



Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time June 30, 2013 C

SPENDING AN HOUR WITH JESUS

In his agony in the garden, Jesus said to his sleeping disciples: “Can you not stay awake one hour with me?”

Some 400 parishioners do spend an hour each week with Jesus in personal prayer in our Adoration Chapel. I am sure some of them, especially those who come in the middle of the night, nod off now and again.

This Sunday at Mass you received an invitation to commit to spending one hour each week with Jesus in our chapel. If you have never done that before, you may wonder how you would utilize sixty minutes with Jesus. Many who go to the chapel on a regular basis find that the time goes rather quickly.

In this column, I will offer some suggestions for spending time with Jesus. Of course in the end, you must use the time as you feel led. There is an old prayer axiom which says:

“Pray as you can, not as you can’t.”

I will also address other issues which are important when it comes to our prayer life.

- Engaging God
- Distractions and danger of being too busy in prayer
- Art of spiritual reading

Engaging God. Prayer, among other things, is all about *engaging* God. All of us have had the experience of being with someone for a period of time without really engaging them. We talk but we do not communicate. In like manner, we could come to the chapel for an hour—read a book, say some prayers—without really *engaging* God. All the Psalms and many of the conversations involving Old Testament figures like Moses, Hannah, Jeremiah and Job, show great examples of people *engaging* God in prayer. Of course prayer, as we shall see, is more than just *us talking to God*; it also involves *listening to God*. At times, prayer simply entails being quiet in the presence of Jesus. At the end of any prayer time, a good question to ask is: Did I *engage* God during this time of prayer, or was I just reading a book in his presence?

Suggestion #1: *Begin with some minutes of quiet in the presence of God.*

If you come to the chapel, you will notice that nearly everyone begins his/her holy hour or visit by spending sometime kneeling in quiet adoration before the Eucharistic presence of Jesus.

Adoration is a basic and fundamental posture of us creatures before our Creator who made the heavens and the earth, and all that is seen and unseen.

Each adorer spends these initial minutes of prayer as he/she is led. For many, it is a time of quiet presence before our Savior in the Eucharist. Often during those initial minutes of prayer, I thank Jesus for bringing me here. After all, without God’s *drawing grace*, we cannot enter into prayer. I also ask God to help me pray well and to free my heart of distractions. Since prayer is both a *gift* and an *art*, we cannot ask God often enough to bless us with the gift of prayer, to grant us whatever we need to pray well.

Distractions. If our prayer time is a battle with distractions, we may easily conclude that our efforts to pray are just a waste of valuable time. What can be said about this problem?

When it comes to the issue of distractions, some of the most comforting and helpful words are found in St. Francis de Sales’ *Introduction to a Devout Life*. He writes: *“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.”*

What wonderful words of encouragement. If we get distracted 20 times during a particular prayer period and return to God 20 times, we have made 20 choices for God, and Francis de Sales tells us that that makes our prayer time pleasing in the eyes of God.

Suggestion #2: Spend a whole hour in quiet.

Some adorers like to simply come and sit in the presence of the Lord for the whole hour or for most of the hour. A medieval mystic once said:

“While we rest in him, he works in us.”

In Proverbs 46:10, God says to us:

“Be still and know that I am God.”

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 of a book. 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 read 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.

You may also find yourself 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 what 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 in the chapel. So we need a certain conviction on the *value* of ‘wasting time with the Lord.’

I am very grateful to Sam Rodriguez for all his time and effort in coordinating a ministry that promotes continuous prayer on our campus 24/7.

Have a prayerful week,

