

Prayer

No one wants to be lonely. It is a horrible feeling. What if we could continuously have a sense that we are not riding solo in this world. Or even better, wouldn't it be ideal if we always knew that someone who truly loves us is with us and will never leave our side. This emptiness cannot be filled by television, work or some passion but only by our Creator, God Himself. And we strive for this by being in dialogue with Him, which is referred to as "Prayer". St. Paul encourages us to cling to God for comfort by praying unceasingly. (1 Thes. 5:17) That might seem like an ambitious act but as Christians we are to strive to be perfect as the Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:48) To work towards and accomplish this goal we need to answer three questions. Why, When and How do we pray? By looking closely at our motivation, our attitude and our disposition we can better know our spiritual wellbeing in order to continue and affirm our efforts to be with God for eternity.

Why do we pray?

You might say to yourself that this question has already been answered in the beginning of this article – "We pray so to fill the emptiness with God". In reality this is the result of our efforts and God's grace in prayer but the motivation to sincerely speak to God goes deeper than that. The reason we look to God to put an end to the craziness of our lives is because we realize that God and God alone makes our lives complete and at peace. If we are sipping on our cappuccinos or Corona lights, while we are planning out our future investment so that we can have that perfect vacation maybe God gets lost in our plans. Or possibly when we are dreaming of that ideal home or sports car, we are in a cloud of idolatry and in essence God is one of those many things that we claim we believe in. WE ONLY SPEAK TO GOD IF WE FEEL WE NEED HIM! And the fact is that we always need Him therefore we should always raise ourselves up to Him in prayer. God forbid we are in a state of delusion relying on our own *efforts*. This does not mean we need to be homeless, poor and suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to comprehend our complete dependency on the Lord but we need to realize that no matter what, if it was not for God we would truly be in a place of despair and hopelessness.

When do we pray?

As stated in the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul compels us to pray always. Unfortunately all of us might not be at that stage of spiritual development, therefore we must work toward that goal steadfastly. We do this by creating an environment that cultivates our hearts to yearn for continuous dialogue with the Lord. This means that we must work at our ability to praise God and talk with Him so that when difficult times come we turn to Him, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit has a better chance of penetrating our hardened hearts. The prophet Daniel prayed three times a day. (Daniel 6:10) Christ often went to places of silence to speak to His Father. (Matt. 26:39 Mark 1:35 Luke 5:16 Luke 22:41) The Lord also guides us to go behind closed doors and worship our uncreated master. (Matt. 6:5) With all this in mind each person needs to take out specific segments of the day and focus on the Lord. Ideally it should be done privately in a quiet place where the least amount of distractions might occur. Therefore on the commute to work, in the office surrounded by co-workers, or in the midst of a sporting event are not the ideal times to have your quiet time with the Lord. Of course prayer can happen anywhere and the presence of the Lord should be on our hearts no matter where we are but each person should have a private set aside time and place to dedicated oneself to the practice of individual dialogue with God. Concretely for example each person should put aside at least 15 minutes once a day in front of his or her icons with a candle lit lifting up their hearts, petitions,

aspirations and challenges to the Lord. In doing this we can cultivate the building blocks to spend every possible moment in conversation with our God.

How do we pray?

We pray to our Lord with awe, hope and reverence. We address our maker who fills us with comfort and reassurance. In this relationship our closeness to Him should also give us the liberty to address the Lord intimately as the Psalmist does “Lord hear me!”, “listen to my prayer!” (141:1) or as Christ did in the Lord’s prayer “Give us this day our daily bread”, “forgive us our trespasses”, “deliver us from evil.” (Luke 7:3-4) These prayer verses are important because each verb has one thing in common and that is that they are commands. Here we see the relationship that each one of us needs to have with the Lord. We need to know Him so well so that when we pray to Him we do not make a suggestion but in the deepest respect we proclaim an imperative, a command to the Lord knowing with all confidence that His Will will be done. Yes we ask for mercy from God as did David the prophet (Psalm 51:1) and as the Publican did (Luke 18:13) but remember both repentant sinners used a command to address the creator, and He is the only one who has the authority to forgive sins. We need to know God as a friend and also as our judge and through this intimate relationship we can begin to pray to the Lord with our entire soul, mind, body and heart and reach out to be constantly comforted by His warm divine presence in prayer that never ceases. Amen.