

**"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind. Amen."**

**This is a centering prayer which Hilary taught us. Centering prayers quiet us in God's presence; that is, they direct us to attend to how things are, not how we want or imagine them to be.**

**Mary C. Richards, the artist, compared centering to making a clay pot. You work the ball of clay until it is warm and soft. You work around it and push into the top of it and as the wheel spins, a column rises between your hands. One hand shapes the outside while the other explores the inside. The outward and inward journeys are both on the same infolded surface. It's also the way an embryo develops. A single cell becomes a berry of many cells, then hollows itself, lengthens into a tube, and wraps around the environment. The outside becomes the inside. This is how things are. Humans develop in the same way as other animals. We share the ancient evolutionary inward and outward journeys of all creatures. But when the clay pot goes off the center of the wheel, it collapses. Any vase is the result of many transformations on the wheel of creation and destruction. So is any species.**

**In worship, we use liturgy, hymns, readings and prayers to nudge ourselves back into the quiet center of the spinning wheel of creation and destruction.**

**The centering prayer begins, "Lord, grant us pardon . . ." The word "grant" is peculiar. Are we asking God for a favor? It's like other words we use: "Incline thine ear," "Hear us, O Lord," "Look down upon thy servant," "Kum bay yah." These words seem to be addressed to someone who is inattentive and frequently absent, but this is not what we believe about God. We sing, "thou are giving and forgiving, ever-blessing, ever-blessed/ Well-spring of the joy of living . . ." So why would we be asking for a gift that we have already received? I think that the word "grant" is a centering word. It is we who are inattentive and frequently absent from relationships. We seek to be nudged back into the right relationship with creator and creation.**

**And we ask for pardon because Christ taught us to petition God. He said to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven . . ." And in those few words he provided the right orientation for us. If humans spoke differential equations to each other, Jesus would have given a different kind of prayer. But what humans know is the family. They understand family relationships. So Jesus tells us to pray as if we were infants crying for a parent. The infant does not know the meaning of the universe or of existence; it does not understand suffering or what is in the parent's mind or even know a language. What it does understand is its helplessness and dependence on the parent. And this is our centered framework of relationship with the unnameable, holy ground of**

being and deep integrity of all that is: We are in a family relationship with the creator and the creation, dependent on the creator and interdependent with the creation. Pope Francis has recently said that we are not stewards of the Earth but brothers and sisters with the Earth. We are not lords and masters of creation, but elder brothers and sisters. Ray Bradbury once referred to us as "the emissaries of consciousness in the universe."

So when we ask for pardon we are centering ourselves on the pardon that has already been given, the eternal resurrection that releases all creation for abundant life. Pardon is all that frees and releases the creatures to praise God by their full existence, the "sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost," the hawk rising on a thermal, the tree spreading its crown of leaves in the sun, the cloud of marine larvae of oysters, clams, crabs and copepods riding a wedge of ocean water into the Bay to begin their journeys to adulthood. Pardon is the release of joy we feel in creative engagement and sustained attention when we do the work we are suited to do. This is the abundant life of how things are.

"Lord grant us pardon and peace . . ." After the resurrection, the disciples went upstairs to a familiar room, shut the door, and locked themselves in. We like to lock ourselves away from fear, risk, threat, the other, and from strange challenges. Once locked in, we pursue our personal journeys without concern for consequences, costs and externalities. In these gated communities of the heart we can believe whatever we want, but our world is off-center and collapsing because it's not how things are. It's just something we built. Our locked door hangs in the last standing wall of a demolished building. Paul said that Christ's peace forever changed the divisions of humanity. He made a new humanity, unified in his body.

Just as the members of a loving family work through problems together, reciprocate, and avoid violence, so the family of creation is sustained by reverence for life, life-fostering concern, and giving without expectation of reward. However much we trap ourselves behind negligence, violence, grudges, and greed, Christ comes through locked doors bringing peace. It's how things are.

"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we may be cleansed of our sins. . ." Sin is separation from the creator and creation. It's not how things are because we know that the Christ who was, and is, and is to come showed us a different way. After Peter's dream of the unclean foods, he undoubtedly recalled how many lepers, foreigners, beggars, thieves, and assorted other unsavory characters Jesus had touched. "What God has called clean, do not call unclean." Peter was not separate. Neither are we. We imagine ourselves as free agents un beholden to any, but we are interdependent with all creation, sharing the inward and outward journeys of all living things and of the Earth

**itself. All are transformed together on the wheel of creation and destruction. We align with the center of how things are or we collapse and fly off the wheel. "Cleansing" is a centering word. It directs us to Christ's forgiveness that is always available. Repentance is turning away from delusion to forgiveness. Albert Einstein once said that humans' belief that they were separate from nature was the great "self-delusion" that religions must change. It's simply not how things are. We are not separate. What is done to the least of us--the crowds in Bangladesh, the forests of Brazil, the Great Barrier reef of Australia, or the fisheries of our continental shelves--is done to Christ.**

**"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee . . ." In today's gospel, Christ commands the disciples to love each other as he loved them. In the family of creation this is mutual compassion, avoiding what Albert Schweitzer called "gratuitous destruction," and it means working in cooperation and collaboration with other people and creatures. This means having different values than profit, progress, market share, convenience, comfort, and recreation. To work for the abundant life of all creation is to realize that "in pardoning we are pardoned, in consoling we are consoled, in giving we receive, in understanding we are understood, and in loving we are loved," as St. Francis said. In other words, compassion and life-fostering concern transform our experience into a "new heaven and Earth" in right relationship with how things are by giving pardon, making peace, and helping in the work of salvation.**

**"Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we might be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind." This new heaven and earth will be quietly centered on our dependence on the creator and our interdependence with other creatures. It will not be the kind of life we have now. We live in a noisy and confusing time. I could have added to the noise by telling you about the alarming threats to the future of our planet. Rocketing population growth will fill the Earth with 9 to 12 Billion people within the next 30 years. These people will want more cars, fuel, grain, meat, electronics, houses, water, cities, jobs, pets, amusements, weapons, and products of all kinds. These wants will make deserts, famines, plagues, wars, shortages, extinctions, vast migrations, more injustices coming to people who are already suffering from disease and deprivation, and irreversible changes in climate, coastlands, and habitats. This is truly how things are. Pursuing our inward journeys as if they were not shared with outward journeys of all other living things is locking the door of denial. It is, in fact, a kind of violence. To open our hearts to cooperation with each other and with the natural geochemical cycles of our planet is to act as**

**elder brothers and sisters of creation and emissaries of consciousness and conscience to the universe. In the words of the old hymn, let us "stay our minds on Jesus."**

**Let us pray. O God, whose love is greater than the measure of our minds and who make even our wrath and violence to serve thee, we give thanks for this island Earth, "in a starry ocean/ Poetry in motion/ this island Earth./ A beautiful oasis/ for all human races,/ the only home that we know,/ this island Earth." Lord, grant us pardon and peace that we may be cleansed of our sins to serve thee with a quiet mind, a mind stayed on Jesus. AMEN**

"This Island Earth" is a song by Jonathan Edwards. Other quotations come from Psalm 148 (Let all creation praise thee.), Acts 11:1-18 (Peter's Vision), Rev 21:1-6 (New heavens & earth), and Jn 13: 31-35 (A new commandment), and the hymn, "Joyful, Joyful, we adore thee."