

November 2017

“Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Mt. 6:5-9)

✚ Reflection:

This month, as we turn our attention to the pillar of prayer, let us strive to draw near to him who draws near to us, to him who is even “closer to us than we are to ourselves” (St. Augustine).

Prayer is an ongoing journey, and yet for us Christians it is not an indeterminate one[a]. The disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray (Lk 11:1). Their search had a directedness; they knew whom to ask and they knew he could answer. They saw something of Jesus’ relationship with the Father as he prayed, and they were simply seeking what they had witnessed. In responding to them, Jesus invites them to be more than witnesses to his way of praying. He draws them in to participate in his very prayer and relationship, the relationship of the Only-Begotten Son to the Father. That is the only reason why as Christians, by the grace of the Holy Spirit and “informed by [Christ’s] divine teaching, we dare to say: Our Father...”

Yet, drawing near to God with such sincerity is not always easy. We are quite invested in our career, ministry projects, pleasures, daily stresses, future plans, relationships and conflicts. We are scattered across many things, and so we make God one more thing among the many. But God is the only “one thing that is necessary” (Lk 10:42). To approach him in prayer, we must retreat from the many. We must gather ourselves up, in order that we might pour ourselves out wholly to him. 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 prayer is from the heart, it is easy 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 a pious posture for some duration. Or perhaps we become satisfied with a time of silence and much 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). The truth is, prayer is only truly prayer when it shares in the prayer of Christ. “Our Father who is in heaven” looks upon us as beloved children in Christ, and our “Father who is in secret” longs to spend secret moments with us in the inner room of Love. Let us desire anew to be there; let us strive to draw near.

Even when it is difficult to keep our hearts steadily in God’s presence, we should not let ourselves become disheartened and become complacent with the prayer of “empty phrases.” St. Francis de Sales 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). Rather than settle for a complacent prayer life, let us learn from the disciples in allowing Jesus to draw us anew into his intimate relationship with the Father.

Lord, teach us to pray. Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit.

☩ Saint’s Quote:

“Your continuous desire is your continuous prayer. If you cease to desire than you will have fallen silent in your prayer.”

-St. Augustine

☑ To Do:

God is a Father who wants to be loved and enjoyed by his children. So respond accordingly in prayer!

