

PRAY Loving God, you are our center, our anchor in our busy lives, our friend. Help us always look up to you and never look down on one another. Amen.

SPiRIT

WALKING THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth is a path of prayer, a mini-pilgrimage. It is a series of seven or eleven intricate, concentric circles that lead to the center in a roundabout way. A labyrinth winds and turns but unlike a maze has no tricks or dead ends. Its single path leads to the center, to Mystery.

The labyrinth in this photo is cut into the grass in a large open space. Individuals come to walk it. Whole confirmation classes come to walk it. Cancer support groups. AA groups. People on retreat.

In medieval times walking the labyrinth took the place of making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Chartres Cathedral in France has a labyrinth in its floor which was made about A.D. 1200. Labyrinth designs have been found on coins and pottery in

Crete from 2500-2000 B.C. Many cultures use the design. Labyrinths are circular, square, or octagonal.

The labyrinth invites both a journey inward toward God and a journey outward toward life. The center is a place of resting in God, of communion. The journey outward is recommitment to one's work and friendships in the world.

One may walk the labyrinth and not find God at the center. But walking and breathing calms the mind. The journey invites the person praying to shed worries and concerns. Finding the unfolding path focuses the mind. This ancient form of body prayer connects head and heart. Walking the labyrinth invites a look into one's life to reflect on questions, such as:

What path am I on?

What am I looking for?

What do I leave at the center?

What or who is at the center of my life?

How is the way out different from the way in?



"My aunt told me to carry my concerns in my mind while I walked the labyrinth paths and then leave them with God at the center. Walking the labyrinth relaxed me, made me laugh, gave me time to breathe."

—Laura O'Neill



by Chris Tures

I knew the lineup by heart that Coach Kastner droned out slowly; first, the forwards—Connelly, Rainy, Shields; then, the midfielders—Rodriguez, York, Greenwood; then the defenders and my name. We had never made it to the conference championship game before.

Soccer at our school was for guys too skinny to play football and too short to play basketball. This season we had new players—not just bench riders but Greenwood who pulled us together and Shields, a ball hog with an attitude because he was that good. He made most of our goals.

Crosby played sweeper and anchored our defense. Anytime I let a forward from the other team slip by, which I had done on occasion, Crosby bailed me out and rocketed the ball the other direction.

Our coach rarely subbed any of us in the starting lineup unless we requested it or got injured or we were leading 7-1. Bench riders seemed disconnected from the team except at practice and

when uniforms blurred together to cheer a victory.

Not one ball will get near the box; not one forward will make it past me, I thought as I waited for Coach Kastner to name the defensive line.

“Flynn, stopper,” said Coach. “Quackenbush, you’re the right defender.”

My name was next. This was the game we worked all season to win.

“Lenz, you’re left.”

I couldn’t believe it. I had played every game and worked my butt off for the team. I was the left defender; I didn’t belong on the bench. Now a bench rider gets to play the game I had practiced for all year.

From the bench I watched Lenz

play my position. As the 90 minutes ticked away, the guys running on the field began to look unfamiliar. I felt betrayed. I didn’t know bench protocol, so I started a conversation with Peterson, a tall, lanky guy who rode the pine.

I asked about math and potential college choices, but he was too into the game to talk.

In the last two minutes Greenwood assisted Shields and raised the 2-2 tie to a 3-2 lead. The bench tensed. Peterson’s eyes followed the ball from foot to foot, mesmerized. It was not the game but dejection and uselessness that held me in a trance.

The whistle sounded our win. Peterson and the rest of the bench

went nuts. I stood up. An official walked a trophy out to Shields, Greenwood, and Crosby in the center of the field. The team flooded around them. I walked out behind the rejoicing Peterson, who rushed and jumped to touch the gold man atop the conference trophy. I just stood there.

Greenwood noticed and brought the trophy over to me. “That’s not mine,” I said.



SUNDAY GOSPEL

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

How should I pray to God?

NARRATOR: Jesus told this parable to those who trust that they themselves are good but look down on everyone else.

JESUS: Two men went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed.

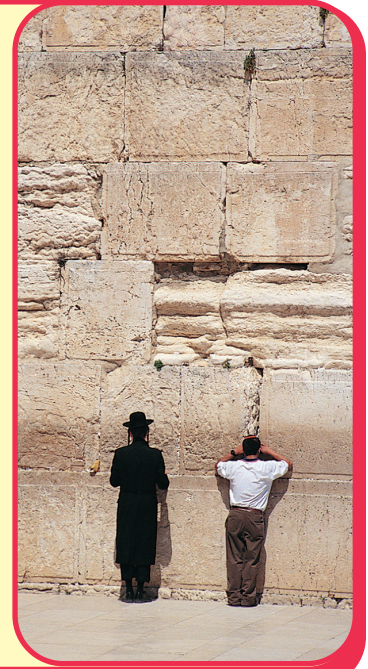
PHARISEE: I give you thanks, O God, that I am not like everyone else—greedy, unjust, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I pay tithes on all that I get.

JESUS: The tax collector, standing far off, did not even dare to look up toward heaven. He beat his breast.

TAX COLLECTOR: O God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

JESUS: I say to you, this man went to his house justified, and the first did not. All who make little of themselves will be lifted up, but all who make much of themselves will be brought down.

Luke 18.9-14



As soon as Coach Kastner announced the lineup, I felt apathy overtake my excitement.

He grabbed my hand and slammed it against the trophy. I recoiled as if I had touched a hot stove but got sucked into the mob that used to be my team.

After the victory I left as quickly as I could. At practice the following week I went through the motions. I couldn't rationalize working hard for a team that was no longer mine. A starter doesn't get benched for the most crucial game of the season and expect to play again.

What irritated me more than having to go to practice was watching the other bench riders. I had never realized how ridiculous it was for guys who hadn't seen more field time than our fans to run and sweat only to sit down for the next game. I showed up because I wanted the varsity letter for my resumé.

When we played our archrival, the Sentinels, I felt in some remote corner of my soul that I might take the field. I was stellar when we played

them earlier in the season. As soon as Coach Kastner announced the lineup, I felt apathy overtake my excitement. Once again I sat with the second and third string, next to the entranced Peterson.

The game was amazing, though I didn't want to admit it. Both teams were ferocious. I felt a jealous longing to be off the bench and helping to hold the 1-0 lead. The feeling mixed with my complacency into anger.

Near the end of the second half, the Sentinels tied the game when our defense lapsed. I hid my face in my hands as Peterson and the bench watched the ball hit the back of the net. Unlike the rest of the team, I was smiling. I wanted them to lose just to give them a little taste of what I was feeling.

The shoot-out was intense for all of us. I sat on the bench, hoping for failure. The entire stadium was quiet as Shields stepped up for his turn. If he missed, our season was over. He arced back too far and the

ball rocketed over the crossbeam. It took everything in my power not to throw my hands up in the air and yell, "We lose!"

After shaking hands, I was getting my stuff together, and I looked up at Peterson. He was crying.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is your attitude toward benchwarmers?
- 2 Which attitude toward the team do you identify with more—Peterson's or the author's?
- 3 What is the Pharisee's attitude toward God? Toward the tax collector?
- 4 What is the tax collector's attitude toward God?
- 5 Whose attitude is most like your own?
- 6 Where do you draw the line between praising God and praising yourself?

Contemplative Prayer

Praying regularly is one way to become a Christian of the new millennium.

This fall *Spirit* explores some of the many ways Christians practice prayer.

Each week *Spirit* invites its readers to reflect on the gospel. Talking about what the gospel has to do with our lives is shared prayer. In this issue *Spirit* explores two other kinds of prayer—walking the labyrinth (on the cover) and centering prayer here.

Many athletes use their minds and breathing to focus before a game. They imagine an ideal run or swimming performance. Imagining in this way is like centering prayer. However, in centering prayer we focus our energies not on a game or competition but become present to the Mystery of God in which we live.

Centering prayer is a kind of contemplative prayer in which we set ourselves before the Mystery of God, closer to us than our own breathing. Closeness to God in prayer grows much as closeness grows in friendship. With new friends we talk endlessly to learn all about them. With old friends we can just be together. Centering prayer is about being together with God, attentively hanging out.

The first step in centering prayer is choosing a sacred word that expresses our openness to God within us. The word could be Jesus' name or the Greek word *Maranatha* (mar-ah-NAH-tha), which means "Come, Lord Jesus." The word could be Father, Mother, Spirit, Peace, Shalom.

The second step is to sit comfortably, close one's eyes, and breathe in and out. Breath is the gift of life God breathed into the first human. Begin to say silently the sacred word that consents to God's presence within. The centering prayer continues in silence for

It is the HEART THAT PRAYS. The heart is the dwelling place WHERE I AM, WHERE I LIVE, TO WHICH I WITHDRAW. The heart is our HIDDEN CENTER, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the PLACE OF DECISION, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the PLACE OF TRUTH, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation; IT IS THE PLACE OF COVENANT.

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2562-63

20 minutes or less at first. One can make the time longer as one gets more used to centering prayer.

When distracting thoughts come into the mind, one returns to breathing in and out, concentrating on the breath of one's own life flowing in and out, and repeats the sacred word like a mantra. To conclude, one can pray the *Our Father* slowly and silently and open one's eyes.

Rather than sit for 20 minutes, some people like to walk as a centering practice. The regular movement of walking or running works like breathing in and out to focus on being in God's presence, which abounds and surrounds us in nature. This focus on walking and breathing gives way to a sense of being centered in God.

Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #2724, also 2709-2719

How to do



Centering Prayer

- 1 FIND** a quiet place.
- 2 CHOOSE** a sacred word that welcomes God's presence in you.
- 3 SIT** on a chair or the floor, hands open and comfortable on your lap or knees.
- 4 SET A CELLPHONE ALARM** for 20 minutes.
- 5 FOCUS** on the sensation of breathing as you inhale and exhale.
- 6 If any distracting thoughts appear, just BRING YOUR ATTENTION BACK** to your breath.
- 7 REPEAT** your sacred word.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1** Make a commitment to try centering prayer for a week. You can do it alone or in a group. Interest friends in contemplative prayer time together and support each other in this practice. Find a place in your school and a time in your day for you or the group to take 20 minutes at rest before Mystery.
- 2** Try different prayer techniques such as Tai Chi, yoga, or any of the Christian practices. Try them more than once. Discover what helps you pray.