

The Centrality of Prayer Part 7

Ceaseless Prayer or Prayer of the Heart

In this, the seventh and final segment of the *Centrality of Prayer*, we will turn finally to Ceaseless Prayer or Prayer of the Heart and the invocation of God's Name. The Psalmist prayed, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!" (Ps. 103:1). Jesus taught his disciples "that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Lk. 18:1). The Apostle Paul wrote, "Rejoice always, *pray without ceasing*, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:16-18).

Consider the following quotations from the Fathers of the Church:

"It is ordained that man must put before all things the universal commandment - to remember God - of which it is said: 'thou shalt remember the lord thy God' (Deut. 8:18). For, by the reverse of that which destroys us, we may be secure. What destroys us is forgetfulness of God, which shrouds the commandments in darkness and despoils us of all good." - St. Gregory of Sinai (1265-1346)

"Let no one think, my brother Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen. No, no; it is the duty of all Christians to remain always in prayer." - St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

"For the sake of saving your souls, do not neglect the practice of unceasing prayer. At first it may appear difficult to you, but be assured, as it were from the Almighty God, that this very Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, constantly invoked by you, will help you to overcome all difficulties, and in the course of time you will become used to this practice and will taste how sweet is the Name of the Lord." - St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359)

"A mind which is not dispersed among external things, returns to itself, and from itself ascends to God by an unerring path." - Basil the Great (329- 379)

"We must understand, then, that even though God doesn't always give us what we want, He gives us what we need for our salvation." - St. Augustine (354-430)

Please note that these Patristic quotations are taken from [Ye Shall Know the Truth: Christianity and the Perennial Philosophy](#), page 73.

We started off these pages on prayer with the following words: "No action is more important in the believer's life than prayer. This is because prayer involves us in a direct relationship between God and ourselves and nothing is more necessary for our life than God. Prayer is that which engages us in a direct communication with God. Since God is necessary for the continuation of our lives, it is necessary for us to be in regular communication with Him."

The necessity of this communication between us and God was illustrated by the Patristic quotations above. Notice particularly the last quotation from Augustine: “We must understand, then, that even though God doesn’t always give us what we want, He gives us what we need for our salvation.” God wants us to have a relationship with Him, that is, to know him and most importantly to be *known* by him (Ps.1:6; Matt. 7:23).

That which God gives us for our salvation lacks nothing in efficacy to bring about its desired end. It does entail, however, without exception, a responsibility upon all who seek to know - and again most importantly - to be known by him. This responsibility is prayer. In the preceding pages I have mentioned Individual or Personal Prayer and Canonical Prayer or recitation/meditation of Scripture, and now I turn to the third and final kind of prayer, which is Ceaseless Prayer or Prayer of the Heart. Those who seek to follow this path of prayer will have to put it into practice, as the Psalmist says, “day and night.” There is no way around the sacred responsibility to pray. Prayer is the beginning and foundation of a truly human life. Prayer in terms of mere words, however, is not enough. Prayer as a responsibility bears intrinsically within it another non-negotiable responsibility, which is to obey the very words which God through the Scriptures puts in our mouths.

Personal Prayer comes from our individual unique situation and comes, we could say, naturally and easily as we reach out to God to take away pain or help us in a particular way. Canonical prayer, the recitation of Scripture, is God’s way for us to encounter him directly and not as an individual who only wants something other than God Himself. This prayer does not do away with the former but is more perfect because the words are God’s. Ceaseless Prayer or Prayer of the Heart is the taking of God’s words and building our lives around them. Through recitation of Scripture, we seek to unite ourselves directly to God, not to get something, but rather to become more human. That is, we seek to be in line with God’s will, to listen to him, to know him, and *to be known* as one who mirrors God in one’s thinking, willing and doing God’s will. Ceaseless prayer or remembrance of God is intended to prolong our consciousness of God and is made possible by the practice of reciting short portions of Scripture. One example of this is the “Jesus Prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” This short prayer has a larger context in the Gospels.

The more one knows and is familiar with Scripture as whole, the better one can make use of short passages in the practice of remembering God throughout the day. For example, if one is familiar with the Four Gospels, one can with greater profit say the Jesus prayer. The Jesus prayer is a very short prayer based on the Scripture and in its brevity is where the power lies. It can be recited throughout the day in any situation and brings us directly into God’s presence through Christ.

Wishing you all the very best I offer in conclusion the following general suggestions:

1. In the morning and evening devotions
 - a. Read Scripture in sequence
 - b. Say the Lord’s Prayer
 - c. Pray for family, friends, neighbors, etc.
2. Throughout the day, recite a short Scriptural prayer, for example the Jesus prayer or a verse from the Book of Psalms.
3. Always seek to live a life of faithfulness to God based on God’s teaching as presented, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

