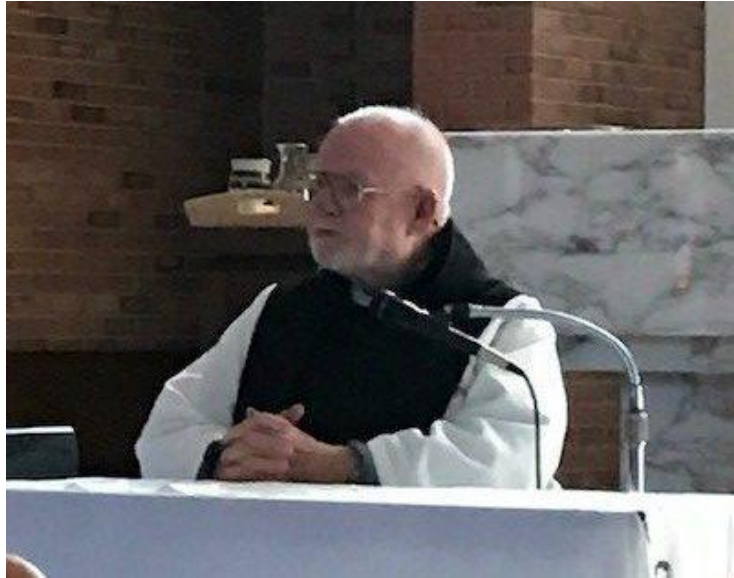


# ***Three Things I Learned: Reflections on the Cloud of Unknowing Retreat with Father William Meninger***

by Mary Haas / Originally published in Spirit Journal May 2017

In the months leading up to the retreat lead by Fr. William Meninger, I felt like a teenager about to see my favorite rock star in concert. With the amount of anticipation I was feeling, it would have been surprising if the experience had lived up to my expectations. And yet, with God, the weekend far exceeded them.

One of the first things Fr Meninger made clear was that everything we say about God is a lie (or at least a very inadequate half-truth). God is so much more than our words can even begin to express. I believe the same disclaimer is true about this article.



What I took away from the weekend is hopelessly colored by my own history, where I am currently in my spiritual journey, and the experiences I had that influenced my understanding of his words. I believe that if someone else were to describe the weekend, it might sound like a completely different weekend! I couldn't even attempt to relate everything I learned that weekend, so I will just describe the three things I learned during the weekend that were the most meaningful to me.

I learned quite a bit about the meaning and importance of contemplation. Fr Meninger said that when we go to God in centering prayer, we take all of humanity with us. And in that time, all of humanity grows a little closer to God. After each period of centering prayer, the world is different.

At the same time, he emphasized how little is required of us to complete this work. When our thoughts wander, and we are unaware of it, our hearts are still loving God. The only way to succeed at centering prayer is to do it, as long as we don't give up, we have succeeded in our mission to love God and bring all of humanity closer to him. The same is true no matter how often we are able to pray. He said if we are able to pray twenty minutes two times a day, that's wonderful. And if we are able to pray once a day, that's wonderful. And if we are able to pray once a week, that's wonderful, too.

Fr. Meninger also gave us a prayer for the rest of the day as well. He gave a lengthy introduction first, let us know that this prayer was one which would guarantee one safe passage through the spiritual journey. This prayer was one that could lead us through the most treacherous mountains and parched deserts that one encounters on the spiritual journey. The prayer?

I am nothing

I have nothing

I desire nothing

Except the love of Christ

All of these teachings were reinforced and impressed upon my mind as I saw them lived out by the other people attending the weekend with me. I met some incredible people, with amazing life experiences and profound things to say, just over breakfast. The circle of service for Contemplative Outreach Chicago was there, diligently working in the background, creating just the right conditions to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. Which brings me to the most amazing part of the weekend. That presence. I can't describe it, but I felt it, deep within my heart. God was there and he was working through and among his people. Though I know this is always true, the day of silence we observed on Saturday, and the people I was surrounded by helped tune my heart to notice and resonate with it.