



Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time July 12, 2015 B

Suggestions for spending an hour with Jesus in our Chapel

I am very much hoping that this column will be helpful not only to those of you who will *begin* to spend an hour each week in our Adoration Chapel, but also to those of you who have been faithful adorers for years. This is also for those of you who do *not* come, but are serious about fostering a healthy personal relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When we think about it, spending an hour with Jesus in prayer should not be a big challenge. Why do I say that? Because who among us have a difficult time hanging out with a friend for an hour? So if we have a difficult time hanging out with Jesus for an hour, might it be because we have not done enough to become more comfortable with him? Perhaps, our relationship with him has been too formal, superficial or a bit stiff or distant. Of course, if some tension has entered into a relationship with a friend, we may not look forward very much to being with him/her. This can also happen when it comes to our relationship with God. We may consciously or unconsciously be a bit upset with him over something. Assuming we have a desire to spend some time with Jesus in prayer, the following are some suggestions on how to utilize the time.

Suggestion #1: Kneel in prayer.

When most adorers come into the Chapel, they usually spend some time praying on one of our two kneelers. As creatures, it is good for us to sometimes kneel before our Creator and Savior. During this time, I usually begin with a short litany of *thanksgiving prayers*. I thank the *Father* for creating me, and giving me 67 years of life. I thank *Jesus* for paying the ultimate price for our salvation. I thank the *Holy Spirit* for the many ways he has guided me and helped me over the years. I try to relate to all three persons of the Trinity. I thank God for all the material and special blessings of my life and for some other things. I don't always remember, but whenever I do, I ask Jesus to help me to be truly present to him during this holy hour and to teach me how to pray well.

Suggestion #2: Sit quietly before the Lord and become aware of what is going on within you at this time.

This is an aspect of prayer that I have recently become *more* aware of. It involves two things: sitting quietly before the Lord *and* becoming aware of thoughts and feelings going on within me. Let's look at the latter first.

If our relationship with God is going to be *real*, then we need to bring our real self to the relationship, to our prayer time. Otherwise, our relationship with him will be unreal and even superficial. All too often in our relationships, we are not real. Someone asks us: "How are you doing?" We respond: "Good." But actually, the truth may be that we are not doing well; we may be sad, upset or very anxious about something. While we may not want to tell *everyone* how we are doing, surely, we would want to tell our best friend(s) and God. So as we continue our prayer time, it is good to take a moment to become aware of the thoughts and feelings we are experiencing and to tell Jesus about them and what we may need help with. Yes, of course, God *already* knows what is going on inside of us, but it is *important* for *us* to *name* it and tell him.

The *second* part of this suggestion is to take some time to *do nothing* other than be there contemplating God or Jesus' presence. In Psalm 46:10, God says to us: "***Be still and know that I am God.***" We should act on that word of God and *be still*, do nothing other than *relax in his presence*. It is amazing how many people find it hard to *do nothing* in prayer. The doing part of our personality may drive us to think that we must always be *doing* something. Remember the Mary/Martha story in the Bible (Luke 11) where Jesus says: "*Martha, you are busy about many things. Mary has chosen the better part.*" What is Mary doing? She is quietly listening to Jesus. We need to follow her example at least sometimes.

A Medieval mystic once said: "***While we rest in him, he works in us.***" Some adorers spend a lot of time resting in the presence of Jesus. So these words are being directed to those of us who tend to be 'busy bodies' during our prayer time.

Distractions. Many will say: “When I try to be *still*, my mind wanders.” I understand. I face this challenge every time I try to be still. A couple of things on distractions that are important... We need to distinguish between *silly* or unimportant *distractions* (e.g., noise from the train, who will win the football game this week, etc.) and distractions that are very much connected with our lives (e.g., a difficult relationship, anxiety over health or financial situation). Sometimes we are called to *pray* about a particular distraction, to take it to God and seek his help and guidance. But sometimes we may feel that we want to put a particular issue aside so that we can focus our attention on the Lord. On the issue of distractions, St. Francis de Sales (1567-1622) said: “*If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back quite gently and place it tenderly in God’s presence. And if you do nothing else while at prayer but bring your heart back again and again and place it in God’s presence, ...though it went away every time you brought it back, your time of prayer would be very well spent.*”

The devil will *not* want us to believe those encouraging words. But we do need to believe them. Sometimes in prayer, we may feel that we are being *sent away empty*. But if we have made a decent attempt to remain focused on Jesus, we should believe that he is indeed pleased with us. If our only focus is on what we are *getting out* of our prayer time (a consumerist mentality), we may quit judging this as *a waste of my valuable time*. On the other hand, if we can come to the Chapel *not* primarily to *receive* but to *give* Jesus some of our time and attention, we may discover the truth of the words: “*In giving we receive.*” Just wanting to *hang out with Jesus*, wanting to *waste time with him*, is a blessed and wonderful attitude to have.

Suggestion #3: Engage in spiritual reading (*lectio divina*).

Lectio divina (divine/spiritual reading) is an ancient and revered practice in the Christian Tradition. Spiritual masters tell us that engaging in spiritual reading *nourishes, illumines, and gives direction* to our deepest self. Without regular periods of reflective reading, we run the risk of becoming victims of passing fads and of allowing ourselves to be led by the wisdom of the world—which is contrary to the wisdom of the gospels and the spiritual masters.

Developing the art of spiritual reading. It is important for us to realize that there is quite a difference between spiritual reading and other kinds of reading. When we are studying a textbook or work papers, reading a novel or the morning newspaper, we use our minds—or what

is sometimes called our “computer intelligence”—to gather information or data, analyze it, and categorize it neatly into sections.

In contrast, we bring a very different mindset to the practice of *lectio divina*. First of all, we move into the *slow lane* of life. *Lectio divina* is slow and meditative. As verses of Scripture or some parts in a book touch us, we pause and rest with them. We are not in a hurry to move on and we put aside all intent to cover a certain number of pages within the allotted time. When the Spirit is moving and we are tuned in, we may only read a few verses of Scripture or a page or two of a book during an hour of prayer.

In *lectio divina*, we are on the alert for how God may speak to us. When this happens, we pause, reflect and respond in some way.

Pausing, reflecting and responding. Without pausing, reflecting and responding, we could read a book for 30 or 45 minutes and *not* pray. It might be a great read but our reading did not lead us to prayer. Prayer involves *addressing* God in some way.

So when we are reading the Scriptures or some other sacred text and something strikes us, we should pause and sit with the verse or thought. This is *meditation*—pausing and sitting with a verse of Scripture or some thought from a spiritual book.

After we have pondered the text for a minute or more, we may be led to *address God* in some way. When we address God or speak to him, we have moved from *thinking* about God to *conversing* with him. This is the moment of prayer. Our words to God need not be anything special but they should express in some way our thoughts or feelings about the text we have just read.

We may also find ourselves arguing with a text—at least I do. There is nothing wrong with questioning passages of Scripture. As we read the Psalms, we find that their authors were frequently “having it out” with God.

Honest prayer is telling God what is on our mind and in our heart. Learning to speak to God honestly from our heart may take time especially if we have developed the bad habit of hiding from others how we truly feel.

Once again, the most important thing to be aware of is that during our time with the Lord in prayer (inside or outside the Chapel), we try to *engage* him and not just *recite* a lot of prayer and *do* a lot of reading.

Persevering in prayer. Perseverance is a virtue we all need when it comes to most things, including dieting, exercising, staying in a difficult relationship. Persevering in prayer is also a challenge especially when we think it is a waste of time, or when we feel God is not answering our prayer. We can be certain that the devil's agenda is always to get us to quit whatever it is that will help us to be better persons. It is easy enough to conclude that we could use our time better than sitting with the Lord. So we need a certain conviction on the value of wasting time with the Lord.

Suggestion #4: Offer prayers of petition and intercession.

Most likely, we who spend an hour in the Chapel use some of the time to pray for our own intentions and for others, local and global. There are many big problems in our world that we often need to lift up in prayer.

Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving: "Thank you, Jesus, for bringing me here. Help me to keep a sense of your presence through the rest of this day/evening."

A word about integrating prayer with our daily lives

There is always a danger that our prayers do not connect with the rest of our lives. Some years ago, I came across a quote which speaks to this very question. John Shea writes: "*Unless the prayers we speak are tightly linked with the lives we lead, they will be babblings we hide behind rather than true speech which reveals who we are in relation to all that is.*"

If Jesus is to become *Lord* of our life, he must be invited to guide and permeate every activity of our day. When this happens, our whole day — with its religious and secular dimensions — will become one act of worship to the Father. Father Richard Hauser, S.J., in his book *In His Spirit: A Guide to Today's Spirituality*, writes: "*The holiest actions of our day are those done most in tune with the Spirit. These may be either prayer or service.*"

For Trust and Confidence in God

My God, I want to have confidence in your love, but so many things seem to hold me back: past wounds, past hurts, past betrayals, past sins—mine and others.

Open my eyes. Open my heart.

Enable me to take the leap of faith that is needed now.

Holiness isn't a matter of starting to love you sometime in the future, or even tomorrow.

I don't have to wait until I become a better person, more worthy, more virtuous.

It's a matter of trusting in your mercy today, just as I am.

You showed this to the saints; show me, too, and give me a spirit of great confidence.

I ask this through your beloved Son, our merciful Saviour. Amen.

Elizabeth Ruth Obbard

Have a prayerful week,

