

From the desk of the Pastor

So many prayers....

Our Catholic tradition has an almost inexhaustible library of different types of prayers. While every type of prayer may not be right for everyone there is always some type of prayer that is right for someone.

It would be a beautiful journey for Lent if we tried as a community to experience different types of prayer. There are many ways to categorize prayers, but perhaps today we can talk about prayer as either vocal prayer, mental prayer or contemplative prayer - which can further be called natural contemplative prayer or supernatural contemplative prayer.

I would like to examine these types of prayers during the season of Lent in order for us to increase the breadth and depth of our understanding of types of prayer. Today I will focus on vocal prayers and then move through the weeks of Lent to talk about other types of prayer. All of which can enhance our experience of prayer.

Vocal prayer is exactly what it sounds like. It is praying with our voice. It is simply the experience of praying prayers that we have memorized - perhaps even from our youth. This type of prayer is very important and should not be minimized. It is, after all, the type of prayer that Jesus first gave to his disciples. When they asked him to teach them how to pray he said to them, "When you pray, say this." And then he taught them the "Lord's Prayer" which we commonly call the "Our Father" based on the first words of this beautiful prayer.

St. Teresa of Jesus, who was a master of prayer, said that vocal prayer must always be a part of our life of prayer. No one will ever reach such levels of sanctity that they can leave aside vocal prayer. Though it is the simplest type of prayer it is essential for the spiritual life of everyone. St. Teresa of Jesus was later named a Doctor of the Church because of the insights and wisdom that

she taught about prayer. She says that there will come moments in everyone's life where the only prayer that we will have the capacity to pray will be that of vocal prayer. We should never put aside the praying of the "Hail Mary" and other beautiful prayers of our tradition. These prayers keep us connected with our tradition and are authentic ways of talking to God and the saints.

There is, however, a danger in the area of vocal prayers. That is the risk of saying the words too casually or without devotion or attention. It happens all too frequently that people pray vocal prayers but without raising their minds to God. For vocal prayer to be effective and laudatory, it is necessary to use the words as a diving board to go deep into our relationship with God. We cannot just say the words like an auctioneer. Rather, our words should be spoken with love, mindful that during our vocal prayer we are addressing the loving God of the universe. Everyone should have a list of vocal prayers that they say every day. It does not have to be complicated. It could simply be an "Our Father" first thing in the morning or three "Hail Mary's" before bed. We should all incorporate the beautiful and ancient vocal prayers of our tradition into our life of prayer. They keep us grounded and always help us to raise our minds and our hearts to our loving God if they are prayed with attention and love.

Next week, I will speak of the power and value of mental prayer in the life of every Christian believer. Until then....keep those "Hail Mary's" coming.

In Christ,
Fr. Dave