Spirituality
Soul Seeing



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Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk who shared the fruits of his contemplation with so many of us, spoke of God as Ultimate Mystery, the source of all reality. More specifically, Keating asserted that we can share in the mystery of God "through the practice of religion, love of nature, science, art, dedicated service of others, deep friendship."

His vision was inclusive and exciting. Various religious traditions share core values such as truth and kindness and forgiveness.

Many people encounter God in nature, the sea and the wind, the grasshopper and the zucchini, a rose and a dewdrop. Scientists enlarge our souls by their research, and artists often focus on the beauty of God's creation. Caring for others and the nurturing of personal relationships grounded in love and compassion are two more paths to experience Ultimate Mystery. One limitation of our spiritual journey is that we cannot travel all these roads.

But behold! There is yet another choice in the land of spirituality, one that Keating did not mention. How could this scholar not include one of the most significant pathways of spirituality that offers connectedness to the Deity, this tremendous love, the ground of our being.

This unnamed pathway is golf, that strange game that causes many of its participants to know fear and anxiety, loneliness and frustration, and — once in a blue moon — a tinge of joy.

Even non-golfers who watch this inane hitting and chasing a small ball can appreciate why golf has the potential that leads to union with God and oneness with other fellow creatures. How so? Because golf contains three elements of spirituality: humility, hope and humor!

When a golfer misses a 12-inch putt or hits two balls out of bounds on the first hole or takes four attempts to get out of a sand trap, the golfer's pride disappears and humility has an opening to take over. Humility (the living in the truth of things) is essential to an authentic, spiritual life. It was this virtue that Thomas Merton often referred to in dealing with the false and true self. Humility was the path to truth, to discovering who we really are and how we must confront our selfishness.

Golf helps to shatter pride and confront our fragile ego. Embarrassment fosters humility and precludes strutting.

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A second benefit of golf is hope, a hope that is more than the Dickinsonian "thing with feathers." Hope glances toward the future and activates expectations. The

world of golf is saturated with dreams of what might be: wearing the green jacket at the Masters; achieving fame and wealth; getting that elusive hole-in-one.

These hopes are trivial compared to golf's true blessings: fostering deep friendships that can last for 30 or more years; spending time out in nature and deepening one's relationship with the wind and the sun and the land; enjoying a drink and tales at the 19th hole. Golf has the possibility of fulfilling the hope of being part of a community that offers a graced hospitality and mutuality.

The virtue of hope is wedged in between faith and charity. Golf's hope is enriched if a golfer has a sense of God's presence (faith) and a game plan that gives love high priority (charity). Theologians keep telling us that God is present everywhere and in everything, that creation is ongoing, that we live in a divine milieu.

Even if life is filled with traps and water holes and 6-inch roughs, the beauty of a golf course and the game itself has a way of deepening our faith. As for charity, hope reminds us that in golf, the opportunities for caring, sharing and showing respect (attributes of love) are ever present.

Besides humility and hope, a third element creeps into the golfing world: humor. Wit, hilarity and comedy are not banned from the game, nor from spirituality. True, there is a certain solemnity and seriousness in major tournaments, but for weekend duffers, laughter brings lightness to the game as well as the lightness of being.

Golf has done so much for my spiritual journey that I was inspired to write a poem:

> *Golf: A Definition*
>
> Hell's hole; Eden's bliss;
> Cow pasture; Manicured meadow;
> A therapeutic walk; A pathway to insanity;
> Anticipated joy; Realized despair;
> A barrel of fun; a keg of sorrow;
> Greatest game on earth; meanest event on our planet.
> Golf: a mystery, an enigma, an unsolvable puzzle.

Humor is important to our physical, social, intellectual and spiritual well-being. Nathaniel Hawthorne, in his classic *The Scarlet Letter*, comments: "We have yet to learn again the forgotten art of gayety." And C.S. Lewis in *The Magician's*

*Nephew*: "Laugh and fear not, creatures."

Beyond doubt, most people are searching for meaning. Many are searching for God, the Ultimate Mystery. But maybe, just maybe, the reality is that God is searching for us. And being clever and full of surprises, this Mystery has a large bag of tricks — formal religions, nature, art and science, friendship and ministry to others. And at the bottom of the bag is "play," things like golf and tennis and rugby and marbles.

We may be searchers, but God is the Ultimate Searcher and God will find us out.