

PRAYER - The Ongoing Conversation

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Catechism states that prayer is the lifting up of our minds and hearts to God. How do we do that? Many see this as a separate and independent action from our daily lives as if there was a time and place for everything. I pray when I want something and feel disillusioned when I don't get it. For many, prayer seems to be a waste of time. From this perspective it might well be, because it is just empty gestures. Prayer is not necessarily ORDER and METHOD as an end to itself [ritualistic]. Prayer is an ongoing conversation with God. Prayer is not just verbal but also action. Jesus, a man of action, his whole life, was a prayer glorifying His Father in heaven. [not my will but YOURS be done]

The main focus of our lives and of prayer is for the glorification of God, not self [take up the cross I give you and follow me]; a submission to God's will which glorifies His name. Taking up our cross is prayer, and an example of true humility when done for the glory of God. Our lives must touch others to inspire them to love of God. We are not the source of love but we reflect God's love for them. There are times when God will answer our prayers in another way; to give us strength to bear the very thing we ask to be relieved of. This is the gift of forbearance.

The mind of man is a marvelous mystery. The content of the mind is also the content of the soul; not visible to other men except by their actions. The mind is the window of the soul. The mind is the repository of our life's actions for which the soul will be held responsible. At death this content is translated by the judgment of God. If the focus is on self then we lose our communication with God and we wind up disappointed. I pray but God never answers my prayer, so why pray? That is missing the point. God did answer the prayer. He said NO! An answer we don't want to hear or accept because we want our will to be done, not His. Prayer is a submission to God's will and for His glorification, a life-long process which

began at baptism. Prayer is all about living our lives with God as our focus; we are dependent on Him. The same thought is part of the marriage contract; husbands and wives dependent upon each other.

God answers all prayer but only grants that which will lead that person TO Him; not what will lead that person FROM Him. God knows all things. That which we seek now may seem proper at the time, but in the long run of life it may be our disaster. Not to believe that God knows all things is to deny that God is God. Our prayers then would be like the pagans all verbiage but no substance. The prayers of pagans have no chance of being heard for they are addressed to nothingness. Lives would have no meaning except in self fulfillment. [gratification] Hypocrites can achieve the sound of prayer, but do not possess the will. They lack the desire to fulfill God's will and desire their own will. Not everyone who prays, "Lord! Lord!", shall enter the kingdom; only the one who does God's will. Even atheists pray when they expound to do social good for the sake of goodness. The idea of goodness now becomes their God. This is emptiness.

The fact that God loves us [proven by our creation] does not overshadow His justice, an integral component of His love. Nor does His gift of mercy become pearls before swine. Mercy is the action of generosity between lovers who offer themselves to each other willingly. The substance of our daily life is turned into prayer by our actions offered as a sacrifice to the Lord's goodness; for our actions speak louder than words. A cup of water given in His name becomes a prayer and will receive a reward of mercy.

This, by no means, is a substitute for personal prayer. Both are needed. We must strive to see God in every event of our lives; in pleasant and unpleasant things, in consolation and sorrow. Without fail we should dedicate time every day to a direct conversation with God; even without words from our lips, because words are already engraved in our hearts. God hears the heart, not the lips which can deceive.

There are basically three ways to pray. Private prayer requires a silent atmosphere because it lowers distractions and increases our focus to meditate; however the heart wishes to express itself. Silence is difficult to master, for distraction is something we must continuously fight. We need silence to hear God in our hearts. Listening is also a part of prayer. Lovers communicate more deeply in silence. There is communal prayer which is vocal and unites us in a community of believers, aids in mutual support and has an influence on other seekers. Lastly there is behavior; which is the way we live our lives by keeping a virtuous life style. We must learn and develop a perspective focused on heaven and eternity. Prayer encourages hope. Lack of prayer brings despair. Thinking about great and holy things is not prayer. Prayer is about faith and trust.

"If we pray, why do we worry? If we worry, why do we pray?" To pray is to put ourselves into God's hands: there is no safer place to be. Genuine prayer leaves the manner in which it is answered to God's discretion as we always appeal to God's mercy. However, we must avoid the pitfall of presumption. The idea that since God loves me, He will save me no matter what I do. Since He is all good, He will forgive all my sins. This is not communication since I am pre-determining God's response as well as His judgment. [a fool's paradise] Sincere sorrow and repentance by prayer, action and intent is a prerequisite.

To communicate requires a speaker, a listener and a response, as well as an acknowledgement of the response. This is also the format of prayer. Prayer is never one-sided; me speaking and God listening. Since we live in the dimension of time we tend to get impatient for a response to our prayer, for time is fleeting and anxiety tends to get the better of us. Prayer does require patience and trust that God is aware of our needs, not our wants. Prayer is the conversation by the mind and the soul with the Creator.