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THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony - A Contemplative Christian Community



MERCY ME

by Tim Cook

As we continue our progress through the year that we've dedicated to community exploration and personal appropriation of "Blessed," we've come to the Beatitude, *Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy*. Now this is not just good advice for nice people to live by. It expresses a principle, a law that governs human experience. That means that we are all, always under its influence whether we realize it or not; so we need to come to grips with its personal relevance. A good way to study any principle, in order to be able to understand and live in harmony with it, is to look at it from the opposite point of view. So let's see how Jesus teaches about mercy by looking at unmerciful action and its result.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who

wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'

But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he

could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. (Matthew 18:23-35)

The most obvious conclusion we can draw from this parable is that the unmerciful servant should have done to his fellow-servant as the king had done to him. Having received mercy, he should likewise extend mercy to others. This insight accords with other great wisdom

teachings of the Bible, like the Golden Rule, *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. The great rabbi, Maimonides, expresses the same idea from another angle: “Do not do to another what you would not have another do to you.” These ideas are referring to the law of cause and effect. It was expressed in the Hebrew Bible as *An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth* and in the Gospels, *As you sow, so shall you reap*. This same law is expressed in Newtonian physics as, “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” Eastern religions refer to this as karma.

But there is also a deeper and perhaps less obvious lesson to be learned if we adopt a contemplative point of view. It has to do with our attention and what happens to our hearts when we lose sight of the Reality of our human condition. Here, another law, the “law of mind action” comes into play. This law can be simply expressed like this, “Thoughts held in mind produce after their kind.” This principle reveals that ideas grow in power and degree of manifestation

through the power of our attention. In the parable the first servant is threatened with grave consequences for an enormous debt, about *fifteen year’s wages* for a laborer, He has no capacity to repay it. The fear of catastrophic consequence causes him to focus all his attention on the king who gracefully and mercifully cancels the entire debt. Relieved of his great anxiety the servant meets a fellow servant who owes him a comparative pittance, about a day’s wage for a laborer. Forgetting all about the generous and merciful king who has just canceled his entire obligation, he turns his entire focus to what is owed him. His great feeling of relief quickly switches to fury and then violent action. The resultant torment he experiences is the responding upsurge of his own unconscious negative emotions. He was happy and free while he remembered the king’s mercy. He was trapped in misery when he felt owed by another.

When we have become caught up in circumstances that seem beyond our capacity to meet their demand, “to pay up,” we become

very aware of our need for God. We turn to Him for help and He responds to us through the very attention we are turning to Him. His harmonizing, ordering love flows into us through our own attention. He brings our lives back into balance and we are restored to a feeling of freedom. If we are smarter than the unmerciful servant we will notice just how much better our lives work when we stay attentive and grateful to our King, God, and our utter dependence on Him. As our awareness of God grows, so does His power and generous influence show itself in greater degrees in our lives.

If, however, we make the same mistake the unmerciful servant made, as soon as the challenge passes we’ll turn our focus away from God. We’ll forget our dependence on Him and how much we owe to His grace. If we should then fix our attention negatively on others, feeling owed by them, we lose contact with His love, our true Life. Our own negativity darkens our minds, closes our hearts and, of course, grows more pervasive

and powerful through the attention we give it.

The opening sentence of the parable gives us the clue to its meaning. It tells us that entry into the Kingdom of Heaven depends on forgiveness—infinite, continuous forgiveness. The Kingdom where God is King is not far off in space or coming at some later time. It is always, already here and now, waiting for us to notice it. Jesus was absolutely clear: *The Kingdom of Heaven is within you*, and *The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*.

*In the Kingdom of Heaven
nobody owes us anything.*

The Kingdom of Heaven doesn't come with outward signs that you can point to here or there. We can only enter into it in our personal consciousness if we give our full attention to God's love and abundant graces for us and then extend them to others. It's all a matter of our own personal power of attention and where we place it. Our experience, what comes to us, is drawn to us, through our very own attention.

The God who is Love Itself has given us everything we've ever had and forgiven all the errors we've ever made. When we are aware of the magnitude of His unlimited generosity, we experience awe at His overwhelming grace and the size of the debt we've been freed from. Our hearts are blown wide open when we realize it. With all our attention focused on God's grace and love, feelings of grace and love are magnified in us and we are deeply happy. We are in tune with Reality and we feel union with God

and fellowship with all creation. In the consciousness of the Kingdom of Heaven we realize that we are all fellow servants and that God, our King, gives us and everyone all and everything. The entire world and everything in it, including us, comes from God and belongs only to God and nobody anywhere owes us anything. Every bit of our good comes from God alone.

In the Kingdom of Heaven nobody owes us anything. 

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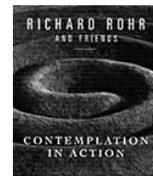
SUGGESTED TITLES FOR MAY



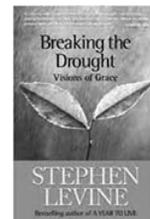
No Future Without Forgiveness
by Desmond Tutu



The Path of the Beatitudes
A New Beginning
by Robert Pish



Contemplation in Action
by Richard Rohr and Friends



Breaking the Drought
Visions of Grace
by Stephen Levine

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OUR GOD IS MERCIFUL, SLOW TO ANGER AND QUICK TO FORGIVE

by Barbara Cook

Many of us can easily relate to the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Like most of us, I spent many years wandering in the far country, educated just enough to believe I was smarter than God. I didn't feel my need for Him and so my behavior patterns didn't match up to my earlier religious training. I left religion and God to make my own way in the world and try to be the good person that I thought I could be on my own, without all those ridged "old fashioned religious" ideas. Fifteen years later, when I, like the prodigal son, came to myself, my father, God, was there with open arms, welcoming me with His gifts, even though I was still a long way from home.

For those of you who had also journeyed to the far country you know this is no exaggeration. I was so happy to feel His love that I jumped into the spiritual world with both feet. Within a few months I had a profound experience of His presence. I was standing in my living room, when suddenly I

felt God and His tender, personal love for me. I knew in an instant that He had always been with me and that He knew everything that I had ever done, even the things I had repressed from my own awareness. I knew that He loved me and held not one thing against me and I knew that He didn't love me any less than He loved His most faithful child. That is how I came to know unconditional love and mercy. All my actions toward God and other people were fully known and yet not held against me. Fr. Thomas Keating says we wouldn't even treat a dog like we treat God; yet He loves us and doesn't judge us.

I am so grateful for my daily practice of Centering Prayer, because though I saw the mercy and love of God in one second, it has take many years of daily applications of His love in prayer for me to fully receive His mercy. He is mercy and so are we in our deepest parts. But at the level of the false self we are run by the ruling ego, which makes accounts

against others. It is self interested, unforgiving, and exacts a price—at least mine has. But as I move closer to home in God, the false self relaxes enough to at least be able to hear and take in His love and mercy.

When Fr. Ronald Rolheiser was here in 2007, he told us: "If we want to feel like God then we must act like God." Who doesn't want to feel good? We too can pour out mercy, even undeserved mercy on everyone; whether they measure up to our standards or not. That is the offering, the possibility, and the necessity if we want to be transformed, if we want to live. This month think of anyone to whom you want to extend mercy, and imagine pouring it out like anointing oil over their head, a healing balm of love forgiveness and mercy.

Remembering the mercy we receive from our Father, God, and infused by our twice-a-day Centering Prayer relationship with Him, we learn to imitate Him in our relations with others. 



Come, O you blessed of my Father! Matthew 25:34

ANNUAL AIM: BLESSED

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

A BLESSING IS THE ULTIMATE GIFT

by Judith Lundin

At this level,
we become fully human.
Our response to life
is cooperative, nonjudgmental
and accepting of others.
... to love one another
in our humanness –
in our individuality
and opinionatedness,
in personality conflicts
and in unbearable situations.
The merciful are those
whose concern
is beginning to expand
beyond family and loved ones
into the larger community.

Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love*

It is a gift from above
to those who have seen the truth
of their own inner lives.
... Seeing over and over
the weakness and infrequency
of our efforts,
how can we blame anyone else
or feel superior?
From this inner ferment
a space is created
for the gift of mercy.

Robert H. Pish,
The Path of the Beatitudes, A New Beginning

*Go and learn the meaning of the words,
I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*

Matthew 9:13

In South Austin where we grew up, everyone around us lived at the lower part of the socio-economic scale. And our family of seven didn't raise it much. The kids we played with were all brown and black; the differences weren't noticed because there was no difference.

Then when we were in grade school, some playmate would always ask the dreaded: "Where do you go to school?" My answer would be slurred against the back of my hand. "St Ignmentosnfg Marfstgr." "Where?" they'd ask. "Saint Indjhbkgksn Mstoantr!" Come to think of it, that's the way I said "The Church of Conscious Harmony" when I first started coming here. "Oh. You mean Saint Ignatius Martyr. You go to *parochial* school." We were the only Catholic family

in a sea of Baptists, Methodists, and anything-but-Catholics.

Everything about our faith was strange. The nuns who taught us were from another planet altogether, in their black serge habits and medieval wimples. We said things like "Holy Ghost" without even blinking an eye. And we heard about mysterious ideas – like "our souls." This was a very clear concept, sealed into our little minds when Sister Mary Puritas would draw a great circle on the board and fill it in completely with chalk. My soul is full of Grace. That really was totally impressive. Then she would take the corner of the eraser and remove small areas of the white, leaving horrible black spots – venial sins. You know the not so serious, excusable actions like the time I took

Allen Frazee's Hopalong Cassidy pencil when I just wanted to *look* at it; I was going to give it back. And the very terrible mortal sin, where all the Grace from the soul circle was erased and only a great black hole remained. Believe me that made an indelible impression.

Sister Puritas talked to us about God. But He was so far away, high up in Heaven. And good little children could get to Him, but you had to climb a long, long ladder of merit (unless you were a martyr; then you could get to God instantly). I wanted so much to be a good little girl. I prayed sincerely at the daily children's Mass. I made Spiritual Bouquets for Mom, which were a collection of short prayers carefully counted and written down. But no sooner would I start climbing the ladder to God with good deeds when I'd fall off and have to start all over again, filling in the little black spots on my soul with new Grace. It was hard and discouraging work.

I left the Church. In spite of Catholic High School and Jesuit University, I had gotten no closer to God. I was without religion for 25 years. It was Grace alone that brought me home again.

A significant change in my understanding of God came from the Unity Church. For the first time ever I learned from Tim Cook at his Unity church in South Austin

that God was within us. What a concept! Truly we are blessed to know this. Truly I continue to be blessed by my participation with The Church of Conscious Harmony.

But without question, the initial breakthrough came at a weekend seminar at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California. (Fr. Richard Rohr said that "Mercy Central" was God's middle name.) Fr. John Hand was teaching on The Gospel of John. I'll never forget the moment he said, "You cannot earn Heaven. You cannot merit it. There is nothing you can do to achieve heavenly status. How would that be possible? This little lifetime set against all eternity. What good works, even a Mother-Theresa lifetime, could merit an endless happiness with God? But here's the good news. You don't have to earn Heaven. It is given. Freely. No strings attached. It is given by a loving Father who wants only for us to share in His infinite Life and Love."

This revelation literally brought me to tears, lifting the heavy burden of a lifetime of misunderstanding and alienation. This is a God I could love, a God I could serve willingly from that love. This is the definition of blessing. This is mercy. "Mercy is not violence" as it states in the Work of Inner Christianity. Mercy is a blessing of divine favor, an act of compassion.

What is blessing? Is it not the ultimate gift, given freely by someone who does not need to give it, to someone who has done nothing to deserve it?

My Jewish husband of 37 years was my entre into the ancient wisdom of Judaism. They have a profound understanding of "blessing," a practice going back to biblical times.

"Barukh Ata Adonoi,
Eloheynu Melekh Ha'Olam,
ha'motzilechem min ha'aretz."

This is the prayer Jesus prayed when he shared bread with his disciples.

"A fountain of blessings are You, Source of Life of all the worlds. Source of the nourishment that is this bread, which You bring forth from the earth."

Giving a blessing, a *brakha*, is a mindfulness practice, a profound practice in the Jewish tradition. As Rabbi Marcia Prager* says: blessing is "a one-minute, deeply meditative exercise exploring the nature of the Creative Force we call God, and the dynamic relationship between God, human consciousness, and the unfolding universe."

Not a mindlessly mumbled prayer, *pro forma*, but one in which each word is crafted to touch our centers of awareness

deeply. A practice that raises our consciousness to inherent gratitude and wonder. “How delicious it is to live in God’s goodness. ... When we live in the abundant flow, we know ourselves to be loved and supported unconditionally. Only then do we become free to both receive and to give fully.”

“Through the practice of blessing we develop an ever deepening receptivity to the abundant love and joy flowing through Creation. We learn to accept that love, absorb it into our souls, and offer it back to the source with joy. In this way we come to feel the Presence of God move within us and through us. The result is bliss.” Each blessing consecrates the moment. In the Jewish tradition, giving blessings becomes a way of life.

I remember my father, in his later years, blessing everyone he was with. Even in the nursing home, he would bless the aide who had just bathed him, the lady who brought his lunch, the nurse who took his pulse. The end of his life took on a gentle sweetness from all his blessings. Rabbi Prager says, “... we uncover the infinitely abundant Presence of God in even the smallest action.” We know that our actions have far-reaching consequences; I see his blessings reaching beyond our world, into the cosmos.

When I bless others, I am blessed. I keep this in mind when I follow my father’s example. It is truly a personal gift because I am extending my experience of

a loving Father to another and acknowledging the sacred fire in them. We are sharing God’s aliveness in this moment. By blessing numerous times throughout the day, I confirm my own “miraculous soul spark,” which is from *A Course in Miracles*: What you share grows.

Blessings are another way of nourishing my spiritual practice, to share in His infinite Life and Love, keeping the remembrance of God always near and counteracting the “dulling” life circumstances that usurp my attention. In Blessing we share in “the flow of divinity through

the world. Each acknowledgment of divine abundance cycles more blessings into the world.”

“When you feel a lack
of understanding
And your creativity declines
Run for the hidden spring!
The higher waters will refresh you,
And you will blossom.
God’s blessing will return to you.
You will become like
a gushing spring,
Like a river that does not cease.”

~Rav Abraham Isaac Kook 

* Unsourced quotes in this article are from *The Path of Blessing* by Rabbi Marcia Prager

SEEDS

There is another kind of justice than the justice of number, which can neither forgive nor be forgiven. There is another kind of mercy than the mercy of Law which knows no absolution. There is a justice of newborn worlds which cannot be counted. There is a mercy of individual things that spring into being without reason. They are just without reason, and their mercy is without explanation. They have received rewards beyond description because they themselves refuse to be described. They are virtuous in the sight of God because their names do not identify them. Every plant that stands in the light of the sun is a saint and an outlaw. Every tree that brings forth blossoms without the command of man is powerful in the sight of God. Every start that man has not counted is a world of sanity and perfection. Every blade of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory.

These are worlds of themselves. No man can use or destroy them. Theirs is the life that moves without being seen and cannot be understood. It is useless to look for what is everywhere. It is hopeless to hope for what cannot be gained because you already have it. The fire of a wild white sun has eaten up the distance between hope and despair. Dance in this sun, you tepid idiot. Wake up and dance in the clarity of perfect contradiction.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, page 138.



**THE CHURCH of
CONSCIOUS HARMONY**
A CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
www.consciousharmony.org

MINISTERS
Tim and Barbara Cook

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Michael Begeman
Pamela Begeman
Mary Anne Best
Eric DeJernett
Donald Genung
Jim McCune
Lauri Raymond

MUSIC
Susan Boulden, Director
musicdir@consciousharmony.org
Sue Young

YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES
Deborah Hale, Children's Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
Jacque Botto, Asst to the Children's Director
Don Hale, Youth Director
youthdir@consciousharmony.org
David Jenkins, Asst to the Youth Director

OFFICE
Mon-Fri 8:30 am-4 pm
Donald Genung, Business Mgr
bizmgr@consciousharmony.org
Lisa Genung, Office Mgr
officemgr@consciousharmony.org

BOOKSTORE
Virginia Maxwell, Manager
bookmgr@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER
Sandra Ely, Editor
garzaely@swbell.net
Carol Hagar, Design
lifeisart@austin.rr.com

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work
Open Mind, Open Heart,
lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.
Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according
to the method of Lectio Divina.
One principle will appear in these pages each month.

22ND GUIDELINE



A community of faith offers the support of example, correction, and mutual concern in the spiritual journey. Above all, participating in the mystery of Christ through the celebration of the liturgy, Eucharist, and silent prayer binds the community in a common search for transformation and union with God. The presence of Christ is ministered to each other and becomes tangible in the community, especially when it is gathered for worship or engaged in some work of service to those in need.

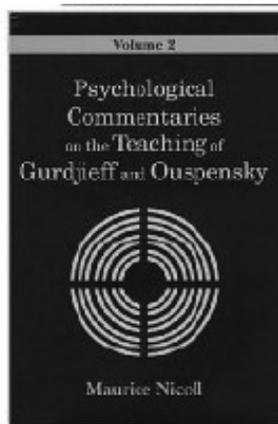
MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS AT CEDARBRAKE

June 17-26	10-day	\$725
Sep 9-14	6-day Welcoming	\$495
Dec 2-8	7-day Advent	\$625

"I am blessed to have been here at this time. As this was my first deep dive into not only Centering Prayer, but the true heart of the Christian message, the facilities, schedule and staff created a most loving and supportive environment which both allowed and beckoned me to safely dig deep. The repetition of activities created both spaces to go deep and come out to rest, like islands in the sea. The care, consideration and obvious refinement of the entire experience clearly demonstrates the grace of God, paired with human openness and efficacy. The staff set up a beautiful and safe container, which inspired my trust and willingness. For this and more, I am grateful. This was truly a peak experience."

~feedback from a 2015 Retreatant

Contact the office to register.



THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

MERCY IS NOT VIOLENCE

Therefore it is necessary for us to have the opposites in us before we can think for ourselves and with individual thinking through the power of the Work something comes that unites the opposites gradually so that ultimately we have no terrific opposites but are in between them. This means first the development of the formatory part of the Intellectual Centre which tends to think in terms of *either-or* and then we have to reconcile the opposites produced by the formatory centre into *Yes and No*. This gives a great deal of force and a great deal of freedom at once. So much of our psychology is held up by being based on implacable opposites.

Now all reconciliation of the opposites depends on individual thinking from yourself. Let us say that my Papa says to me: "Never shake hands with a person who does not believe in God." Suppose I remain under the psychological orientation of what Papa told me, I would always tend not to shake hands with a man who does not

believe in God. On the other hand, I may tend *only* to shake hands with those who do not believe in God. But do you not see that it is the same thing? It is still the opposites because I have not begun to think for myself about the whole question. Suppose suddenly that after a certain time I have a moment of illumination and I say: "What am I doing? What does it mean, a person who believes in God or who does not?" This is the beginning of the Work acting on me. And this makes a difference in your relationship to other people. You cannot get an expansion of consciousness as long as you are in the acquired opposites. A person is neither good nor bad, nor am I. Once you can see this in yourself, then in your relationship to other people, you begin to find a Third Force, a way of taking people and yourself as not being wholly evil or wholly good. This is the beginning of mercy in you and it is what mercy means. Mercy is not violence and as long as you are in opposites you are always violent. Someone says:

"What, he does that kind of thing! I won't have anything more to do with that person." And someone in the Work says: "But don't *you* do it?" And after a lot of humming and hawing I think: "Well, I am perhaps like that myself." So try always to think what mercy means, because it lies between the opposites. Think very much about what external considering means, one aspect of which is seeing others in yourself or seeing your own faults in the other person—always an irritating thing.

Among the sayings of Christ not included in the Gospels are the following: "*When the Lord was asked by a certain man, when should his kingdom come, he saith unto him: When two shall be one, and the without as the within, and the male with the female, neither male nor female*"—i.e. active and passive are replaced by Third Force. 

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 1374-1375. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

SEEKING HELP IN INNER TROUBLE

When you feel that your heart is sinking under trouble, be simple and frank in saying so. Do not be ashamed to let your weakness be seen, or to ask help in your urgent need. By doing this you will advance in simplicity, in humility, and in trustfulness. You will go far to root out self-love, which keeps up a perpetual disguise in order to seem cheerful when it is really in despair.

If you nurse your troubles in silence they will grow stronger and finally overpower you, and the unreal courage that self-love creates will cause you a world of harm. The poison that goes into the system is deadly. The poison that comes out does no great injury. You must not be ashamed of seeing a free discharge from the sore in your heart.

I would give no consideration whatever to certain expressions that escape you, and that are merely the utterances of suffering in spite of your real self. It is enough if such expressions teach you that you are weak, and if you learn not to hide and cherish your weakness, but bring it to the light so that it may be cured.

The Complete Fénelon, page 77. François Fénelon was a seventeenth-century French archbishop, controversial theologian and spiritual thinker. Surrounded by the splendor and decadence of the most powerful court in Europe, he chose a different path, one that took him through enormous inner suffering – he lost his job, his fame, his money, and many of his friends – and into a relationship with God that few have known. His words have been widely read for three centuries.

HYPED SPAGHETTI LUNCHEON & FUNDRAISER

Harmony Youth Practicing Evolving Devotion, the HYPED group, is fundraising for their annual pilgrimage to The Lama Foundation in June 2016.

You're invited to support their annual fundraiser (featuring lunch with gluten-free options, music by our teens, and a silent auction) at CCH on May 29 after Sunday service.

Luncheon tickets are sold in advance and can be purchased at the event.

To make a donation for the silent auction, please contact the office by May 22.

For more information about our Youth Programs, please visit www.consciousharmony.org.

MAY CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

2-Day Commuter Retreat
May 20-21 7 am-4:30 pm
\$100 Register with the office.

HYPED Spaghetti Luncheon & Fundraiser
May 29 11:45 am-1:30 pm (see details)

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Community Workday
May 7 9 am-noon

Gurdjieff Music
May 17 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9 am
Worship Service 10-11:30 am
Youth Program 10-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays
Prayer Circle 10:15-10:45 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available through the Bookstore and online at www.consciousharmony.org



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*This is the day the Lord has made;
let us be glad and rejoice in it!*

Psalm 118:24



THE GRACE OF THE ASCENSION

The grace bestowed by the Ascension of Jesus
is the divinization of our humanity . . .

Our life is a mysterious interpenetration of material
experience, spiritual reality and the Divine Presence.
The key to being a Christian is to know Jesus Christ
with the whole of our being. It is important
to know His sacred humanity through our senses
and to reflect upon it with our reason,
to treasure His teaching and to imitate Him.

But this is only the beginning . . .

It is to the transcendent potential in ourselves –
to our mind which opens up to unlimited truth,
and to our will which reaches out for unlimited love –
that Christ addresses Himself in the Gospel with
particular urgency . . . We are in God and God is in us,
and the unifying force is the Spirit. To live in the Spirit
is the fulfillment of every law and commandment,
the sum of every duty to each other,
and the joy of oneness with everything that is.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*