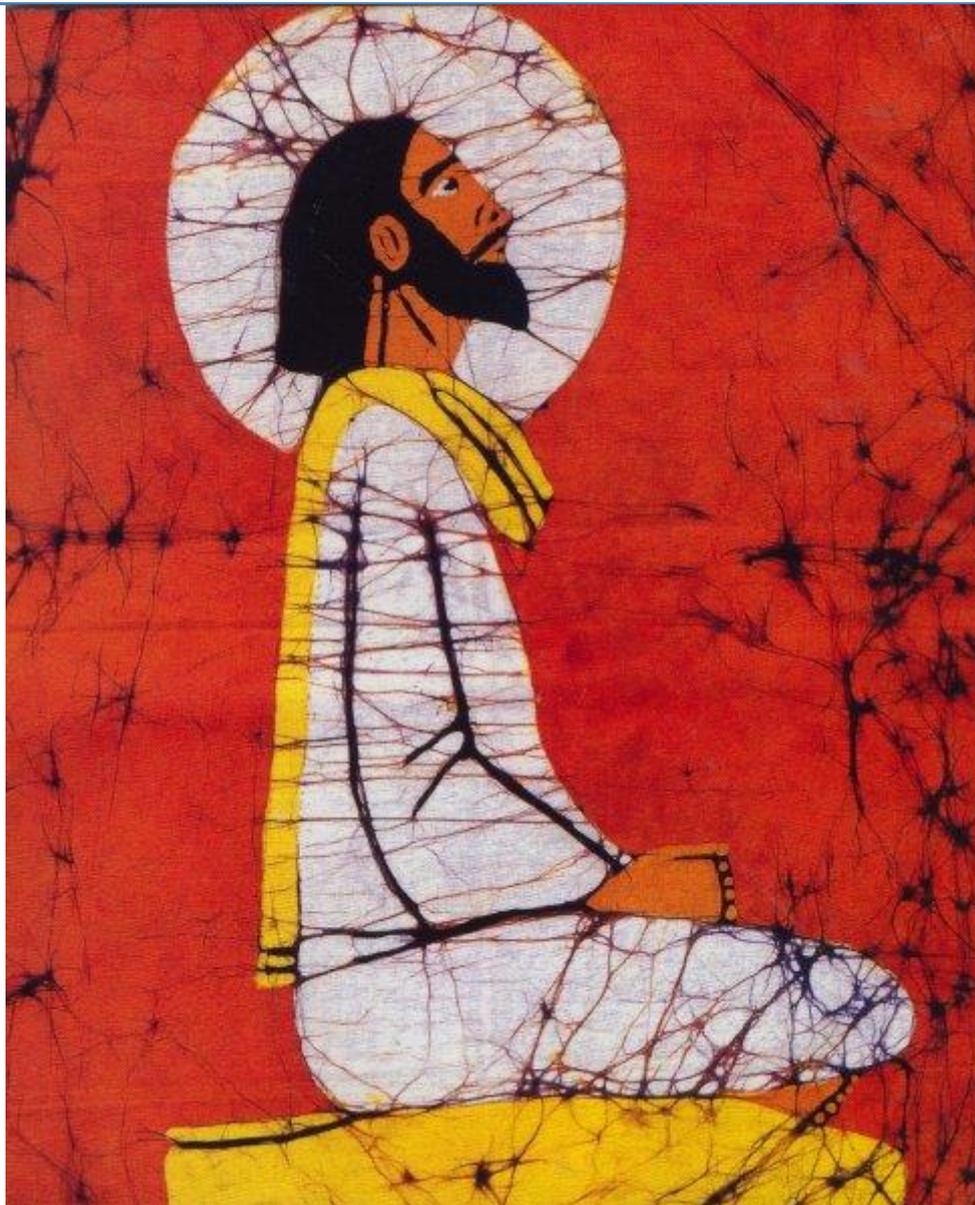


WAYS TO PRAY



CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

**The heart of the contemplative teaching of Jesus
on prayer.**

WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation is found in all religious traditions. In Christianity it is the heart of the contemplative teaching of Jesus on prayer.

Christian meditation "*engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire*" in prayer. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2708*)

It is also known as *mental prayer*.

Meditation is a universal spiritual wisdom and a practice found at the core of all the great religious traditions, leading from the mind to the heart. It is a way of simplicity, silence and stillness. It can be practised by anyone, wherever you are on your life's journey. It is only necessary to be clear about the practice and then to begin – and to keep on beginning.

"The sublime and glorious reality which we call God, is to be sought first and foremost in the human heart. If we do not find God there, we shall not find God anywhere else. If we do find God there, we can never lose God again; wherever we turn, we shall see God's face." Meister Eckhart

In Christianity this tradition of contemplation, the prayer of the heart or 'apophatic prayer', became marginalised and often even sometimes suspect. But in recent times a major recovery of the contemplative dimension of Christian faith -and prayer - has been happening. This is transforming the different faces of the Church and revealing the way the Gospel integrates the mystical and the social. Central to this process now is the rediscovery of how to pray in this dimension and at this depth: finding a practice of meditation in the Christian tradition.

One of the most significant developments in the world of Christian Meditation is the way in which children and young people are embracing this form of prayer.

One form of Christian Meditation taught is a practice derived from the Gospel teaching of Jesus and the advice of early Christian monks. The Desert Fathers and Mothers teach a Christian spirituality of powerful relevance for those today who want to give their discipleship to Jesus in a radical and simple way.

John Main OSB was a Benedictine monk and priest who presented a way of Christian meditation which utilised a prayer-phrase or mantra. John Main learned a simple way of meditation: the faithful recitation of a mantra chosen from his own Christian tradition during two periods of meditation, before and after his day's work. Each week he would return to his teacher, meditate with him and be reinforced in his commitment to this discipline of silence, stillness, and simplicity.

John Main and the community he inspired had a major role in this contemporary renewal of the contemplative tradition. His own introduction to meditation came to him from the universal wisdom but led him to recognise and then go on to teach it as a way of prayer rooted in the Gospels and the Christian mystical tradition.

Open to all ways of wisdom and drawing directly from the early Christian teaching John Main summarised the practice in this simple way:

Sit down. Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word – a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word "Maranatha". Say it as four equal syllables.

Breathe normally and give your full attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and - above all - simply. The essence of meditation is simplicity. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and in each meditation day to day.

Don't visualise but listen to the word, as you say it.

Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words.

Don't fight your distractions: let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it as soon as you realise you have stopped saying or it or when your attention wanders.

Meditate twice a day, morning and evening, for between 20 and 30 minutes. It may take a time to develop this discipline and the support of a tradition and community is always helpful.

Opening Prayer by John Main

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son. Lead us into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call, 'Maranatha...Come, Lord Jesus.'

Closing Prayer by Laurence Freeman

May this group be a true spiritual home for the seeker, a friend for the lonely, a guide for the confused. May those who pray here be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve all who come, and to receive them as Christ Himself. In the silence of this room may all the suffering, violence, and confusion of the world encounter the Power that will console, renew and uplift the human spirit.

May this silence be a power to open the hearts of men and women to the vision of God, and so to each other, in love and peace, justice and human dignity. May the beauty of the divine life, fill this group and the hearts of all who pray here, with joyful hope. May all who come here weighed down by the problems of humanity leave giving thanks for the wonder of human life. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen.

