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## In or Out

Fr. Randy Roche

*Loyola Marymount University*

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## In or Out

When my older brothers kindly took me along to a small lake so we could paddle around in a boat, I made the mistake of tentatively putting one foot in the boat while keeping one foot on the dock, and fell right into the water. I had put some of my weight in the boat, causing it to move away, while at the same time trying to maintain the apparent safety of contact with solid ground: a "learning experience" about either going or staying, not both at the same time.

Many of our interactions in life require us to either move in or stay out, with no realistic option for both moving and staying. If we open our mouths and use the word "love," for example, we will have left the relative safety of keeping our truth within us and have declared a position from which there is no return. Even if we later were to say that we didn't really mean it, we can never go back to our former stance of completely private thoughts and feelings.

Praying is like getting into a boat. We are either going to set ourselves in motion, which might at least appear to involve some risk, or we are going to remain with our own familiar thought processes and stay put. If we step in, we had best get in, not keeping a part of our focus on some other interest.

What are the risks of engaging in prayer? Climbing into a boat in calm waters is relatively risk-free, as long as we act fully on our decision, for we can climb back out again when we wish. Praying would also seem to hold no risk for us, because we can stop at any time. We seem to be at least in as much control as is anyone paddling a boat in a safe environment. And if our expectation and desire is to do something as recreational as boating or as re-creational as praying, chances of sinking or suffering are quite remote.

In stormy waters, most of us would not want to enter a small boat unless it would be a last resort, as when escaping from a sinking ship. Some of us might think of prayer in troubled times as a small life-boat, and only enter when there seems to be no alternative. The risk might seem high, because we are frightened, or hurting, angry or overwhelmed. But the risk is only apparent. Getting into a small boat that is bobbing up and down in turbulent waters is truly perilous, while the lifeboat of prayer never sinks or overturns. When our minds and hearts are in turmoil, many of us have difficulty in beginning to pray because we know intuitively that we will have to acknowledge, without denying or rationalizing, the full extent of our present experience with all attendant thoughts and feelings.

When we decide to consciously engage with Love (for God is love) we are praying, and we are received just as we are, as we ourselves might wordlessly accept any other person in pain, fear, or whatever their condition might be. If we decide to enter into prayer, we can still leave at any time – no risk of being retained against our will – but while we pray we will almost certainly be held. The risk is that we might suffer the embarrassment of being loved as we are. Would we rather stay out?