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Praying, not Preying

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Praying, not Preying

Praying and preying sound alike but have very different meanings. They are not opposites, but they differ as much as a love relationship is distinct from a demeaning, "using" relationship. Praying and preying are both action words. But praying is about communication between persons, whether or not words are employed, while preying describes treating others as things, and using them selfishly.

Praying does not include preying, for God is neither a commodity to be used, nor a person that we can manipulate for our own purposes. We have needs, and we are encouraged to ask for gifts and guidance, for love and support. But to demand anything would be entirely out of place, since God is not in the least subject to our control.

We might try bargaining with God to get what we want, but what do we have to offer that is wholly our own, unless it might be our love? To withhold our love in order to obtain something we desire would make us the losers, not God. If we do not love in return, our lives become meaningless to us, even though God continues to love us.

Since we want to pray and not prey in our relationship with God, we can find, by reflecting on our experiences of prayer, some of the small but subtle ways of thinking and acting that will be helpful to us. For example, we might think of ourselves as the initiators when we pray. But we might grow closer to God by acknowledging that the One to whom we "go" in prayer resides within our hearts, and is the origin of our every desire to pray. If we consider prayer as "talking to God," we could act like those who tell a story to win someone's admiration, or offer an opinion to demonstrate wisdom and knowledge. But prayer is always a form of two-way, interpersonal communication with God, including listening as well as speaking, more like a phone call than a voice-message left on an answering machine.

If there is any preying that takes place with regard to praying, it is in the thoughts that we are too busy to pray. If we are too busy to pray, we are too busy. Do we have time to live? Do we have time to love, to appreciate others, to renew our sense of purpose in all that we do? Praying is exactly what busy persons need: not "another thing to do," but communication with God in thoughts and words, in recognition of a loving presence in nature and in neighbors, and in our capacity to love. The Source of our life is intensely interested in all that interests us. In communication with God, we discover our deepest desires and the

guidance we need for making decisions; we gain freedom from the kinds of thoughts that would prey upon us.

When we experience a movement within us towards God, we can consider ourselves as having been invited into prayer. Whether we spend but a moment at the time of inspiration or decide to "make an appointment" and set aside some time for prayer as a regular practice, we will be in communication with the One who loves us as we are. We can never be too busy for Love. Amen.