

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

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Prayer ... Words and Actions of Love.....

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The Catechism definition of prayer is 'the raising up of the mind and heart to God'! We all have our favourite prayers but there are as many prayers as there are people for each person is in fact 'a prayer', a creation made to give glory to God. We each have of course a favourite, well-loved prayer. For some it is The Lord's prayer, the Our Father, and a perfect prayer if lived out, a Hail Mary- the Rosary- a Novena- words of a Saint, or something that we read or made up ourselves. But it is that all that prayer is, a repetition of a certain form of words even if heartfelt? Of course they make up what is a huge number of ways in which we do 'the action' which we call prayer.

Let us unpick and look carefully at what prayer is and should be for all of us. First of all, it is possible for all people to pray. It is not something only for the pious or devout, priests or religious, or for special circumstances or situations. Indeed it is the easiest thing to do for it is at the base of what we are made to do... interestingly we often forget the 'heart' when we think of prayer thinking that God requires a certain form of perfected words, or to be clever and repeat long sets of words. Some of these are helpful and beautiful, enriching and can lead us on, but none are actually required for prayer. We are made for relationship and The Father, Son and Spirit long to communicate with us. We are mere children and he loves, longs for our simple words of love, or thanksgiving, or requests and our sorry's. He does not expect a Degree in Theology, and begs us not 'to babble as the pagans do'. He wants our hearts to be lifted up to Him with all our daily concerns and worries and the many things we carry in our hearts. How often we have things that concern us and instead of speaking to the Lord directly about these, our successes or failures, we sidestep these and produce other peoples' words to convey them to God, often with no link between the two.



Prayer then is first and foremost a communion, a relationship, alive and active which takes us to the Heart of God. Our hearts become conjoined with His... Prayer unites us to Him and to each other - His heart always available, always listening, abounding in Mercy and Love hears us. This is so important for too often we think of God as distant and our prayer reflects this. But he always listens and hears and loves us in our ordinariness and littleness.

When a child learns to speak it grasps a few words, little phrases, but to the parents they are like pearls which bring joy and are no less than the words spoken later in their fullness. Jesus himself referred to His Father as Abba, Daddy, and reminds us to be as little children- so the first step to real prayer is to be simple and childlike.

Prayers such as 'Help me' or 'I'm lost', 'Thank you Jesus' are heart prayers which require nothing save the truth and a loving heart. Now some would now be saying – so why have all these prayers, or I love the Rosary or this or that devotion. These of course are crucial too and especially for communal prayer. For we pray singly and together as God's people. Repetitious prayer too not only stills us but leads us ever the more deeply into communication with each other but also leaves us free to make reflections and thoughts about the life of Jesus and the Gospels. Obviously collective prayer has to have a format. It is interesting to note that these prayers said from the heart lead to silence. The Mysteries of the Rosary make us meditate on the Scriptures and lead us into a better way of living. This is also true of the psalms especially in the Morning and Evening prayer of the Church (The Office) now prayed by many lay people and not just in religious communities or by Priests. Some psalms are well known such as 'The Lord is my Shepherd' and can guide and lead us into more prayer.

"PRAYER IS, FOR ME, AN OUTBURST FROM THE HEART; IT IS A SIMPLE GLANCE DARTED UPWARDS TO HEAVEN; IT IS A CRY OF GRATITUDE AND OF LOVE IN THE MIDST OF TRIAL AS IN THE MIDST OF JOY!" *St Thérèse of Lisieux*

Using our minds too is important, as well as our heart and is called meditation. This too, often has today, a kind of image of either a guru on a prayer mat or people sitting for hours waiting for lofty thoughts or performing some difficult exercise, whereas in fact listening and pondering the words of a reading at Mass or The Gospel is meditation, reflection, especially when we try to live it out ourselves. Such prayer can lead us to silence as we are awed or stuck by The Word. Sometimes as we sit in a quiet place, or our garden, countryside, we are transported to think of the Creator or stilled into simply being in his presence. This can happen anywhere and is a precious moment for us but being in the presence of God, simply being, is also a very important part of prayer. Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is a place where this can happen but any time or place is suitable for this at-oneness with God. This is a place of listening to the Lord.



Yes, *listening*, for it is not only the words that we use but those which *He* uses to speak to us that form prayer. Remember that it is an ‘exchange’, a conversation between two people in love. When two people love each other words are not necessary- A glance, a small touch is sufficient, but they are listening to each other, both in this and when they speak. The Lord does and will speak to us if we listen – he may do so directly, or through others, or even a sense of something felt in the heart. Cultivating this silent listening is crucial in our journey in communication.

But is it only about words and thoughts? Certainly not! We all have work to do; our everyday lives are full of action, paid employment, parenthood, recreation – so how can we spend time in prayer? The answer is simple. Our lives, our actions must become prayer.

We are made for service and our everyday actions

should reflect our belongingness to God. As St. Teresa of Avila said ... ‘we must find God amidst the pots and pans’ - We can do this by offering our actions to God, or deeper, we can do this in union with God... that is we make our actions speak as we do them to the best of our ability and with great love. When a parent reads a story, changes nappies, feeds the family, goes out to work, plays with the children, corrects them is he/she more or less a parent? The answer is they are in all these things – not more or less. In the same way all our actions are valuable when carrying out the duties of the day. Our lives become a prayer – all that we do becomes a relationship with God, whether we think of Him at any moment or not.

This gentle self-giving is as much a prayer as the words that we utter- The Holy Spirit is our Guide in prayer – He leads us and what is certain is that without prayer, lived out prayer, we cannot serve God and our fellow man adequately as the transforming action of prayer perfects us. The Holy Spirit prays for us and within us when words are impossible.

For a Catholic keeping of the Sabbath Holy – the obligation of Sunday (Saturday) Mass is crucial for with the Mass we have all the elements of prayer mentioned. We are fed and united with The Holy Trinity and all the Saints, which in turn allows us to develop a sacrificial form of life as prayer. The Saints did not pray the Mass but *lived* it. **Our Lives must become prayer.**

Resolve to make this a priority. Decide on a few moments of listening to God, a few words of Love, and everything done with love; then we will pray as Jesus did giving glory to God. H.H.

“Perfume all your actions with the life-giving breath of prayer.” Pope John XXIII

Saints and Feasts in September...

.St. Gregory the Great, 3rd Triumph of the Cross 14th - St. Matthew, 21st - St. Padre Pio, 23rd, - Our Lady of Walsingham, 24th - St. Vincent de Paul, 27th - as well as the Korean Martyrs, 20th, and St Lawrence Ruiz and Companions. 28th.

VALUE OF SILENCE

Pope Francis 1 prayer intention for September... ‘That people today, often overwhelmed by noise, may discover the value of silence and listen to the voice of God and their brothers and sisters’.