



A weekly reflection by members of the Precious Blood Community

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Fr. Joe Nassal, C.P.P.S.

Why Do We Pray?

*Become more and more a person of prayer,
of interior life, of a greater union with God.*

St. Gaspar del Bufalo, Letter 1598

I imagine when the disciples saw Jesus “praying in a certain place,” he was doing what Gandhi suggested prayer is, “a longing of the soul.” Gandhi reflected that prayer is not about asking but rather is a “daily admission of one’s weakness.... And so, it is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart.”

The great spiritual writer and director, Jesuit William Barry echoes Gandhi’s belief about prayer as a longing of the soul. “I pray because my heart aches for God,” he once wrote, “even though I am also afraid of closeness with God.” Barry admits that at one time he prayed because “I’m supposed to pray.” Prayer, he wrote, “was an obligation, a burden.” He prayed “to placate God—to get God off my back, as it were.” Barry prayed for the same reasons many of us do—“to obtain something, a favor, for example.” This makes our prayer “utilitarian.” But in his better moments, he says, “I pray because I believe in God.”

As the disciples observe Jesus at prayer, they are so moved that they want to pray like him. “Lord, teach us to pray.” My guess is that Jesus did not mark his breviary with a ribbon when he finished praying. He likely was simply sitting in silence and soaking in the divine presence. When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he doesn’t use a lot of words but rather stresses the importance of naming and claiming the relationship and focusing their faith on key themes of his teaching: God’s realm and the reality of reconciliation and forgiveness.

As the prayer Jesus taught us reflects, “God in whom we believe wants a relationship of intimacy and partnership with each of us and all of us together,” Barry writes. Prayer is an activity of intimacy, a reflection of right relationship with God, as one would with a good friend. “Intimacy between two persons develops through mutual self-revelation,” Barry wrote. “So, in prayer I try to let God know who I am and ask God to reveal himself to me. It’s that simple.”

This is the prayer of the heart to a God who loves us freely and unconditionally. But our fear often is how can we let someone, anyone, let alone God love me this much? It is not that God does not allow us to get close to the divine presence; we often don't want God to get too close to us. Prayer in the manner Jesus taught his disciples requires trust, allowing God to see "even those things that seem unsavory, and that God wants to reveal himself to us," Barry wrote. This deepening intimacy with God in prayer changes us.

Prayer is about mindfulness—calling to mind those we love, those who need God's attention and affection. Prayer is also about heartfulness. When we empty our heart of all the clutter and focus only on the fullness of God's love reflected in the beauty of life, we hold in our very full hearts all peoples of the earth. And our prayers for unity are answered without our ever saying a word.

With humble hearts, acknowledging our need for God's pardon and the daily bread of divine kindness and compassion, let us pray. As I often say at the conclusion of a retreat, until we meet in person, let us meet often in prayer and linger there awhile.

Fr. Joe Nassal has been engaged in retreat, renewal, and reconciliation ministries throughout the United States. He currently serves as Vice Provincial for the Missionaries of the Precious Blood.

This weekly reflection is made available to all who are part of our Precious Blood family. Feel free to share it with others. Would you be willing to write a reflection? If so, please contact Vicky Otto at votto@pbspiritualityinstitute.org