

PRAYER - PART FIVE

Again, let's us have a brief review so far what I have written. We began with Prayer as Public and Private, with Public Prayer as Liturgy, 'Work of the People,' as our right through Baptism.

Then we talked about Private or Personal Prayer, where one goes to their Prayer Space and Meditates on some particular subject from Scriptures, Points of Faith, the Creed or the Our Father, etc. This type of prayer is one that **Saint Aquinas** would be comfortable with and others of the same disposition. Or one can use the Prayer of Affections with the same particulars mentioned above, and be attentive to how one's emotions reacts to certain passages or beliefs, etc. This Prayer of the Heart would be a favorite way of **Saint Ignatius**, even in his Thirty Day Retreat.

Whatever method is used above, both should lead us to a place of Quiet in our prayer, made popular by both **Saints Teresa of Avila** and **John of the Cross**! Usually called Contemplation, this quiet prayer allows God to speak to us in the silence. If this prayer is begun and finished on its own without previously meditating or using the prayer of Affection, then the one would begin with simple *breathing exercises* to calm down and focus attention using a *centering word or phrase*. Formally, this type of prayer is called Centering Prayer, since that is simply what one does, centering all throughout prayer on the Word or Phrase. The Phrase can even be taken from the day's Gospel! This type of prayer has been made popular by the Trappist monk, **Thomas Keating**.

Hopefully, our daily prayer life will lead us to a deeper peace that we can tap into during times of trouble, difficulties, sorrow, disappointments, and even in the midst of a pandemic! This is a peace that the world cannot give, only Christ, who offers this peace in the Eucharist. Another effect of prayer, especially Contemplative Prayer, is letting go and letting God! This prayer helps us to let go and move beyond the small things like hurt and disappointment. Over time it will help us to accept the bigger hurts in life and eventually let them go too, like betrayal and sorrow.

Prayer will also open us up to the bigger picture of life, move us beyond ourselves so that we start looking *from the inside out*, and rather see life as looking from the

outside in. It will slowly deepen our relationship with God, becoming more intentional and personal. This is the water that will *quench our thirst*. It is at this point that prayer now opens up to all we do and move and have our being. Life becomes a dance with God and not just during prayer time!

God calls us each day to move into this dance with all we do. We become more intentional, as with Zen, the practice of focusing all our attention on the NOW! If God is the “I am who am,” then God is the God of the Present, not the past or the future, and we will find God in our present moments! That is why our Centering Prayer attempts to bring us into the present by not reflecting on the past or future, but the NOW. Notice how time almost stops when one is waiting?

My series of articles on “The Spirituality of Bird Watching” takes one specific activity that slowly brings one along to a point in the present where such an activity becomes a prayer, Bird Watching! It is more than *just watching birds* at your backyard feeder! One is brought into the world of birds to the point that a person becomes one with BIRDS. Even though it is important, Bird Watching goes beyond even conservation and protection of Bird Sanctuaries. Imagine if we apply this method to God, *would we try to become more like God?* Certainly it would move us beyond preserving Jesus in the tabernacle! Even the Orthodox Churches believe the whole process of Christianity is the ***Divinization*** of the person.

Now apply this ***Zen-Centering***-like Prayer to other activities in life such as Cooking. After all, one could say that our God is a little like a ‘Gastro-intestinal’ God, when Jesus tells us in several places that the Kingdom of Heaven is like a **Banquet** or a **Wedding Feast**!

In the next article I will talk about a few hindrances to prayer and what to do about them.