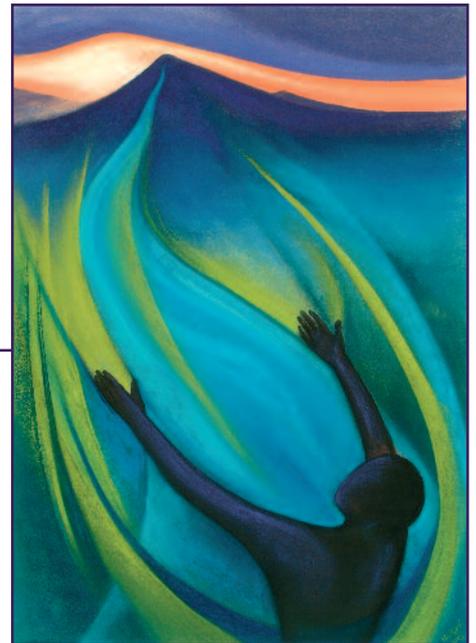


A Journey in Prayer

Text to accompany the DVD

<i>Images by</i>	Sr Mary Stephen CRSS
<i>Meditations by</i>	Sr Petra Boex OSB
<i>Running time</i>	45 minutes (approx.)
<i>Reference</i>	MBJIPDVD



Introduction

God is everywhere, in everything and all around us. He is the source of life flowing through all creation. The life-blood of the universe. Our modern civilized world, particularly has lost touch with this truth. We find it very difficult to leave behind all the worries and busy-ness of our lives, tending to rely on technology to solve everything and do not learn to look deeper than the surface of things. To discover that the whole fabric of creation is woven through with the thread of God's light, and that in the depth of our own being God dwells. This is what prayer is all about – a journey of discovery.

Prayer is the love relationship between us and our Creator, and like any love relationship it does not just happen. It has to be cultivated. We have to give time and energy to it. This is prayer.

According to the depth of our relationship with God and our different circumstances, our prayer will vary in its expression. The images that follow will show something of the depth and breadth of prayer, from listening and stillness, through suffering, to joy and praise. This life of prayer is a journey into the depths of the mystery which is God.

Sr Mary Stephen CRSS

“Give me, O God, ears to hear that the flute of the universe is played without ceasing, and its sound is love.”

Kabir

Longing

O God, you are my God, for you I long; for you my soul is thirsting.

Psalm 62 (63) v 1

I lift up my eyes to the mountains: from where shall come my help?

Psalm 120 (121) v 1

AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN rises above the Eastern hills, life and meaning return to the world. Dark shadows become a familiar landscape: a new day breaks. What will it bring? God is the daybreak of our lives and this landscape before us is unexplored country: the landscape of his love. We yearn to be filled with this love – and this yearning calls us to the adventure of Prayer.

See the stream of blue water flowing from the mountain heights, growing ever wider? This is God's love – the river of life – flooding the world. I seem to stand in this river, reaching out my hands in longing to know the God who created me and whose love keeps the world in existence.

See the ripples of light shining on the river? His light transforms all the fears and dark places in our hearts. *I am the light of the world*, said Jesus. We have no need to be afraid. As we begin our journey into prayer we are full of hope for God is faithful. The dawn, the river and the light promise us that.

At every moment I receive my life from his



hand. He is the meaning of all that I am and hope to be. So I hold out my arms to welcome God's love and life into the depths of my being.

LORD, we ask your blessing on our journey of prayer: open our hearts that we may be filled with your love and light.
Amen.

Open to God

My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.
Psalm 107 (108) vs 2

My soul is longing for the Lord, more than watchmen for daybreak.
Psalm 129 (130) vs 6

GREEN AND YELLOW are growth colours. They suggest Springtime, the awakening influence of sunshine, warmth and new birth. They are the colours of the Holy Spirit who awakens us to the awareness of God's presence. Then we long for God and turn towards his light.

To welcome God in prayer we need to put aside our everyday thoughts – our hopes and fears, our worries and dreams, our ambitions, however urgent. We surrender all to his light. It drinks up our fears, sweeps away our darkness. God's light enters into us, melting our resistance, warming our cold hearts, making us supple to do his will, energising us for his work: *Come Holy Spirit.*

My open hands and lifted face both say YES to the light of life. God's light meets and surrounds me like an embrace. My face is blank and empty. I do not know what my encounter with God will ask of me or where it will lead me. But I turn my face resolutely to his light for it is good: *Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart with the light of your love.*

COME, HOLY SPIRIT, fill our hearts and set us on fire with your love.
Free us from any selfishness that holds us back.
Grant us true freedom of spirit that we may follow you with generous hearts.
Amen.

A Burning Offering

A thanksgiving sacrifice I make; I will call on the Lord's name.

Psalm 115 (116) vs 17

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

Psalm 24 (25) vs 1

JESUS GAVE HIMSELF TOTALLY to doing the Father's will. There was no half-heartedness in him, no reservations. St Paul said that in him there was no Yes and No. His nature is *all YES*. (2 Cor:19). We are called to this through the life of prayer. Only commitment allows God to act in our lives.

When we stop hesitating and say 'yes' to God, then new horizons open before our eyes. We begin to recognise the workings of God's providence in small things as well as great.

When our whole being says 'yes' to God we experience a profound joy. With mind and heart we are in partnership with God, seeing everyone and everything through God's eyes. All things are grace and we know the whole universe is alive with God's love. In joy and love we offer all that we are in his service.

It is as though we are offering God a living flame of love. This flame is our whole being, the greatest gift we can give. Our flame of love makes our lives become a sacrifice of thanksgiving and we share that love with all that we meet.

LORD, you have given us the gift of life; grant that we may thank you making our lives an offering of love.

You are our God. May all our words and actions proclaim your goodness.
Amen.



Overwhelmed

I have entered the waters of the deep and the waves overwhelm me.

Psalm 68 (69) vs 3

Your torrents and waves swept over me.

Psalm 41 (42) vs 8

THEN THERE ARE TIMES when we are exhausted, overworked or ill – and the world seems a ruthless and relentless place. Daily duties seem unending; they pile up and suffocate us with their demands. We can feel that no one cares, no one wants to listen or help us, and our hearts become angry. We feel that we are being swamped by life.

At such times we cannot pray. Distracted and burdened by cares and responsibilities we can only worry and fret. When we try praying the time seems long and dreary. We feel God has forgotten us.

When I come before God burdened with the burden of living, I bow down low with my face in my hands as though I am being crushed by waves of sadness. I have only one prayer: *Help me Lord!* No other words are needed. My body prays for me – says what I cannot put into words. My whole being asks the Lord to have mercy on me. Then I know I am in God's hands. He is with me.

God is in our exhaustion and despair. If we rest in him then gradually we will begin to unwind. Our scattered thoughts will calm down and his peace will enter our hearts.

We shall have the strength to rise up and start again. We might need to make changes in our lives – he will show us the way if we trust ourselves to him.

LORD, grant us faith to believe you are with us at all times, for even when you seem far away you are with us and upholding us.

We ask for the grace to entrust ourselves to your care with peaceful hearts.

Amen.

The Depths of Distress

Listen to my cry for I am in the depths of distress... Bring my soul out of this prison.

Psalm 141 (142) vs 8 - 9

Out of the depths I cry for you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice.

Psalm 129 (130) vs 1

SUFFERING CAN CLOSE US IN on ourselves. Physical pain can make us feel imprisoned by the aches of our bodies, and mental suffering can trap us in thoughts that go round and round, getting blacker at every turn. Then our world can seem to close in like a concentration camp. At times like this the humiliations we experience, the bitter memories that will not let us go seem to cage us in as if they are barbed fences; and the barbs bite deeper the more we struggle with our pain.

We have reached the end of our own resources – with our whole being we cry out to God for help. *Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice.*

Then it is as if we see the light of his presence like searchlight beams in the darkness. But these beams shine through the dark to heal us. Now we know that we shall find a way through our suffering.

His presence will light up the way. Perhaps, if we are patient, he will teach us the inner meaning of our pain. Then we might discover it brings us a blessing we had never dreamed possible.

Jesus died on the cross for love of us. That is his pledge that he does not abandon us when we are in darkness. Knowing how much he loves us we pray that his light may heal us when we are in darkness. Knowing how much he loves us we pray that his light may heal us so that our suffering opens us up, giving us generous compassionate hearts. May it teach us to pray in union with all who are imprisoned unjustly, with all who suffer persecution, with all trapped in mental illness. May our suffering be a way of growth by which we become more like Jesus in love.

LORD, bless and uphold all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Grant us patience in suffering and the grace to grow in compassion.

We ask this through your sacrifice on the cross.

Amen.



Agonised Pleading

My heart is stricken within me, death's terror is on me, trembling and fear fall upon me and horror overwhelms me.

Psalm 54 (55) vs 5-6

Lord my God, I call for help by day; I cry at night before you.

Psalm 87 (88) vs 2

WE ARE IN ANGUISH when great suffering meets us and our world seems in ruins. Perhaps a personal loss or bereavement seems more than we can bear. Or we must cope with the consequences of a serious mistake. Perhaps a loved one has been diagnosed with a debilitating or terminal illness. Or we have to face our own aging and death.

The world news can fill us with grief and near despair. Day after day we are faced with brutal images of war: buildings in flames, thoughts of innocent lives destroyed. Or the scale of natural disasters seems overwhelming. *Why?* we ask. *Where is God in this?* At such times my whole body is a prayer of distress: my hands clenched, my head raised in pleading for help from God.

In times of anguish we are in company with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. There, terrified of the pain of crucifixion he knew he must undergo he pleaded in agony to his Father for another way: *My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me!* (Matthew 26:39). Three times he pleaded and three times surrendered his will: *But let your will not mine be done* (Matthew 26:39).

When suffering seems unendurable we can pray to enter the mystery of pain with him. It strengthens us to know he has been there too. He has even entered the darkness of death and come through.

In the depths of my prayer I experience a strange truth. I become aware that if I could only fathom the depths of God's love I would know he is there in the darkness as much as in the light. So I cry out to God in company with Jesus. I pray for the faith and courage I need. Then in my own life I come to understand that the Agony in the Garden is the first step on the way to Easter morning. When I go through suffering with God he opens my heart to this secret.

LORD, grant us to enter into the mystery of suffering with you. May we be full of faith and plead with you for all who are in distress. May we be patient in our own times of suffering, trusting ourselves to your saving love.
Amen.

Sorrow and Forgiveness

The Lord is compassion and love, slow to anger and rich in mercy... as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our sins.

Psalm 102 (103) vs 8 & 11

Have mercy on me, O God, in your faithful love, in your great kindness wipe away my offence.

Psalm 50 (51) vs 1

GOD KNOWS US as we truly are. He loves us and wants to bring us into his light. This means growth for us, so in prayer he will gradually help us to recognise the darkness that is mixed with the goodness within us. It hurts our pride to see it. We will see how selfish we can be, how spiteful, unloving and bad tempered. We will remember times we have behaved very badly. And sometimes our hearts will seem to stop with shame. Sometimes we will be in tears. Sometimes we will simply know we need to ask to start again.

We know we cannot blot out our past and forgive our own sins. Only the Lord can wipe them away. So we turn to him - and find he is full of mercy.

Look - I am bowed down in sorrow - even my clothing is dark as if I am hiding away. He does not want me stuck in my grief. So it is as if he reaches out his hand and touches me firmly and gently on my shoulder. The touch says: *Do not be afraid... do not be discouraged. I died on the cross for you. I forgive you all your sins. I will make them a way of growth for you. Through your sins you will know how frail you are. However many times you come to me I will not send you away. Through my forgiveness you will become gentler, kinder, compassionate. You will become more like me. Then you will know I am full of mercy.*

This is a moment of grace. The light comes back into our lives. We see the way ahead like a clear road and go on our way rejoicing.

DEAR LORD, forgive us our sins through your great love. Grant us gentle and forgiving hearts so that we may forgive as you have forgiven us. Teach us to put all our trust in your mercy and love.
Amen.



Darkness

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me... My God I call by day but you do not answer, at night I find no respite.

Psalm 21 (22) vs 1, 2

Darkness is not dark for you and the night is as clear as the day... To me how mysterious your thoughts...

Psalm 138 (139) vs 12 & 17

WHERE AM I?

It seems I am in a desert place, walking into the darkness. One more moment and I shall be swallowed up into the night. I am unsteady and afraid, arms reaching out to feel my way. I am tempted to turn and run back into the light.

There are times in the life of prayer when God calls us into the darkness of the unknown.

There we encounter our deepest fears. Fears of loss, of helplessness, rejection, fear of dying.

It seems the light has gone out of our lives or we can have the sense of being abandoned in prayer: God is no longer there.

At such times perseverance in prayer is like standing in the dark, simply holding out and waiting for daybreak. Although they are so lonely, these are times of growth, if we persevere.

God is there in the dark. But it takes us time to recognise him. Only faith allows us to do this.

Without faith we become bitter and shrivelled by the hard things of life. With faith we enter the darkness like swimmers going into deep waters in the dark. Swimmers trust the waves to hold them up. We trust that God is with us even when we cannot feel his presence.

Look carefully and you will see a distant horizon, almost one with the dark. It is a sign that God never abandons us and that on the other side of darkness there is light.

WE PRAY for all who are experiencing a time of darkness; that they may never despair of the light: And that when we walk in darkness we may persevere in faith, trusting in your presence.

Amen.

Trust

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Deuteronomy 33 v 27

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High and abides in the shade of the Almighty, says to the Lord: My refuge, my stronghold, my God in whom I trust.

Psalm 90 (91) vs 1 & 2

WE ARE ALL PILGRIMS on the journey of life with no idea what the next step will bring us. We hope for sunshine and Spring flowers but sometimes find ourselves on a rocky precipice. We must keep walking, no matter what!

Our traveller is on a high and narrow precipice with no destination in view. All he can see is a strip of rocky desert road with sheer sides dropping perilously to the sea. So the only way ahead is forward. There are no trees, no signposts. Just the road leading to the source of the sunlight. Our traveller walks with steady step, attentive to the light ahead. He keeps a central and safe path along the precipice. He has no surplus baggage and his stick tests out the rough places ahead and prevents him from falling.

He is each one of us when we pause and look at ourselves as we really are. Like our traveller we stand in a small area of light on a short stretch of road. We too are vulnerable but valiant, and we are on our way towards God.

This is the road of faith and trust. Our traveller's path is lit by the blazing sunshine of God's presence yet all he sees is the patch of shade he walks in. And when he looks at the foot of the mountain he sees only the ocean; but we see that the precipice is held in the hand of God.

Hidden from our eyes, the Lord watches over us on every stretch of our journey. We can never fall out of the hand of God. We are God's pilgrims, infinitely loved.

LORD, we believe that wherever we are, and whatever befalls us you are with us and will never forsake us.

Amen.



Listening

Truly I have set my soul in silence and peace.

Psalm 130 (131) vs 2

In quietness and trust shall your strength be.

Isaiah 30 vs 15

TO FIND THE PATH we are called to travel, and to follow it through thick and thin, we must learn to listen to God. We must become attentive in the depths of our hearts. We need to make space for him in our busy lives and find a quiet place where we can sit still and wait on his presence. This is especially so when we take up the Scriptures seeking to find him in his Word.

We become like Mary who sat at Christ's feet and listened to his word. Her sister Martha busied herself with preparing food for the Lord but Mary sat at his feet, listening with all her mind and heart, unaware of the bustle around her. She gave him the welcome of an undivided heart.

When Mary listened she heard God's Wisdom speaking through Christ's human words to her spirit. It is the same for us when we take up the Scriptures. We turn our hearts and minds to God alone, reading slowly, quietly, receptively. We pause for times of silence and prayer. We are alert to hear the Holy Word he speaks in our hearts.

His word is alive and active, full of creative power. When we truly listen it remains within us, abiding in us, so that we live in God's presence at all times. Hidden in our hearts it will shape us ever more in his image and likeness. His word will be our peace and our guide, our strength and consolation.

LORD, teach us to be still and attentive in prayer. May we hear you speaking to us in the Scriptures, and live your word generously in our lives.

Amen.

Pleading

Listen to my prayer, turn your ear to my appeal.

Psalm 142 (143) vs 1

In your great love answer me, O God, with your help that never fails.

Psalm 68 (69) vs 14

PRAYER EXPANDS MY HORIZONS. When I pray I am lifting up my life and the world to God. I am not escaping into a dream existence, but seeking to see everything and everyone through God's eyes.

The prayer of petition, of asking, is an essential part of prayer. It is a prayer ever expanding outwards. I plead with God for my own needs, for the needs of my family and friends. I plead for countries and peoples suffering famine and poverty. I pray for the great needs of the world – for the preservation of planet Earth. I kneel, arms outstretched, my face turned in trust towards God, offering up my petitions very simply and openly.

Petition made in faith is always answered. But God's ways are not our ways and his answer may not come in the way I expect. When I offer my prayer to God, I must be open to receive the answer he gives as the very best for me and those I pray for.

Ask, Jesus tells us, and you will receive (Luke 11:9). He told us to turn to God as to a loving Father. So my pleading will be humble and trusting. I will ask for the faith and love that leads me in his way. The light towards which I turn is a golden path between us. When I pray in loving concern I am holding all I pray for in the path of God's love and light. What is there to fear?

LORD, you have commanded us to pray for our needs with great confidence and faith.

May we pray with thankful hearts, knowing you will hear and answer us according to your love.

Amen.



Rejoicing

Cry out with joy to God all the earth.

Psalm 99 (100) vs 1

Rejoice in the Lord, exult in his presence.

Psalm 67 (68) vs 5b

WHEN MY HEART REJOICES in God my prayer is full of praise. I am in communion with his goodness. My praise may be silent, but my heart will be full to overflowing with gladness. This is one of the most self-less ways of prayer, for I forget myself through my rejoicing.

Here I rejoice in the Lord with the freedom of a child of God. I feel myself in harmony with God and with the whole of creation.

So, as I raise up my hands in thanksgiving, the rhythm of my movement echoes the rhythms of life and divine love within me and surrounding me. In the depth of my being I know that I am loved by God with an eternal love. He revealed this through his Son, Jesus Christ, who *loved me and gave his life for me* (Galatians 2:20). Nothing can destroy this love unless I turn my back on it. I receive the love gladly, rejoicing that I share the divine life through him.

This is a moment of profound joy. With heart and mind I am in partnership with God, seeing everyone and everything through God's eyes. All things are grace and I know the whole universe is alive with God's love. In joy and love I offer all that I am in his service.

LORD, I thank you for your gift of love which fills the universe, and for Jesus who reveals your love to me.

Almighty God and Saviour, grant that I may share the joy of your presence with those I meet.
Amen.

Our Gift to God

Let my prayer come before you like incense, the raising of my hands like an evening oblation.

Psalm 140 (141) vs2)

My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.

Psalm 107 (108) vs2

IN ANCIENT TIMES men offered God the sacrifice of living creatures; lambs, goats, bulls, as their best gift. Then Jesus Christ offered the sacrifice of his life *once and for all* (Hebrews 10:12) for the forgiveness of sins. No gift could be greater. Since then our best prayer to God is a sacrifice of praise.

Hands held together and uplifted as they bear a gift are a beautiful and universal symbol of offering: nothing is held back, all is joyfully given.

In prayer the offering I give is myself. Because my gift is freely given it is like a ball of fire alight in my hands. It is also like a beating heart because it is my deepest, truest self. It glows with light and fire because it is also the world I lift up to God in prayer with all its hope and pain.

With this offering I say with Jesus, *Here I am, Lord*. I offer myself, my actions, my sufferings back to God, my Creator. With this offering I say *I am yours. I come to do your will* (Psalm 39 (40) vs 8-9). I make this offering with great trust, for I am a child of God, giving myself in the service of my loving Father. It is the most precious gift I can offer, and I give it joyfully.

LORD, my Creator and Redeemer, I offer myself to you in love and service. May my offering be pleasing to you and bear fruit for the world.
Amen.



Praise

*Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before
him singing for joy.*

Psalm 99 (100) vs1

*O peoples bless our God, let the voice of his
praise resound, of the God who gave life to
our souls.*

Psalm 65 (66) vs 8 & 9

What really matters is that we should live our lives well, becoming ripe and whole like grains of wheat after long Summer sunshine. They have absorbed the warmth and light and are full of goodness.

Here the glory of God shines on us like a flood of golden light. Its rays reach out and touch us. God's love is endlessly giving. He loves each one of us uniquely with an everlasting love.

When we drink in God's wonderful love we long to praise and love him in return.

Praising God makes us fully alive. We become so full of joy that our whole being, mind, body and spirit, seems to be dancing in praise.

God's love awakens our love and we grow to be like him. When we love we are fully alive and we give to others. The more generously we give, the more God's love fills our hearts making them even more generous for his sake. Our love and compassion breaks down the barriers within us that fear has built up. We love not only our family and friends, but all we meet: the stranger, the poverty stricken, the refugee, the sick, the prisoner. All of God's little ones find a place in our hearts. We share in God's goodness and are filled with his praise.

LORD, may we never cease to praise you and may our praise flow out to others in word and deed.

Amen.

Stillness

*In you is the source of life and in your light
we see light.*

Psalm 35 (36) vs9

Be still and know that I am God.

Psalm 45 (46) vs11

DURING HIS MINISTRY of healing and teaching, Jesus often went away alone to pray. Sometimes he would pray all night in deep communion with God. The silence between them was filled with God's love and gave him strength. He taught his disciples to pray always.

As our prayer grows deeper so will we long for times of stillness and silence. In prayer we enter the silence where no words are needed. The deepest longing of our hearts is satisfied because we are at rest in God. The language God understands best, says St. John of the Cross, is the silent language of love.

In our first meditation on prayer we saw ourselves taken into the river of life which is God's love. Now, in the silence of prayer we will find that river of love rising in our hearts.

In this silence of the heart we understand – without words – how we are loved with a great love that has no beginning or end. It simply is. God's love is his eternal being. As we sit in prayer, attentive to his presence, we are aware of God's love surrounding us like golden light.

Our whole being receives this love so that we dwell in God and he dwells in us. Our whole being becomes centred in our heart: it is a holy place because God dwells here in the depths of our being. There, in silence, he speaks his eternal word. He is our inner life and that life will become ever more manifest in us. Day by day through prayer he becomes the light in our hearts, the light of our lives, the light of the world.

LORD, we thank you for the gift of prayer.

May we always be open to receive your light; and may it so grow in our hearts that in all our comings and goings in this busy world we may carry your presence to all we meet.

Amen.