



*"Go into your room and shut the door
and pray to your Father who is in secret."*

July 2015: Reflection - (Mt. 6:6)

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (Mt. 6:5-9)

God, who dwells in unapproachable light, has revealed Himself as love to us. In our brokenness and confusion, the love of God has reached us, we who were far off, because "Christ came into this world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst!" (1 Tim 1:15). Therefore let us lift up our eyes to God in prayer, to Him who has always looked upon us with tenderness and mercy. Through prayer, let us strive to draw near to Him, who draws near to us and who is "closer to us than we are to ourselves" (St. Augustine). This month, we turn our attention to growing in the pillar of Prayer.

Lord, teach us to pray. Jesus, who opened the door for us to God, also taught us to converse with God in prayer as in a loving relationship. This is why, “informed by divine teaching, we dare to say, *our Father.*” Not only does He simply teach us this, He gives us the Spirit of adoption who also testifies in our very depths that we are truly sons and daughters of God. *Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit moves our hearts to love God as Father and to cry out to Him in filial affection, “Abba! Father!” (Rom 8:15).

Prayer is thus drawing near to God in love, placing ourselves in His very presence, longing for Him who longs for us. But how often prayer becomes something else: a show for others, a superstitious practice, a great flow of words, as though God would be persuaded by the use of many words! Jesus therefore gives a strong teaching in this regard. Prayer of this kind is not prayer, though “they think they will be heard for their many words.”

Yet, bringing ourselves to God in prayer is not always easy. We are deeply invested in our work, ministry commitments, pleasures, anxieties, relationships and relationship struggles, etc. We are ‘scattered’ across many things. But God cannot be one more thing among the many, since He is the only “one thing that is necessary” (Lk 10:42). To approach God in prayer, we must retreat from the *many* in order to reverently draw near to Him who is *One*. We must gather ourselves up, in order that we might place ourselves in His presence. We must go into the inner room; indeed, we must shut the door! True prayer is therefore said to originate from the *heart*, “the dwelling-place where I am, where I live... the place ‘to which I withdraw’... our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully” (CCC 2563).

When we lose sight of the fact that true prayer is from the heart, we tend to become complacent with our prayer life. Instead of striving to bring our hearts into God’s presence, we become satisfied with bringing our bodies into a holy place or into a pious posture for some duration. Or perhaps we become satisfied with a time of silence and thinking. While this is not to be undervalued as a discipline, surely “if our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain” (CCC 2562). God wishes for us to draw near. Our “Father who is in secret” longs to spend moments with us in the secret depths of love. We must therefore *strive* to draw near to Him in prayer.

The struggle of prayer is often that we are so easily scattered again across the innumerable things of life. It is difficult to keep our hearts steadily in the presence of God. However, this struggle must not dishearten us so that we become content with a prayer life of “empty phrases.” St. Francis de Sales wisely teaches, “If you do nothing else while at prayer but bring your heart back again and again and place it in God’s presence... though it went away every time you brought it back, your time of prayer would be very well spent.” (Introduction to the Devout Life).

Let us respond to the Father’s love. Lord, teach us to pray. *Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit.*