

Practices for the Spiritual Life — Stopped in Our Tracks by God

Third. We must weigh all our actions without the impetuosity or impulsiveness that mark a distraught spirit. As we carry out our duties, we must work gently, tranquilly and lovingly with God, asking Him to accept our labor. Through our continual attention to God, we will crush the head of the devil and make his weapons fall from his hands.

“...continual attention to God...” for some may mean being constantly on our knees in prayer, or in church, or even having our homes filled with statues, crucifixes, and holy pictures. These should help us. But we must guard against them becoming the substitute for what we are supposed to be doing in our lives.

“...continual attention to God” means that we take the time to place ourselves quietly in God’s presence, and listen with an open heart to the will of God — and then act on it.

Here, we set aside our own preferences so that we can hear, and then respond, to God’s plan for us and others. In doing this, the will of God, we conquer the evil which pervades our society and the world. Aware of the presence of God always with us, we now are to bring the presence of God alive for others.

Remember when Jesus took Peter, James and John up Mt. Tabor and was transfigured in their sight? The awe and wonder experienced was so great that they fell silent, and later Jesus warned them not to speak of it until after the resurrection (when insight from the Spirit would be provided). [See Matt. 17, Mk. 9, Lk. 9] How difficult it probably was for them to leave the mountain top following such an awesome experience. How overpowering it had to have been for these men to be made privy to such knowledge. How strong was the experience that they could only wish to remain there instead of returning to the daily routine and grumbling they would face when returning to the valley. Of course, they had yet to realize that what God showed them on Mt. Tabor was their own call to glory, just as it was for Jesus. We have the Spirit, a gift of our baptism, that acts in and through our lives.

We need to be mindful of what the Spirit does.
We are not ‘doing’ as much as ‘responding’ to

what God intends, and to what God is ‘doing’. Our work is to become coworkers, aware of God’s doing. And this is always meant to lead all people to salvation and the joy of eternal life, rather than the temporary satisfaction found in our feeble accomplishments, truly small in comparison to God’s fulfillment.



Our “*continual attention to God*” is what allows us to be transfigured in mind and heart, and ultimately consumed into the reality of God always with us, even in the valleys of life that are

often filled with the same squabbles present during the time of Jesus. The world hasn’t changed, and the message remains real for us as it was then.

God has a plan

that includes all of us. As we move into the presence of God, we too will be shown by the Spirit, all that is meant for us. But it will be realized only by those open to the Spirit of God. Openness to the presence of God is openness to the Spirit of God which moves and directs our actions. It is this Spirit that also gives us the courage and strength to desire the mountain top of divine revelation rather than the mountain top created by our own desires, and by a world that stands in contrast to the truth of the word of God.

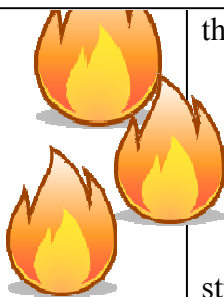
And when we falter? We are assured of God’s presence that heals, forgives, and moves us again on the right path. How encouraging!

Fourth. During our work and other activities, and even during our times of reading or writing, even though they may be spiritually oriented — and yes, even more during our outward devotions and prayers aloud — we ought to stop for a short moment, as frequently as we can, to adore God deep within our hearts and take pleasure in Him, even though we might have to do this momentarily and in secret. Since you are not unmindful of the fact that God is present before you as you carry out your duties, and you know that He is at the depth and center of your soul, why not stop from time to time, whatever you are doing — even if you are praying aloud — to adore him inwardly, to praise Him, to beseech Him, to offer your

GOD FIRST

Year Two, Part 10

The Prayer of Awareness



heart to Him, and to thank Him?

What could please God more than for us to leave all created things over and over each day in this way in order to withdraw and worship Him in our hearts? Not to mention the fact that this is the way to destroy self-love, which cannot exist except among us creatures. Inwardly returning to God in this way rids us of self-love without our even being aware of it.

Finally, we can give no greater witness to God of our faithfulness than by continually renouncing and turning from the created things around us to take pleasure, even for a single moment, in our creator.

This is not to suggest that you should withdraw inwardly forever. That is not possible. But prudence, the mother of virtues, will guide you. Nonetheless, I maintain that it is a common error among spiritual persons not to withdraw from outward things from time to time to worship God within themselves and to find comfort and pleasure in the peace of His Divine presence for a few moments.

This digression has been lengthy, but I thought that the matter demanded all this explanation.

Did you ever have one of those moments when someone came up to you and asked, "What were you thinking about? You looked like you were somewhere else." That's what taking these moments to give praise and adoration, to beseech God, are all about. They can happen in one of two ways. The first is an unconscious act when we realize the awesomeness of God present to us at a particular moment. It can happen during mass, and often leaves us unable to sing when everyone else is singing, or to open our mouths in prayer, knowing well the only words that could be spoken are those of praise and thanksgiving, so wonderful is God's love and mercy realized at that moment. It can happen as we are going about our daily tasks. A small act of kindness may trigger it.

The second way is a conscious decision to stop and give praise and thanksgiving to God — us directing our will to become one with the will of the Father.

In both cases, these moments are gifts from God, meant to provide the faithful with great strength and peace. It is in these moments that we realize that nothing else matters. They may well be contemplative experiences with God showing, and offering us, the holiness that he is. We experience just how gracious is our God. We see Merton's "Hidden Ground of Love" being revealed in our lives, the lives of all people, and in all of creation.

And we're thankful.



UNDERSTANDING FORMS OF OUR PRAYER

Last week, descriptions of prayer of Blessing, Adoration, and Praise were provided from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). These explanations are meant to help us consider our current understanding of prayer, and/or whether we need to change anything along the way. Those given as part of last week's insert should always be the first prayers uttered when we seek to encounter God.



PETITION helps us express our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end. We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to him. (CCC 2630)

The first movement of the prayer of petition is asking forgiveness. It is a prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer...Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer. (CCC 2631)

Christian petition is centered on the desire and search for the kingdom to come, in keeping with the teaching of Christ. There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the kingdom, then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming. This collaboration with the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit is the object of the prayer of the apostolic community. (CCC 2632)



INTERCESSION is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all people, especially sinners. He is "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. The Holy Spirit "himself intercedes for us...and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (CCC 2634)



THANKSGIVING characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for his glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their head. (CCC 2637)

As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. (CCC 2638)