



## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time January 24, 2010 C

### **HOW TO PRAY LIKE JESUS AND THE SAINTS A BOOK BY FR. ALBERT MCBRIDE**

This past summer, Our Sunday Visitor published a book by Fr. Alfred McBride entitled *How to Pray like Jesus and the Saints*. The book contains the following eleven chapters.

1. Jesus Prays
2. Thus Shall You Pray: The *Our Father*
3. God's Prayer Book – The Psalms
4. Advice About Praying...  
*From Augustine to the Lady Proba*
5. Soul Prayer...  
*According to St. Anselm*
6. The Woman Who Talked With God  
*St. Catherine of Siena*
7. A Warrior's Way of Prayer  
*St. Ignatius of Loyola*
8. The Earthy Mystic  
*St. Teresa of Avila*
9. The Role of Love in Prayer  
*St. Francis de Sales*
10. Small Deeds – Great Love  
*St. Thérèse of Lisieux*
11. Praying With Mary  
*Mary's Song - The Magnificat*

Conclusion: Going Forward in Your Prayer

In Chapter 2 (a commentary on the Our Father), the author quotes the 9th century Abbot Smaragdus as saying: “Prayer is the work of the heart, not of the lips, because God does not look at the words, but at the heart of him who prays.”

I will now share with you excerpts from three chapters of the book.

#### **Chapter 4: St. Augustine responds to a rich widow's questions on prayer**

Augustine and Lady Proba lived in the fifth century as the Roman Empire was crumbling. Lady Proba was a matriarch and widow of one of the richest men in the empire. From one of her estates in North Africa, she contacted Augustine and presented him with her questions about prayer. A sample:

**Lady Proba:** I like to use a lot of words when I pray. I approach God with a number of petitions about my worries concerning my family, my exile, my health and my future. Yet Jesus says, “In praying do not babble like the pagans, who think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt 5:7-8). Yes, but is there no value in words of petition?

**Augustine:** The psalmist says, “O God, you are my God, for you I long. My soul thirsts for you; my body pines for you like a dry, weary land without water” (Ps 63:2-3). The most important aspect of prayer is your *desire* for God, your yearning to be with him, your holy longing to be in his loving presence. The one thing to ask is the gift of being in a relationship with God. Our Lord does not need to know what we want; in fact he cannot fail to know it. Your prayers are meant to fire up your desire for God. The goal of prayers is to exercise your longing for God.

Think of it this way. God has an enormous gift of his love and happiness for you. To make that possible you need a capacity large enough to receive it. Daily prayer is like stretching your ability to take in what God wants you to have....

An early Father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, wrote the following on the grace of having a longing for God.

*Prayer stands before God as an honored ambassador. I speak of prayer, not words. It is the longing for God, love too deep for words, a gift not given by man but by God's grace. When the Lord gives this kind of prayer he gives us riches that cannot be taken away, heavenly food that satisfies the spirit. One who tastes this food is set on fire by an eternal longing for God: Your spirit burns as a fire with the utmost intensity.*

St. John Chrysostom, Homily 6, *On Prayer*

**Chapter 5: St. Anselm, champion of the relationship between faith and reason.** Anselm (1033-1109) was a saint with a great intellect. His genius was to connect faith and reason in the life of prayer. Anselm coined the phrase *Credo ut intelligam* (I believe, that I may understand). In our secular world today, many put understanding first and faith second.

“The result,” according to Fr. McBride, “is that we start with an invisible wall between us and God. We break the link between reason and faith, and so reduce our understanding of creeds, Scripture, and Church teachings to what makes sense to us *apart from* a relationship with God. Such an approach leaves us destitute, because we treat relationship from an analytical point of view instead of the perspective of love; in fact, the idea of relationship is actually left out of the equation—which is sad, because God begins his approach to us with love, not as if observing us through the lens of a microscope.”

**Advice for us who engage in spiritual reading.** During his life, Anselm wrote a book of prayers. In his introduction he said:

*The purpose of the prayers and meditations that follow is to stir up the mind of the reader to the love or fear of God, or to self-examination. They are not to be read in a turmoil, but quietly, not skimmed or hurried through, but taken a little at a time with deep and thoughtful meditation.*

**My addition.** When it comes to spiritual reading, the big danger for all of us is that we read spiritual texts the way we read the newspaper or a secular book. Spiritual reading should be done slowly and meditatively and with a readiness to pause along the way to sit with what touches our hearts.

### **Chapter 10: Small Deeds - Great Love, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897)**

The chapter opens with this lovely quote by Thérèse.

*After my death I shall let fall a shower of roses...I shall come back to earth and teach others to love Love.*

St. Thérèse died at age 24. Fr. Al shares with us this beautiful excerpt from one of her writings.

#### **“I Will Be Love in the Heart of the Church.”**

*When I had looked upon the mystical body of the Church, I recognized myself in none of the members which Saint Paul described, and what is more, I desired to distinguish myself more favorably within the whole body. Love appeared to me to be the hinge for my vocation. Indeed I knew the Church had a body composed of various members, but in this body the necessary and more noble member was not lacking. I knew that the Church had a heart and that such a heart appeared to be aflame with love. I knew that one love drove the members of the Church to action, that if this love were extinguished, the apostles would have proclaimed the Gospel no longer, the martyrs would have shed their blood no more. I saw and realized that love sets off the bounds of all vocations, that love is*

*everything, that this same love embraces every time and every place. In one word, that love is everlasting.*

*Then, nearly ecstatic with supreme joy in my soul, I proclaimed: O Jesus, my love, at last I have found my calling: my call is love. Certainly I have found my proper place in the Church, and you gave me that very place, my God. In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love, and thus I will be all things, as my desire finds its direction.*

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *LH* Vol. IV, p. 1451

On St. Thérèse, Bishop Ahern writes: *Far more than for the power of her intercession, she is known for the depth of her insight into the mystery of Who God Is. She knew God deeply because she loved him deeply. “How can I fear a God,” she asked, “who is nothing but Mercy and Love?” That was her definition of God, “Mercy and Love.” Everything else in her Little Way and in her spiritual doctrine follows from that profound intuition. She will be known as Doctor of God’s Merciful Love.*

*Let nothing disturb you,  
Let nothing cause you fear.  
All things pass.  
God is unchanging.  
Patience obtains all.  
Whoever has God needs nothing else.  
God alone suffices.*

Bookmark found in St. Thérèse’s prayer book

*If I don’t go into the desert to meet God, then I have nothing to say when I go into the market-place. I could only survive my work as Archbishop...if I have allocated so much of the day to prayer. That has to be done, in my case, early in the morning. I don’t think I could survive in my job unless I had that half hour. It has become very important to me.*

Cardinal Basil Hume

I found all eleven chapters of this 138-page spiritual book enriching. I believe many of you would, too. I encourage you to consider purchasing copies for your friends here and elsewhere, Catholic and non-Catholic. I feel certain non-Catholics who are active Christians would love this book.

As you probably know, very few parishes make available to their people good spiritual books at a *big discount*. So please also consider giving a copy to a non-churchgoing family member, friend or co-worker. During Lent, lots of people are motivated to do a little extra.

God bless,

*Le Sarah*