

Holy Trinity Introduces Christian Meditation - Bernadette Cey: Holy Trinity Catholic School Division



Be still and know that I am God

These words are a call for our present age. We live in a culture that pulls us outside of ourselves to our iPhones, our iPads, our computers and all the social media that they offer. We now have a generation that will never know what it is like to not look at a screen to connect with their world. Though there are many advantages to these technologies they do have their downside. We have lost the ability to be comfortable with silence, to take the inner journey to the place wherein lies our true identity. That is why Holy Trinity Catholic school division has implemented

the use of Christian meditation. This is very different from the mindfulness of Buddhist meditation or new age relaxation or visualization techniques. Though they have their good fruits, Christian meditation is about connecting with a person, the person of Christ.

Christian meditation is not new but rather has been part of the history of Christian prayer since the 3rd and 4th centuries. Interestingly enough it started as a response to the assimilation of Christians into a soon to be collapsing Roman empire after the Edict of 313 CE, when Constantine made Christianity the office religion of the empire. Christians lived in a hectic, commercial world, similar to ours today and soon bought in to the status quo.

But a group of Christian men and women fled this lifestyle and entered the desert to seek a life of solitude, simplicity and community. It was out of this experience of the desert fathers and mothers that Christian meditation came. St. John Cassian wrote instructions to his followers to repeat a mantra a Sanskrit word meaning "that which clears the mind." In this way as they repeated it throughout the day their whole life would become a prayer. He stressed contemplative prayer without words or images.



This prayer of the heart characterized the first 11 centuries of the Christian era. In the 12th century there was a marked development in religious thought. It was the time when the great schools of theology where founded. It was the birth of precise analysis in regard to concepts, definitions and classifications or **left brain thinking**. Unfortunately this analysis was later transferred to the practice of prayer and came to be called mental prayer, more complicated and systematized as time went on. Prayer of the heart was still presented as the ultimate goal of spiritual practice but gradually came to be seen as reserved for the holiest people such as priests, monks, nuns or sisters.



Thankfully John Main an Irish Benedictine monk began the rediscovery of this ancient tradition of Christian Meditation and it has been spreading throughout the world. And how much it is needed. In its simplicity anyone can do it. Through the information supplied on the Christian Meditation with Children website, it has been suggested to use the word **Maranatha** (Aramaic meaning *Come Lord Jesus*) as our mantra. It is the oldest Christian mantra and one of the earliest Christian prayers. It is said silently within our hearts in four syllables of equal length: ma-ra-na-tha. Students are seated

quietly in their desks or cross legged on the floor of the classroom with eyes closed as they repeat their word in silence. Should they get distracted they are encouraged to simply return to the mantra. The period of mediation can last anywhere from 3-10 minutes depending on the age and make-up of the class doing it. A lit candle representing the light of Christ, with lights off can aid in this time of silence. Beginning and ending with some quiet reflective music can also help the students to enter into and come out of their Christian meditation.

The **right side of the brain** processes our **mystical** experiences. Capacity for the mystical begins to fade or be devalued as the left brain gains dominance. From about age 2 onwards, use of the left increases. Meditation helps children to reconnect with the right brain way of being and therefore increases a sense of balance. We misjudge children if we think they do not hunger for silence and enjoy it. They yearn for the experience of meeting God just as adults do. Teaching children to be silent is more than just being quiet. It is in the stillness, being open, that God can speak to their hearts and they can discover the love of God for each of them personally.

For the teacher in the classroom by using meditation to begin the day with their students, they notice many benefits such as greater focus in the face of distractions, greater ability to solve complex problems, making more confident decisions, improved self-awareness, reduces stress, reduces anxiety, improves coping strategies, calms and relaxes and cultivates acceptance and compassion.

Those who have used mediation in their classrooms find the children like it and ask for it, report feeling closer to God, felt comfortable and safe and sit still longer. They were more considerate and caring towards others and all of this builds a sense of community in their classrooms. Indeed in our world of technology Christian meditation can provide a much needed balance where in silence, stillness and simplicity students and teachers alike can hear the voice of unconditional Love.

