

Sunday, February 3, 2012

How to Pray?

The following question came to me from some of the congregants:

How do I enjoy the life of prayer? I long to live in a life of continuous prayer, but I often face laziness and disappointment. Tell me what to do?

Prayer is the greatest work man can do. When we heed prayer, many aspects of our lives change to the better. However, as St. John Chrysostom said, he who leads a life void of prayer will be completely void of any goodness. Thus, please allow me to present some simple guiding points so that together we would be filled with the spirit of prayer.

1. **Through prayer, we learn how to pray.** That is to say we will not taste the sweetness of prayer unless we practice it rather than just reading and hearing about it. Additionally, prayer reveals to us new depths and horizons that makes us rejoice in conversing with God and yearn for these conversations to last forever.

St Moses the Black said that **Prayer of the spirit starts with the body.** Therefore, we ought to abandon laziness, rise to prayer, and bring our bodies into subjection to start praying.

We ought to stay firm in prayer for sometime even if we pray by simply reading the words of the book of prayer. When God sees our faithfulness, the Holy Spirit starts reacting within us so He leads our thoughts and moves our feelings. Then, our hearts begin to move and engage with God in lovely spiritual prayers that may be accompanied by tears and spiritual groans which inundates the heart with joy.

2. It is important that we have a **consistent daily regiment for prayer, the Agpeya is the greatest tool to achieve that.** In that regard, St, Isaac the Syrian says: **“Keep the hourly service (The seven hourly prayers) by praying at least one psalm of every hourly prayer.”** It is a simple and beautiful exercise to take the blessing of each hourly prayer of the Agpeya by praying at least one psalm. It is possible to combine all the prayers in two prayer times, one in the morning and another in the evening.

3. **Starting our day with God by matins’ prayer** has a great impact on having a successful day in all aspects of our lives. In that regard, St. Augustine says: **“Whoever prays well will spend his day well.”** Additionally, sanctifying the beginning of the day to the Lord by offering a morning prayer strengthens within us the sense of God’s presence throughout the whole day. Thus, morning prayers help us to continue praying by lifting up our hearts all the time.

After concluding the Agpeya prayers, we should give ourselves a chance to offer thanks and give our personal supplications before God. We should do so by talking to God from our hearts without reservations or formalities, this is what we call spontaneous prayers. These are simple prayers through which we express our feelings, longings, and needs. In these prayers we place all the details of our lives in the hands of our compassionate heavenly father.

4. Liturgical prayers such as the liturgy and midnight praise help us train ourselves to have prolonged prayers before God. They also provide deep spiritual and intellectual nourishment. Liturgical prayers such as hymns and praises provide us with material for our own prayers at any time.

5. It is important for us to understand that God may grant us comfort in prayers more abundantly at certain times more than others. We ought to do our part and pray regularly even if this consolation is intermittent or sparse for a while. During these period of sparse consolation, we will get a great crown for our strife, comfort will come abundantly in due time when God see fit. In general, our spiritual life goes through cycles of spiritual drought followed by revival and comfort, this is what the Church Fathers call “visits of grace.” Our part is to keep on praying regularly even during the periods of droughts and lack of comfort. We ought to understand that prayer in and of itself, without noticeable consolation, is very beneficial for us. Prayer deepens our roots in Christ, supports us with a hidden divine help, and strengthens our spiritual immune system within us so sin may not overcome us. Thus we strive to pray regularly regardless of the amount of comfort that is given to us in prayer. We trust that prayer is the food of the spirit that edify it and gives it life, even though sometimes we don’t quite taste the sweetness of this food for one reason or another.

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