

SOME METHODS OF PRAYER

(There are as many ways of praying as there are human beings! The following exercises are only suggestions: they are not presented as THE WAY TO PRAY, but they may help you to find YOUR WAY, which is the best way for you).

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Here are some ways of being still:-

1.
 - a. Sit, feet flat on the ground, back reasonably straight, but not rigid.
 - b. Concentrate your whole attention on what you can feel physically in your body. Don't think, just attend to what you can feel. You may begin with your feet and work upwards, spending a moment or two on each part of the body you can feel. The longer you can attend to one part of the body, the better.
 - c. If you feel an itch, discomfort, and want to move, acknowledge the discomfort, tell yourself "It's alright", and try not to move. If you become aware of thoughts, questions, treat them as you treated the itch. Acknowledge the questions, but then get back to focussing attention on the physical feelings in your body.
 - e. Once you feel rested, you may like to turn this exercise into a more explicit prayer. 'In Him we live and move and have our being'. We are meeting God in the awareness of our own body.

2.
 - a. In the same position, relaxed with back straight, concentrate all your attention on the physical feeling of breathing in, then of breathing out. Do not deliberately change your breathing, though you may find it changes naturally, becoming slower and deeper. If this exercise always causes you breathlessness, then abandon it!
 - b. Do not be surprised if this exercise makes you feel drowsy. If, once you are rested, you want to turn this exercise into more explicit prayer, then let your in-breath express all that you long for, and let your out-breath be a surrender of yourself to God, together with all your worries, anxieties, guilt, pain. DO NOT MORALISE OR JUDGE YOURSELF.

PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

1. LECTIO DIVINA. In reading Scripture we believe that God communicates with us and so the bible is called 'The Sacrament of the Word'.
 - a. Choose a passage that you like. Read it over several times without trying to analyse or moralise. Pray for what you desire.
 - b. If any word, phrase or image attracts your attention, stay with it as long as you can, relishing it, not analysing it. This word/phrase is God communicating with you now.
 - c. If what are called 'distractions' come into your mind, e.g. "I wonder what's for dinner?", let them come in and mingle with the word/phrase which attracts you. This is letting the word of God enter your everyday preoccupations, worries, anxieties, hopes, longings, temptations, guilt, and you pray out of the mixture of your preoccupations and God's word. Do not be afraid of negative feelings you may have about God, but tell Him of them. He is big enough to take our tantrums.

2. IMAGINATIVE CONTEMPLATION - especially suitable for Gospel passages.

- a. Read the passage several times until it is familiar to you.
- b. Imagine the event is happening now and that you are a participant **ACTIVE IN THE SCENE**. Do not worry if you cannot imagine vividly. If you find it difficult to enter the scene, imagine you are trying to describe it to a child, making it as vivid as possible.
- c. Ask for what you desire.
- d. It helps attentiveness in any scene to ask yourself, "Who is present, what are they saying, what are they doing?" You join in with them.
- e. If 'distractions' come, let them enter the Gospel scene. As long as they do not divert your attention totally from prayer, they will probably lead you deeper into it.
- f. Talk with the characters in the scene, talk to Jesus, to the Father. Always speak from the heart, simply and honestly.
- g. Do not worry if your attention keeps straying from the scene. When conscious of inattention, bring yourself gently back into the scene.

3. EXAMEN OF CONSCIOUSNESS/REVIEW OF THE DAY

(This is a method of praying at the end of each day, the events of the day being the substance of the prayer).

- a. Be relaxed and ask God, "Lord, let my whole being be directed to your praise and service.
- b. Let the day play back to you in any order and look first at those moments of today which you enjoyed. Relive them, relish them and thank God for them. They are his gift to you, sacraments of his love. Avoid any self-judgement. Just thank God.
- c. Pray for enlightenment, "Lord, that I may see". Now look at your moods and inner feelings during the day, but without judging them. Moods and inner feelings arise from our desires, and our habitual desires become attitudes. When our desires/attitudes are satisfied, we are content: when they are frustrated, we become irritable. We are praying to know the desires and attitudes which underlie our moods. Are my desires/attitudes directed to His Kingdom - am I living to praise, reverence and serve God, or are my desires directed to my personal kingdom - my comfort, my wealth, status, success, honour - wanting creation to praise, reverence and serve me?
- d. Express sorrow for not responding to God in the events of the day and beg his forgiveness, knowing that it is always given. Thank Him, too, for the times you have responded.
- e. Ask his guidance for tomorrow and entrust yourself to His goodness, 'like a child in its mother's arms'. Ps 131.

Four Prayer Exercise in Holy Awareness

Prayer Exercise 1 Holy Reading

Using the method outlined on the next page set aside 30 minutes, or even better an hour, to engage in the Holy reading of Scripture. Try reading Luke 11:33-36

Prayer Exercise 2 Holy Looking

Take a walk in a park or a Garden. Begin by asking God to give you a sense of peace and quietness, invite God to reveal his presence. Now spend some time take a good look at the garden/trees around you.

Choose one plant (tree, flower, moss etc) to take a closer more detailed look at.

Look at the intricacies of the design; observe the colours, textures, smell.

Observe how this plant is related to other plants around it, the soil, the water, the sun.

Ask yourself how this plant is like you?

What attracted you to this plant?

How is your life/situation at the present point like that of this plant?

Ask God to show you what type of plant he would like you to become?

Look around you is there a plant like that one near?

What would it mean for you to become more like this plant?

What help do you need from God or other people to become like this?

Ask God for that help?

Talk to God about how you feel at the moment?

Keep conversing with God until you sense a peace in your spirit and then continue on your walk enjoying in a relaxed way the beauty of God's creation.

Prayer exercise 3 Holy Looking *(This exercise is parallel to the one above)*

Take a walk through and art gallery or museum. Begin by asking God to give you a sense of peace and quietness, invite God to reveal his presence. Now spend some time to take a good look at the paintings and art works on display.

Choose one piece of art to take a closer more detailed look at.

Look at the intricacies of the design; observe the colours, textures, the use of light and darkness

Notice the mood of the art work.

Ask yourself how this painting/sculpture like you?

What attracted you to it?

How is your life/situation at the present point like that of this piece?

Ask God to show you what type of art work he would like you to become?

Look around you is there a piece of art like that one near?

What would it mean for you to become more like this piece?

What help do you need from God or other people to become like this?

Ask God for that help?

Talk to God about how you feel at the moment?

Keep conversing with God until you sense a peace in your spirit and then continue on your walk enjoying the art work.

Prayer Exercise 4 Holy Listening.

By mutual agreement arrange to meet with a friend (spouse or partner) in a friendly and relaxed place where you may spend some time practising listening to one another. The object is share a story with each other and to listening carefully and prayerfully as the other speaks.

When you are ready decide who will go first.

Sit in silence together for about two minutes and then let the first person share an experience in their life in which they would like to gain clarity.

As you listen do not interrupt with your own story.

Give only enough feedback to let the other person know you are hearing what they are saying and if necessary ask clarifying questions.

Let the first person speak for about 10 minutes.

Reflect on the experience. Now pause in silence for another two minutes.

Both listener and speaking to think about "In what way did you experience the presence of God in this conversation?"

Take about five minutes to share any insights that you have with one another.

Now repeat the exercise beginning with two minutes silence and then allowing speaker two to share their story.

Afterward, decide together on an appropriate response. You might like to pray together, or drink tea together, go for a walk together, you decide, but spend as much time as appropriate enjoying one another's company.

Lectio Divina Holy Reading

Preparation.

Set aside a time and space in which you will not be interrupted and will not feel inhibited. Make sure you are physically comfortable. Choose a passage of scripture that you want to use and mark the place.

Quietness, openness, stillness, Silence is not necessary, we are learning to hear God in the busyness of life, so as long as the noise is not distracting, don't be anxious about it. It is important to remember that the object is to commune with God, so come with an attitude of openness. Pause as you begin to centre yourself and become still within. Take as long as you need to find the quietness within to clear a space where you can truly listen.

Invite the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire you.

Lectio Reading

Read your chosen scripture passage, read it slowly and prayerfully.

Be prepared to stop reading at any point that a word or phrase strikes you at a deeper level.

You may need to read the chosen passage more than once.

You may be struck by a phrase almost immediately.

Stay with that phrase read it over and over, repeating it thoughtfully and prayerfully

God is present in you through the Spirit, who speaks to you now in scripture, and who prays in you and for you. Ask for the grace to listen to what God says. Begin reading Scripture slowly and attentively. Do not hurry to cover much material. If it recounts an event of Jesus' life, be there in the mystery of it Share with the persons involved, e.g., a blind man being cured. Share their attitude. Respond to what Jesus is saying. Some words or phrases carry special meaning for you.

Savour those words, turning them over in your heart.

When something strikes you, e.g.,

- you feel a new way of being with Jesus or he comes to you in a new way (e.g., as healing or accepting you in a way different than other times)
- you are happy and content just to be in God's presence,
- you are struggling with or disturbed by what the words are saying.
- you experience new meaning,
- you are moved to do something loving. This is the time to....pause.

This may well be God speaking directly to you in the words of Scripture.

Do not hurry to move on.

Meditatio thinking chewing over

Think about the meaning of the phrase, try saying the phrase over emphasising different words.

Consider the associations that you have with this phrase, what feelings or memories does this phrase evoke?, what images come to mind? Why has this phrase attracted your attention now? What is going on in your life now that connects with this phrase? Let your imagination see what God is saying to you through this phrase? Sit with these thoughts, talk to God about them.

Oratio Responding/Speaking

Respond in a way that is most appropriate. Talk to God about that which you have read, understood and been touched by. Writing in your journal is a good way to respond. Your response might be one that is too deep for words you may choose at times draw pictures, or sing a song. Whatever the response is, this is your authentic prayer.

Contemplatio Silence Holy Listening

When you have said all you would like to say written all you want to write, drawn all you want to draw, sit still in God's presence, say nothing, do nothing just sit and cool off.

In the silence God might speak, God might reaffirm something, or as I often experience, God seems to do something deep down inside behind the scenes; something that I can't really put into words, God reorganises something within me and moves me closer to integrity and wholeness.

Don't rush away or rush on to the next verse. Allow the love of God to flow over you. Relax in the stillness of just being with God, without having to do anything or figure anything out.

If there is still time in your allocated prayer slot, you may then go back to the passage and repeat the process with the next word or phrase that comes to you. Very often though you'll find that going through this process once will take all your time. Go into the rest of your day with the word of God dwelling deeply within you.