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Playing

Fr. Randy Roche

Loyola Marymount University

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Playing

A friend of mine had a disorder that made it difficult for her to enunciate words clearly, so she would often say "playing" when she meant "praying." Perhaps the two words are closely connected after all, and not just by closeness of spelling, but also by nearness of meaning.

Lots of people tell stories about themselves in which they tried as hard as they could to think of an answer to a question, or to pray seriously and well, or to come to an understanding of their own motivation, and were unable to attain their goal. After recognizing their inability to succeed by force of effort or will power, they stopped trying. But their stories continued. Rather than move on to something else, they remained where they were, still focused on their desires. Then, without exertion, the answer they sought, or contact with God, or self-understanding, came to them. Sometimes our best results follow not upon the amount of work we do, but upon "playing" and praying.

Our experiences of spirituality often have about them a kind of playfulness. We probably have learned by now that exertion and force, struggle and power are seldom the quickest or the best means for gaining insights, creative ideas, or personal contact with God or anyone else. Children learn much while they are playing. We continue, through all stages of life, to receive much that is of great importance to us when we stop working intensively at attaining our desires and make space in our minds and hearts for thoughts and feelings to arise, in something of a playful attitude.

Praying and playing are most closely aligned in one-to-one communications with God. In public or communal prayer, we necessarily give some of our attention to others, just as we do even in forms of play, as when we engage others in a hand of bridge or a tennis match. But when we participate in personal and private conversations, whether with God or with any other person, we do not follow a script, and we do not hold ourselves to strict rules of grammar. We allow ourselves the playful freedom of spontaneously changing topics, disclosing and eliciting feelings, and expressing opinions that often go beyond the bounds of pure logic. When we pray in a similar fashion, we often find that we are far more satisfied than if we had followed the forms that would be expected of an employee speaking with an executive.

When we need ideas, answers, or personal contact with God, we do not stare out the window expecting our minds to be flooded with knowledge or inspirations regarding anything and everything of significance to us. We think, consider, and exercise our interior senses as we apply ourselves to meeting our desires. At the same time, if we have reflected on our

experience, we will know when to allow rather than try to make something happen. When we open ourselves to attaining our objectives by more than our conscious efforts alone, we are liable to work less and “play” more, including when we pray.