

JULY 2, 2023: 13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



Last week we spoke about the necessity of a real prayer life if we are going to be a true disciple of Christ. But how do we make that happen? I believe that most people want to pray but just need some help in establishing a fully functional prayer life. There are, in essence, three aspects to a good prayer life.

The first, of course, is the celebration of the sacraments and most particularly our participation at Mass. We need to enter into these celebrations because Christ initiated all of the sacraments for our benefit. Each of the sacraments—in its own way—enables us to experience the Paschal Mystery (Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost). In the Eucharist we experience Christ in a unique way, and that experience of Christ is of the greatest value. Because Christ is truly and substantially present in the Eucharist (body and blood, soul and divinity), we come to experience the fullness of Him in the consecrated elements of bread and wine that become his body and blood. The dialogue we encounter at Mass is directed toward living a life centered in Christ. As we hear the words proclaimed from the scriptures and through the prayer texts, we are called to recognize the voice of the living God. Mass is the classroom where we learn to pray.

The second is spontaneous prayer. This prayer should be a natural response to God's invitation to dialogue with Him. In the midst of our busy lives, God invites us to talk to Him. We must remember that the dialogue of prayer *never* begins with us, but rather with God, and as we open to that dialogue we must be ready to respond. The question should *never* be: is God speaking to me?—God is always speaking to us. The question *should* be: how well am I listening and am I giving God the space to be heard in my life? The final purpose of prayer is *not* to tell God something He doesn't know or understand. Rather, the purpose of prayer is for us to understand what it is that God wants to do in our lives. The ultimate goal of prayer is to have a real and personal relationship with the living God.

Understanding the nature and purpose of prayer leads to the third element of a real prayer life—a structured devotional prayer life. I believe that when this does not exist at some level, the other two cannot be what they are intended to be. It is not enough for a real relationship with God to have only one or two of these elements. Many people will tell me that they are just too busy. Sorry to say, but that is baloney and ultimately a copout. If Christ the Savior of the World had time to pray, then you can also. As we saw last week it does not need to be a long process. The Lord gives us 1440 minutes a day. We can *all* give to God less than 1% and that is *only* ten minutes. Last week we talked about one way to establish the beginning of a prayer life. I would like to propose another: praying through the scriptures. The use of scripture in prayer is ancient. And when we use scripture, we do not have to guess whether we are hearing God because the Bible is God's very word proclaimed to us. The Bible is a treasure trove of God's wisdom that is made so easily accessible. I would like to propose the following steps in beginning to pray with and through scripture.

1. Find a quiet place to sit and relax.
2. Take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds and then release.
3. Pray a prayer to the Holy Spirit for guidance (something like the following):
4. "Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart with your holy gifts. Open my heart to hear your voice and to respond."
5. Then say "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."
6. Open the Bible (I would recommend beginning with the New Testament, probably one of the Gospels but any part of scripture will do.)
7. Just slowly read the passage you have chosen. (It need not be long—most Catholic bibles break it down for you.)
8. As you are reading, realize that the very action of reading scripture is an act of prayer, and that God is speaking to you through scripture. Listen for a word or phrase that strikes you.

9. After reading through the passage, just sit and contemplate the meaning that it might have for your life, paying close attention to the word or phrase that struck you. Sometimes nothing in particular will resonate with you and, if so, just think about what the entire passage might be saying to you. (Realize that scripture can have more than one meaning and that God will use that tool to speak with you.)
10. Finally, say some words of gratitude to the Lord for the time He has given you.
11. Pray an Our Father.

Next week I will present a similar, but still different, way of praying with scripture.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,



Fr. Brian