a woman being pregnant and not feeling life within her, to paraphrase St. Simeon the New Theologian (cf. George Maloney, *The Mystic of Fire and Light*, p. 58).

Procedure

- A. Discuss the participants' experience of praying the Jesus Prayer at home: their ability to keep to their scheduled task; the question of distractions; their sensible experiences; the meaning of these experiences and the seeming non-experience of those who "felt nothing"; their comparison of the Jesus Prayer to other prayer forms they are familiar with.
- B. Discuss the following questions:
 1. Can you see the wind? What color is it? Can you give to me five pounds of it?
 2. What can you tell me about the wind? Does it exist? How do we know?

To the catechist:

We see trees blowing. We can feel breezes and winds. Therefore, the wind has power and energy.

3. What can you tell me about breath? Do you feel yourself breathing? Breathe on your hand... do you feel it? Do you see it? What would happen if you stopped breathing?

4. What do wind and breath have in common? (They have both power and energy.) How do they differ? (Breath is life.)
5. Does God have breath?

To the catechist:

Show the breath of God in the scripture reading of *Genesis 2* (creation of man) and in *Ezekiel 37: 9-10* (dry bones prophecy).

6. What is the Spirit? Does anyone know what the Spirit is?

C. Show the sound collage *Neshama*.

1. *Neshama* is a Hebrew word which means "breath of life". This sound collage explores through several different techniques the action of the Spirit in our lives. In the book of *Genesis*, there is an interplay between two Hebrew words, *ruach* (spirit) and *neshama*. It is because the Spirit of God breathes into a being that it has the breath of life. Nothing symbolizes the life within us better than the in-draw and outflow of breath. Utilizing this same imagery, the sound collage plays with the idea of "breath-wind-spirit".
2. Interspersed throughout the sound collage are readings concerned with the presence of the Spirit. Some are drawn from the Christian tradition. Some are Mohammedan and American Indian reflections of the life-spirit. Listen to the voices... notice how they communicate the cultures from which the readings come.
3. Twice during the sound collage, a chorus chants various names of the Spirit, drawn from many cultures: *Spiros, Spirit, Seele, Soul, Sila, Saiwala, Saiwalo, Aloos, Atun, Us-anan, Anima, Animus, Anemos, Wind, Waft, Wehen, Wentos, Wata, Vehas, Vejata, Feth, Dukho, Geist, Guent, Pneuma, Rih, Ruh, Ruach, Neshama*.

And then: *Paraclete, Advocate, Enlightener, Sanctifier, Lord of Light, Finger of God, Fire of Love, Fountain of Life*.

4. If the tape is used, ask the following questions:
 - a. What does the sound communicate?
 - b. How many of the names do you recognize?
 - c. What happens to the names when they are distorted, confused? (They do not convey the same attitude.)
 - d. Do the sounds remind you of anything we connect with spirit-filled people? (Power of energy surging forth.)

D. Read *Exodus 14: 21* aloud, followed by silent reflection. Share. What does this reading say to you in relation to what we have been talking about?

Content for presentation:

A person is more than he appears to be. We are each filled with intangible powers like love. People are motivated to do things out of love for a member of the opposite sex, for nature, parents, family, society or God.

Others may pick up these energies. A person may walk into a room and feel good vibes or feel uncomfortable ones. We pick up others' energies and we give out energies. But we are not these energies just as we are not the love we give. Who we are is our essence. We are unfulfilled and frustrated if our energies are not exerted. What completes us is the release of our energies and our opening to the Spirit of God.

This inner quality or spirit we have points to what God is like because we are made in His image. But, because God is so different in His essence for us, our human spirit is only a shadow of His divine Spirit. The Spirit of God is not an intangible power, but a personal being, one of the Holy Trinity. How this is and what kind of person He is, and how there could be three Persons in one Godhead is beyond our ability to understand. We accept it because Christ has shown it to be so.

It was Christ himself who promised that this Spirit of God would come upon the early Church after He Himself had returned to His Father: "I will ask the Father," He says, "and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you always: the Spirit of truth..." (*John 14: 16-17*). The Spirit would be a Paraclete: One to urge us on in the service of God (the word means an advocate or counselor; today we might say a coach). He would be the One to make the energies of God present in the world. He is "another Paraclete", meaning that there has been one already (i.e. Christ). While Christ was present in the world physically, in one set time and place, the Spirit would be "everywhere present and filling all things" as we say in our liturgical prayers: communicating the energies of God to those who come into a relationship with Him. Just as we communicate to others without words, the Spirit of God communicates the life of God in an intangible—but no less real—way.

The Spirit was given to the Church at Pentecost and, faithful to Christ's promise, has remained with us forever. He works in a special way in the Church, the community of people who recognize His presence and consciously glorify Him. And He takes up His dwelling in each Christian when he is christened. We are sealed or marked with the presence of the Holy Spirit according to St. Paul, as a kind of pledge by God the Father of the full life with Him to come. "God has fashioned us for this very thing and has given us the Spirit as a pledge of it" (*2 Corinthians 5: 5*). And so the Spirit of God is within each of us in a way we can't grasp and more often than not forget. We have to be reminded, like St. Paul kept telling the Corinthians, "You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is within—the Spirit you have received from God" (*1 Corinthians 6: 19*).

This Spirit does not force His divine life on us: we must reach out to Him and grasp that life. If we allow the Spirit of God to work through us, if we open ourselves to Him, we become powerful, It is the power of God working. The transcendent becomes normal, the supernatural becomes natural for us.

But if we isolate ourselves from God, build up walls around us and live in our own world, we are out of touch with reality. We live in a dream world. Only by breaking down the walls within and touching the Spirit within the depths of our own spirit are we in touch with reality. And the way to break down the barriers to the Spirit is prayer. Prayer lets us get in touch with reality.

If we trust only our senses, we probably won't perceive the presence of the Holy Spirit within us unless He makes Himself felt in some extraordinary way. But if we trust the promise of Christ, we will reach out to Him and then we will know that He does guide us, coach us and enable us to be complete in a unique way.

E. Summary of key concepts.

1. The Spirit is the mover, (the Paraclete), given us by God to move us out of ourselves and in particular toward God.
2. The Holy Spirit liberates us from our physical limitations, our finite capabilities. We no longer have to feel that we have to do everything on our own.

3. The Spirit provides us with a way to move outside our self-centered nature and become united with God's spirit.
4. We cannot see the Spirit of God, but we can experience Him as a reality in our lives for reality is not just what we can see.

Wrap-Up

Have a discussion on the Holy Spirit. As a child what was your concept of the Holy Spirit as compared to now?

Assignment

Essay:

How has your spirit gone out this week in words, actions? How has it been sent out and what did it invoke? As winds knock over trees, buildings, how have you been an impact upon your environment?

Session Three

INTRODUCTION TO MEDITATION

Objectives

1. To help the participant to understand the simplicity of meditation and prayer as a procedure.
2. To increase openness and receptivity to the mind of God.
3. To help the participant discover that freedom is interior, that with meditation one is freer no matter what situation confines or limits one.
4. To experience the Jesus Prayer as a Christian mystical experience.

Suggested Materials Needed

Bible, record player or tape player, record or tape of the song *The Rose* along with typed handout of the lyrics. The catechist is free to select any song that deals with love with an appreciation of the participants' taste in music. This shared experience of listening to a song provides a new experience that can be tied into their other experience on love and, therefore, provide a readiness for a consciousness of divine love.

For the Catechist

God is love. God's love is not conditional, inconsistent or temporary. It is not conditioned by anything we do to be loved. We cannot turn God's love on by anything we do or turn His love off by anything we fail to do. Rather His love is unconditional, free, abundant and constant. Despite our weakness and sinfulness, His love remains because God is not judgemental. He is merciful and the Lover of mankind.

To grasp the depth of God's love for us, we must first go into ourselves and see ourselves as the image of God (*Genesis 1:26*). With a new understanding of who and what we are, we look at ourselves, others and the world differently. We feel and we realize that the others around us are also in the image of God. We can see and, therefore, experience God through them.

The second stage is where we see the world around us not as a thing but rather as a creation of God. All creators leave their imprint of themselves on their creation: you can immediately recognize a painting by Michaelangelo from that of Picasso. In the same way, we see the imprint of God in creation. The beauty of creation is the beauty of God. We call this *pan-en-theism*. This is different from the pagan notion of *pantheism* in which the divine dwells in things. We see the image of God in all creation. We see a harmony in the world, a pattern, an order. This reveals a harmony in the mind of God and all things together in God. With this new perspective, we are moved away from the works of God to Himself.

The third stage is where we share in the divine harmony. Our mind works with God's mind. Our will is in harmony with God's will. This may sound strange, but in actual experience, people are constantly looking for the transcendent experience. The use of drugs, the schools of transcendental meditation and even the "free love" movement are signs of humankind's desire to become in touch with and part of something other and greater than themselves. In psychology it is humankind's desire for the significant other.

Who can be more significant than God? If drugs help people remove themselves from the confusion of the world, the mystical experience removes confusion and replaces it with a harmonic view. If transcendental meditation offers an image of self in harmony

with all of nature, the mystical experience provides a divine image of self in harmony with God, each other and all creation. If "free love" is freeing and loving, the mystical experience frees us from the distractions of the world and allows us to adapt to only one environment, the unchanging God, and it is joining with the love of God which burst into creation.

To use the imagery of Gregory Palamas, God is like the sun. His rays permeate all of creation (pan-en-theism). He is a life-giving Spirit. When we move inside ourselves and remove the distractions of these false images and prophets who steal away our energy, we are filled with His life-giving rays.

In our experience of the sun, in order to get the full benefit of its rays and tan, we need to be still, then the rays transform us. If we are still (meditation), the rays of God give us new life. We see for the first time who and what we really are. We have no need for masks because we are in reality someone great, who is in harmony with God and nature, who gets our strength from the divine rays and we become what we are and someone with whom we are proud to be.

Procedure

- A. Discuss the participants' experience of praying the Jesus Prayer at home. Compare the past week's experience with the previous week's.

Discuss the essay question assigned. Through the discussion, help the participants see the comparison between their own spirit and the Spirit of God.

- B. Read and reflect on the words of *The Rose* (or a comparable song) from the typed handout. Discuss its meaning. Now relax and hear these words sung in the recording.

To the catechist:

We do not usually pay attention to the words of a song, just its melody. In this exercise, by examining words we are emphasizing awareness.

In their discussion of love, they should note that there are different kinds of love and that true love always has a positive affect on the beloved.

1. Discuss:

Are you the same person with your parents, girl or boyfriends, friends, teachers?

To the catechist:

When we operate to please people, we never really become our true selves. It is only when we are with God that we can come in contact with our true nature because we do not have to pretend with God. He knows us and loves us as we are.

2. Discuss:

Why do we cover up who we are with a mask? (Acceptance, love, people lose sight of the fact that God loves them for who they are.)

3. Who accepts us totally for who we are? (God—God just loves; His energy gives life to the universe.)

Read the Prodigal Son, the adultress (*Luke 15: 11-32; John 8: 1-11*). This is what we mean by "mercy": it is God's way of loving unconditionally. In both of these cases, the person's weaknesses did not change God's love. By God's mercy, new life was given.)

4. Presentation of concept of being receptive to God, harmony with nature, being truly who we are is what God constantly sees us to be:

To the catechist:

In the beginning of this session, we were talking about the impact of our energies. One of our most powerful forces to transform another is love. True love in its transformation of the other makes the other a better person. But this can only work if the individual is aware of this love. If someone had a crush on you and you never knew it, it would make no impact. Or if someone loves you and you do not respond, you never get to know the person. Openness and knowledge go together. If we know of God and are not open to His love, we do not really know God. If we are not open to the love of God, His love can't transform us. We cannot be who we really are.

Our identity is the image of God. Being created in the image of God means, among other things, that we have the seed or potential to become lovers of mankind as he is. This is what is meant by growing in the likeness of God: to love as God loves. By being silent and by being still, we open ourselves up to the activity of God in us. We become part of God's work, co-creators. In silence and in the tranquility it brings, we encounter the love, the energies of God. But if we are distracted by worldly cares, we never have the consciousness of God working in us. We become imprisoned in our limited finite capacity. By becoming trapped, we never grow because the energies of God are not being allowed to activate us. In being activated, we become truly who we are and that is what God constantly sees us to be.

Wrap-Up

Conduct the relaxation exercise as in Session One on page 11 and the Jesus Prayer experience which follows. Spend some concluding moments in silence to reflect on what has taken place.

Assignment

Direct the participants to continue practicing the Jesus Prayer daily before an icon of Christ, this week increasing their commitment to seven minutes a day.

Have the participants write a reflection on their response to the Jesus Prayer. Note that the Prayer points to several aspects of the way God deals with us: the breath of God as life-giving, the need to be silent to receive from God, God as reaching out to us in love (mercy) and we as responding, the unique place of Christ as Lord. Direct the students to reflect on these points and discern if/how the use of the prayer may have changed their sensitivity and perception of people, places and things. If this has moved in a positive direction, it is a sign of God's transforming love, making of the pray-er an instrument of light and harmony in the universe.

Have them discern whether they are judgemental or critical or insensitive to the frailties of others; if they have come to look upon things of nature as signs of God's love and presence, if they have more respect for life and creation because of their use of the Prayer.

The Rose

Some say love, it is a river
That drowns the tender reed.
Some say love, it is a razor
That leaves your soul to bleed.

Some say love, it is a hunger
An endless aching need.
I say love, it is a flower
And you it's only seed.

It's the heart afraid of breaking
That never learns to dance.
It's the dream afraid of waking
That never takes the chance.
It's the one who won't be taken
Who cannot seem to give.
And the soul afraid of dying
That never learns to live.

When the night has been too lonely
And the road has been too long,
And you think that love is only
For the lucky and the strong.
Just remember in the winter
Far beneath the bitter snows,
Lies the seed that with the sun's love
In the spring becomes the rose.

Session Four

PRAYER OF THE HEART

Objectives

1. To bring about an awareness that the heart is center (core) of man's being and the meeting place of the Lord (the place where God and man meet).
2. To make praying incessantly a reality in one's life so that one can live as one prays and one can pray as one lives.

Suggested Materials Needed

Bibles.

For the Catechist

It seems at times that the winds of fortune or fate blow us in many different directions. We want an anchor. In human relations, youth looks for the stability of intimacy. Though this may seem to be just fickleness, love is actually a firm foundation. Hopefully, we were conceived in love, grow in love, give love and die in a loving embrace.

This is verified in psychology by Erikson who talks about our striving for intimacy. We want this intimacy to be constant without end. Just look at the amount of time that young people spend on the phone after having spent the whole school day together. They can never get enough of each other. They look for the support of each other as can be seen by the young males hanging about on a street corner. Time in the company, in the embrace of friends goes by very quickly. This time and these friendships give them a perspective on what is right and wrong for them. Most commonly this is called peer pressure, but whatever it is called it reveals that they become like those around them, both good and bad. It is for these reasons that examples of love and marriage are popular with this age group.

There is no better friend than God. In the Old Testament, the Book of Hosea speaks of a relationship with God in terms of a marriage. Hosea is a prophet who was told by God to take a harlot for a wife. He married a woman by the name of Gomer with whom he fell deeply in love. But she was not a faithful wife. No matter how unfaithful Israel was, God would always love her. Through his own love for Gomer, Hosea came to see how God could love an unfaithful Israel. Marriage and love put things into focus. Friendship with God does the same and it is constant. It provides a constant identity, image and a perspective on what is right and wrong.

This is not something that comes like a bolt of lightning but rather it is nurtured by Christ coming to us in His Word (the Gospel), in His Person (the Eucharist), in His Power (Energies) and in His Body (the Church). Many young people need experiences on the human level before they can understand this, as Goldman reminds us.

In the human experience, we are growing yet remaining the same. A child's concerns are with what I want. As we become adults, we sacrifice in order to be a we. Growth involves letting go; thus as we mature, we are called to let go of all selfishness. Growth comes from letting go while sin is hanging on to the ego. In letting go we become who we are; we are self-actualizing images of God.

While the term "self-actualizing" is from a contemporary psychological frame of reference, nevertheless our Tradition has always affirmed that God has made us in His image and that He will bring us to new growth if we only let Him take the initiative.

We are becoming. We are, and yet we are becoming. We are becoming like God. We become partakers of the divine nature. We become what we truly are, divine and human, sharing not in the essence of God, but in His power.

What we are is called a state of being. We are not what others want us to be, whether they are parents or friends. We have to close all of them out to learn what God wants us to be. We learn by going within and praying. Prayer is not an isolated act of saying or doing. It is being who we are—individuals in communion with God.

We go through various stages of growth in our prayer life. It starts out with saying words just like when we first meet a new person who later becomes a friend. In the beginning it is just words... "It's nice to meet you." Then our words are not just words any longer but our hearts joining with our minds moving to God who dwells within. When we see that special someone in our lives, our words are not just from our minds but our heart as well. If we truly are being receptive to someone, we listen with our hearts; we listen to love which no longer needs the form of words.

This does not happen the first time we pray just as it does not happen the first time we meet someone. Rather it is the result of a day to day process of growth. Prayer builds upon prayer until one prayer flows into the next where one intimate moment with our loved one, God, is without end. Then every moment is a prayer. Every moment is with God. Every moment is filled with love of and for God. This is called unceasing prayer.

This is real; it is attainable. It is not a fantasy. Nor are we saying that we can turn God on and tune Him in with the right process. Rather, it is a mystery and God works in mysterious ways. All things are possible to God and because He loves us, He wants us within Him all the time. God has an unceasing attention toward us and by our unceasing prayer, we join with God.

Procedure

- A. Discuss the participants' experience of praying the Jesus Prayer at home, particularly in reference to their changing perspectives as they continue in the Prayer.
- B. Discuss the following:
 1. Who were the Pilgrims? (A group of Puritans who arrived and settled in New England.)
 2. Why do you think they were called Pilgrims? (They were called Pilgrims because they were on a pilgrimage. Their search was to find a place in which they could settle and practice their religion as an example to the whole world.)
 3. How is your life a pilgrimage? Just reflect for a moment... Are you the same person you were ten years ago? How are you different? How have you changed? In what ways? If you have changed within a span of ten years, how do you envision yourself ten years from now? How will you get there?
 4. What changes you? (School changes you because you learn new things; food changes you because your type of eating reflects your body type; responsibilities change you—you become mature; aging changes you in looks; true friendship changes you—you become a better person.)

To the catechist:

Try to conclude on the theme of friendship because it becomes the stepping stone to prayer. The interaction among friends enlarges one's vision and perspective of life; it enlarges one's ideas simply because two minds are better than one, and the community of ideas increases one's warehouse of knowledge and changes one's perspectives.

Our relationships impact upon our thinking and we become like one another; so too, God is a significant Other, Someone who has an important affect on us.

In our human relationships, how we communicate with someone is based upon our impression of that person. So, too, our impression of God is going to influence how we pray. As with anything else we do, prayer is going to make a difference in us because of its intimacy with God.

5. Do you think prayer changes you? How? (Prayer makes you more aware of God working in your life; it makes you more sensitive to the image of God in other people; it gives you relief because you are able to share your innermost secrets with someone; it gives you strength to face difficulties in life; it frees you to be yourself and to become more than what you can be on your own.)

C. Read and reflect on *1 Thessalonians 5: 17* and share your reflections.

1. In light of what we have been talking about, what does this verse mean to you?
2. How can the practice of the Jesus Prayer lead to unceasing prayer?

D. Presentation on degrees of prayer.

St. Paul tells us that we should be praying every single moment of every day. We should pray when we get up and when we go to sleep and every moment in between as well as when we sleep.

When a person is asleep, the brain still functions. One of the brain's nighttime functions that we are all aware of is that of dreaming. We do not usually think about it, but we know that another of the brain's nighttime functions is to regulate our breath.

We have been tying in prayer with the act of breathing. If we develop the practice of this prayer with each and every breath we take while we are asleep and awake, we will find ourselves praying the Jesus Prayer.

As with most things that are worthwhile in life, this does not happen overnight. It is something that we grow into with much practice.

At first, the prayer is just words that we say. We consciously mouth the words of the Jesus Prayer over and over again. We have to concentrate on this activity. Later, after we do this for some time, the prayer takes on a life of its own. The prayer moves inward from our lips and acquires a rhythm all its own. We can hear the words in our mind with each breath we take. This can be very frightening the first time you hear the words. We must remember: if it is something that makes us closer to God who dwells within, then it is a pearl of great price, something we should value and not be afraid of.

The final stage is where the prayer takes up residence, so to speak, in our hearts.

The heart is the symbol of the center of our lives. Look at all the expressions that we have that deal with the heart: all heart, heartbroken, heart of gold, big hearted, my heart bleeds, died of a broken heart and, of course, the celebration of love on St. Valentine's Day with heart-shaped decorations.

When we feel good, we are light-hearted and when we feel sad, we are heavy-hearted. When we are generous, we have a heart of gold and when we are stingy, we have no heart at all.

When we say that the prayer is in our heart, we mean that the prayer is at the center of our existence. At the center of our existence is also God. Our prayer like all

prayer is the worship of God. So inside of ourselves, we are standing before God and worshiping. As Theophan states, "Inner prayer means standing with the mind in the heart before God, either living in His presence or expressing supplication, thanksgiving and glorification." (Chariton of Valamo, *The Art of Prayer*)

When prayer becomes a part of us, we are no longer saying words on our lips, no longer reflecting on words but rather we are standing before God totally open to Him as He transforms us from within.

Just as in human love, there is a time when you go beyond words. Words are no longer needed. All that is needed is the presence of the loved one to make us complete. The words of the Jesus Prayer disappear and we stand open to God in love.

Wrap-Up

Conduct the relaxation exercise and the Jesus Prayer experience which follows as found in Session One, page 11.

Assignment

Direct the participants to continue practicing the Jesus Prayer before the icon of Christ for seven minutes each day. Encourage them to increase their awareness of life and what surrounds them each day as well.

Session Five

BREATH CONTROL AND POSTURE

Objectives

1. To help the participant understand that to pray well, one first must be self-possessed, in control of oneself and be calm and relaxed. This is achieved through posture and breath control.
2. To reduce sensate distractions around oneself.

Suggested Materials Needed

Bibles.

For the Catechist

It is important to remember that a human person is a whole and not the combination of opposing parts. The Greek philosophers introduced into Western thought that a person was composed of two parts, body and soul, which worked in conjunction or in opposition to each other.

The tradition of the East is based instead on the Biblical concept that a human person is one and is whole. What affects one part of the person affects the whole. When we burn our finger, we feel the pain in our finger and in our mind. If the burn is serious enough, it can affect how we feel and how we react. A personality change can come about from a serious burn over our whole body.

After we exercise, we feel tired yet we also feel good. We also feel good when we are with friends. If we are tired and our friends come over, we feel better in our bodies. One affects the other because we are one.

When one steals, it is not the hand nor the mind alone that commits the act, but rather both of them working together. Only a person can sin.

If sin involves the body, so does prayer. Our whole self must be involved in our prayer.

This is a good way to look at ourselves. When we see ourselves working together, psychologists would say we are well adjusted. Erikson, for example, emphasizes the person's need for wholeness. Fragmentation of a person as a result of sin (our own or others) causes a psychological imbalance. A whole person has the divine energies working throughout his whole self.

We should also remember that we are more than simply psycho-physical beings, made up of bodies, thoughts, feelings, natural abilities and the like. We are also temples of God. As St. Paul writes,

"You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within—the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body."
(I Corinthians 6: 19-20)

It is in the totality of our person that we glorify God, not simply with our minds. And so the body must be brought into the glorification of God if it is to be something that engages our whole being. When our bodies are used in the worship of God, our entire self enters into prayer as we witness to God alive in us. We are using all that God has given us to glorify Him and proclaim His presence in the world. As St. Irenaeus has said, "The glory of God is man fully alive and the perfect life of man is only found in the vision of God."

We also glorify God in our bodies because they are the seed of our glorified resurrected body. Like wheat which dies to become seed, our bodies die and are planted in the ground as a seed. As God first built us up from the ground, so too, He will build us up on the last day. God gave us our bodies. He gave them life and He will give them life again.

Procedure

A. Discuss the participants' experience of praying the Jesus Prayer at home, particularly in reference to their changing perspectives as they continue in the Prayer.

B. Breathing exercises:

1. Have the participants sit on the floor in lotus position or in chairs. Have them sit in a relaxed position with a straight spinal column. Tell them to be still, to conserve energy by not moving.

To the catechist:

This is giving them the opportunity to get in touch with their bodies.

2. Question them on the following:

- a. Is there anyone here among you who plays a wind instrument?
- b. Is there anyone taking voice lessons?
- c. Is anyone here a life-guard or terrific swimmer?
- d. If so, what can you tell us about proper breathing?

To the catechist:

Hopefully, if any of the participants are engaged in any of the above activities, they will relate the proper method of breathing diaphragmatically. When one inhales, the diaphragm expands and is filled with air; when one exhales, the diaphragm is contracted, having relinquished all of the air or breath.

This can be observed by deep breathing and exhaling a few times. If, when a person breathes deeply, his stomach is sucked in and his shoulders rise, he is not breathing diaphragmatically. On the contrary, he is forcing the ribs onto the lungs and lessening his breathing capacity. When a person breathes from the diaphragm, we should notice his lower abdomen expand while his shoulders remain motionless. As he exhales, his abdomen will contract.

3. Tell the participants that in order to have better breath control, they must store the breath in the lungs expanded by the diaphragm. They can tell if they have done this when they put their hands on their diaphragm and feel it swell up as they breathe in. Then as they exhale, they feel that they are diminishing the used-up breath.

Continue to "breathe in", "breathe out"... inhale, exhale with your hands on your diaphragm. Do this at least five times.

4. Now close your eyes and continue to breathe deeply with great relaxation. Concentrate on every part of your body as you are breathing, starting with your head. Tell your tensions to disappear. As you are concentrating, let go of the tightness in your forehead, your cheeks, your chin... relax. As you are breathing, concentrate on the tension in your shoulders... let go of its tightness. Feel the tension on your arms; let go of that tension; in your hands... your fingers... let go of that tension, etc. (legs, feet, toes). Relax and continue to breathe in and breathe out. Concentrate on your heartbeat; synchronize it with your breathing.

5. Open your eyes. How did you feel? What did you experience? What is so important about proper breathing?

To the catechist:

Breath is the obvious symbol of the gift of life from God. The first thing doctors do to newborns is to slap them on the buttocks so that they breathe in life. To be a healthy person, however, one must not only breathe, but also breathe properly, otherwise respiratory illnesses result.

In breathing properly, relaxation is so important. When one is not relaxed, one breathes improperly. This can be seen in the gasping for breath in a nervous person giving a speech before a large audience. Also, people who drown usually panic in the water and suffocate first before they drown. If the diaphragm were filled with air/breath and they were relaxed, they would not drown but would float. A key concept here is that we become most conscious that we are alive when we are breathing. When we cannot breathe, we struggle for life.

6. Read *Genesis 2*. How important is breath to life? What is the relationship of breathing to prayer?

To the catechist:

We really are becoming religious athletes. Breath is important to the athletes' meet just as breath is important to prayer. Without breath, proper breathing, the athlete could not perform his tasks. Without God's breath in us, we could not live; we would merely exist, skimming the periphery of life and never plumbing the depths of the reality of God's nature in us. The religious athlete becomes aware that his life is dependent on something outside of himself to sustain his life.

* See theological ideas on *Genesis 2* under the title, *For the Catechist*, page 14.

7. Let us focus, center ourselves on Jesus. Let us pull our whole body together and focus on His name. Let us get our body back into position. Relax, breathe properly, diaphragmatically.

* See *Session One*, countdown exercise and discussion.

Wrap-Up

Use this time for participants input on problems that they are having with the Jesus Prayer (content—clarifications and answers to be given).

To the catechist:

If you breathe properly and you are conscious that every time you breathe, you are breathing God's breath, God will become more a part of your life because you are consciously letting God more and more into your life.

Assignment

Direct the participants to continue practicing the Jesus Prayer daily before an icon of Christ, this week increasing their commitment to ten minutes a day.

Session Six

LIVING PRAYER

Objectives

1. To live the *now* of one's daily life by being the person God creates one to be.

Suggested Materials Needed

Bible, Agape Feast (see materials in *Wrap-Up*).

For the Catechist

As the song goes, "love makes the world go 'round." We change things about ourselves to impress that special someone and at the same time the love of that special someone can make us into someone new. In other words, love transforms.

The love of one human being for another is often conditional. We sometimes love someone as long as they love us and if they stop loving us we look for someone else to love. This kind of love is superficial. We love a person for their touch. This love means embracing and feeling the warmth of the other. We love because we need to be loved. Young girls especially can be in love with being in love when the person is not as important as the relationship. God's love, on the other hand, is unconditional. He loves us not because of anything that we could possibly do but rather the whole person, the outside and the inside.

God is love and God's unconditional love is given to us freely. The manifestation of God's love is Jesus Christ who came to show us how to love and be like God.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of *John (15: 12-13)*, "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

This is not simply an action to be performed. It is a way of life to be lived. We are called to love and live as Christ loved and lived. He had the greatest love, namely, He was willing to lay down His life for His friends—us. We must love with the same love, a love that is based on giving not receiving.

When we look into the mirror we should see the love of God working in us. This love is what is making us a saint. It is the love that can take a sinner and make him/her a saint. We are made holy because of God's love for us.

We can become the expression of God's love for the world. We are truly sons and daughters of God. In *2 Peter 1: 4* we are told that we are partakers of the divine nature. Thus we can become the same kind of force in the world. Like God, we are called to be sensitive, compassionate and to serve, rather than be served. We love people as they are. Christ loves sinners, publicans and the woman caught in adultery. If Christ did not judge on this earth, we too, cannot judge. As Jesus tells us, "If you want to avoid judgment, stop passing judgment." (*Mt 7: 1*) When we look at our neighbor, we look at them with love and not with a measuring rod.

If we live in this love, we will have true joy. We will have a sense of identity, the image of God. This image will be easier to live up to because the love of God provides the springboard to energize our conversion to the likeness of God. But we have to let go of all selfishness and give up ourselves freely in love to God so that the energy of God may make us more God-like. As we become more God-like, we become more outgoing because love cannot be contained. God did not keep His love to Himself, but rather

gave His love to all His creatures. God will never turn His back on His creation. There is a bond between the Creator and His creation and the bond is love. This love binds us together with God and with all creation in one family.

God's love forms a community of love. This is what Scripture calls *agape*. It is translated as "charity", or "love feast". Both of these definitions focus on love and on giving to one another. Christian love is service. Christ washed the feet of His apostles. We are called to be humble as Christ was humble. We must be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We must be active and whole in our gift of love.

A person who is truly living the Jesus Prayer cannot but be a lover of mankind. It is for this reason Jesus said, "By their fruits you shall know them." (*Mt 7: 16*) A Christian is known by his love and this love, like a light, cannot be put under a bushel basket but rather it shines forth bringing light and joy to those in the valley of darkness. (*cf Mt 5: 15*)

Procedure

- A. Discuss the participants' experience of praying the Jesus Prayer at home, particularly in reference to their changing perspectives as they continue in the Prayer.
- B. Discuss the following situations:

1. If you found out that you were going to die tomorrow, what could be said about your life up to this point? *Focus on the quality of your love...* when you love, how much do you want back? When you love someone, how much do you want the other to be in your image, according to your standard of perfection rather than God's standard? Do you really love the person or are you looking to an appendage of your own person?

Focus on who you are... who have you become? Whom do you bring before the Lord? Are you a lover of humankind? How much of your life have you spent on yourself? On your hairdos, on your clothes, on your material possessions? How much do you give? What will heaven be like if you have not left aside all earthly cares?

To the catechist:

It is not what you have. It is who you are before the Lord. The above questions are "seed plantings", for this "givingness" and truly "othercenteredness" comes with maturity and wisdom.

2. If you were to die tomorrow, would this change what you do now? Would this change the way you are living now? Your date tonight? Your relationship with your parents? Your possession of material goods? Would you go to the Sacrament of Repentance?

Read and reflect on *Matthew 25: 35-46*. What message does this reading convey to you? From this reading, should my knowledge of my death tomorrow change the "now" moments? What answer does *Matthew 7: 20* give?

3. Is prayer transforming you? How have you changed? Are you the same person you were yesterday? Judgmental? Angry often? As critical of people as you used to be? Is your way of doing things the best way? Are you close-minded? Overly cautious about the outcome of things? Do you not do things because you fear failure?
4. What kind of fruits would a meditative person have in relationship to other persons, themselves, God? (Openness, awareness, peacefulness and harmony,

oneness, concern, sensitivity, joyful, honesty, hopeful, alive, genuine, authentic, loving, tolerant, patient, compassionate, kind.)

Content for presentation:

Throughout this whole series on the Jesus Prayer, we talked about being in relation with God. This is going to have an affect on who you are and what you do, as was pointed out in the previous discussion.

If there is anything that we have been trying to get across to you, it is that you must be open to God and that God, who dwells within, will work through and with you.

The key to all of this is being open. You probably have had the experience of talking to someone and they answered you and you were able to tell that they really did not hear what you had to say. That is because the person was not open to you. They were physically present to you but not personally present. Well, you can be sure that God is personally present to you. At your baptism he made His dwelling within you. He has made His home within your heart.

He is a friend. Do not be frightened of making a commitment to God because He will not hurt you. He will not reject you. He will always love you, just as much as He has loved you from that very first moment of your existence in His mind. God was just so filled with love that He created you to experience the joy that comes from His love.

You can only share in that joy by putting down your defenses and opening yourself up to being with God. The only reason a person puts up a defense against being open is that this person is insecure. Being insecure in who she/he truly is, the person is afraid of opening him/herself to being hurt.

God will not hurt you. There is nothing of which to be afraid. Even in human relations we are afraid of being open to someone else, but in the case of God there is no need to be frightened because throughout history He has consistently shown His love.

When we feel love for God, we love all who are in His image, namely all people. We love them because we see God in them. God expresses His love for them through us if we are open enough to God to be His instruments to spread love and joy in the world.

Being the source of love and joy is a freeing experience. God came to free us, not enslave us. And so, when we truly love Him we do not see what we do for others as an obligation or a commandment, but as an opportunity to please the Beloved. Serving God becomes a joy when we love Him. There is a basis for morality in unconditional love as St. Augustine said, "love God and do what you will." When we love God wholeheartedly, our will is the will of God as we pray in the Our Father, "your will be done." We love God because there is harmony between our will and the will of God.

If we truly love God, we will surely move out to others because love is an energy that cannot be contained. We will love our neighbors as ourselves. We love ourselves because we are in the image of God. We love ourselves because we are whole. We are one person whole and complete in the image and likeness of God. We love ourselves because we are truly our supernatural selves.

We are no longer alone. We can never be alone if we are with God. We are never without human companions because we are one with all that God creates. In our harmony with all creation, we share God's life-giving breath. We are truly alive.

Wrap-Up

Agape Feast:

An agape feast is a meal in love and friendship. It may take many different forms. It can go from the simple punch and cookies to a Eucharistic celebration. But whatever form it takes, it is seen as an expression of God's love moving from the individual to the community. This love of God is shared and binds the group together. The one common food is broken and shared by the group and symbolically the group becomes one as they eat.

Example of Format:

1. Prayer of thanksgiving with lighted candle.
2. One gigantic chocolate chip cookie (baked on a pizza pan) or one loaf of bread or one pizza along with one common drink (one bottle of soda or juice from one large pitcher).
3. The one common food is shared by being broken and eaten by each person. The one common drink is shared by being taken from one container and consumed.
4. Symbolically, the group becomes *one* upon sharing the food.

Bibliography

- Brianchaninov, Ignatius.** *On the Prayer of Jesus.* London: John Watkins, 1952.
- Chariton of Valamo.** *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology.* Timothy Ware, editor; E. Kadlovbovsky and E. H. Palmer, translators. London: Faber and Faber, 1966.
- Erickson, Eric.** *Identity and the Life Cycle.* New York: Norton, 1980.
- French, R. M.,** translator. *The Way of the Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way.* New York: The Seabury Press, 1965.
- Goldman, Ronald.** *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education.* New York: The Seabury Press, 1965.
- Goldman, Ronald.** *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.
- Kadlovbovsky, E. and E. H. Palmer.** *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart.* London: Faber and Faber, 1971.
- Lonkes, Harold.** *Teenage Religion.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Maloney, George A.** *The Breath of the Mystic.* Denville, NJ: Dimension, 1974.
- Maloney, George A.** *Inward Stillness.* Denville, NJ: Dimension, 1976.
- Marthaler, Berard.** *Catechetics in Context.* Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1973.
- Monk of the Eastern Church, A.** *The Prayer of Jesus.* New York: Desclee, 1967.
- Monk of the Eastern Church, A.** *Orthodox Spirituality.* London: S.P.C.K., 1945.
- National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States.** Department of Education, United States Catholic Conference. *Sharing the Light of Faith.* Washington D.C.: Publications Office, 1970.
- Priest of the Byzantine Church.** *Reflections on the Jesus Prayer.* Denville, NJ: Dimension, 1978.
- Raya, Joseph.** *The Face of God: An Introduction to Eastern Spirituality.* Pittsburgh: God With Us Publications, 1984.
- Ryder, Andrew.** *Prayer: The Eastern Tradition.* Thomas Curran, editor. New York: Living Flame Press, 1983.
- Sjogreen, Per-Olof.** *The Jesus Prayer.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Ware, Kallistos.** *The Power of the Name.* Oxford, England: SLG Press, 1974.

Pamphlet

- Winkler, Gabriele.** *Prayer Attitude in the Eastern Church.* Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1978.

Periodicals

- Chapman and Chrysostomos.** "Scripture and Tradition in the Orthodox Church." *Diakonia.* Vol. 14, No. 3, 1979, pp. 213-223.
- Colie, Frances.** "The Mission of the Eastern Christian Education in the Western World." *Diakonia.* Vol. 8, No. 4, 1973, pp. 338-350.
- MacDonald, Katherine.** "Relevance of the Jesus Prayer." *Diakonia.* Vol. 12, No. 3, 1977, pp. 226-278.
- Maloney, George A.** "Eastern Christian Asceticism." *John XXIII Lectures,* Vol. 1. New York: Fordham, 1966, pp. 42-51.

Marle, R. "The Concentration on Hermeneutics in Catechesis. The Interpretation of Experience." *Lumen Vitae*. Vol. 25, 1970, pp. 545-550.

Monios, Constantine. "The Giver of Life." *Diakonia*. Vol. 7, No. 3, 1972, pp. 271-276.

Morse, Jonathan. "Fruits of the Eucharist: Henosis and Theosis." *Diakonia*. Vol. 17, No. 2, 1982, pp. 127-142.

Teasdale, Wayne. "The Spiritual Significance of the Transfiguration." *Diakonia*. Vol. 14, No. 3, 1979, pp. 203-212.

Resource

Neshama from *Teleketics* can be obtained from Franciscan Communications, 1229 South Santee Street, Los Angeles, CA 90015.