“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30.

Through Jesus, God reveals many truths. In this passage he says, “I will give you rest.” We find this rest in contemplative prayer. In silence, God speaks to us through “the ears of our heart.” In silence, we are able to listen for God, hidden within our self; our authentic self, our true self. We gradually move from the slavery of the ego to the freedom of our true self in God.

The 2015 NACC conference theme is **Honoring the Gift.** How do we honor our gifts and the gifts of others? Jesus encouraged his disciples to seek and rest in God particularly after a long day of work. (Mark 6:30, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, ‘Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile.’”) Jesus knew if we are to honor our gifts, we must come away and rest with God in silence. Just as we resonate with people in the depths of their experience, in silence we learn to resonate with God in the depth of our experience. Sitting with God in silence we touch our own depths in ways that help us honor and meet others at the point of theirs. Psalm 130: “Out of the depths I cry to thee, Lord hear my prayer” and another psalmist says, “Deep calls unto deep.” (Psalm 42:7)

History provides us with many guides that teach us how to be quiet and to listen for God in silence. We will look to the Desert Mothers and Fathers, to St. John of the Cross and to a modern day contemplative, Father Thomas Keating, who says, “Silence is God’s first language.” We need to find the quiet within our own space and our own bodies. This is what we learn in contemplative prayer.

One of the values of the National Association for Catholic Chaplains is discipleship. “Discipleship is reflecting on and following the mission of Jesus in head, heart, and action.” In this retreat, through the prayer practice of Lectio Divina, we will listen to the words of Jesus with our hearts and learn to take what we have been given in silence out into the world and into our day.

We will also learn and practice the breath prayer. We remember that God first created us with God’s Breath, the breath of life. In silence, we will breathe God’s Holy breath in and out as we slow down our bodies and minds and become aware of our internal states. We then incorporate that awareness, stillness and peace into our daily lives.
In every season there is a time for dying, a time for birth – in the contemplative tradition we practice silence as we learn to die to our “old” self. In silence, we learn to let go of our “ego self” and attend to our true self, God hidden within us. It is “the dying of the ego” that allows us to live into the life that God has for us. We become less controlling, less worried and anxious, less “all about me.” In the dying of the old self we are learning to constantly rely on God and trust in His care.

In silence we learn to embrace our shadow side – asking God’s help to integrate our shadow side into our daily life and learn to see it as “all of us.” We honor it all.

This “dying” is not easy as our brains are wired to put ourselves first. We will share information on how our brains are hardwired for survival and how contemplative practices, including mindfulness, help rewire the brain for love, compassion, intuition, receptivity and tolerance.

Much of the day is experiential in nature. In the rhythm of each prayer practice…the silence, the journaling, and in the sharing… we experience God through and in each other and this changes us.