

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Armand M. Nigro, S.J.

### *GOD SPEAKS TO US FIRST*

This fundamental truth makes it possible for us to pray to God. He has been concerned for each of us long before we became concerned for ourselves. He desires communication with us. He speaks to us continually, revealing Himself to us by various modes:

- through Jesus Christ, His Word;
- through the Church, the extension of Christ in the world (because we are joined together in Christ, God speaks to us through other people.);
- through visible creation around us, which forms the physical context of our lives. (Creation took place in His Son, and it is another form of God's self-revelation.);
- through the events of our lives;
- through Holy Scripture, a real form of His presence. This is the mode of communication we are most concerned with in prayer.

### *HE INVITES US TO LISTEN*

Our response to God's initial move is to listen to what He is saying. This is the basic attitude of prayer.

### *HOW TO GO ABOUT LISTENING*

What you do immediately before prayer is very important. Normally, it is something you do not rush into. Spend a few moments quieting yourself and relaxing, settling yourself into a prayerful and comfortable position. In listening to anyone, you try to tune out everything except what the person is saying to you.

In prayer this can be done best in *silence* and *solitude*. Select a favorite passage from Holy Scripture, 5 to 10 verses. Put a marker in the page. Try to find a quiet place where you can be

alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence. Try to quiet yourself interiorly. Jesus would often go up to the mountain by Himself to pray with His Father.

In an age of noise, activity, and tensions like our own, it is not always easy or necessary to forget our cares and commitments, the noise and excitement of our environment. Never feel constrained to blot out all distractions. Anxiety in this regard could get between ourselves and God.

Rather, realize that the Word did become flesh -- that He speaks to us in the noise and confusion of our day. Sometimes in preparing for prayer, relax and listen to the sounds around you. God's presence is as real as they are.

Be conscious of your sensations and living experiences of feeling, thinking, hoping, loving, of wondering, desiring, etc. Then, conscious of God's unselfish, loving presence in you, address Him simply and admit: "Yes, you do love life and feeling into me. You do love a share of your personal life into me. You are present to me. You live in me. Yes, You do."

God is present *as a person*, in you through His Spirit, who speaks to you now in Scripture, and who prays in you and for you.

Ask God the grace to listen to what He says. Begin reading Scripture slowly and attentively. Do not hurry to cover much material.

If it recounts an event of Christ's life, be there in the mystery of it. Share with the persons involved, e.g. a blind man being cured. Share their attitude. Respond to what Jesus is saying.

Some words or phrases carry special meaning for you. Savor those words, turning them over in your heart. You may want to speak or recite a Psalm or other prayer from Scripture. Really mean what you are saying.

When something strikes you, e.g.,

- You feel a new way of being with Christ. He becomes for you in a new way (e.g., you sense what it means to be healed by Christ.)
- you experience God's love,
- you feel lifted in spirit,
- you are moved to do something good,
- you are peaceful,
- You are happy and content just to be in God's presence,

This is the time to ---- *PAUSE*.

This is God speaking directly to you in the words of Scripture. Do not hurry to move on. Wait until you are no longer moved by the experience.

Don't get discouraged if nothing seems to be happening. Sometimes God lets us feel dry and empty in order to let us realize it is not in our power to communicate with Him or to experience consolation. God is sometimes very close to us in His seeming absence (Ps. 139:7-8). He is for us entirely in a selfless way. He accepts us as we are, with all our limitations -- even with our seeming inability to pray. A humble attitude of listening is a sign of love for Him, and a real prayer from the heart.

At these times remember the words of Paul: "The Spirit, too, comes to help us in our weakness, for when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words." (Rom. 8:26-27.)

Relax in prayer. Remember, God will speak to you in *God's* own way: "Yes, as the rain and snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out *my will* and succeeding in what it was sent to do." (Isaiah 55:10-11.)

Spend time in your prayer just being conscious of God's presence in and around you. If you want to, speak with Him about the things you are interested in or wish to thank Him for, your joys, sorrows, aspirations, etc.

#### SUMMARY OF THE 5 "P'S"

1. *Passage from Scripture*. Pick one and have it marked and ready.
2. *Place*. Where you are alone and uninhibited in your response to God's presence.
3. *Posture*. Relaxed and peaceful. A harmony of body with spirit.
4. *Presence of God*. Be aware of it and acknowledge and respond to it. If nothing happens turn to the
5. *Passage from Scripture*. Read it very slowly aloud and listen carefully and peacefully to it.

Read *aloud* or *whisper* in a rhythm with your breathing -- a phrase at a time -- with *pauses* and *repetitions* when and where you feel like it.

*Don't* be anxious, *don't* try to look for implications or lessons or profound thoughts or conclusions or resolutions, etc. Be content to be like a child who climbs into its father's lap and *listens* to his words and his story. When you finish, remind yourself that God continues to live in you during the rest of the day.