You, darkness of whom I am born –
I love you more than the flame
that limits the world to the circle it illumines
and excludes all the rest.
But the darkness embraces everything.²

Gregory of Nyssa, fourth century mystic
and bishop, reflecting upon the ascent of
Moses up Mount Sinai notes the journey began
with light from the burning bush, then God
spoke to him as in a cloud. Further on, Moses
saw God in the darkness. He went beyond
the visible into the dark where the light of
understanding – does not reach.³

In the 20th century, Bede Griffiths, OSB, when
speaking about how one comes closer to God,
would often say, “I know of no other way to
God except through the darkness.” We have
only to recall from The Cloud of Unknowing
and John of the Cross’ Dark Night of the Soul,
that the soul’s journey is often into silence, stillness,
and darkness. As one prays, surrenders and
befriends the darkness, grace glistens as light
upon the dark.

Guidance and insight also come from Psalm
139:12: “even the darkness is not dark to you,
and the night is as bright as the day. Darkness
and light are the same to you.”

The word darkness, however, in the New
Testament is most often equated with sin,
Satan, evil, selfishness, something to be feared,
and clearly not of God. We read: “God is light
in Him there is no darkness at all.” (Jn 1:5)
“For he rescued us from the domain of darkness.”
(Col 1:13) “For you were formerly darkness,
now walk as a child of light.” (Eph 5:8) “Then
watch out that the light in you is not darkness.”
(Lk 11:35)

Yet, are there not times when you have known
a darkness or loneliness of body and spirit, a
fear of not being good enough, feeling scared,
or far away from God? You may even have
judged yourself harshly and wondered if there
is any goodness in you. In such moments,
believe with all your heart that you, just as you
are, can give yourself to the loving embrace of
Divine Darkness.

Share your thoughts with a friend or chaplain.

¹Cathedral Altar Inscription, Salerno, Italy, 11th century
²The Night, Rainer Maria Rilke
³Dazzling Darkness: The Mystical or Theophanic Theology of St Gregory of Nyssa,
Philip Kariatlis. www.academia.edu/2016792/Dazzling_Darkness_The
Mystical_or_Theophanic_Theology_of_St_Gregory_of_Nyssa, p. 103,
CONTEMPLATIVE SITTING: HELPFUL GUIDELINES

At the heart of contemplation is the awakening to the presence of God in the human heart and in the universe. A community gathered in contemplative sitting is grace flowing for the community, for the church, and for the world.

To begin a contemplative sitting or meditation practice, you may find it helpful to:

• Find a space that calls you into quiet (light a candle or play a chant if it aids stillness).
• Set a specific time for your sitting: 5, 10, 20, or 30 minutes.
• Set an intention for the session, dedicating it to a situation, a person, or a quality needed to grow in our world, such as truth, justice, peace, forgiveness, or courage.
• Become aware of your whole body as you enter into the silence; follow its rising and falling as you breathe in and out. You may wish to say In as you breathe in and Out as you breathe out, or repeat a mantra, such as “Holy One” – breathing in Holy and breathing out One – or “Maranatha” (Aramaic for “Come Jesus”).
• Gently note each time your mind begins thinking or feeling or planning – and gently bring attention back to your breath or mantra.
• Give gratitude to yourself for the time you dedicated to contemplative sitting.

It is important to remember that contemplative sitting is not about achieving a particular feeling or experience. It is simply sitting in God’s loving presence, coming into present moment, calming the mind by following your breath in and out or repeating your mantra. Contemplative sitting is an encounter with God in the midst of our daily lives.

— Esther Kennedy, OP

Esther conducts a monthly Day of Mindfulness at Weber Center.