

Hand out session #5

A Short Review of the Follow Christ Experience

- Daily prayer is an essential part of our Christian life. We truly receive the Holy Spirit through the sacraments of The Church, that's the way Christ set up to mediate salvation to humanity through all time and space. Our salvation is sacramental. That is, God joins our humanity in Jesus Christ, so that we may join in His divinity. However, sacraments are not magic! The grace they impart does not affect us unless we open ourselves to its transforming power. This is what we do in our daily prayer life, we open ourselves to the inspiration and power of the Holy Spirit to allow it to transform us into Christ likeness. Thanks be to God for this great gift!
- Yes, it is hard to find time to pray daily in our busy world. However, we must see prayer not as a duty or luxury that we must somehow fit in, but as an essential part of our life that when we fail to do we fail to receive the help God wants to give us to make our lives better and to live in His freedom as children of the King, not as slaves to the world.
- The Martha and Mary passage (Lk 10:38-42) is both instructional and challenging. To live more like Mary is a choice. We often do not feel that it is a choice, but even the busiest persons can make some choices to make prayer part of daily life. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Saint John Paul II both were adamant in their teaching that the busier we are the more important daily prayer is. Recall the passage some prayed from Luke 5:1-11, that in just one instant, Jesus can accomplish the work we spend all night struggling to do. If we are truly seeking to do God's work in the world, we will have time for prayer.
- Some choices we can make to incorporate time for daily prayer might include; getting up 15 minutes earlier, watching less TV, less news, less social media, less shopping, or less activities that really do not benefit us. It might mean praying in the car or on the way to school or work. Additionally, we should ask ourselves (and God) if we really need to work as much as we do? Are we trying to sustain a material life that is beyond what is necessary? Do our possessions possess us? Are we involved in many activities that while may be good, only serve to divide us rather than keep us focused on "The one thing is truly important"?
- There are indeed many ways to pray, and different people will pray differently. However, an essential part of our prayer life must include a

deepening knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is the fullest revelation of God, and the pattern of how humans are to live. Our prayer life must be focused on a deepening knowledge and love of Jesus Christ. The fullest revelation we have of Jesus Christ is in the Gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It has been the testimony of the church throughout the ages that praying with the Gospels is a way that we truly encounter the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. This is why we have spent so much time during follow Christ to develop the method of praying with the Gospels.

- Another essential aspect of prayer life is a deepening knowledge of self, and to submit our sins, faults, and disordered loves to the purifying fire of the Holy Spirit. God wants to gently transform us to become holier, and more loving. A regular examination of conscience in the light of God's Grace is also an essential part of prayer. This examination can be done separately from prayer with the Gospels, or as part of the same prayer. Regular participation in the sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation are also essential parts of this transformation.

New Teaching for Tonight

- I think it is helpful to look at common stages of a growing prayer life. Our relationship with God in prayer can sometimes be likened to a human love relationship between husband and wife. We can look at three stages, dating honeymoon and then the regular days of marriage.
 - At first prayer can be awkward and even difficult, this might be likened to the dating phase. The object during this time is to get to know the other, Jesus Christ better.
 - If we're able to persevere through the awkward and difficulty of beginning prayer usually there comes a point where we start to feel a true relationship with Jesus and an excitement and spark of love experienced in our prayer. Saint Theresa of Avila refers to these times as consolations. These consolations encourage us to pray more, to look forward to our prayer, and helps us to know God's love for us.
 - St. Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and many throughout the history of the church, also describe a time when these consolations diminish, and prayer feels dry, tedious, and routine. When this happens there is a great temptation to stop praying regularly. However, the mystics of the church tell us that this is really the most important time of our prayer life where we are truly

learning to die to self and live for God and others in a more loving way. Prayer in times of dryness is teaching us to NOT seek the consolations of God, but to love the God of consolations. The prayer of dryness is purifying our selfish motives to help us be more other centered and less self-centered. In dryness we develop patience and die to our unrealistic expectations about life and others. This frees us to be more open to the Holy Spirit's inspirations, to live more in the moment and to allow God to work through us. This dynamic is the "Dying to self" or "Pascal Mystery in us" that is often spoken of.

- Although personal prayer is an essential aspect of our spiritual life, praying together and supporting one another as church is also essential. As a minimum our Sunday Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation are part of that communal life. But in addition, it is a great help to have others with whom we share our lives and grow together. That is why we are encouraging small groups to continue. If you do not continue in a group, consider finding one or two prayer partners. Checking in occasionally and sharing how God is working in your lives helps us grow closer to God and one another, building up His Body, The Church.
- There are many other aids to develop our spiritual life, this includes regular service to others, retreats, and the study of our faith. I would like to summarize these elements of a wholistic spiritual life by suggesting that we should be mindful to practice PS-SSS. That is our spiritual life needs to include both **P**rayer and **S**acrament, especially **S**cripture, **S**ervice, and **S**tudy.

Homework assignment #5 & forever

Continue to pray every day, in the way God leads you to, but I believe strongly that praying the Gospels as we have been (using both meditation and contemplation, that is lifting your heart up to God after meditating upon the scripture), and the examination of conscience followed by opening our wounds to God's power for healing, are essential parts of a prayer life. Therefore my challenge and recommendation is to set aside time every day as part of your calendar, ideally in a secret space, and pray the Gospel passage for the upcoming Sunday, and include an examination of conscience, and finally and most importantly the prayer of the heart allowing God to continue to shape it and transform it into His heart.

Additional handouts

The following pages I would like to leave you with some additional descriptions of methods of prayer that I have found have helped people.

1. A Teaching on Prayer from the introduction to the Prayer Journal from Ydisciple (NET Ministries) (This includes the type of prayer I have been teaching in this follow Christ series.)
2. Some references and a short list of ways to pray that Fr Paul has put together and used over the years.
3. "The Prayer Process" by Matthew Kelly of DynamicCatholic.com.

Suggestion agenda for your small groups in your home or at church beyond tonight.

1. Opening prayer, giving God thanks and praise for bringing us together and asking for the Holy Spirit to guide the time together.
2. Praise and worship song (optional), with a recording, or if someone has the talent with voice or instrument.
3. Each check in like we have been about how your prayer life and your spiritual life has been going since the last time you met. (Please consider also sharing. How was your experience of Mass the Sunday before. Were there any insights in the readings, the prayers, or the songs? Were there any "God moments"?)
4. Pray together in the manner we have been (or other ways if the passage does not lend itself well to the imaginative method we've been using) the Gospel for the upcoming Sunday Mass and together break it open and discuss it.
5. Anyone who feels inspired can share what they are hearing in the passage and how they think it is guiding them.
6. Finish your meeting with a longer intercessory prayer time inviting all to voice out loud intentions for their lives, for one another, and for the church and world.
7. Conclude with an Our Father, and a request for God's blessing until you meet again.