

Walking the Labyrinth in Prayer, March 11-17

Each Lent at St. Agnes parish, we are blessed with the opportunity to take part in a meditative prayer from the Middle Ages, walking the path of a labyrinth, painted on a large piece of canvas.



The cloth labyrinth is a copy of the tiled floor of the Cathedral in Chartres, France, which dates back to the 12th century. Labyrinth practice quiets the body and mind so that you can listen more easily and relate more deeply with yourself and God.

Meditative prayer with the Labyrinth is available in Kemp Hall on these days and times:

Friday, March 11, 3-9 p.m.

Saturday, March 12, 8 a.m. – 9 p.m.

Sunday, March 13, 12 Noon – 9 p.m.

Monday- Thursday (March 14-17) 3 -9 p.m.

Practical Guides for Walking the Labyrinth:

- * Please remove your shoes to walk the labyrinth. However, if you need shoes for support in walking keep them on. It is far more important to experience walking the labyrinth than to remove your shoes.
- * Walk around the outside of the circle in preparation.
- * As you walk, find your pace.
- * Become mindful; become conscious of your breath.
- * Before entering, bow or pray.
- * When you meet someone along the path:
 - Either pass them or allow them to pass, as needed;
 - If you wish to maintain an inward meditative state, simply avoid eye contact;
 - If appropriate to your relationship, you may wish to offer a hug or a touch of the hand in acknowledgement/affirmation.

- * After walking the labyrinth, take time to reflect: write about or draw pictures of any insights, images, dreams, hopes, or commitments which sprang from the experience.
- * Before leaving, please sign the guest book, leaving a brief description of what the experience was like for you.

Here are several lists of suggestions for a prayerful labyrinth walk:

1. Before you begin, decide why you are going to walk. Focus. (You may use one of the suggestions below.)
2. Stand before the entrance and pray, dedicating the walk.
3. Move into the pattern. The path you are on leads to the center. Trust. Go at any pace (fast or slow) that seems comfortable. Notice what is happening around you and make it part of your walk. If you get turned around, you will either end up in the center or at the entrance/exit. Wherever you find yourself, continue from there. You can always leave the labyrinth if you want to.
4. When you get to the center, rest. Reflect on what has happened so far, or simply tune in to what you are sensing. Don't hurry away.
5. When you are ready, take the pathway back out. You may wish to continue with what has started, or consider how to integrate what it means into your life.
6. When you reach the threshold, give thanks for whatever your experience has been.
7. After moving off the pattern, reflect on what happened. You may want to write down your thoughts and feelings, or creatively express them in another way (drawing, movement, etc.).

Walking the Labyrinth: A Contemplative Journey

Many of us have trouble quieting our minds. When the mind is quiet, we feel peaceful and open, aware of a silence that embraces the universe.

Complete quiet in the mind is not a realistic goal for most of us. Instead, a more realistic goal is to try and let go of the thoughts that go through our minds, and dis-engage ourselves from them as they flow through. Thomas Keating, a Cistercian monk, describes the mind as a still lake. A thought is like a fish swimming through. If we get involved with the fish ("Gee, what an unusual fish! I wonder what it's called?"), then we are "hooked". The task in contemplation is to not get hooked, to let that thought swim on by.

In the labyrinth, the sheer act of walking a complex, attention-demanding path begins to focus the mind. Thoughts on what we are going to prepare for dinner or what our next deadline is become less intrusive. A quiet mind will not happen automatically. We must gently guide the mind with the intention of letting go of extraneous thoughts. This is much easier to do when our whole body is moving ---when we are walking. As the mind surrenders to the winding path, the soul finds healing and wholeness.

"Solvitur ambulando..." It is solved by walking... St. Augustine

The purpose of all spiritual disciplines – prayer, fasting, contemplation – is to help create in us an open attention so that we can receive and renew our awareness of our grounding and wholeness in God.

The labyrinth walk is a process of contemplation. The three parts of the walk are parallel to the threefold mystical path: Purgation, Illumination, and Union.

Purgation: The walk from the entrance to the center represents the letting go of what blocks the Divine.

Illumination: The center is where the walker is invited to be fully present to the moment and to pause, open to receive from the Divine.

Union: As the walker leaves the center and begins the journey back out the same path, the gift or insight gained is integrated for use on the journey beyond the labyrinth.

Other Ways to Walk the Labyrinth:

There are as many ways of walking the labyrinth as there are walkers.

Gracious Attention: Quiet the mind, choosing to let all thoughts go when they present themselves in your awareness. Allow a gracious sense of attention to flow through you. Be still and rest.

Ask a Question: Most of us carry questions subliminally. Even if we don't realize it, we are searching for clues to life's mysteries. Try to bring these questions into your conscious mind. Focus on a question that you may have been asking yourself for a long time. Walk with a listening heart.

Use of Repetition: Repeating a significant word, mantra, or phrase over and over can help a person focus or reach a state of peacefulness.

Honor a Benchmark: A birthday, a change in life, an anniversary, a memorial can be the focus of your walk.

Reading Scripture: Traditionally in Christianity, the Scriptures and spiritual reading are ways of getting to know God. Choose a Scripture story as your focus before you begin walking, or read the Scriptures silently as you walk.

Asking for Help through Prayer: Bring to mind persons, issues or situations for which you wish to pray for. If something is weighing heavily on your mind and heart, the labyrinth can give you enormous support. Ask for what you need. To ask is to humbly seek God's nurturing care.

Body Prayer: Move spontaneously as your body is prompted by your feelings and by the Holy Spirit. Dance the path. Move your arms and legs; bend and sway.