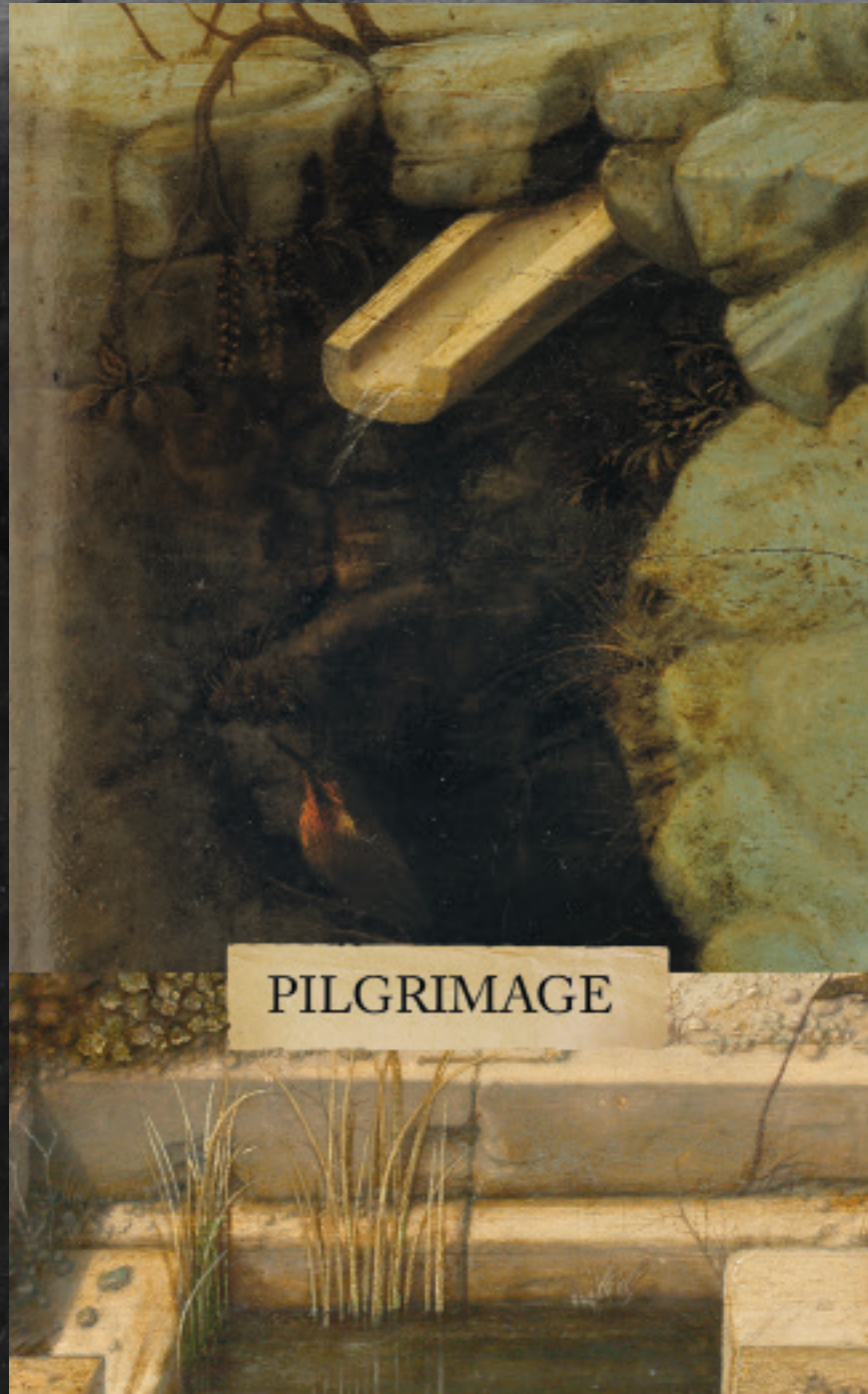


March 2018  
Volume 30  
Number 3



# THE MARK

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



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# OUR SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE

BY PETER HAAS

*“To journey without being changed, is to be a nomad. To change without journeying, is to be a chameleon. To journey and be transformed by the journey is to be a pilgrim.”*

- Mark Nepo, *The Exquisite Risk*

Our focus for March is *Pilgrimage*. It pairs well with last month’s focus on *Welcoming the Unknown*, since to be on pilgrimage is often associated with the unfamiliar, the unknown, the foreign. In fact, the Latin root of the English word pilgrimage means *strange*.

Perhaps, from a contemplative perspective, to be on pilgrimage is to regularly welcome seasons of life where we can let go of our self a little bit more; releasing our sense of certainty and control. Indeed, to be on pilgrimage is to become a stranger to oneself again. Pilgrimage is an opportunity to discover who we are in a different, and sometimes deeper way.

Lent is just such a season of discovery. In Lent, we are invited to notice and release chosen activities and comforts that ordinarily support our self’s sense of ease, pleasure or control. Not because these activities and comforts are inherently less spiritual. Rather, because they are often the location within our

human experience where, like glancing in a mirror, we can see our self and its appetites, patterns, moods, dispositions, thoughts and behaviors more clearly.

It’s not just the season of Lent either. In a certain sense, all of life is a pilgrimage. Whereas life is always a journey, the spiritual dimension can transform it into a pilgrimage. While each pilgrimage is unique, there is much that is similar about the human spiritual journey: definite experiences, states, stages, phases, levels and characteristics. While we may use different words to describe these stages, they are frequently described in the Christian tradition in a five-fold way: Preparation, Awakening, Transformation, Illumination, and Union.

In his profoundly beautiful book *Eternal Echoes*, John O’Donohue sums it up like this:

“Ideally, a human life should be a constant pilgrimage of discovery. The most exciting discoveries happen at the frontiers. When

you come to know something new, you come closer to yourself and to the world. Discovery enlarges and refines your sensibility. When you discover something, you transfigure some of the forsakenness of the world.”

This connects pilgrimage to the notion of sacrifice in that our pilgrimage of deepening discovery and release of self is in some way a sacrificial offering for the sake of the *forsakenness of the world*.

The cross of Christ is a symbol of this fruitful forsakenness. On pilgrimage, through faith, the dark light of suffering becomes something of a column of energy connecting that moment of history to eternity, and that specific location to the universal space of the cosmos. While each of our pilgrimages is rooted in a particular time and place, from a quantum spiritual perspective, our particular pilgrimages also interweave into the Christic-Whole.

The cross also teaches us that our suffering and sacrifice can

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become transforming sponges that both soak up the forsakeness of the world and anoint it with the healing grace of mercy and love. On pilgrimage, we are participants in the divine energy of love; a quality of love that not only infuses our feelings with joy, but that also births new life, and a strength to endure the suffering within life.

Jesus' pilgrimage led him to both a place of agony and surrender, summarized with two famous outcries of his spirit:

*My, God, my God, why have you forsaken me.* Matthew 27.46

*Into thy hands I commit my spirit.* Luke 23.46

These are cosmic mantras of love that we can echo. They remind us that participating and caring for the forsakeness of the world, may first require the experience of forsakenness oneself – the feeling of being forsaken from God, from consolations, from other's approval, from life's pleasures. Perhaps it is through the depth of our own brokenness that we can most authentically respond to the suffering of others.

A dilemma along the way is that (at least in my experience of our American, Western culture) we tend to exalt the beautiful,


the powerful and the successful as primary evidence of fruitful spirituality. While everything belongs, it may be more honest to say that such outstanding graces have little to do with spiritual fruitfulness over the long term and more to do with the side-effects of divine love and grace in our life.

Beauty, power, or success are not irrefutable indications of spiritual life, maturity or fruitfulness. They are tangential possibilities, but not essential to the path of pilgrimage. Some of the most spiritually vibrant and fruitful people I have known were infirm, aged and "unimportant" in the culture's eyes. In fact, Jesus teaches us that the presence of Christ may often be found amidst the least among us – along the fractured places of our lives where the poor, needy and cast away huddle with no hope of being praised, recognized or even helped.

May our spiritual pilgrimages be less concerned about our own self-development, and more effective at deepening our awareness and surrender for the sake of love for the least of these: the most vulnerable, the most forsaken, the poorest, the hungriest, the coldest; the abandoned, the imprisoned and

the sickest. Mr. Gurdjieff taught that one of our life-strivings for the brief pilgrimage that we are here on this planet, is to ease the suffering of our common Father-Mother God. Such is the depth of our possible role on this planet. It's a pilgrimage not just for yourself, but for the All and Everything.

As a contemplative community in the lineage of the Work of Inner Christianity, we do not often place our attention externally on the forsakeness of the world. We tend to give more of our attention to our inward state and our inward interpretation of the forsakeness. I'm suggesting that the two are integral and that the inward and the outward cannot be separated for long, without mutations of energy arising.

Perhaps this Lent, your pilgrimage will be one wherein you and your life become the fusion zone, where the inward fractures of a lifetime greet the outward fractures of the world – where we experience the touch of divine grace, healing and integration, so that, with Christ, we may declare that our pilgrimage is *finished* not because we have done it, but because Spirit has undone us into love. 

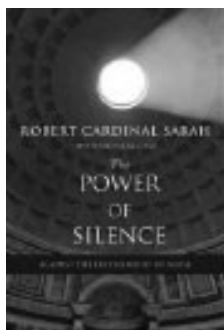


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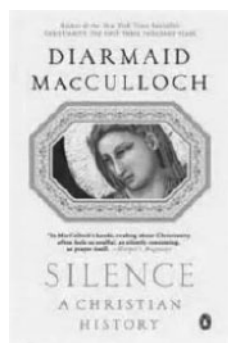
## BOOK LOOK

Two different but related books are a rich resource for our Lenten pilgrimage.



*The Power of Silence* by Robert Cardinal Sarah is a wisely curated conversation with a monastic Abbot that takes place, in part, at the Grand Chartreuse monastery in France. The richness of this book is the exhaustive contemplative wisdom conveyed in conversation after conversation – linking the ancient monastic tradition with the

needs of the modern world and the hungry spiritual pilgrims who are realizing that the one necessary, yet often missing thing needed, is silence. While the method of Centering Prayer is not featured prominently as a means to cultivate silence in our lives, the book makes up for that oversight by rewarding the reader with an abundance of spiritual writings, quotes, maxims and encouragement to cultivate the silence and other monastic principles in one's life.



Diarmaid MacCulloch, Oxford professor and author, is one of the world's leading scholars of Christian history. He turns his story-telling capacity to focus on the specific history of silence in Christianity and the church. His book, *Silence: A Christian History*, turns out to be a compelling

anthem to the importance of silence, as well as an overall review of the way the contemplative tradition was safe guarded and developed within the monastic ethos, century after century. He also notes how throughout church history, silence has been abused – for example, keeping scandal hidden and the oppressed quiet. It's a very accessible and well-balanced read, and very useful as an introduction to anyone interested in exploring what we mean by “monastic values” and the wish to be a church that is a “monastery without walls.”

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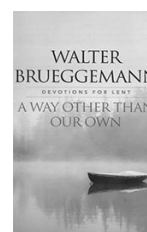
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## CCH BOOKSTORE

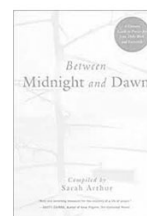
### SUGGESTED TITLES FOR MARCH



*The Ascent to Truth*  
Notes on Christian Mysticism  
by Thomas Merton



*A Way Other Than Our Own*  
Devotions for Lent  
by Walter Brueggemann



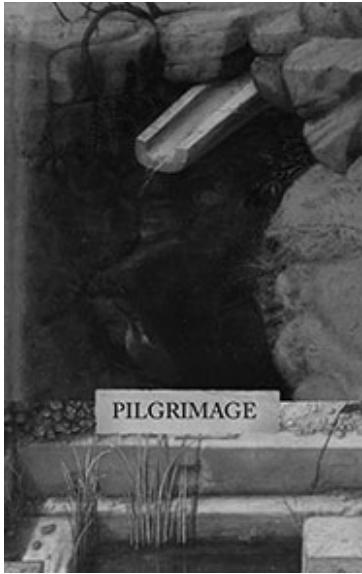
*Between Midnight and Dawn*  
Guide to Prayer for Lent and Holy Week  
Compiled by Sarah Arthur



*Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*  
Spiritual Journey  
by Thomas Keating

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Bookstore and Library Hours  
Open Monday-Friday 9:00 am-4:00 pm  
Sunday 9:30-10:00 am & 11:30 am-noon



*In Your light, we see light.* Psalm 36:10

## ANNUAL AIM: EVOLVING AS CHRIST

PILGRIMAGE BY JAN BROWN

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The human pilgrimage  
is a real pilgrimage  
involving our whole body,  
our entire intellect,  
and our undivided spirit –  
mindful of the greatest  
of the injunctions of the  
Judeo-Christian tradition  
to love God  
with all our strength,  
mind and heart.

Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being,*  
*The Unbroken Trinity*

Where are you going?  
Where are you  
on the road to peace?  
How is your journey  
leading you to God?

John Dear, *We Are Already One,*  
*Thomas Merton's Message of Hope*

The start, middle and end of the spiritual journey  
is the conviction that God is always present.  
... God is part of every reality.  
The present moment, every object we see,  
our inmost nature, are all rooted in God.

Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gift of the Spirit and Open Mind, Open Heart*

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The Third Step prayer in the  
Alcoholics Anonymous Big Book  
reads,

“God, I offer myself to  
Thee—to build with me and to  
do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve  
me of the bondage of self, that  
I may better do Thy will. Take  
away my difficulties, that victory  
over them may bear witness to  
those I would help of Thy Power,  
Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.  
May I do Thy Will always!”

For many years I said that  
prayer every morning truly desiring  
to know and do God's will. Then  
about eight or nine years ago, my  
Twelve Step sponsor suggested  
I go with her to The Church of  
Conscious Harmony. Through  
her, I often heard God speaking  
to me, so I listened.

Early on, I learned from Tim  
Cook that the Third Step Prayer  
could be condensed into one word  
– Consent. I didn't really think I

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had a hard time with that word, at first. I had a long standing mental image of myself as being a “Yes” person. It took several years for me to become aware that that particular image I carried around, along with numerous other images, was not true. I learned that all those negative people around me that drove me crazy with their resistance to what life offered were just my projections, or another way to see this is, that they were mirrors of my own “No” stance to life.

With this new awareness, I consciously set an aim – to consent to whatever God put in front of me knowing that everything is custom made by God for my transformation. For the first time I began to be aware of what came before that intentional consent. It was a long string of “no way, are you joking, no, no no!” type reactions. I’m quite certain that voice had been there all along, I just was so caught up in being a “yes” person that this “no” voice was hidden and not even on my radar screen.

Our annual aim this year is “Evolving as Christ.” To this, I consent. I want to keep evolving, growing in Christ, as Christ. I’ve

always had that desire, but in my life before I found CCH, I felt helpless to change anything. I would try; and then find myself right back in the exact same situation. I would pray to God for help, but I didn’t know how to listen for His answers. I had a friend tell me, “Jan, pray for a sign that even you can see” because she knew that I could, and would, rationalize and justify anything. After what seemed like a revolving door of catastrophes, I had a huge wake-up call; and life as I knew it then, stopped. Slowly this new life I have now began. Occasionally, I can still see the world through old eyes and can feel that loneliness and desperation...and grief. I see now that I didn’t know anything, which is so amazing because I thought I did. I thank God now for the humility to be able to remember at times that I know nothing.

I have always felt drawn to God. I’ve journaled practically all my life. My journal entries all began, “Dear God...Help me.” About ten years ago, I began spending time where I could feel the healing presence of God. This was only at Twelve Step meetings and at CCH. The panic and shame would stop and I could feel

peaceful, calm, and still.

In Twelve Step programs they say whatever the addiction is that got you to the program, it is but a symptom of the problem. The real problem is the loss of a connection with God. I was told The Steps would give me a design for living based on God, and I knew CCH was giving me that same thing. My life got very quiet. I learned from both sources to “do the next right thing,” even if that was to make dinner or take a bath. I learned to say “God, have mercy on me.” I had been meditating for a long time; but through Centering Prayer, I learned to call on God in the silence.

Through participation in the Work of Inner Christianity classes, I’ve learned better and better designs for living. My Twelve Step sponsor called the classes “A1-Anon on steroids.” It’s taken years and lots of effort for everything I’ve learned to become part of me. Now, more often than not, I feel guided from within. This has all been evolving in Christ, and for this I am filled with gratitude.

The monthly aim for March is Pilgrimage. I realize now that the spiritual journey itself is a

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pilgrimage and that this can be done without having to go very far at all. However, this past year, I've had the opportunity to go on two pilgrimages. The first trip was to India and the second was to Nepal. When I looked up the word pilgrimage in the dictionary, it reads "a journey especially a long one, made to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion." For years, I had listened to our former minister, Tim Cook, share his stories of being in India and how transformative that time was for him and Barbara. Without considering what it might take to make that trip, I immediately consented.

I went to both India and Nepal with a small group. The itineraries looked ideal. Three weeks of visiting ashrams, temples, and other places where holy men (and women) had lived. My response each time to the idea of doing all this was Yes, Yes, Yes!!! I had pictures of myself immersed in the culture, and coming home transformed. Needless to say, reality was quite different than my imagination.

As soon as we arrived in Rishikesh, I got sick and was in bed for four days. All I could think

about was I'm in a third-world country feeling miserable and sick. The hotel situation is dismal. Everything, just everything, is wrong. The voices in my head were objecting to all of it, loudly! As soon as I felt I could, I joined the rest of the group who were all very excited about all the holy places they had been visiting. I just wasn't prepared! Immediately, I was hit with obstacles and resistance at every turn. I couldn't breathe due to the very high levels of pollution, the food was way too spicy, there were a billion people crowded into that country, and some of the toilets were just holes in the ground. There were cars everywhere, all honking at each other.

In Nepal, the roads were still torn up from an earthquake. In one of the lodges, there was no heat and we had to sleep with hot water bottles to stay warm. The toilets didn't flush. And on and on. Both times, it took me a while to see past my preferences and negativity. When this finally happened, it was as if my vision itself had changed. For example, I saw that the drivers weren't angry when they honked. It was just their way of saying "Move over, I'm here."

I became aware of the reverence

the Indian and Nepalese people of all ages had for their gods. Statues of these gods, Shiva, Lakshmi, Ganesh, and Buddha were everywhere. On the beaches of the rivers and in the temples, there were holy ceremonies called Yagyas going on all day long. It was so interesting to see both young boys and older men walk with their arms around each other's shoulders or even holding hands. The women dressed in their traditional garb of beautiful brightly colored clothes. They laughed with each other while doing their daily chores. The faces of the children as they played will always remain in my mind.

During our last days on both journeys, we had several holy men perform yagya ceremonies for us. The holy men begin training as young boys to sing ancient chants written in Sanskrit. The first one I went to was in a very small temple. We crowded in and sat crossed legged while the men chanted and made offerings of flowers, grains, fruits, and money to smaller statues of their gods. Though I was told that these pujas were highly transformative, all I could focus on consciously was how cramped and uncomfortable

I was. I wondered if it would ever end.

Three and a half hours later, it was over. On the drive back to the hotel, I began noticing a tightness in my chest and a big lump in my throat. By the time I got to my hotel room, I was sobbing. The strangest thing was they were tears of joy. I felt my heart open and I experienced feelings of such profound love for all things and deep gratitude like I'd never experienced before. It was like having my heart blown open by Love. I feel so blessed to have had that experience, which continues to warm my heart each time I reflect and remember.

Each trip had components that mirrored the spiritual pilgrimage I've been on right here in Austin, Texas. It's a deep journey to an unknown territory that can be both painful and joyful at times. It seems I have to continually be broken open to access my truer self. Like the paver stone at CCH that is a quote of Leonard Cohen, "It's a blessing to cry out." When I compare the life I had before to the life I have now, I feel very blessed. I am an evolving person and for this I thank God. ☸

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## SEEDS

The man who does not permit his spirit to be beaten down and upset by dryness and helplessness, but who lets God lead him peacefully through the wilderness, and desires no other support or guidance than that of pure faith and trust in God alone, will be brought to the Promised Land. He will taste the peace and joy of union with God. He will, without "seeing," have a habitual, comforting, obscure and mysterious awareness of his God, present and acting in all the events of life.

The man who is not afraid to abandon all his spiritual progress into the hands of God, to put prayer, virtue, merit, grace, and all gifts in the keeping of Him from Whom they all must come, will quickly be led to peace in union with Him. His peace will be all the sweeter because it will be free of every care.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, page 239.

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## 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.

### 2<sup>ND</sup> GUIDELINE

Our basic core of goodness is our true Self.

Its center of gravity is God.

The acceptance of our basic goodness  
is a quantum leap in the spiritual journey.

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

# LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

WE ARE CALLED TO A NEW KIND OF CONSCIOUS SUFFERING

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**Work Idea:** The Work of Inner Christianity teaches that “the only thing we can sacrifice in the Work is our suffering.” Yoked with that idea, it’s also true that the Work calls us to a new kind of conscious suffering. This is true because all metanoia, transformation, development and evolution is grounded in giving up what we are, so to become something different. Such “giving up” is the heart of sacrifice – an intentional kind of choice done not just for our own evolution, but also for the evolution of humankind, the planet, and the cosmos, indeed for the Almighty-Most-Holy-Merciful-Source-God.

**Work Source:** The idea of sacrifice is scattered like gold-dust throughout the writings of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and Maurice Nicoll. For example, Ouspensky’s *In*

*Search of the Miraculous* records Mr. Gurdjieff as having said, “without sacrifice, nothing can be attained.” One essential passage can be found in Nicoll’s *Commentaries* on pages 669-670. Here is a choice excerpt:

“The Work says there are endless useless forms of sacrifice. People think they have something to sacrifice and even imagine they are sacrificing themselves when they are not doing anything of the kind...Yes, here indeed we have something to sacrifice and I think you will agree with me that it begins with sacrificing our pictures of ourselves, our imaginary ‘I’ and False Personality, our eminent virtue and extraordinary merits that we so much cling to and with which we are so identified. But the Work teaches us more than this, if you reflect on it. Take this startling phrase, *‘that we have to sacrifice our suffering.’*”

**Practical Application:** The essence of our Lenten pilgrimage is a reconnection with conscious suffering, particularly through fasting, denying the body of its ordinary and accustomed pleasures and comforts related to food. We know that limiting select foods from the taste buds and stomach is one way of getting the body’s attention, and therefore, awakening a bit more through suffering and intentional sacrifice. Food is not just limited to the body though. During Lent, we can also deny our self the food of negative impressions, such as violent movies or ephemeral entertainment and news – and to do so consciously for the sake of sacrificing our suffering – without complaining about it. That said, practice not avoiding your suffering, or the suffering of others. Notice it. Observe. Don’t look away or hide from it. Let the suffering



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in. Feel it. Ponder it. Sense it. Another approach is to ask a loved one or trusted friend how they are suffering. It is rarely a question asked, and provides a possibility for deepened, conscious conversation. Human beings can connect in our suffering. We can also get lost in our suffering. Can you practice sacrificing your suffering? Can you suffer silently for the sake of another? ... the sake of love? ... the sake of your transformation? How might you apply this to your life as a daily effort during Holy Week?

**Further Resources:** Sacrifice is an important idea in Mr. Gurdjieff's

teaching. He himself speaks of sacrificing his own esoteric powers in order to help him remember in his book *Life is Real Only Then, When I Am*. Gurdjieff also strikingly acknowledges that most people will first sacrifice their pleasures before their sufferings. Connecting these ideas with the teachings of Jesus is also useful, especially during Holy Week. Perhaps practice Lectio Divina with John 19, by reading through the lens of the Work idea of sacrificing one's suffering. 

For more 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.

## Community Reading for March-April

*Written in Our Hearts*  
by Theodore Nottingham

Nottingham is a rare combination of wise pastor and Work of Inner Christianity teacher; his practical summary of the broad Work tradition is invaluable. This book is an insightful exploration of the Work through the lens of Christian experience.

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# 2018 LENT AND HOLY WEEK

WORSHIP THEMES AND SCRIPTURES  
AT THE CHURCH OF CONSCIOUS HARMONY

**March 4th Third Sunday of Lent**

Holy Purification  
John 2.13-25

**March 11th Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Holy Consent  
John 3.14-21

**March 18th Fifth Sunday of Lent**

Holy Transformation  
John 12.20-33

**March 25th Palm Sunday**

Holy Hope  
John 12.12-16

**March 29th Maundy Thursday**

Holy Surrender John 13.1-15  
7:30 pm Taize

**March 30th Good Friday**

Holy Suffering John 18.1-19.42  
Noon Worship

Easter Prayer Vigil 1 pm Friday - 7 am Easter morning

**March 31st Holy Saturday**

Holy Silence  
8:30 am -12:30 pm CP Retreat

**April 1st Easter Sunday**

Holy Life Mark 16.1-7  
7:00 am Sunrise Service  
10:00 am Easter Worship

## MARCH CALENDAR

Visit [consciousharmony.org](http://consciousharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Introduction to Centering Prayer  
Mar 10 8:30 am-3:15 pm  
plus (6) Mondays 7:30-9:00 pm  
\$75

Contemplative Outreach United in Prayer Day  
Mar 17 9:00 am-3:00 pm  
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary  
Register at [www.HeartofTexas-co.org](http://www.HeartofTexas-co.org)

Half-Day Commuter Retreat  
March 31 8:30 am-12:30 pm  
\$10

### MONTHLY

1st Sundays  
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

### WEEKLY

Sundays  
Lectio Divina 8:00-9:00 am  
Worship Service 10:00-11:30 am  
Youth Program 10:00-11:30 am  
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays  
Prayer Circle 10:15-11:00 am  
Contemplative Lunch noon-1:00 pm  
Contemplative Communion Service 6:00-7:00 pm  
Infusion 7:15-8:25 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9:00 pm  
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm  
Devotional Service

Saturdays noon-12:50 pm  
Scriptorium

### DAILY

Sunday-Saturday 7:00-7:35 am  
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

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Recordings of services are available  
through the Bookstore and online at  
[www.consciousharmony.org](http://www.consciousharmony.org)



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## DEEPER INTO LENT

The heart of the Christian journey is to face the unconscious values that underlie our motivation, that we're not normally aware of in everyday life and where, through the observance of Lent, we face the human condition in ourselves at new and deeper levels. It's like the church and the Christian communities all over the world entering into a 40-day retreat, like Jesus did in the desert.

And we need Lent and practices to purify our unconscious. These things hinder us from answering the call to divine union that is the basic invitation of the whole of the Christian gospel and life ... and allowing God to be God in us and consenting to letting Him work in us ever more completely and that is my prayer for us all.

Thomas Keating, recorded conversation for Lent, February 9, 2015