

PRAYER – A PERSONAL RESPONSE TO GOD’S PRESENCE

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We hear a great deal about Religious crisis, don't we? There are crises of authority and obedience, of Community life, of personal identity, of Religious poverty, etc. I am convinced that at the basis of it all is a crisis of faith. But there is no hope for improvement here unless individual persons begin to respond better to God in prayer. Either we are not praying correctly or we have stopped praying. This is true, I think, both of lay people and of us religious.

The single, most important conviction I want to share with you is that prayer is a personal response to God's presence.

Prayer is a personal response to God's presence. This means that God first makes Himself present to us. Prayer is our awareness and acknowledgment of God's presence. It is what God does to us, rather than anything we do. St. John reminds us that genuine love means first of all not that we love God (which may or may not be true), but that God first loves us. His love for us is more important than our love for Him. He wants and appreciates and is grateful for our love, but since His love for us is more important than our love for Him, His love deserves more of our attention.

1. Love. The first step in prayer is for me to wake up and face reality; to realize that He is present to me, that He loves breath and being a share of His own divine life and all my capacities into me, and to be able to say, "Yes, God my Father, You do love all this into me. Yes, Jesus, You do. Yes, God my Spirit, you do." -- That is to pray. If in the few minutes that we have during the times of private prayer, we do nothing else but merely make ourselves aware of the God who is already making Himself present to us, that experience in itself is profound prayer; it is fruitful prayer; it is even the beginning of mystical prayer. This is a genuine opening up to God who communicates Himself to us if we only give him the opportunity.

2. Thanks. The second step, it seems to me, is that once we realize what God is to us, what He does for us and how much He loves us, the only decent, polite, obvious and spontaneous response is not only to say, "Yes, You do," but also **"Thank You, God my Father, for loving life, being, and a share of your own nature into me.** Thank You, Jesus, God the Son and my brother. Thank you God the Holy Spirit, for living on in me." Gratitude is an obvious, spontaneous outflow of being aware of what God is and is doing for us.

Sometimes in our good and holy desires to communicate with God we "junk-up" our prayer. We begin immediately to make acts of faith, hope or love, of contrition or sorrow; we ask for things or just say something, because, after all, we can't just sit there and let nothing happen; so we do something, we say something! I call this "junking-up" our prayer. If we do that before we are really conscious of God being present to us, it is like opening up a dark room and talking because there might be somebody there who might possibly be listening. It is important that we take time peacefully and quietly (even if we have only a few minutes to pray), first to make ourselves aware of the loving, creative, sustaining, divinizing presence of God, because prayer is a personal response to God's presence.

3. Loving Response. The first step then, is to acknowledge God's presence; the second is to thank Him. The Third is a loving response. A person responds to love freely given by saying, "I love you, too." When we say this to God it implies that we first become aware that He first loves us. To say, "God my Father, Christ my Brother, God my Holy Spirit, I love you, too," is our response at its best. With regard to asking God for favors, I hope we don't misunderstand it as imperfect prayer. When we beg God for sunny weather, or pray that our bursitis will go away, or pray for something more holy or important such as international peace and justice we pay a great compliment to God. This is an expression of "becoming as little children" which Jesus recommended, and honored. A child who comes to his parents and asks for things is paying them a big compliment. What is the child saying but, "You are good and can fill my needs. Please, may I have a candy bar?" When we approach God with this sense of our absolute, total dependence, and need, we are conscious of being precious and important, but without Him of being nothing, because all that we have is loved into us by God. Notice how much of the "Our Father" is petition. Our Lord teaches us to pray this way. If the prayer of petition is made correctly, it says, "God, you are everything; Creator, Sustainer, Divinizer, Forgiver, Merciful Lord of the Universe, Provident God of all, I belong completely to You." When we pray for any favor we mean, of course, "Thy will be done." We are not trying to blackmail or fool God into giving us something by groveling in His presence. No we presuppose, "Thy will be done" – but we still would like to have our requests-- a sunny day tomorrow, etc.

All growth in prayer, then, is rooted in our conviction that God is present to us, that His presence is personal, loving and provident, uniquely saturating us; that God is and wants more and more to be our Father and that like every good father, God wants to speak and communicate with us. He keeps trying to speak to us through all the experiences of our life, through his Church, through His living work in Holy Scripture, through His Eternal Word Jesus Christ, in whose Holy Spirit we are invited to be sons and daughters. God, I repeat, longs to communicate Himself to us and He invites us to listen and receive. But He will not force this on us. In practice, what can we do in order to enable God to communicate Himself more fully and freely to us? Try to be faithful to at least 15 to 30 minutes of daily being alone with God. **[You can start with just 10 minutes!]** Try to make room for this at a regular time each day. **God wants time to be alone with each of us and communicate with us; and what God wants from us God deserves. Can you remember 5 "P's" of prayer?**

- (1) **Passage from Holy Scripture (choose one):** Before beginning your prayer period choose a short passage of 5 to 10 verses from the bible. This is very important. Never omit this before your prayer period, either the evening before or the first few minutes before you begin to pray. Choose a passage that you want especially to listen to, to taste and savor and relish. It may be a favorite psalm or parable or miracle story or section of one of Our Lord's sermons. It should fit your mood and your need. **Put a marker in the page and keep it ready.** You may or may not come back to it before your prayer period ends.
- (2) **Place: Find a private spot where you can be alone with God.** This is important. Sometimes it is good to be in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament but if people are in the chapel with you and you feel like stretching out your arms, if you feel like throwing back your head or looking up, if you feel like sighing or complaining or crying or dancing or singing, you will not do it. But you can do this when you are alone; you should feel free to do this. Otherwise you are inhibiting yourself. You must not be inhibited when you respond to God's presence. So, pick a quiet place where you are alone and can uninhibitedly speak and react to God's presence without drawing attention from others.
- (3) **Posture: At the beginning of private prayer, take the time to settle yourself peacefully.** You do not pray as an angel or disembodied spirit or as an intellect: but you pray as a man or a woman. Men and women have bodies and bodily posture is important in prayer. Do you pray better when kneeling? Then kneel. Do you feel more receptive and open to God's presence when sitting? Then sit. St. Ignatius, was a mystic who seemed to prefer lying down during his prayer and recommends that we try it, too. Experiment with various postures till you find one most conducive for responding to God's presence. This may vary from day to day and within the same prayer period. Try, for example, lying on the bed or sitting in a comfortable chair with feet propped on a stool and arms resting on arm rests or on your lap with palms up; or sitting in a hardbacked chair with palms facing up or down on your lap, with head back and jaw relaxed; or standing (perhaps leaning against something) with head comfortably back; or sitting at a table or desk with arms resting on it; or kneeling with arms resting on a support or outstretched, etc., etc. Different postures fit our different moods and needs.
- (4) **Presence of God: Respond to God's presence.** Peacefully remind yourself how present He is to you. Feel, e.g. the cloth of your clothes or the desk in front of you and admit to **God, "Yes, You love feeling into me and texture into it. You love sight into me and color into it. You love hearing into me and sound into it. You love life into me. You are in me. Thank you for living in me, for loving goodness and sonship/daughterhood into me."** This takes a little time, but it should always be done and never rushed. You should not hurry that part of your prayer, even if it takes up the whole time. **You may feel like saying, "Thank You. I love You, too."** In these moments God's special communication may come with that deep personal sense of His presence. Sometimes He makes his presence felt (experienced) by us. And when He does, let it continue; let this experience hold or carry you, just as water holds up a floating body. Stay with it until it fades. Do not move away from it or change or rush the experience or overreact with too many or unnecessary words. We tend to "junk-up" our prayer with too many words. **Perhaps a simple repetition of "My Lord and My God" or "Abba, Father" will do. If it fades, continue the reminders that you have of His presence.**
- (5) **Passage from Scripture (return to it and listen to it):** There may be no time left to read the Scripture passage you selected. If so fine. But when you try to respond to God's presence in a grateful, loving and adoring way, if nothing seems to happen, if you feel dry and desolate, do not be discouraged or judge this as a sign of failure. **Rather, the dryness may be God inviting you to listen to Him as He speaks to you in Holy Scripture.** Always have the Scriptures available when you are at prayer; never be without them. When nothing seems to happen after trying patiently and peacefully to respond to God's presence, when you feel He is not communicating Himself, turn to the place you selected in Scripture and give Him a chance to communicate Himself to you. **Listen while He talks, because Scripture is the living Word of the living God; it is living now because God is alive now and He hasn't changed His mind in what He said through the inspired writers. It is more important to listen this way to God than to speak.**

Very slowly with attention whisper or read aloud (not silently) God's words. Pause between the phrases so that the echo and meaning of the words can sink into you slowly like soft rain into thirsty soil. You may want to keep repeating a word or phrase. If you finish the selected passage, go back and slowly repeat it (just as we repeat the chorus of a song). Why whisper or speak aloud the words of Scripture? Because this engages our attention more fully through eyes, ears and voice. Often when I read something in silence, my eyes focus on the words while my imagination and attention wander far away.

Praying with Scripture this way is an experience of listening to God. Do not try to make applications or search for profound meanings or implications or conclusions or resolutions. These usually "junk-up" our prayer. Be content to listen simply and openly as a child who climbs into its Papa's lap and listens to a story. When the time is up, thank God for speaking to you. Realize that Father, Son and Spirit live on in you as you move away to continue the rest of your day. These are my suggestions for permitting God to communicate Himself to us. **Taste and see for yourself.** I promise that within a very short time, God will make a real mystic out of you if you give Him this opportunity and remain faithful to it. By mystic I mean a very normal, healthy, ordinary, everyday sort of mystic graced with the kind of prayer God longs to communicate to us.

Hello, Magnificat-Omaha Gifts of the Spirit Retreatants.

We hope you are looking forward to our time together on Saturday. We want to remind you of a few details and invite you to pray in preparation for the retreat.

Reminders:

1. The retreat begins at 9:00 AM, and the parish Mass at St. Roberts starts at 8:30 AM. If you attend Mass afterward, please grab your name tag on the way to Mainelli Center, pick up a beverage or treat, and quickly find a seat.
2. Parking will be packed during Mass, so consider arriving early or carpooling.
3. There is no assigned seating, so you can arrive early to reserve seats if you like. However, please don't turn the chairs toward the tables, as this creates a safety hazard.

Prayer:

Praying into your time at the retreat is a powerful way to prepare yourself to be open to all God wants to communicate to you. Please read the wonderful one-page encouraging article on prayer by Fr. Armand M. Nigro, S.J. Fr. Nigro reminds us that "Prayer is our awareness and acknowledgment of God's presence. It is what God does to us rather than anything we do." He suggests a format of 5 P's for prayer:

- 1) Passage. Choose a passage of Scripture and set it aside. (You can use the ones below related to the retreat).
- 2) Place. Find a place where you can be alone with God for at least 10 minutes.
- 3) Posture. Settle yourself in a posture where you can be receptive to hearing from God.
- 4) Presence of God. Respond to God's presence. For example, "You are here, Lord, You love life into me. Thank you, Lord, I love you too. (See the attached article for more information.)
- 5) Passage from Scripture. Read the passage from Scripture slowly. Listen as He talks to you.

To powerfully prepare yourself for the retreat, please consider setting aside 10 minutes for prayer using Fr. Nigro's 5 P's format every day this week. We recommend using these Scripture passages (bolded with short commentary BELOW from *Finding New Life in the Spirit* Book. Holy Spirit prayers follow.

DAY ONE - Monday

God is not someone who lives far away in a place you can never reach. Nor is He a heavenly warden, eager to punish you for doing wrong. He is a father who loves you. He says these words to you. **Jeremiah 31:3: *I have loved you with an everlasting love, so I'm constant in my affection for you.***

This word of life is a promise and offer from God. You can know God deeper, and you can know how much he loves you. He wants you to be in a personal relationship with him. He wants you to be his daughter. He does not want there to be any barrier or distance between you and him. **Jeremiah 31:33-34: *I will be their God and they shall be my people. There will be no further need for neighbor to try to teach neighbor or brother to say to brother, "Learn to know the Lord!" No, they will all know me, the least, no less than the greatest—it is the Lord who speaks — since I will forgive their iniquity and never call their sin to mind.***

DAY TWO - Tuesday

Because God loves you, He sent his only son to save you. He sent Jesus that we might have life, a better life now, and a life that will last eternally. **John 3:16: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in Him, should not perish, but have eternal life.***

God loves you, and He is speaking to you now, reaching out to you. He is saying to you in **Isaiah 55:1-3: *Oh come to the water all you who are thirsty; though you have no money, come! Why spend money on what is not bread, your wages of what fails to satisfy? Listen, listen to me and you will have good things to eat and rich foods to enjoy. Pay attention, come to me, listen, and your soul will live. With you, I will make an everlasting covenant because of my sure, steadfast love.***

DAY THREE - Wednesday

God's answer to what the world needs most is Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent into the world to save us, to free us from the power of evil in the world so that we might live a new life now and forevermore: **John 11: 21- 27: *Martha said to Jesus: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that even now whatever you ask of God, he will grant you." Jesus said, "I am the***

resurrection and the life. If anyone believes in me, even if he dies, he will live, and whoever lives and dies in me will never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord," she said, "I believe that you are the Christ, the son of the living God, the one who was to come into the world."

Our freedom costs something. Jesus had to die so that we might live. But God loved us enough to send his son, who willingly died for us. As Paul says: **Romans 5: 6-8: It is not easy to die even for a good man – though, of course, for someone really worthy, a man might be prepared to die – but what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.**

DAY FOUR - Thursday

Throughout the ages, prophets predicted that the day would come when God would freely give His Spirit to us. Those who turned to Him and received His Spirit would be changed. They would be new persons with a new life. **Ezekiel 36: 22-28: The Lord God says I shall pour clean water over you, and you will be cleansed. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I shall remove the heart of stone from your bodies and give you a heart of flesh instead. I shall put my Spirit in you. You shall be my people, and I will be your God.**

Jesus promised to give his followers the Holy Spirit before he died. The Holy Spirit will live in you and give you new life. The promise of Jesus is for everyone: **John 14:15-18: Jesus said. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world can never receive it neither sees or knows him; but you know him because He is with you. I will not leave you orphans.**

DAY FIVE - Friday

On the day of Pentecost, Jesus' disciples were gathered together in one room in prayer and the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised, came on them. From that moment on, they were changed. **Acts 2: 1-4: When Pentecost day came round, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.**

The Holy Spirit has equipped you with spiritual gifts and given you new power to do His work. In Isaiah 11 (Confirmation Gifts of the Holy Spirit) and 1 Corinthians 12 (Power Charisms of the Holy Spirit), for example, you can read about some of the gifts, and as you are open and aware of them, including over 30 gifts mentioned in Scripture, you will rely on them more.

Isaiah 11: 1-2: But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, A spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord...

1 Corinthians 12: 7-11: The particular way in which the spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose. One may have the word of wisdom given by the Spirit; another may have the word of knowledge given by the same Spirit; another gift of faith given by the same Spirit; another again the gift of healing through this one Spirit: one, the power of miracles; another, prophecy; another gift of discerning spirits; another, the gift of tongues and another gift of the ability to interpret them. All these are the work of the one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as He chooses.

Commitment Prayer	Prayer to the Holy Spirit	Personalized Holy Spirit Prayer
Father, I believe that you know and love me. I have not always chosen to love you and have broken my relationship with you through my sins. Thank you for sending your son Jesus who proved your love for me on the cross. Lord Jesus, I open the door of my heart and I invite you to be the center of my life - to be my Lord and Savior. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and help me to live the Gospel with my whole life. Holy Spirit, open my heart to receive all the gifts you have for me. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.	Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. LET US PRAY. O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.	Come, Holy Spirit, fill my heart and kindle in me the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and I shall be recreated, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that in the same Spirit I may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Given out at IPF Retreats and the Cloisters. Brief Version, Used by permission, Dwyer.