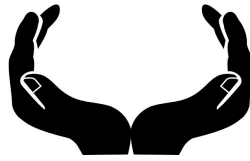


# Prayer – a Lenten Study



## Session 1. The Essence of prayer

### Read these Quotations

*“Praying is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very centre of your person, to see there what you would rather leave in darkness, and to touch there what you would rather leave untouched. Why would you really want to do that? Perhaps you would let the other cross your inner threshold to see something or to touch something, but to allow the other into that place where your most intimate life is shaped—that is dangerous and calls for defence.”* Henri Nouwen  
“With Open Hands”

*“There's nothing more certain than this: The Holy Spirit is not produced by any efforts of our own. He cannot be "merited." There is absolutely nothing we can do to get him. He is a pure gift of the Father. We can't produce the Spirit. We can only wait for him to come. And this is something our poor human nature finds very hard to do in our modern world. We cannot wait. We cannot sit still. We are too restless, too impatient. We have to be up and about. We'd rather undertake many hours of hard labor than endure the pain of waiting in stillness for something that is beyond our control; something whose time of arrival we do not know. But wait we must; so we wait and wait and wait--but nothing happens (or rather, nothing we can perceive with our unrefined spiritual sight), so we tire of waiting and praying.”* Anthony de Mello “Contact with God”

*“To pray means to open your hands before God. It means slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together and*

*accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend, but as a gift to receive. Above all, prayer is a way of life which allows you to find a stillness in the midst of the world where you open your hands to God's promises and find hope for yourself, your neighbour and your world. In prayer, you encounter God not only in the small voice and the soft breeze, but also in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in the distress and joy of your neighbour and in the loneliness of your own heart."* Henri Nouwen "With Open Hands"

*\*\*With the person next to you, discuss what they mean to you and the extent to which they resonate with the way you think about prayer.*

## **Reading      John 15:1-16**

### **Three aspects of Prayer**

**1) Prayer as relationship.** *'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me.'* (John 11:17-44) We have the potential to share the life of the Trinity. It is this intimate sharing that we are after in prayer, rather than simply asking God to do things for us or for others. In prayer we are seeking a relationship with the one who gives rather than the focus being on asking for and expecting gifts.

**"Prayer is not seeking union with God, but opening out the gift of the union itself."**

*Read John 11:17-44 and look at the relationships that Martha and Mary each have with Jesus then in that context discuss with the person next to you what you see in the statement above and what it means to you. When you have discussed Martha and Mary's relationship with Jesus, discuss your own relationship with God.*

**2) Prayer as a response to God's initiative.** Prayer isn't our initiative, it's our response to God's initiative. *'I stand at the door and knock.'* (Rev 3:20-21) We respond through the Spirit, with explicit loving attentive to God.

**“It is beyond us to have a loving relationship with the ‘invisible God’ by our own power.”**

*\*\*Read Revelation 3:20-21 and then discuss with the person next to you what you see in the statement above and what it means to you.*

**3) Prayer requires mutual presence.** Prayer is a journey towards union with God and this journey has to be made personally by every individual Christian at their own pace. An important stage is the awareness of God's presence in my life – God becoming personally present to me, rather than simply aware of me. Through this awareness, knowledge and love, God and I become at home with one another. We can then be drawn into the life of Jesus and enter the Trinity. The Spirit makes us able to achieve this bond. *'The Spirit helps us in our weakness.'* (Rom 8:24-29)

**“Through mutual presence God and I become ‘at home’ with one another.”**

*\*\*Read Romans 8:24-29 and then discuss with the person next to you what you see in the statement above and what it means to you.*

Our focus in this session is keeping the balance between:-

**1. God's action and ours:**

The gratuitous action of God balanced against our own efforts at Christian living.

Expecting God to do it all is called *quietism*. We have to remember that the Spirit enables us to act also. (*St Augustine - Sermon 169.13*)

*“But God made you without you. You didn't, after all, give any consent to God making you. How were you to consent, if you didn't yet exist? So while he made you without you, he doesn't justify you without you. So he made you without your knowing it, he justifies you with your willing consent to it.”*

The opposite heresy is called Pelagianism – that our endeavours are not dependent on God’s Grace, we can manage fine and God can simply stand on the sidelines and approve (or not).

A better balance is found in the image of the mother enabling her child. If a child gives their parent a Christmas present, it isn’t undermined by the fact that the parent gave them the pocket money in the first place.

## 2. **Interior and exterior activity:**

In relation to prayer, life is central, it’s not about prayer in isolation. Life includes both prayer and action. *John 15. 4-5.* as well as getting the balance right between God’s action and our own, we also need to understand the balance between our interior responses and our exterior actions. God relates to us through both and both are important.

Prayer is part of life and life is part of prayer. We need special times of intimacy with God, but that time needs to be prepared for and built up to. To enrich our relationship with God, involves finding intimacy with God in the midst of our everyday lives, much like we do with the other important relationships of our lives. If we think about what gives life and intimacy to those relationships, we might grow in the affective side of our relationship with God.

## 3. **Words and silence:**

- **words:** mine, set prayers, Scripture; ‘listening’ to God’s word.
- **active silence:** image of a parent looking at a new-born child.
- **prayer of petition:** in contrast with ‘being still in God’s presence’, Christ intercedes for us all without naming us all (*Hebrews 7:25*). Our Lord told Catherine of Siena “*Think of me child; and if you do I will not fail to think of you and yours.*”