

PRAYER - PART THREE

You are probably wondering, as I did, that prayer comes in many styles and seems more complicated than what it should be. Actually, as I mentioned in Part Two, prayer can come from either the HEAD or the HEART, and both Liturgy or Public Prayer and Private or Personal Prayer can have both elements.

Is there a way to pray with both? Yes, there is and that is through *music*! For example, in the title of a popular hymn, "Holy God we Praise Your Name," the last verse is very theological on the topic of the Trinity: "Holy Father, Holy Son, Holy Spirit, Three we name thee; While in essence only One, Undivided God we acclaim thee." Even though that is very heady, we pray it all the time when we sign ourselves with the Sign of the Cross. OK, maybe not adding the last part and using the four points of the cross. But notice, music draws in our hearts and therefore our emotions. So in essence, we are singing with our minds and with our hearts, "Holy God, We praise Your Name!"

It is good to learn to pray both ways, with the mind and with the heart, even though we will be more comfortable with one way more than the other, but there are plenty of books on prayer that will meet the needs and interests of everyone. It is important to know which kind satisfies us and to use that way, BUT, we also need to challenge ourselves by using a different way that we may not be necessarily comfortable with as a way to grow in all kinds of prayer.

MEDITATION - the Mind, AFFECTATION - the Heart, both lead to CONTEMPLATION. That means we should incorporate Contemplation into our prayer life whether we use Meditation or Affective Prayer.

CONTEMPLATION - Prayer of Quiet and/or Centering Prayer, St. Ignatius suggests breaking the ONE HOUR into three **20 minute** periods throughout the day. I would suggest that you at least try for a 20 minute period once a day to end your formal private prayer, but do try for the two periods.

What are the FRUITS of Prayer, especially CONTEMPLATION?

A solid and regular prayer life will eventually lead to several noticeable effects. One effect is that it helps us to get in touch with this **Deep and Abiding Peace** that the world cannot give! That is why, in the Eucharist, we have a formal Kiss of

Peace, a peace that the world cannot give. When we come out of our Quiet time of Contemplation, we notice that we are coming out of a Deep Peace within. This peace is always there, it is just that we are now becoming aware of it through the *regular practice of prayer in our daily life*. It is also this deep peace that keeps us coming back to this prayer, even though beginning this prayer may be difficult at times.

I remember that after a few years of practicing this prayer on my own, I was in touch with this peace and even looked forward to this time of prayer. When my aunt died, my mother's sister, I was devastated, since she was the love and support of my life, a woman so filled with life that joy that she literally danced around the kitchen. At her funeral I wept uncontrollably, BUT, interestingly, I still noticed this feeling of peace deep within that my deep sorrow had opened a door to see and experience its presence. I slowly felt that peace come over me knowing that she was with God. The same was with my brother John who died two years ago this April from alcohol abuse!

This practice of prayer will also change our *perspective on life*, especially on our own life. As we grow and mature, we still tend to look at our lives 'From the Outside In!' Once we decide to commit our life to God through a life of regular, daily prayer, our perspective on life changes. As we mature spiritually we begin to start looking at our lives 'From the Inside Out!' BEFORE, we measured ourselves against others, how we dressed, our success or not, whether others loved us or not, etc. AFTER, we start to measure how we have lived our lives for the Lord, loving others, and giving of ourselves for others. Sometimes it takes a disaster for people to act. But what happens when the disaster is over? Do we change for the better? In times of CHRISIS we are presented with the opportunity. The Chinese Symbol for CHRISIS is depicted by two signs; *DANGER* and *OPPORTUNITY!*

Another more measurable way is that we are more sensitive to, as St. Ignatius writes, "the good and the bad spirits affecting our lives." When we listen to and move with the Good Spirits through our life in Christ, our decisions that we make and the actions that we take leave us with a sense of **PEACE**. There is that feeling of peace again, 'as the world cannot give'. When we do the opposite and move with the Bad Spirits we are left with feelings of **anxiety** and **depression**. Saint Ignatius mentions that we may not know which is good or bad, but only by the

effects. That is why he says not to make any move after deciding on important decisions; the greater the decision, the longer the wait should be. These decisions may be as simple as prayer styles or as important as a change of job or lifestyle!

Another phenomena that begins to present itself as we persevere in prayer over the years, is that prayer itself does ***strange things*** to us. Don't worry, let me explain, and why. In Contemplation, when prayer ends and our timer goes off, or however you keep time, it seems that an hour or more has passed by. Yet, our timer says only 20 minutes. Or the opposite is true, when it seems like we just sat down to prayer and the timer goes off! St. Teresa of Avila explains it this way. At one point God takes over our prayer, especially in our quiet or centering prayers of contemplation. When God takes over, God takes us to places that we are not allowed to know or recall, and since God has no sense of time, we enter into a state of 'No Time.' I am only mentioning this so that when it happens, you won't worry about it. Let it go and Let God continue the work in us.

In Prayer: Part Four, now that we are all on the same page, I want to talk about praying and being with God OUTSIDE of Prayer! You will find this interesting, since this is the goal of my presentation on prayer which is an introduction to this next part.