

Prayer – a Lenten Study



Session 2. The Person who Prays

Read these Quotations

“When you want to pray, then, the first question is: How do I open my closed hands? Certainly not by violence. Nor by a forced decision. Perhaps you can find your way to prayer by carefully listening to the words the angel spoke to Zechariah, Mary, the shepherds, and the women at the tomb: "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid of the One who wants to enter your most intimate space and invite you to let go of what you are clinging to so anxiously. Don't be afraid to show the clammy coin which will buy so little anyway. Don't be afraid to offer your hate, bitterness, and disappointment to the One who is love and only love. Even if you know you have little to show, don't be afraid to let it be seen.” Henri Nouwen “With Open Hands”

“A prayer in church, at table or in school is only a witness to what we want to make of our entire lives. Such a prayer reminds us that praying is living and it invites us to make this an ever-greater reality. Thus, there are as many ways to pray as there are moments in life. Sometimes we seek out a quiet spot and want to be alone, sometimes we look for a friend and want to be together. Sometimes we like a book, sometimes we prefer music. Sometimes we want to sing out with hundreds, sometimes only whisper with a few. Sometimes we want to say it with words, sometimes with a deep silence.” 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.*

Readings

Matthew 14:13-26; Matthew 6:1-15

Three types of prayer

1) Liturgy: a mosaic of Scripture that teaches prayer, but time and space are needed to tune in to the communication

2) Group-Prayer The mandate: *“where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”* (Matthew 18:19-20)

Examples of Jesus leading in public prayer.

Luke 3:21 *“Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened,”*

Matthew 14:19 *“He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food,”*

Matthew 19:13-15 *“Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray;”*

3) Personal Prayer in solitude – something Jesus did often.

Here are some examples:

Matthew 14:23 *“After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone.”*

Mark 6:46 *“After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray.”*

Luke 6:12 *“It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.”*

Mark 1:35 *“In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house, and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.”*

Luke 5:16 *“But Jesus Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.”*

*** With the person next to you, read the passages given as examples above and then discuss what contribution these three types of prayer play in your life.*

The Context of Personal Prayer in Solitude

The social setting and the limitations it imposes: time, space, culture, degree of security, outside pressures. Different views of God. Moods, weather, what’s happening in our lives.

Personal temperament: extrovert/introvert. Degrees of these characteristics and the preferred way of praying (much has been written on this subject and on personality types (Meyers-Briggs, Enneagram etc.)

Extroverts pray differently to introverts (neither has the monopoly on holiness) and both need the space to pray in ways that are comfortable. The goal of everyone who seeks to deepen their relationship with God is to become *“closer to God than breathing”*.

Inward-looking prayer has the danger of ‘domesticating’ God or even recasting God in our own image. Someone only interested in ‘*me-and-God prayer*’ is reluctant to be called from prayer when practical help is required by someone, or to share the peace or other community aspects of worship. There are also real dangers in purely outward-looking prayer.

Grace: the close presence of God within the double gift of situation and temperament. What role does Grace have in decision making?

Daily prayer; a regular period of personal prayer (although sometimes group or liturgical prayer). In Ignatian Spirituality there is an expectation

of feeling closeness to God in ‘*consolation*’ in prayer, which may amount to a very different experience for people of different temperaments.

- Meeting God in others.
 - Examining the day in God’s presence.
 1. Where did I experience the love of God today?
 2. How did I show God’s love to each person that I met today?
 3. Who was doing what I did today for: Christ, others, myself?
- **With the person next to you discuss the context of your prayer in solitude and how it affects what you pray and how you pray.

Things that may be unhelpful

We sometimes entertain the notion of “praying well”, it’s an illusion, there’s no such thing. Prayer is about responding to God as part of a relationship, not about keeping up ‘my’ prayer standards

Praying when tired or ill, again there’s no standard to keep up. Someone who’s tired or ill should just ‘flop’ before the Lord and say “*I’m really exhausted, please help me*”. Is that not what you would do in your other relationships, or do you feel the need to ‘keep up appearances’?

Also there’s no such thing as an ‘average’ amount of prayer. Different times of the year and different patterns of life will lead to different patterns of prayer. Again it isn’t necessary to do the same thing all the time for the same amount of time, relationships aren’t like that are they?

There is no ‘right’ setting for prayer. Where you pray depends on where you are. Prayer is part of life and life part of prayer and so the setting will vary just as the setting for life varies: weather, mood, the other things going on, all play their part. Pray whilst walking the dog, washing the dishes, cutting the grass, driving to Inverness, waiting for (or travelling on) a bus or train – a Church or dedicated prayer space isn’t necessary, though you might find the latter helpful.