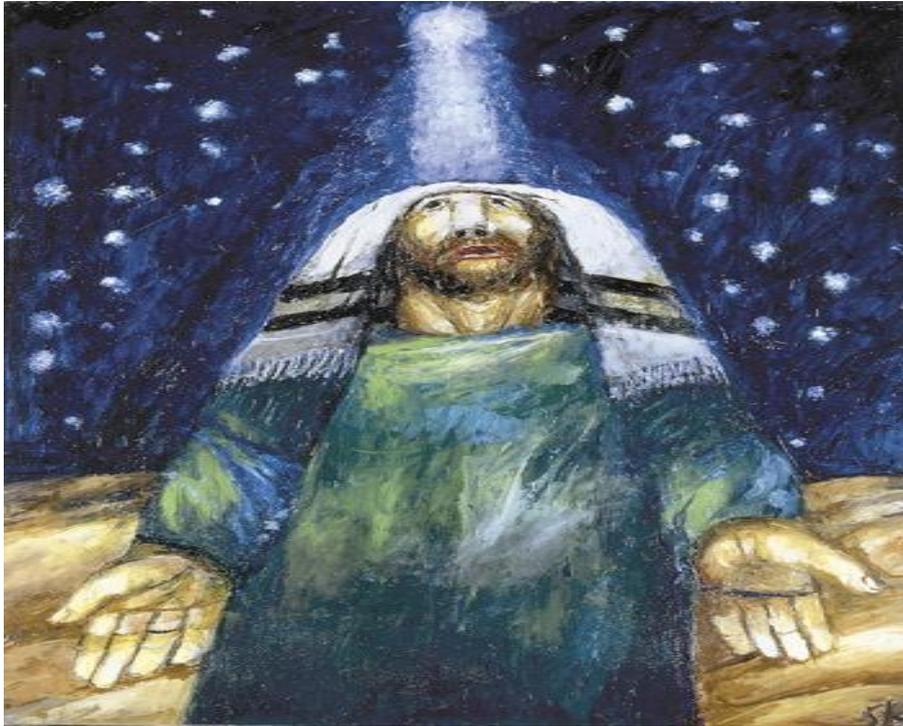


Like a Child at Rest

Stillness Exercises



'Covenant' *Sieger Koder*

One of the things that frequently gets in the way of prayer is a lack of quiet and stillness, inside and outside of myself. I can do something about outside noise: choose a quiet place, switch the phone off, pick a time when I am less likely to be disturbed. But what of interior stillness and silence? How do I stop my mind racing off in different directions, throwing up those distractions that come between me and God?

Taking a few minutes to try a stillness exercise as I start my prayer can be very helpful. Sometimes this may be a preparation for prayer. At other times, simply entering into a companionable silence with God may be all the prayer I want and need.

Awareness of My Breathing

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting on your lap.

Slowly let yourself become aware of the pattern of your own breathing. Notice whether it is deep or shallow, regular or irregular, through your mouth or your nose, or both.

Don't try and change or control your breathing. Just notice as you breathe in, and as you breathe out.

(If there is anything in this experience that bothers you, if your breath starts coming too fast, for example, gently leave this exercise aside and move to one of the other stillness exercises).

You may want simply to rest in the quietness that this awareness of breathing leads to. If, however, you want this exercise to develop into more explicit prayer, the following ideas may be helpful:

- As you breathe in, feel yourself drawing God's life-giving Spirit deep inside yourself, so that the Spirit fills the whole of your being.
- As you breathe out, release anything that would tend to separate you from God, or get in the way between yourself and God.

Awareness of My Body

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting on your lap.

Concentrate for a moment on becoming aware of the feel of your feet as they press into the floor. Notice the feel of the ground beneath them, any constriction of your footwear, the feel of your individual toes - you might need to wiggle them a little to do this!

Now let that point of awareness travel up your lower legs. Flex the muscles, and be aware of how this part of your body feels. Let any tension you find there relax and flow away.

Let that point of awareness move slowly round your body, gently travelling from one part to the next part of it. Notice the feeling in each place, and let any tension ebb away before moving on.

When your point of awareness has reached your head and face, and spent some time there, let it return to your feet, and slowly make the same journey again, releasing any tension initially overlooked, or that has built up since you last focussed there.

When this process feels it has reached a natural conclusion, let the point of awareness come to rest somewhere at the centre of yourself, and remain there quietly.

Awareness of Sounds

Start by sitting in a relaxed position, with your back straight, feet side by side on the floor, and your hands resting on your lap.

Take a few moments to focus on any sounds you can hear outside the room where you are sitting. Try to identify each, and for a moment to focus on that one alone.

Without trying to block out these sounds (let them be!) let your attention move inwards, to any sounds you can hear within the room where you are - the ticking of a clock, the hum of electrical appliances etc. For a few moments, let your attention be on these sounds.

Again, without blocking these out, let your point of attention take another step inwards, and be aware of all the 'noise' going on within yourself - the sound of your own breathing, or maybe an awareness of the rush of thoughts and feelings passing through your heart and mind.

Finally take one step further inwards, and let your awareness come to rest in some quiet, still place at the centre of yourself. Rest there, in the quiet, for as long as seems good to you.

'Keep my soul tranquil and quiet, like a child in its mother's arm.'

Psalm 131:2