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The Taizé Community: Music and Prayer

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Illuminated Journeys

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Prayer at Taizé

From the depths of the human condition a secret aspiration rises up. Caught up in the anonymous rhythms of schedules and timetables, men and women of toady are implicitly thirsting for the one essential reality: an inner life, signs of the invisible.

Nothing is more conducive to a communion with the living God than a meditative common prayer with, as its high point, singing that never ends and that continues in the silence of one's heart when one is alone again. When the mystery of God becomes tangible through the simple beauty of symbols, when it is not smothered by too many words, then a common prayer, far from exuding monotony and boredom, awakens us to heaven's joy on earth.

Prayer is a serene force at work within human beings, stirring them up, transforming them, never allowing them to close their eyes in the face of evil, of wars, of all that threatens the weak of this world. From it we draw the energy to wage other struggles—to enable our loved ones to survive, to transform the human condition, to make the earth a place fit to live in.

Wherever you are on earth, in your heart of your heart: do you sense within you, even fleetingly, the silent longing for a presence?

Would you only love those who love you? Almost anybody can do that, with no need for the Gospel. But Christ calls you to love even those who hurt you and to pray for them.

Prayer takes us by surprise: even if all kinds of contradictions and doubts are still there, a longing comes to light, and the silence reveals a peace close at hand...It sets the heart free and releases a surge of new life.

Brother Roger of Taizé

There's really very little of a "Taizé model" for prayer. There are elements that we feel are very important. Prayer is meditative. It's scriptural. It's christocentric. It's prayer in the Spirit. It's trinitarian. It's God-centered. But the form of prayer needs to change in response to the needs of the people.

At the same time, it can be a big help for people to see that there is a structure to prayer: the Psalms at the beginning, scriptures, prayer intentions, the Lord's Prayer, a blessing. It is a traditional structure, based on the ancient Christian prayer of the hours. And we've found over the years that singing and silence are two fundamentals of prayer. It's not that spoken prayer is unimportant. But the spoken word can be a little bit cerebral. There's a fullness to sung prayer, an element of wholeness.

It's impossible to imagine a time of prayer at Taizé without that long moment of silence in the middle. It's a time of listening, a time to leave things before God, a time to be before God, to have one's soul open for God.

Brother Jean Marie