

How do I pray?

One of the greatest questions that a Christian faces in their daily walk with Christ is this: how do I pray? It is a question that I've had to personally struggle with. How do I pray? How do I know I am praying? What is prayer? Sometimes we can spend years 'praying' but not know what 'praying' is. But as I reflect on my past I do remember the sweet moments of prayer. I remember the type of prayer where I was truly nourished by the word of God, where I wanted to go back again and again and where I discovered the treasures of the Scriptures.

The topic of prayer is pertinent to our Gospel today because Jesus says that he has not come to abolish but to fulfill the law and the prophets. What type of fulfillment does he want to bring about? Indeed, he has come to fulfill the prophecies by coming as the promised messiah and the true lamb of God, but he wants to fulfill much more.

Yes, he came to bring about the external fulfillment of prophecies but he also wanted more deeply the internal fulfillment of the law in our hearts. He didn't just want to be the promised Messiah of the Scriptures but also the long desired Messiah of our hearts.

And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD (JER 31:34)

And the best way to know the Lord personally is through Lectio Divina which is the divine reading of the Scriptures for as St. Jerome says, "Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." So now I just want to break down a simple four step way of praying with the Scriptures.

Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio and Contemplatio.

Lectio refers to reading. It is not just any type of reading but a slow reading of the Scriptures. Just like a metal detector scans the ground for a small signal, so too your heart is slowly scanning the Scriptures for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: something moving your heart, an interesting idea/phrase, a memory is recalled. This is the cue to stop and move onto the next step. You might have to read it several times to be more attentive to the subtle movements of your heart.

Meditatio refers to meditation. Meditation is your reflection on that word or phrase that caught your attention. It involves asking questions, pondering more deeply, actively engaging with the text. However, the next step is one of the most crucial one.

Oratio refers to prayer. This is critical because if all we do is remain in the meditatio then we are just doing theological reflection and not prayer. Prayer is entering into that relationship. Meditatio involves more third person language: Jesus is doing this, I think that..., that is interesting whereas oratio involves second person language: Jesus what do you think about this, why did you do that. Meditatio can be impersonal but oratio involves a dialogue.

Contemplatio refers to contemplation and contemplation is simply this: opening your heart to receive. Oratio is critical because it engages us in that relationship in an active way but contemplatio allows us to engage not in a passive but a receptive way. This can be done by either savoring the insights from the oratio or meditatio or by just remaining in loving silence.

“Seek and you shall find: knock and the door will be opened for you'. That means also, seek through reading, and you will find holy meditation in your thinking; and knock through praying, and the doors shall be opened to you to enter through heavenly contemplation to feel what you desire. Reading puts as it were whole food into your mouth; meditation chews it and breaks it down; prayer finds its savour; contemplation is the sweetness that so delights and strengthens” (Guigo, Carthusian Monk).

Therefore, I invite you try out this method of prayer, this method of Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio, so that Jesus' fulfillment of the law and the prophets does not remain merely external and foreign to you but deeply personal and real.

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