

Praying as Jesus Taught

Reflection by Msgr. Marino



Matthew's Gospel 6: 5-13

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offers this counsel:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Jesus offers very clear directions on prayer. From the above passage we can excerpt three important points:

- Withdraw in Secret
- Do not pray like Pagans
- Trust in the Father

1. Withdraw in Secret

Secret Silence is the sacred context for fruitful prayer and meditation.

Prayer is an encounter with the living God, a personal encounter with Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Here Sacred Scripture encourages the one who **desires to pray** to find a place of seclusion, retreating from the activities and the demands of the world. One needs to withdraw in secret, that is, willfully isolating oneself from engagement with others and things.

The long tradition of the Church suggests that this withdrawing is in fact an effort at creating **quiet**. The discipline of silence is the necessary setting for communion with God. One who desires to pray deeply must practice the **discipline of quieting oneself down**.

Prayerful Silence has both an exterior and interior dimension.

In order to achieve interior silence, that is the quieting of the senses and mental activity, one must have a proper degree of exterior quiet. Much, if not most exterior noise can be controlled and eliminated with a proper setting and proper planning. One must find a conducive place that has little or no physical distractions. A **prayer chair** or other comfortable place should be identified. It may take a little time until the proper place is found. Once established this **prayer place** should be used on a daily basis. It should be made clear to others that this is your special place for quiet and prayer. You and others should respect this place as **your sanctuary for prayer**. Activities, other than prayer, should not take place in this sanctuary. **For this sanctuary is reserved for Divine Encounters with God.**

Only meditation, reflection and prayer are fitting activities for this sanctuary.

Controlling Exterior Noise

All exterior noises need to be controlled, including the interruptions caused by electronic devices which are becoming more and more invasive.

Exterior noise is disruptive and destructive to prayer.

Necessary communication with family members and others does happen. However, for one who desires to pray unnecessary interruptions must be addressed.

Controlling Interior Noise

Once exterior noise is quieted, the real and **most demanding challenge is the control of interior noise**. We are blessed to have active minds, imaginations, and memories, as well as the five senses of the body. While these gifts are essential in navigating the world of the physical, they have their limitations and drawbacks with regard to spiritual life. In the realm of the spirit one needs to **quiet down all interior distractions and focus entirely on God, and God alone**.

Praying With Sacred Scripture

One initial way of controlling the noises of the mind, imagination and memory is to occupy them with appropriate activities. Since communion with God is the purpose of prayer, appropriate activities would include a short reading from Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels, repeating the Hail Mary while mediating on the *Mysteries of the Rosary*, or repeating a short prayer (*My Lord & My God*).

Since prayer is communion with God, we need to **listen to God** before we begin talking to Him. **Jesus Christ is the Word of God**. Therefore, beginning prayer with a reading from the Gospel initiates the prayerful exchange with God in proper order: God speaks; we listen and only then do we respond.

Meditating on Sacred Scripture

After reading a small passage from the Gospel, or another portion of Sacred Scripture it is very valuable to reflect on the Word of God. The Gospels tell us that the Blessed Mother would often **ponder** the events of her life and her son's words. So too, we are to ponder God's Word by **desiring** to

have God reveal how this passage/word applies to our life. You may be moved to respond to God with mental or vocal words of praise and thanks, or petition. But remember to keep your response short, and make your words deliberate and from the heart.

However, you may not feel like placing anything into words, but rather to just remain quiet enjoying the presence of God. This is very appropriate and valuable.

2. Do Not Pray Like Pagans

It is hard not to use a large number of words in praying especially when offering petitions. Many of us feel the great need to identify every person for whom we have promised to pray, and describe in detail the circumstances of their needs. Yet, Jesus cautions us to refrain from ***babbling on like pagans***.

We gain God's attention not because we use a lot of words; **we have God's attention because we are His children and we are in need**. In another place in Holy Scripture Jesus explains that if our natural father has enough sense to give us food and shelter then for sure God the Father

knows better what we need and how to satisfy those needs.

3. Trust in the Father

Using a lot of words in our prayer has one debilitating result—it reduces our trust in God.

When we feel like we have to convince God to care for us, or we try to pressure God to do good for us, we shift from Trusting God to depending on our own skills and words of persuasion.

We never get God's attention or goodness because we force him; we have God's attention and providence because He loves us! God is always attentive, and we need to grow in trusting Him!

PRAYER STEPS

A. Call on the Holy Spirit

Come Holy Spirit open my heart and mind to your Holy Presence.

B. Read from Holy Scripture

Especially from the Gospels.

C. Ponder the Word

Seek its application to your life.

D. Offer a Response or Silence.

A vocal, mental, or silent response to God.

E. Complete your prayer with the Our Father.

May God bless our efforts, and may He find in each one of us a welcoming heart and soul awaiting Him in silence. Amen.