



## Introduction

Grace and peace to you, dear reader, as you begin this journey with *Daily Christian Prayer* and learn again the power of contemplative and reflective daily meditation and prayer.

### **The Echo Within**

Deep within each of us we detect an echo, an inner voice that sounds in our hearts as we open ourselves to transcendence and prayer. Learning to hear that echo within us and respond to it helps us experience well-being and meaning. It's the road to

personal depth, a road that leads to authenticity and fulfillment. Inner peace and happiness result from us listening to that echo.

Pausing in a forest to hear the wind in the trees, to see the moss beneath our feet, and to allow ourselves to connect with the life in the woodland can bring this voice to the surface for us.

Likewise, savoring those moments spent with our beloved ones, with friends at dinner, or with companions in prayer in our faith community can arouse this echo within us.

Serving those who are abandoned or poor, working to end injustice and establish peace, or giving witness to the overwhelming power of love can also put us in touch with that inner echo.

Beyond that, freely forgiving those who offend us, going an extra mile when no one can see it, or changing the diaper of our partner as he ages and slips into dementia can lead to such a moment of grace.

Spending time each day in quiet contemplation of the mysteries around us—that forest, those friends, our faith community, the call to service—allows us to hear more clearly. Daily Christian Prayer is important because embedded in everything around us is a summons to love. It is a summons to the Holy One who is love. We cannot detect that summons unless we pause to hear.

We often pray by directing words toward the Holy One, but we rarely hear words returned to us in response. And yet, deep within us there emerges a conversation of intuitions, ideas, insights, and yes, my friends, a sort of inner voice passed back and forth between our heart and the divine heart of love. That inner and privileged place of prayerful conversation occurs as we pause throughout the day to be mindful of it, to check out our sense of divine Presence within us, and in a word, to pray.

Hence this book of prayer, designed to help us hear the echo within us and allow it to guide our lives on the road to depth, the road to the heart of the Holy One.

### **A delicate blend**

Just as fine wine is a delicate blend of a variety of grapes, these prayers are a delicate blend of ancient and modern forms of prayer. They are a wonderful form of meditation and centering prayer blended carefully together. They're *Lectio Divina*, but also, *Ignatian Discernment* and the *Examen*, sewn together like a quilt. They include elements of the Breviary—but the psalms and readings are shortened and reduced to one or two to allow time for silence and reflection. The long canticles usually prayed daily are moved to the appendix and made optional.

**Contemplative prayer** wants to be a slow, intentional, mindful journey with our inner divine companion. Therefore, dear reader, I encourage you not to rush through these prayers as if the goal is to reach the end. The goal of prayer such as this is to help us live in communion with the Holy by helping us interiorize or integrate the words of scripture and prayer into

our daily lives. To do this, we must slow down and pause. We must learn to listen.

In this way, the scripture here is not meant to be studied, but *to live in our hearts*. The passages—and even the psalms—are intentionally short. As you pray, pause frequently to re-read the psalms, scripture, and readings from other wisdom figures, and “chew” on them as *Lectio Divina* teaches us to do. What summons to love do you find in these words? Which phrase or image will you take away from this prayer to contemplate today? Ask yourself what gifts God is offering to you in these moments of prayer. To whom or what is God calling you?

### **Discernment**

Likewise, pause intentionally for the Ignatian Discernment. We speak of discernment in two ways. First, we become aware of and slowly come to understand the different “movements” within us. This allows us to receive the gifts that the Holy offers to us. It helps us know what will lead us toward the Holy One and to avoid what will lead us away from God. These movements within us may be feelings and emotions, ideas, daydreams, or intuitions.

Second, in discernment we slowly understand and make concrete decisions about how to respond to the world around us. We come to know what actions we are called to as we serve the poor, support each other, tend to the needs of the earth, or respond to politics or other outside forces. To what or whom is God calling us?

## **Naturally Ecumenical**

These prayers are naturally ecumenical because they belong to no religion. They simply invite everyone to encounter once again the mystery of the holy, indwelling, divine companion. One does not need to be religiously active to experience the intimacy of the Holy.

**Community Use.** If you use these prayers in community—and they were written with that use in mind—rotate readers with each stanza of the sense lines. They’re written to be prayed aloud so even if you are alone, consider speaking these words quietly as you pray. You may wish to add a closing line to Sacred Readings, such as “The Word of God living among us.” The community may answer, “Thanks be to God.” You may also wish to add other elements of prayer with which your community is comfortable.

## **Brevity in Prayer**

These prayers are brief. You may wish to add to these from your own store of inspiration: nature, art, and poetry; music, memories, and friends. As the poet Tim Dordell has put it, “We are fallible, inarticulate, and inartful in prayer, as in life. Recall your own intentions as you pray, whether silent or spoken only in the heart. Trust yourself, dear reader, because the bottom line is that God trusts and believes in and truly, infinitely loves you. And that remains true whether and how you pray—or not.”

That said, these prayers, over the course of three weeks, repeated afresh again and again, can provide a welcome

roadmap, leading to a closer connection with the Holy One and a doorway to unexpected gifts. Such repetition and your frequent reflective pauses—day in and day out—the psalms, discernment, prayers, *Lectio Divina*, nightly examen, and the prayer that Jesus taught us—all become a cadence, a sort of drumbeat in our lives. We find ourselves waking to prayer, sleeping in prayer, walking, talking, and seeing all of life through this lens.

### **Three-week cycle**

These prayers are presented in a three-week cycle. After the third week, simply return to Sunday Week 1 and begin again. Because the prayers will lead you to new insights each time you pause and pray, they will continue to be fresh as often as you use them.

### **The Name of the Holy**

We often refer to the Holy One as “God.” I grew up using that name for the Holy One, but I also know that the very word we use: “God,” carries with it an image of an ancient male deity sitting somewhere beyond the world, a bearded old man from medieval art. In this prayer book, therefore, I use the name “God” interchangeably with “Holy One” or simply, “the Holy” and I frequently use the name that Karl Rahner—an influential theologian of the last century—and Elizabeth Johnson—an influential theologian of this century—seemed to prefer: “*Holy Mystery*.” When I use the latter name for the Holy One, I italicize it in this text to emphasize that *Holy Mystery* is remarkably close to us and yet, still unknowable. A mystery of depth, not of misunderstanding.

Expanding on that name a little, the Earth is filled with generous gifts that we believe come to us from *Holy Mystery*. Speaking frankly, we do not understand the source of life, the genius within each cell of our bodies, how we connect with plants and animals, or the unfathomable universe beyond us. And yet, we believe that such *gracious* gifts, given freely to everyone, come to us from *Holy Mystery*. Hence, I prefer to speak of God as *Holy and Gracious Mystery*. And quite honestly, I usually whisper this name. It's that sacred. The Holy One is the utterly unknowable whose name I use with great humility and awe, deep reverence, and profound gratitude.

This *Holy Mystery of Love* is indeed the author of our very being, indeed of everything in existence. And yet, out of sheer love, the Holy One has chosen to live among us and speak with us in that inner place of prayer. Speak with us as a friend. There is likewise the almost-unbelievable Presence of Christ, *Holy Mystery Incarnate*, the anointed and beloved one of God, in whom the fullness of God does dwell. And there's more. This same *Holy Mystery* is also within as God gives God's own very self to us, not merely as a gift but as that deep element of our lives that constitutes who we are. Hence, we speak of *Holy Mystery Indwelling*, the source of wisdom and the wellspring of holiness.

For more on this, please see the companion volume to this prayer book, *Speaking of God*. This latter text is truly theology for the modern times—but it's in plain English. Like these prayers, it uses gender inclusive language for God and all of life and embraces diversity of belief and culture. It's ecumenical in tone and spirit and will leave you inspired and hopeful.

**About the author:**

Bill Huebsch is a husband, an author, a gardener, an advocate for the poor, and a bit of a monk. He did his grad work in pastoral theology at Catholic Theological Union of Chicago and has served on pastoral teams at the parish, diocesan, national, and international levels. He is a retired publisher and university professor and is deeply engaged with poor and abandoned children and families in Guatemala.

