

FEBRUARY 1

At no point in history has it been more important to listen to the tradition that reveals prayer as the progressive penetration of the present moment, as a journey ever deeper into the union of love and the progressive shedding of self that leads to that union. But, such is the risk that makes the human being free, even the tradition can teach us nothing of ultimate importance if we do not have some real light from our own experience to read it by.

It is this experience that saves the tradition from ever becoming a mere memory transmitted in print, and that revitalises it for every generation. In the personal act of faith that opens this experience to us, the tradition is invested with human relevance for all and it is relevant because it restores us to that present moment in which we are propelled into the actuality of God.

Letters From the Heart

FEBRUARY 2

To learn to meditate the first thing you have to try to understand - and this is the principal challenge to all of us - the first thing is to understand how simple it is. We live in a society that is highly complex. All of us have to deal with a variety of challenges in our life, all of them quite complex. It is very difficult for us to believe in anything that is very simple, very straightforward, very clear. It is very difficult for us to believe that such a teaching could be important and could be effective.

We speak to you as Benedictine monks and our message to you is that we are the inheritance, you and I, in this time, of a long and rich spiritual tradition and it is a tradition that has been passed on and has survived for hundreds of years, despite many attacks on it, despite many misunderstandings of it and despite simple neglect. Because we have been brought up in our society in a largely intellectual climate and tradition we tend to think that once something has been written down it has power to survive on its own.

But what I think we have to understand is this: a tradition does not and cannot survive either merely by being talked about or by being written down. A tradition survives and grows only because men and women can be found who will enter into the experience of the tradition. In other words, we not only inherit a tradition but we have to re-create the tradition in every generation and we re-create by discovering it from our own experience and at that moment of discovery, the tradition lives. It is a living tradition and living, it possesses power. It becomes a living flame that has the power to enlighten, to guide and to warm.

The Door to Silence

FEBRUARY 3

In meditation our way forward to this growing awareness of the Spirit praying within us lies simply in our deepening fidelity to the saying of the mantra. It is the faithful repetition of our word that integrates our whole being. It does so because it brings us to the silence, the concentration, the necessary level of consciousness that enable us to open our mind and heart to the work of the love of God in the depth of our being.

To understand the process once more, begin by sitting down comfortably and calmly and then start to say your mantra in the silence of your mind: *Maranatha*, *Ma-ra-na-tha*. Repeat the word calmly, serenely, and above all faithfully for the full time of your meditation, that is for about twenty to thirty minutes. We begin by saying the mantra in the mind. For modern Western man who has so restricted himself to the mental modality, there is no other way to begin. But as we progress with simple fidelity, the mantra begins to sound not so much in our head but rather in our heart. That is, it seems to become rooted in the very depths of our being.

Word Into Silence

FEBRUARY 3

We must be always careful that thought of the goal does not deflect us from understanding the means necessary to reach it. The means are as utterly simple as to meditate every morning and evening and during the meditation to say our word from beginning to end. Thus we turn from all daydreaming, from all holy floating and self-dialogue. Thus we gradually submit ourselves to the yoke of poverty. It is the poverty of the 'one little word' which requires the faith of commitment. There are no half-measures possible. You cannot meditate a bit. You either say your word or you do not.

I suppose it is the completeness of the commitment that frightens us. But commit yourself but once and you will know from your own experience the love that casts out all fear. It takes many people years to come to that moment of commitment. Yet whether it takes years, months, weeks, or days is of no importance. All that is of importance is that each of us, as best we can in these earthen vessels, is as open as we can be to the essential truth of union. We are invited to be in the 'all in all'. As far as we can see with our limited insight, the way to the necessary commitment for this union is the way of poverty, silence and humility - the way of the mantra.

Word Made Flesh

FEBRUARY 5

Meditation is the great way of purification. Every time we say our mantra, we purify, we clarify our spirit. The process of meditation over a lifetime is the restoration of our spirit to its natural tendency. So often, when we look into our spirit, we see only ourselves. Our spirit is like a mirror and all we see is our own reflection. But the glass must be cleared and cleansed. It is as though the other side of the glass is covered with the sum total of the dross and trivia of a lifetime, with all the images that we have accumulated.

Meditation is a cleansing of the glass so that when we look *at* it we see right *through* it. We see reality unimpeded by any reflection of ourselves. We have to meditate every day, every morning and evening, because we are always accumulating more limiting dross and images. The wonder of the life of Jesus and His message to us is that our spirit need not be constrained by any limits whatsoever. Each of us is called to unlimited development, to expansion and to utter freedom as we soar to total union with God.

It might seem to you as you read these encouragements to meditate, or as you attend a weekly group, or simply meditate every day, that you know all of this and have nothing more to learn. There is a real sense in which you do know it and a real sense in which you have nothing more to learn. If you can fully learn and absorb that truth you have learned everything! The dynamic of learning it is that, in saying our mantra, in the daily return to the discipline, we gradually find how to look beyond ourselves. We learn to see with a vision that focuses ahead of us, in God. In that focusing of everything in God (everything that we are), everything in our life becomes aligned on God and is rightly set into its proper place. Meditating is powerful because it leads us into this right order, into this tranquility and peace.

The Heart of Creation

FEBRUARY 6

The purpose of meditation for each of us is that we come to our own centre. In many traditions, meditation is spoken of as a pilgrimage — a pilgrimage to your own centre, your own heart, and there you learn to remain awake, alive and still. The word ‘religion’ means a ‘re-linking’, being ‘rebound’ to your own centre. The importance of meditation is to discover from your own experience that there is only one centre and that the life task for all of us is to find our source and our meaning by discovering and living out of that one centre.

I think that what we have to understand is that returning to our centre, discovering our own centre, is the first task and the first responsibility of every life that is to become fully human. Again, in meditation, in the discipline of it, you will discover from your own experience that to be at one with our own centre means that we are at one with every centre.

The truly spiritual man or woman is one who is in harmony, one who has discovered that harmony within themselves and lives this harmony with creation and with God. What we learn in meditation is that to be in our own centre is to be in God. This is not only the great teaching of all Eastern religions but it is the fundamental insight of Christianity. In the words of Jesus, ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you.’¹ And the kingdom, in the teaching of Jesus, is an experience. It is an experience of the power of God. It is an experience of the basic energy of the universe. And, again in the vision of Jesus, we understand that this basic power, out of which we are invited to live our own lives vitally, is love.

Moment of Christ

¹ Luke 17:21

FEBRUARY 7

I think one of the concepts that can help us to understand the absoluteness of saying the mantra, the absoluteness of the experience of meditation, is the concept of destiny. Prayer, we could perhaps describe as the state of obediential love. The state wherein we are wholly at God's disposition, not desiring, not planning but simply placing ourselves within the fullness of his gift of life, the fullness of his gift of our own unique creation. And each one of us is created for a unique destiny, a unique fulfilment in God and our only task in life is to be wholly open to that destiny. In other words, our task is to live out of the divine energy, to live within the divine plan and to play our part in it fully and generously. You may have been meditating long enough to know that prayer has very little to do with asking for this or asking for that. Prayer is something much more simple than that. It is being at one with God.

Stillness is the way to rootedness and it focuses the challenge that fact that all of us, to be rooted in our true self. To put it another way, it is the challenge to be wholly open to the gift of our own creation. Stillness helps us to be rooted in the gift that God has given us in our own being, which we learn by being still in the one place. Coming in to our own selfhood is coming into God. What you will discover in your meditation is the reciprocal harmony that we have with God. Becoming rooted in ourselves, we become rooted in our own proper place in creation and, as a result rooted in our Creator. St Paul constantly reminds us that the challenge and the task of life is to become rooted in Christ¹, who dwells in our hearts. This is why we have to become rooted in our own hearts. Outward silence and stillness are an effective sign of the inner stillness and silence of inner rootedness.

The Way of Unknowing

¹ Eph. 3:17

FEBRUARY 8

One of the things that we must dearly understand is that meditation, this pursuit of wisdom and love, must take place in an entirely ordinary, natural way. Meditation must be built into the ordinary fabric of everyday life. We must learn to see the whole of life shot through with the divine, in harmony with the divine. We must also understand that it is our destiny to enter this divine harmony, to be in harmony with God. It is not a question of trying to fit a bit of spirituality into our lives. The spiritual quest, the permanent spiritual invitation is getting our lives, ourselves, into permanent focus with ultimate truth, ultimate goodness. Not in any self-important or exploitative way but in a very simple, childlike way. It is by being still, by paying attention and by becoming mindful of the one who loves us.

To be fit for the great tasks in life we must learn to be faithful in humble tasks. Meditation is a very simple and very humble pilgrimage that prepares us for this focusing of our lives on the divine centre. Our lives are nourished by the spiritual sap, the energy rising from the root of all being. The invitation that each of us has received is to find out who we are, to discover the destiny that we have, to go beyond the limitations of our separate selves and to be united with the One who is all in all. In that going beyond ourselves, we find ourselves. And we find our unlimited capacity for development, for liberty, for love.

The Heart of Creation

FEBRUARY 9

In beginning to meditate we usually have to face the question, ‘What should my expectations be?’ What should we expect to happen? To approach meditation like this, however, is like approaching breathing and asking ‘what will happen as the result of my breathing’? What happens when you breathe is that you live. Your vitality is assured with every breath. Meditation is very like that. Nothing dramatic happens except that your spirit breathes. You also come to a vitality of spirit very similar to the vitality that your body enjoys as a result of your breathing.

But it is very difficult for us to approach meditation without expecting some kind of pay-off for what we are putting into it. As Westerners we think in terms of the production line and we judge in terms of profit and loss. When we are told to meditate for half an hour morning and evening it seems like a big investment of time and effort and we want to know what the return is going to be. Meditation cannot be reduced to a commodity like this and the spiritual tradition is not a supermarket to shop in or a stock market to gamble on.

Because we think in these terms, however, there can be a real danger that meditation is presented in terms of return and pay-off. Most of the books on meditation in the bookshops offer a whole list of returns from lowering your blood pressure to better exam results and levitation. But whether any of these results reasonable, some reasonable, some false, occur at all is not of the slightest importance. The only important thing is that your spirit lives, that it lives wholly and that it realises its unity with God and with all.

Word Made Flesh

FEBRUARY 10

I think it is so difficult for us as men and women of the twentieth century because we live in such a materialistic society. It is a society that sees everything in terms of possession and possessing and, even if we happen to be more spiritual in our outlook, we can easily become spiritual materialists. Instead of accumulating money we try to accumulate grace or merit. But this way of prayer is the way of dispossession and of surrender, and that is hard for us because we have been taught success, we have been taught the importance of winning, not losing. But Jesus tells us that if we would find our life we must lose it. And saying our mantra is exactly our response to that command of Jesus to be wholly at his disposition, to give him our undivided attention, to give him our undivided heart, to be in the state of undivided consciousness, which is another way of saying to be at one with him.

St Paul is one of those wise teachers of the contemplative tradition. In writing to the Galatians his case is that our call as Christians is fully to experience the 'glorious liberty of the children of God'. And he asks how do we achieve that freedom, how do we enter and realise it? He replies, 'The only thing that counts is faith active in love.'¹ And the way to that faith, active in love, is 'union with Christ Jesus. This is what Christian meditation is about. Jesus dwells in our hearts in perfect simplicity. Christian meditation is simply allowing His presence to become the supreme reality of our consciousness. To do that we must learn to be silent, to be still and to be attentive to this presence in our hearts. And the way to that attentiveness is to recite our mantra. To recite it from the beginning of our meditation until the end, without ceasing.

The Way of Unknowing

¹Gal. 5:6

FEBRUARY 11

Consider all the innumerable things that can go wrong in our lives. Then reflect, what can undo these catastrophes? What can heal the inevitable wounds? In every case the answer is 'the power of love. Love it is that heals, that makes new, that fills us with hope, that delivers us from the prison of our own egoism. In meditation we learn to be still, to be calm, to be recollected and to become aware of the love of God's presence in our hearts. This awareness arises from his .revelation, not our manipulation. What we have to do, though, is to be still. His presence is not just another theory, some speculative theology. It is a dynamic personal presence that is to be found in the heart of each one of us, found if only we will be still. Stillness is the door through which we enter the state of transcendence that leads us into the greater reality.

Forgetting about ourselves and encountering this reality, entering into this presence is, quite simply, most important thing in our lives. It is the supreme priority of each day and of each phase in our life because, once we do set out on this path, every part of our life becomes energised with the divine love and this means that we are constantly healed. We are coming into a state of inherent unity. We are constantly being made whole as and, as a result we are continually discovering new courage to go on living with hope in the goodness of God, and with supreme confidence in His plan being worked out in our lives.

The Heart of Creation

FEBRUARY 12

You cannot learn to meditate unless you build it into your life as a regular pattern, as a regular discipline. It requires considerable sacrifice to find that time every morning and evening, indeed considerable discipline. But it is necessary. It is so necessary because the presence of God, in His universe, in His creation, in your heart and my heart, is of such importance that we ignore it at our peril. If we ignore it, we can never make sense of either ourselves or the universe. Because it leads to such meaning, the journey requires seriousness and discipline, which will lead you to a peace and a joy that no words can possibly describe.

Silence, you will discover, is the medium of unity. You will discover in the silence of meditation that your outer life and your inner life are unified. That is why bodily stillness is so important. In meditation you will discover body and spirit in *unity*, then in *union* with God. Nothing is more important for people of our time, or indeed of any time, than to recover this capacity for silence.

The way remains one of absolute simplicity. There is no advanced technique involved or any complicated books that you need to read. The most simple person can undertake this journey. Indeed, the simpler the better to begin with. All you need for the journey is discipline, commitment to the daily return to it and to making that space in your day and in your heart. And you need faith. The basic _faith you need is that you *are*, that you are valuable and that you are valued. This is the faith that you are loveable and that you are loved. You need this faith when you begin and as you continue on the pilgrimage your faith will grow, your fears will fall away. The maturing of faith and the falling away of fear depend on your commitment to the mantra, which is another way of saying your determination to leave self behind and to journey into the mystery.

The Way of Unknowing

FEBRUARY 13

This discovery of our own spirit, our real self, is an experience that consists of an indescribable joy, the joy of liberation. But the loss of self which makes it possible, the erosion and the shedding of long familiar illusions require those qualities which have so important a place in St Paul's teaching: boldness, courage, faith, commitment and perseverance. It is these qualities, mundane rather than heroic, which enable us to persevere in the daily commitment to the pilgrimage, the fidelity to the twice-daily meditation and the 'grand poverty' to which the mantra leads us. These are not homegrown qualities; they are given to us by love, gifts from the Spirit to lead us to Himself, to deeper love. There is no way to truth or to the Spirit that is not the way of love. God is love.

As we advance into the silence we begin to experience the true meaning of the words of Jesus: 'The one who would find their life must first lose it.'¹ And again: 'Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine, must leave self behind.'² It requires nerve to become really quiet. To learn just to say the mantra and turn away from all thought requires courage. But as we persevere we discover that the poverty of the mantra leads us to a really radical simplicity that makes this courage possible, for we are capable of greater courage than we usually believe of ourselves. But meditation is the prayer of faith, because we have to leave ourselves behind before the Other appears and with no pre-packaged guarantee that He will appear. The essence of poverty consists in this risk of annihilation. This is the leap of faith from ourselves to the Other. This is the risk involved in all loving.

Word Into Silence

¹ Matt. 10:39 ² Mark 9:34-6

FEBRUARY 14

In the journey of meditation as we say our mantra and let go of our thoughts and plans and ideas and imaginings, we learn the value of renunciation, of non-possessiveness, we let go of our own images of self, we let go of our own desires, we let go of our own fears and of our own self-consciousness. This renunciation enables us to enter into communion with the Other and with others at a deep level of reality. The solitude of our meditation is the foundation stone on which we build all communion, true communion with ourselves, with others and with God. It is in the silence of our own heart that we enter into the deep harmony that reveals to us our oneness with all. Listen to St Paul writing to the Colossians:

Put on the garments that suit God's chosen people, His own, His beloved and those garments are compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. Be forbearing with one another and forgiving. Where any of you has cause for complaint you must forgive as the Lord forgave you and to crown all there must be love. To bind all together and to complete the whole, let Christ's peace be arbiter in your hearts. For to this peace you were all called as members of a single body.¹

The Door to Silence

¹ Col. 3:12-15

FEBRUARY 15

Meditation does call for generosity because it calls for everything. It calls for that abandonment of desire and desiring and, positively, it calls for generous openness to God's destiny for us, to His plan for us, to His love for us. What you discover in meditation is just that - His love for you. So many people when they hear about meditation for the first time think of it as some extraordinarily dry, intellectual, unemotional, unaffectionate way.

But it is none of those things. It is commitment to and openness to infinite love, and that love is like a mighty fountain bursting through in your heart. The mantra is like the needle of a compass. It heads you always in the direction of your own destiny. It points always to the true direction you must follow, away from self into God and, whichever way your ego may lead you, the compass is always faithful in the direction it points you. The mantra, if you say it with generosity, with faithfulness and with love will always point you in the direction of God and it is only in God that our true destiny can be revealed.

The Way of Unknowing

FEBRUARY 16

People who have been meditating for a short time, three or four years, often think that the time quickly comes when you stop saying your mantra and when you just rest, stay in silence. What you must learn, and it is best to learn it when you are beginning, is the absolute necessity of saying your word from the beginning to the end. There are all sorts of problems that are posed for us. If you are a Christian, your ego poses the problem for you: 'Is this really prayer? Am I really praying to God now?' If you are not a Christian your ego poses the question to you, 'Am I really using this time to the best of my advantage? Shouldn't I be analysing the profound insights that are coming to me?' But what you must learn, whether you are a Christian or whether you are not, is that you must be silent. What you will learn is that you have to learn to be silent.

Fully Alive

FEBRUARY 17

The aim has always been to stress and, as far as we are able, to prove by our lives that there are no ^methods of prayer.' There is only prayer. There is only one prayer and this is the prayer of Jesus - not words He addresses to His Father but the overflowing plenitude of His relationship with the Father. To talk then, of methods of prayer or of 'our prayer' at all is to miss the essential Christian dimension of prayer revealed to us - that we ourselves do not know how to pray. We have to learn by following the teaching of our Master and He teaches us by taking us into the creative and liberating mystery of His prayer, the stream of love that flows between Him and His Father that is the Spirit.

'Our prayer' is simply our entering into this stream of divine love because of our realisation of our incorporation with Jesus - not because we read about it and think about it, but because ^realise it. The freedom of spirit that is the fruit and mark of prayer is due to our discovery that the stream of love we have been plunged into and that sweeps us along is the foundational principle of all reality, is Being itself.

Letters From the Heart

FEBRUARY 18

My advice is to see your times of meditation not as times that are at your disposition at all. See your meditation, your prayer, not as your own but as the prayer of Jesus. As long as we are self-importantly thinking of our meditation, or our prayer, we have not fully started this pilgrimage. The time is His, the prayer is His. The miracle is that His prayer is ours, the miracle is worked by simply bringing us to that total and unshakable confidence in the Father which the Gospel describes as hope. We approach meditation with hope rather than desire: without hesitation and with a childlike sense of being available to God.

We learn therefore to say the mantra with this same simplicity. We are not analysing it, or its effect, in a calculating way. We say it with a wholly sincere, self-emptying love. Yet by virtue of this self-emptying we are filled with the power of God and with the knowledge that we are one with God because we are lovable and loved. The only requirement is total selflessness expressed in the total abandoning of all our own thoughts, imagination, insights, and, above all, our own prayers. This is our openness to the prayer of Jesus in our heart.

Word Made Flesh

FEBRUARY 19

I first learnt to meditate some thirty years or so ago, and my teacher used to say to me - in answer to whatever the question I put to him about meditation - 'Say your mantra, say your word.' The longer I have meditated over the years, the more I have realized the absolute wisdom of what he taught me. Learn just to say your word and keep saying it, keep repeating it throughout the twenty or twenty-five minutes or half an hour of your meditation, and keep repeating it from the beginning to the end. You will eventually be unhooked from your ideas, your concepts, your words, your thoughts, all that amalgam of distraction that is going on in your mind most of the time, and you will come, with patience and with fidelity to clarity of consciousness.

Whatever phenomena present themselves to you - whether you see colours or hear sounds or see visions, whatever it is - take it as the general principle that it is all utterly unimportant. It has no real significance of any kind, except perhaps that you may need to be a bit more relaxed before you start. One of the things you have to learn in approaching your meditation is to approach it by not expecting anything. A lot of us in the West, when we begin meditating, hope it will bring us to see visions or to understand life with deeper insight, teach us wisdom or knowledge. But you must come to it absolutely generous and absolutely poor in spirit, that is, without demands or any sort of expectations other than this - a conviction that you will come to in the meditation itself - that this is what we were created for. This is what everyone reading this book was created for - to be and to be in relationship with our Creator.

Moment of Christ

FEBRUARY 20

The important thing about meditation is that it is a learning process. It is a process where we enter ever more deeply, ever more richly into *the* mystery. I think that what we all discover from our own experience is that God is Spirit. God is the breath of life. God is presence and He is present deep within our being, in our hearts. If only we persevere we discover that in the power of His Spirit each one of us is regenerated, renewed, recreated so that we become a new creation in Him. 'I have poured out My Spirit upon this people', said the prophet Ezekiel.¹ And the Spirit is the presence of power, the power of love.

Meditation teaches us that this is the foundational wisdom on which to build life and true religion. What we discover is that we can only live our lives fully if we are always open to this mysterious presence of the Spirit and always open to the presence more profoundly. That is the pilgrimage we enter upon every time we sit down to meditate. We open our minds, our hearts, our consciousness more permanently to the ultimate reality that *is*, that is now, that is here.

The Heart of Creation

¹ Ezek. 36:27

FEBRUARY 21

Just listen to these words of St John of the Cross:

On a dark secret night, starving for love and deep in flame, O happy, lucky flight!
Unseen I slipped away, my house at last was calm and safe. In darkness, free from
light, disguised and down a secret way, O happy, lucky flight! In darkness I
escaped. My house at last was calm and safe.¹

That is the silence of prayer that John of the Cross describes there so eloquently, so beautifully, in his poetry. The silence of our prayer is our opportunity to steal away into the night of darkness, into the night where we are filled with the light that is love. Again, you have all been meditating long enough to know that all that is required of us is simple fidelity, to come to our meditation every day in utter simplicity, not to be bothered about insight, not to be bothered about knowledge because our insight and our knowledge is always so limited, but to be open to the love of God. In His love all knowledge and all insight is given and it is given, not upon any limited scale, but infinitely and it is ours, now and for all eternity, because with our heart open to the infinite love of God, our now is indeed eternal. Simplicity, fidelity and poverty.

The house that we must leave¹ is our ego with all its possessive values, the self-important values - we must leave it and we must go out into the infinite liberty of God. How do we do this? Only by having our priorities absolutely clear in our minds, within our heart, and our priority is this- the kingdom of God which we seek, not in third place, or second place, not in the sixth hour or in the third hour, but in the first place and in every hour. The times of our meditation are like times of epiphany but God is with us always and we seek Him always and we love Him always. Our priority must be very clear: His kingdom first.

Fully Alive

¹ John of the Cross. The Ascent to Mount Carmel, Part I

FEBRUARY 22

Our daily fidelity to meditation and our fidelity to the mantra throughout the meditation is the sign that we have heard and attended the gospel's call. Each day that rests on the twin pillars of the morning and evening meditation is a step on the pilgrimage from theory into reality, from idea into experience as we turn aside from all complexity, all trivial concerns, simply to be one in Him, with Him and through Him.

The silence releases the power of the glory of God in our heart. Indeed we find the silence itself as a power within us the power of the Spirit who in silence is loving to all, and the silence we find through the poverty of our mantra. As we approach that profound silence reigning in our heart that is the Spirit, we know that it is itself the light, the glory that beckons us onwards. And as we pass more fully into the transforming aura of this silence the greater becomes our wonder, the deeper our joy that we are on this pilgrimage at all.

The Present Christ

FEBRUARY 23

The purpose of meditation is that we can learn to live our lives as fully as possible in the presence of God. Learning to live in His presence means also being energised with His energy and, as we know from the Gospel, His energy is love. Learning to meditate is learning constantly to be in this presence and constantly to live out of that presence. To learn, to learn anything, you have to learn to listen. We have to learn the humility to listen and then to begin the simple tasks involved in learning. If you want to learn a musical instrument you have to learn to play the scales. If you want to learn a language you have to learn the elementary grammar and you have to be content to learn that because without the foundation of that simple learning no progress is possible.

In learning to meditate, perhaps the first thing you have to learn is to sit well, to sit, that is, with a good posture; and the essential rule of posture is that our spine is upright and the essential rule of our sitting is that we sit still and so one of the first things we must learn is a physical stillness of meditation. We sit still, not just so as to get the body out of the way, but so that body and spirit can both be harmoniously involved, unified in our meditation.

Meditation is a complete unity of body and spirit, still and present to God. Now we have to prepare ourselves to meditate and the first preparation is the goodness each of us must practise in our everyday living and it is of great importance: that we learn to prepare ourselves by kindness, forgiveness, simple goodness and then the immediate preparation is the quiet of the place where we choose to meditate and the quietness of our body as we prepare inner quietness of the spirit, leading us to that total attentiveness of body and spirit.

The Door to Silence

FEBRUARY 24

People often ask me what sort of progress can I expect to make in my meditation? I think it is important for us to understand that our progress is not to be found in anything else but stillness and the fruits of stillness. It is inappropriate to seek for progress in the phenomena of meditation. Don't ask yourself 'am I levitating?' or 'am I seeing visions?' That has nothing to do with it and in fact if you are seeing visions or levitating it is more likely due to drinking too much soda water than to the Spirit!

Fidelity to the path of meditation allows us to move beyond this kind of materialistic spirituality. Instead we are able to see our progress in the light of a deeper understanding of the meaning of Scripture. Take, for example, these words of St Paul to the Ephesians:

So He came and proclaimed the good news: peace to you who are far off, and peace to those who are nearby; for through Him we both alike have access to the Father in the one Spirit.¹

The message for us here is that Jesus has already achieved all this by opening the highway to the Father for us. We do not have to do anything / to bring this about. That is the way it is. We have access to the Father in Him and all we have to do is to realise it. Realisation is what meditation is about. The phenomena of 'progress' are utterly unimportant beside the process of realisation which is the opening of our heart, our consciousness, to the great reality that is taking place in our heart. There in our heart the Spirit of Jesus worships and loves the Father and is continuously returning to Him in love.

Word Made Flesh

¹ Eph. 2:17

FEBRUARY 25

This is the purpose of our meditation: to lead us to a full awareness of who we are, where we are, to stop hovering in the realms of eternal postponement. We must touch down in the concrete reality of the present moment where our divine splendour is revealed. We must become still. We have to learn how to pay attention steadily and continuously to the reality of our being in the here and now. Pere de Caussade called this 'the sacrament of the present moment', and this is what the mantra leads us into, a full awareness of the divine splendour of the eternal present. The mantra is our sacrament of the present moment.

We must always remember that we cannot attempt to force the pace of meditation in any way or to speed up the natural process in which the mantra roots itself in our consciousness by means of our simple fidelity in saying *it*. *We must not* be self-consciously asking ourselves, 'How far have I got? Am I saying the mantra or sounding it or listening to it?' If we try to force the pace or to keep a constant self-conscious eye on our progress we are, if there is such a word, non-meditating because we are concentrating on ourselves, putting ourselves first, thinking about ourselves. Meditation requires complete simplicity. We are led to that complete simplicity, but we begin and continue by saying the mantra.

Word Into Silence

FEBRUARY 26

Religious people have often become very confused by thinking that religion demands that they 'placate' God or keep him happy or distract him from punishing them. So religious people tend to get too busy with their ceremonies and liturgies. But we must also learn to be still and to be rooted in the knowledge that we need neither placate God nor distract him. We need only respond to his infinite love. We respond by total attention, by total stillness, not thinking of his love but by being open to it; not thinking of his mercy, but receiving it. The one thing we must understand is that in the time of meditation we need not think about anything. This is the time of the day for total attention, for total openness, for total love.

The Christian experience is, in essence, a certain knowledge that God is love and that He lives in our hearts. Our call, therefore, is more than to dialogue with Him, it is to be in union with Him. To be one with Him, each of us must come to the fullness of our own created oneness. Each of us must experience our own harmony in order that we may be in total harmony with Him. The Christian way is a way where each of us is made whole by becoming completely stable, completely rooted in truth, in love, in goodness, in justice.

The Heart of Creation

FEBRUARY 27

Basically, meditation is a way of coming to your own centre, the foundation of your own being, and remaining there - still, silent, attentive. Meditation is in essence a way of learning to become awake, fully alive and yet still.

It is the stillness of meditation that leads you forward to that state of wakefulness and the sense of being completely alive that dawns in you because you are in harmony with yourself and, gradually, in harmony with the whole of creation. The experience of meditation puts you in resonance with all life. But the way to that resonance, the way to that wakefulness is silence and stillness.

This is quite a challenge for people of our time, because most of us have very little experience of silence, and silence can be terribly threatening to people in the transistorised culture that we live in. You have to get used to that silence. That is why the way of meditation is a way of learning to say the word interiorly, in your heart. The purpose of repeating the word s to launch you into the silence. So, lay aside all kinds of materialistic ideas about how long this will take. It might take twenty years. But that doesn't matter at all. It might take twenty minutes. That doesn't matter either. The only important thing if you want to re-establish contact with your centre is to be on the way.

Moment of Christ

FEBRUARY 28

For our heart to be purely open to supreme reality we require the simplicity of a child, to sit still in the presence of God and to remain open at the beginning of each day. Even so, our day can often drift into distraction, meaninglessness, anxiety or illusion. Then the evening meditation again gathers the scattered parts and binds them together in the love of Christ. So do not think of your meditation as the icing on the cake of your day. It is not 'putting a bit of spirituality' into your life. See it rather as informing your whole day with reality: the supreme reality that we now have access to God with freedom.

We are living in the age when the possibilities for the development of human consciousness have been radically transformed by the resurrection of Christ. Every human consciousness has undergone this transformation because in His risen and universal consciousness we have access to the Father, the source and goal of human life and indeed all creation. We live in an age of the infinite mystery realized in Christ and in us. Meditation is simply openness to that reality.

When we start to meditate we have to learn to say, to sound the mantra from the beginning to the end of the meditation. Every meditation is a new experience of this. Starting to sound the mantra silently in our hearts, we then learn to say it continually. When we find we are not saying it or have become distracted we simply return to it gently but with utter fidelity. It is always new. It is always the same.

So when you think of progress think only of progress in stillness. This is the stillness of fidelity. In your physical posture be as still as you can. As your heart fills with wonder at the unfathomable mystery that we are part of, be more deeply still. Progress is only progress in fidelity.

Word Made Flesh

FEBRUARY 29

Meditation is above all the prayer of simplicity. We must therefore, each one of us, learn to be natural and to allow natural processes to unfold themselves in their own time. So, we each find our own speed for saying the mantra. Most people say it in rhythm with their breathing. The important thing is to articulate it clearly in the silence of your mind a silence that is itself deepening and spreading all the time, and to concentrate on it to the exclusion of all other thoughts. Remember: you begin saying it, you then sound it in your heart and finally you come to listen to it with total attention.

As to frequency you must say the mantra for the entire time of your meditation to the rhythm you find for yourself. You will be tempted to rest on your oars, to float in some anaesthetised netherworld of your own. The way to transcend the temptation is absolute fidelity to the mantra. This is the condition of rooting it in your heart.

Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks