



Fourth Sunday of Lent March 15, 2015 B

◆ Three Catholics share how they pray ◆ The false and true self

The first part of this column is a sharing by three Catholics on how they pray. The second part is an interesting piece on the true and false self, and how our false self keeps us from getting close to God.

JULIE BILLMEIER, age 35, Dallas, stay-at-home mom

When did you last feel like your prayer life was in a rut? What helped you move past that?

Every day I felt like my prayer life is in a rut. I have a hard time getting a vibrant prayer life going with the demands of young children. I'll try a new way of praying or pick up a different meditation book. Sometimes that helps. Sometimes I'll find a saint I can say a novena to. Sticking to something for nine days and having an intentional focus for my prayer time really helps me to give over my troubles to God.

I try to be dedicated to my prayer time. I really try not to check my e-mail or Facebook until I have done my morning prayer.

Do you find that to be a regular challenge?

Yes, I find it to be a challenge all the time. Although technology sometimes helps me to pray, e-mail and social media can definitely be a distraction.

When do you pray?

My son is 8 months old and my daughter is almost 3, so I don't have much of a typical day. I set my alarm for 30 minutes before I expect the kids to be awake, and I try to use that time to pray.

Sometimes, though, if the baby is up too often during the night or one of them wakes up early, that idea goes out the window. I get my cup of coffee and go back to sit in bed, where I'll either read the daily Mass readings or the morning prayer. I've been using *Give Us This Day* from Liturgical Press. I like reading the daily saint and the scripture reflection. I actually took a break from *Give Us This Day* only to find that I really missed it. Sometimes it takes changing something to realize it was working. I also like *Daily Meditations (with Scripture) for Busy Moms* by Patricia Robertson (ACTA).

Once the day gets underway, I'm usually saying little prayers to God anywhere and everywhere. My husband and I take turns putting our daughter to bed, and whoever does says prayers with her as well.

On weekends, prayer time in the morning doesn't normally happen. We go to Sunday Mass, but that sometimes feels more like a wrestling match with two kids rather than prayer time.

What and whom do you pray for?

I mostly pray for my kids. I thank God for them and ask God to help them grow into the people he wants them to be. I thank God for my husband and the time I get to spend with my family.

Also, after my son was born, we had a hard time with breastfeeding, and I started praying when I would nurse him. Around this time, I had several friends who were struggling with infertility or miscarriages. So I started saying a Hail Mary and praying for each of them every time I fed my baby.

What other practices do you have?

We pray before each meal, and at bedtime we say something we call the family prayer: "Father in heaven, hear my prayer. Keep me in thy loving care. Be my guide in all I do. Bless all those who love me too. Bless Mommy and Daddy...." Then we pray for all our family members and anyone else who needs our prayers. We finish up with the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Guardian Angel prayers.

Where did you learn the "family prayer"?

My parents used to say it with us when we were little, but I had forgotten it. One night after my parents had watched the kids, my daughter asked for "the family song." I told her I didn't know it, and she said, "Yes, you do, Granddad sings it." So I called my parents, and as soon as they started singing it, I remembered. Now the tradition continues.

DAVID BRIONES, age 47, campus minister

After I participated in the *JustFaith* program, my prayer life changed. There I was exposed to material I never knew existed—Daniel Berrigan, John Dear, Richard Rohr, and Ilia Delio all became household names to me. I couldn't get enough. I wanted to talk to everyone I

encountered about God's love and compassion. All this helped me become a better husband, father, friend, and human being.

How does a disciplined prayer life influence you in your work?

I think it helps me handle stressful situations with less anxiety. In addition to my work at the Catholic Center. I have been working as a legal assistant/social worker for a disability law firm, where I have encountered many poor and homeless members of our community. Through prayer I see people differently and am better able to listen to their stories with love and compassion.

I know for me to help our students at the Catholic Center grow in their faith, I have to live my faith openly and honestly. My disciplined prayer life allows me to do that.

What and whom do you pray for?

I always pray for an openness in myself to receive all those I encounter during my day. I generally remember my family and friends. I also include those who have requested prayers. I find myself praying for poor and downtrodden individuals whom I have heard or read about in the news. I also pray for our leaders both in government and in the church.

When do you pray?

Early in the morning, before anyone wakes up, I'll sit quietly in the living room to read the *Catholic Liturgy of the Hours*, or I'll go to the back porch to watch the sunrise and listen to God's wonderful gift of nature. Often I find myself in conversation with God when I'm driving, working in the yard, walking, or early in the morning before my wife of 25 years, Persia, or my college age kids, Mykhael, 24, and Nikki, 21, are out of bed.

Around lunchtime I have an alarm that reminds me to take a moment to stop and offer thanks to God for the people that I have encountered or the work that I am doing.

LUS ELENA RAMOS, age 53, high school Spanish teacher

The moment I wake up, I put myself and my loved ones in God's hands.

Lately I have been praying especially for my son Daniel, 24, who's currently deployed in Afghanistan, and all soldiers of the U.S. Army and their families. I pray for the soldiers to come home soon, safe and sound.

I pray while I am on my way to work. I include my students in my prayers; one day I forgot to pray for them and I had a terrible day! I tell them that I do not do

anything without asking God for wisdom and illumination.

Usually as I drive, I pray the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and a prayer to the Holy Spirit. I have conversations with God about people I know and people I don't, especially those who have been victims of natural disasters. I pray for peace on earth and people whom I've been asked to pray for. I'm always telling God what I'm doing. I constantly repeat, "What would Jesus do?" in order to help me make the right decisions. I pray in Spanish.

At night I pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy; sometimes I fall asleep before I finish it. I started praying this prayer about nine years ago after one of my cousins was kidnapped in Mexico City. She prayed the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and the kidnappers let her go after a few days. She gave the prayer to every family member.

Almost a decade ago I was going through a very difficult time in my marriage. Things did not change despite my prayers and effort. Finally I realized I was not able to save my marriage, and exhausted, I stopped praying. Then, one day when I was very sad and didn't know what to do, I began to pray again. I realized that I needed to be close to God because I could not do anything without him. So I continued praying.

I use the paschal candle when I am praying for something very special. Sometimes I pray in front of the Virgin of Guadalupe; other times I pray in front of the image of the Divine Mercy. The prayer to St. Jude is one of the prayers I use when I have a very special need.

Daniel called me early on the morning of his birthday, July 26. He asked me for the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel. I used to pray it a long time ago; after he asked me for the prayer, I started praying it again. He is going through a difficult time and will be away from his base for different missions. He felt protected with this prayer:

*St. Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.*

*Be our defense against the wickedness
and snares of the devil.*

*May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts,
by the divine power of God, cast into hell Satan,
and all the evil spirits who roam
throughout the world seeking the ruin of souls.
Amen.*

THE TRUE AND FALSE SELF

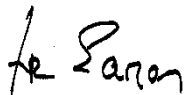
The following is an excerpt from a book called *Ten Evenings with God* by Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF.

The secret of my life lies in God, Thomas Merton wrote. If I find myself I find God, and if I find God then I will find myself. The problem is I cannot find myself, or the self I find is not the self I want to be. I want to be something other than myself, a self I think I need to be so others will find me more attractive or desirable. But the more I strive to be something other than what God created me to be, the further I move away from God and thus from the will of God. God makes things to be themselves, Merton said, and in being oneself lies the glory of God. Just as the wild sunflowers and poppies are saints gazing up into the face of God because they do nothing more than be themselves, so too we must be ourselves to give glory to God.

One of the main causes of division in our consumer culture is the diminishment of the human person through the lure of idols. We are constantly challenged to be something new and different, something other than ourselves. The culture of consumerism is so dominant that many people live with divided selves, in between the true self (which God created) and the false self (which we create), struggling to find their identity.

The further I am from my true self, Merton claimed, the self that God created me to be, the more wrapped up I am in my false self, the self I think I need to be and the one that is farthest from God. Indeed, God knows nothing about this false self because God did not create it. To live in the false self is to lose sight of God because it is a self that God knows nothing about; hence, it is to lose sight of the will of God. Because God knows nothing of this self, the false self is usually restless, distracted, confused, and unhappy. This self, because it is in darkness, demands all my time and attention, turning me away from my true self whose seed of life lies in God.... The single source of our happiness, therefore, is the love of God that lies within us. Out of this love we have been chosen from all eternity to give glory to God through our individual personalities and our unique creations.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Aron". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.