

CAN PRAYER BE A SATISFYING EXPERIENCE?



UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES

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THE EMMAUS SERIES



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith

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SESSION 1

Introductory readings

From the Gospels of Mark and Matthew

Reading 1

Gospel of Mark (1:35-37)

In the morning long before dawn, Jesus got up and left the house and went off to a lonely place and prayed there. Simon and his companions set out in search of him, and when they found him they said, 'Everyone is looking for you'. He answered, 'Let us go elsewhere, to the neighbouring towns, so that I can proclaim the message there too, because that is why I came'.

Reading 2

Gospel of Matthew (6:5-10)

When you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them, your Father knows what you need before you ask him. So pray like this:

Our Father in heaven,
may your name be held holy,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven ... ◇

Questions opening up the topic

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp.14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:

Questions

- ◆ The place of personal prayer in our Christian life has always been emphasised; but many Catholics complain that they have not been taught how to make personal prayer. What are some of the difficulties you have encountered in prayer?

- ◆ Have there been experiences in your life that helped you in this regard?

Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Chapter 1:
A Source of Frustration for Many
- ◆ Chapter 2:
Recovering Childhood Attitudes

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp.14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

A reading related to the theme

Psalm 139

Lord, you examine me and know me,
you know when I sit, when I rise,
you understand my thoughts from afar.
You watch when I walk or lie down,
you know every detail of my conduct.

A word is not yet on my tongue
before you, Lord, know all about it.
You fence me in, behind and in front,
you have laid your hand upon me.
Such amazing knowledge is beyond me,
a height to which I cannot attain.

Where shall I escape your spirit?
Where shall I flee from your presence?
If I scale the heavens you are there,
if I lie flat in Sheol, there you are.

If I speed away on the wings of dawn,
if I dwell beyond the ocean,
even there your hand will be guiding me,
your right hand holding me fast ...

You created my inmost self,
knit me together in my mother's womb.
For so many marvels I thank you;
a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.

You knew me through and through,
my being held no secret from you,
when I was being formed in secret,
textured in the depths of the earth ... □

Final reflective sharing

This final sharing of personal responses to the questions given below is the most important phase of the session, and should be entered into generously, in the spirit of the Sympathetic Listening in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15.

It may begin with a brief period of silent reflection, which is followed by two stages:

- 1. An informal Buzz Session in which each participant is able to express their response to each question – questions should be discussed separately;*
- 2. The sharing is brought to a conclusion, with each participant expressing, in a few words, what is their personal response to each question – in view of all that has been discussed in the session.*

Questions

- ◆ What are the ways in which this session has helped you look forward to a more satisfying experience of personal prayer?
- ◆ Are there things in this session that you would like to comment on?

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SESSION 2

Introductory reading

Book of Exodus (3:1-15)

A description of the commissioning of Moses at the burning bush, and the revelation of the Divine Name YAHWEH.

Moses was looking after the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led it to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb (i.e. Sinai) the mountain of God ... Moses looked; there was the bush burning, but the bush was not being burnt up. Moses said, 'I must go across and see this strange sight, and why the bush is not being burnt up'. ... God called him from the middle of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' He said, 'Here I am', he answered. 'Come no nearer', he said. 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors', he said, 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'. At this Moses covered his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Yahweh then said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying for help on account of their taskmasters. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. And I have come down to rescue them from the clutches of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that country, to a country rich and broad, to a country flowing with milk and honey ...

So now I am sending you to Pharaoh, for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses said to God, 'Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' 'I shall be with you', God said ...

Moses then said to God, 'Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you" and they say to me "What is his name" what am I to tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM HE WHO IS'. And he said, 'This is what you are to say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you'. God further said to Moses, 'You are to say to the Israelites, "YAHWEH, the God of our ancestors ... has sent me to you" ... This is my name for all time, and thus I am to be invoked for all generations to come'. ◇

Questions opening up the topic

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing reactions to the following questions:

Questions

- ◆ Does a greater familiarity with the Scriptures make prayer more rewarding for you?
- ◆ Have you known times when you were inclined to abandon personal prayer?

Viewing of DVD

- ◆ Chapter 3:
No Longer Talking to Ourselves
- ◆ Chapter 4:
Many Moods and Seasons
- ◆ Chapter 5:
Common Difficulties

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening in the booklet 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

A reading related to the theme

With Christ in the School of Prayer

by Andrew Murray

A commentary on the words of Jesus, 'pray in my name', repeated several times in from chapters 14 to 16 in John's Gospel..

Until now you have not asked anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and so your joy will be complete. (Jn 16:23-24)

What is meant by praying in Christ's name? It cannot mean simply appearing before God with faith in the mediation of the Saviour. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he supplied them with petitions. And afterwards Jesus said to them, 'To this point you have not asked for anything in my name'. Until the Spirit came, the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer were dormant within them.

When the Holy Spirit of Christ came into their hearts, they desired the very blessings which Christ ... obtains for us by his prayer, from the Father ... To pray in Christ's name is to be identified with Christ ... by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ...

In all prayer, the one essential condition is that we are able to offer it in the name of Jesus - as according to his desire for us, according to the Father's will, according to the Spirit's teaching. And thus praying in Christ's name is impossible without self-examination, without reflection, without self-denial, in short, without the aid of the Spirit. ◇

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Questions

- ◆ Do you think the two questions ('**WHO ARE YOU GOD?**' and '**WHO AM I, WHO COME BEFORE YOU?**') can help you find a new relationship with God in your prayer, and in time of recollection?
- ◆ What is the most important thing you take away from our two sessions on personal prayer?

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

Most Christians find themselves frustrated and discouraged, when they try to give prayer a bigger place in their lives. Prayer is a challenging activity, which takes us to a very elemental level – Jesus tells us that we must recover **the simplicity and trust of little children**.

Perhaps the difficulties we commonly experience – we seem to be talking to ourselves; asking for things seem to be childish – can provide a clue to how these difficulties can be overcome.

Developmental Psychology has brought an understanding of how a small child's consciousness develops. One important milestone psychologists call "**differentiation**" – the capacity the tiny child develops to relate to another person as "someone". Before differentiation, other people are a comforting environment in which the child can explore its growing awareness. The difficulties we have mentioned may involve a subtle form of "**regression**" to a manner of acting of early childhood. This is understandable since prayer is such an unusual and challenging activity.

The great adventure of prayer really begins when we recognise that instead of speaking to ourselves – with God as a comforting environment, which facilitates our self-exploration – we face the challenge of **meeting God face to face**. A simple way of doing this is to ask the question: "Who are you God? Who are you for me?" This question inevitably raises the further question, "Who am I? What is in my heart making me the person I am today?" This approach brings a new realism to our prayer.

The faith of the Old Israel began with the "Who" question at the burning bush – and the answer came as their life in Covenant with God led God's people to know God's ways, what is in the heart of God. In our prayer we can make a similar journey of **covenant-faith** as our lives unfold.

We must be ready for the **many moods and seasons** of an authentic life of prayer – particularly the "desert" time when our faith, hope and love are deepened and purified.

True Christian prayer will learn to share with Christ his **concern for our struggling world**.

Jesus often commends **prayer of petition** – but he warns against mechanic repetition. We must ask "in his name" – that is, in a spirit of oneness with all that he stands for.

Much of our prayer time will be spent in **distractions**. This should not discourage us. Our distractions – when we become aware of them – help us to understand what is on our minds and in our hearts, bringing a greater realism to our question "Who am I?" ♦

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