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2006

Let us Pray

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Let us Pray" (2006). *Spiritual Essays*. 374.

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Let Us Pray

We know that Jesus prayed. He prayed, "...that all might be one;" he prayed, "Let this cup pass... but not my will, yours be done;" he prayed, "Father forgive them..."

When his disciples asked him how to pray, Jesus gave them the "Lord's Prayer." The words to the "Lord's Prayer" that we use are not the exact words that Jesus spoke. He used Aramaic, not the Greek or Latin of the Scriptures that have been translated into the languages we use. It is not the words, but the meaning that we both bring to and receive from the use of the words that is important.

The "Lord's Prayer" is beautiful in every language. Saying the prayer can be consoling and helpful, as also the use of another written prayer, a Psalm, or the words of a song. When we pray the "Lord's Prayer" or any prayer, it is not the same as merely reading or reciting the words.

Praying is part of our communication and interaction with God, in a two-way relationship. We do not talk to ourselves; we talk to God, and we attend to God as someone we know and love who also knows and loves us. Whether we use the words of the "Lord's Prayer" or our own words, we do not talk "at" God, but respectfully present what we have to say.

When we pray with words, or without them, we do not perform a task, but we communicate with the Other, who is always present and available to accept our message and to respond. Since God desires communion with us, the Holy Spirit inspires our desire and our decision to pray, and enables us to communicate without the use of visible sight, audible sound, or electronic media. Every least moment of prayer has about it a touch of both mystery and miracle: we, of ourselves, cannot make contact with God except by God's wanting to be in communication with us. The idea is ours, as well as our habits of prayer, but the inspirations and the connections are gifts of God.

Imagine trying to talk to someone across town who will not answer the phone or to relate with someone in the next room who keeps the door closed. Communication is impossible if the other person does not want to interact with us. God is always open to communication with us; God is present with us more closely than our breath and heartbeat, and desires to have our free consent to his gifts of love more than we desire to receive them.

When we engage in communication of any kind, we might emphasize speaking or listening, the expressing of our thoughts or receiving those of others, and the relating of our feelings or sensitivity to what others are experiencing. We can try to control the interaction by neither looking at others' non-verbal expressions nor pausing for their possible responses, or we can choose to be sensitive to how our communications are being received, and deliberately seek free responses from those with whom we speak. In using the words of the "Lord's Prayer" or any other expressions of our intentions to God, we have the same possibilities for communication as with other persons, and we can also either assume that we are the presenters and God is an obligated listener, or we can think and act as those who are in communication with the One who loves us into each moment of our lives. The attitudes we bring to prayer have much to do with the quality of our experiences.

Just as we can watch and listen for visible and audible responses from another while we are speaking, we can, in prayer, pay attention to how God is responding to what we are saying. As long as we maintain an attitude of respect for God, we can sense, even in our silent words, the graced inspirations to mean what we say and to discover this day's understandings of how our words match our realities. We are quite capable, by the gentle but real action of God in prayer, of receiving a sense of peace or a simple realization that it is "good for us to be here." Some conversations are intense and deeply satisfying, while others are quite ordinary. When we pray, we open ourselves to both the possibility of pleasant surprises and the nearly imperceptible experiences of ordinary everyday acceptance of being creatures in the presence of our Creator.

In prayer, words can hold meaning for us who use them. God surely hears our every word, but takes pleasure in the intention of our hearts just as we are more impressed with others' sincere smiles than some words that might less perfectly convey what they are thinking and feeling. Let us pray.