

*The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*, by Joan Chittister (BlueBridge 2011, 224 pp.)

Joan Chittister is a well-known Benedictine speaker and writer from Erie, Pennsylvania. If you do an Internet search with her name, you will discover that she is an amazing woman who has written an impressive number of serious books.

This particular book of hers, which is probably intended for the loose network of people who wish to establish “monasteries of the heart,” is a delightful introduction to contemporary Benedictine spirituality. As such, it reflects the same spiritual journey we find ourselves on as we commit ourselves to the practice of Centering Prayer.

Rather than presenting the Rule of Benedict as ‘information’ to be explained, Joan Chittister engages the reader by being both lyrical and passionate, by speaking of profound matters with loving conviction. The whole book is written in thought units, which invites slow, thoughtful reading. Here is an example from the chapter on Silence:

Silence is the mother  
of the Spirit.  
It births in us  
the cloister of the heart.  
It brings us beyond the noise  
of chaos and clutter and confusion  
of a spinning world  
to the cool, calm center  
of the spiritual self.

Silence enables us to rest in that center,  
to allow God to work in us there,  
to clear from our hearts  
whatever thoughts or pain,  
desires or demands,  
clamor within us for puerile attention  
and so take us away from our best selves.

You can find this book in the “Spiritual Life” section of the Contemplative Outreach Library (Keane Library) at Grace Episcopal Church, in Kirkwood, Missouri. There are two copies, one belonging to the Keane Library, the other to Contemplative Outreach. Check it out!