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CATHOLIC RETREATS

THE COMPLETE CHRISTIAN

A RETREAT GUIDE ON THE CALLING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

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INTRODUCTION

Retreat Overview

Big companies are willing to pay big bucks for good branding. A good brand usually includes a visual logo, and a short tagline or motto that packs a punch.

Back in 1997, the British Broadcasting Company spent almost \$2 million coming up with a new logo. In 2008, Pepsi spent \$1 million for their new image. Also in 2008, British Petroleum spent \$211 million to come up with a new logo and tagline.^A

What's the big deal? Why are a good logo and a good tagline so valuable?

Because good branding is good communication; it's the bridge between desires and decisions. Potential consumers have desires and needs. Companies have products that can satisfy those desires and needs.

The right logo and tagline can connect a consumer's desire to a business's product in an instant, moving the consumer to take action, to decide to buy the product. This principle has been at work in the Church, on a spiritual plane, since the earliest days of Christianity.

In the fifth century, for example, St. Benedict composed his famous rule for monks. And he gave his monastic community a motto: *ora et labora*, work and prayer — summing up in just three words the life mission of every Benedictine monk. That motto has been a guiding light for Benedictine orders for over a thousand years.

But it's not just religious orders that choose mottos for spiritual focus and inspiration; individuals do too. Every bishop chooses a motto to guide their episcopal activity, and so do popes. And in this case too, the motto serves as a kind of personal brand, a bridge between the heartfelt desire to be a holy bishop and the day-to-day decisions that will fulfill or frustrate that desire.

For example, Blessed John XXIII chose the motto, *Obedientia et Pax*, obedience and peace. He longed to live the deep peace that Christ came to give us, and he knew that the path to that peace was obedience to God's will.

A: <http://www.businessinsider.com/heres-how-much-money-the-worlds-biggest-brands-spent-designing-their-logos-2012-8?op=1>



If companies, religious orders, and bishops can leverage the power of a good motto, why can't every Christian?

Why can't each one of us have a motto to keep our spiritual efforts focused, to inspire us, to help bridge our deepest desires and our daily decisions? I think we can, and I think we should. And in this Retreat Guide, *The Complete Christian: A Retreat Guide on the Calling of the Twelve Apostles*, I would like to propose one.

It's taken from the passage in the Gospel of Mark where Jesus chooses his Twelve Apostles. In that passage, the Gospel identifies three things that the first Apostles were chosen for, and in a certain sense, those same three things are a description of the complete Christian life that we are all called to live, the core elements of Christian discipleship.

- The first element is prayer, which we will look at in the first meditation.
- The second element is fellowship, which we will look at in the second meditation.
- And the third element, which we will examine in the conference, is apostolate, or apostolic action.

If we put those three together, the motto would be: prayer, fellowship, apostolate. But it sounds a little better if we use verbs instead of nouns: to pray, to love, to give. And some would say that it sounds even better in Latin: *Orare, amare, dare*.

Before we dive in, take a few minutes to simply enjoy the Lord's presence. You have reserved this time to spend with him, and he is eager to spend it with you. In the silence of your heart, renew your faith in him, ask him for what you need, and open your mind and soul to receive the grace he longs to give.



FIRST MEDITATION

The Gospel Passage: Mark 3:13-15

In three verses from the third chapter of his Gospel, St. Mark sketches one of the most important moments in Christ's earthly ministry, the calling of his Twelve Apostles.

These twelve men were already followers of Jesus, along with a crowd of others. But Jesus picked them out of that crowd, and spent the rest of his earthly ministry preparing them for their mission of leading and spreading the Church.

Here's how St. Mark describes the encounter:



He [Jesus] now went up onto the mountain and summoned those he wanted. So they came to him, and he appointed twelve; they were to be his companions and to be sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils.

— Mark 3:13-15, NJB



FIRST MEDITATION

The Contemplative Dimension

Jesus summons his Twelve Apostles, and sets them apart. What for? What does he want from them?

The first thing he wants from them is so simple, and so beautiful, and so amazing. St. Mark tells us that Jesus appointed them “to be his companions.” And this is the first dimension of the Christian life, the contemplative dimension.

We are all called to be Christ’s companions, to spend time with him, to get to know him. And how do we do that?

Primarily through prayer. Prayer is spending time with the Lord, “being his companion.”

When Jesus pulled us out of the crowd and set us aside to be his followers, he was calling us first and foremost to a life of prayer, of an ongoing friendship with him that would take place through an intimate exchange of thoughts and words and affections, always in an atmosphere of faith.



Imagine trying to build and deepen a friendship without communicating or spending time with your friend.

In the same way, how can we let God fill our life with joy, light, strength, and purpose if we don’t spend time with him, get to know him, enter into a dynamic, personal relationship with him in prayer?

St. Paul urges us to “pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Christ himself admonishes us:



Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.

– Mark 14:38, NABR

FIRST MEDITATION

The Importance of Prayer

Would you say that you are a better pray-er today than you were a year ago, five years ago, ten years ago?

If we want to grow in our Christian life, we have to grow in our prayer life.

In past ages, this was kind of taken for granted. Everyone knew that prayer was necessary, as necessary as breathing or eating.

But we live in a secularized culture, a culture based not on faith in God, but on faith in our own abilities to create heaven on earth. God is seen as something irrelevant. And as a result, prayer — personal conversation with God, contact with the Savior, developing a relationship with Christ — is seen as optional and tangential.

Here is how Pope Benedict XVI explained the secular challenge when addressing the bishops of the United States in Washington, DC (16 April 2008):

People today need to be reminded of the ultimate purpose of their lives. They need to recognize that implanted within them is a deep thirst for God. They need to be given opportunities to drink from the wells of his infinite love. It is easy to be entranced by the almost unlimited possibilities that science and technology place before us; it is easy to make the mistake of thinking we can obtain by our own efforts the fulfillment of our deepest needs. This is an illusion. Without God, who alone bestows upon us what we by ourselves cannot attain (cf. Spe Salvi, 31), our lives are ultimately empty. People need to be constantly reminded to cultivate a relationship with him who came that we might have life in abundance (cf. John 10:10).

If we are going to grow in our prayer life, the first thing we need to do is be convinced of its importance.

Pope Francis made this point powerfully early on in his pontificate. He spoke to tens of thousands of pilgrims who had come to his Wednesday audience about this primary, essential dimension of every Christian's life:

To listen to the Lord, we must learn to contemplate, to perceive His constant presence in our lives; we have to stop and talk to Him, give Him space with prayer. Every one of us... should ask ourselves: how much space do I give the Lord? Do I stop to dialogue with Him? Ever since we were little, our parents have accustomed us to begin and end the day with a prayer, to teach us to feel that the friendship and the love of God accompany us. Let us remember the Lord more often in our days!



FIRST MEDITATION

Prayer as Relationship

But what is prayer? Is it enough for us just to say some prayers? Is prayer just asking God for what we want or need?

The essence of prayer goes even deeper.

Prayer, for Christians, is fundamentally not something we do, not just something we put on our to-do list. Rather, it's a relationship. In fact, the Catechism actually defines prayer as a relationship.

In discussing the mystery of our Catholic faith, it tells us:



This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer

– CCC 2558

Pope Benedict XVI said the same thing to a gathering of 20,000 young people in New York (April 2008). He told them:



What matters most is that you develop your personal relationship with God. That relationship is expressed in prayer...

This is actually a unique vision of prayer, when compared to other world religions. It goes back to when Jesus called his first Apostles — he appointed them to “be his companions,” to be with him, to spend time with him, to enter into a real, interpersonal relationship with him.

This is prayer. And this is why prayer is often so difficult. Our relationship with God takes place only through faith. We can't touch him and hear him the way we hear each other — but only through the mediation of faith.

And our faith is often very weak, so we get distracted easily, and we find it hard to encounter God in prayer. But that's okay! All God needs is our sincere and constant effort, and he will teach us everything else.



It can be comforting for us to look at the experiences of Christians who have gone before us, to see how even though God worked wonders in their lives, prayer was not always easy for them. The example of Fr. Walter Ciszek is one that has spoken deeply to my heart over the years.

Fr. Ciszek was a Jesuit priest sent as a secret missionary into the Soviet Union between World War I and World War II. Soviet Communism was intent on destroying Christianity, and especially Catholic Christianity, and so it was a dangerous mission.

Fr. Ciszek was eventually arrested and sent to the infamous prison of Lubyanka, where he spent five years in solitary confinement, being interrogated — sometimes violently — on a regular basis. Eventually, he was transferred to a forced labor camp in Siberia, where he spent another fifteen years. After nearly 23 years behind the Iron Curtain, he was sent back home on a prisoner exchange.

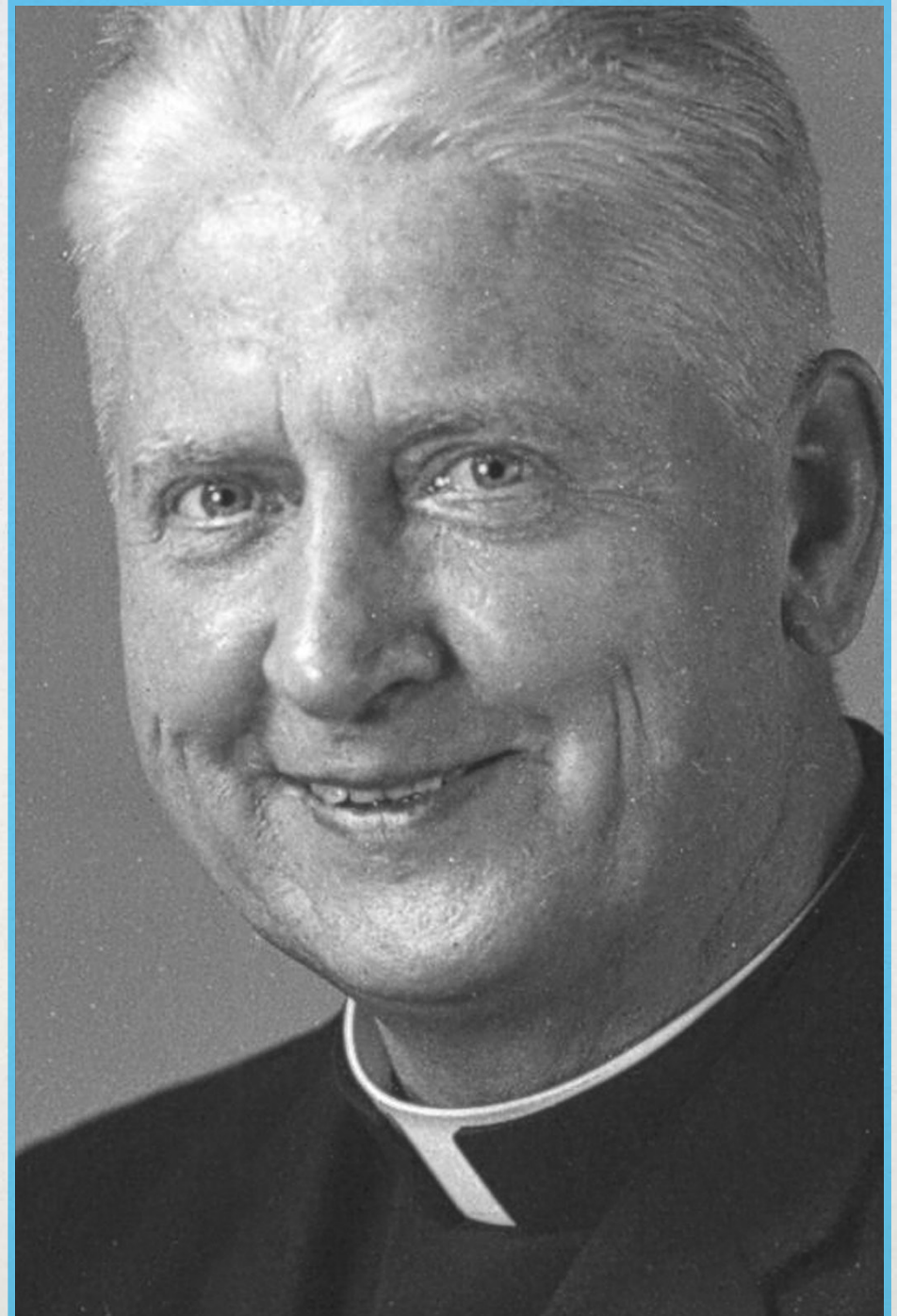
Back in the States, he wrote two books about his experience in the Soviet Union before dying in 1981. In his writings, he explained that his harrowing experience of solitary confinement in Lubyanka “in many ways became a school of prayer for me.”

We might think that his isolation would make prayer easier for him — but it didn't. He found it difficult to stay recollected even inside the limits of the prison.

He described struggling to find God's presence amidst the daily anxieties, the physical hardships, and above all the loneliness.

One of the lessons he learned in that hard school of prayer was precisely that real prayer is always more than simply reciting words; it's a relationship.

“Words do not make a prayer,” he wrote later in his second book, *He Leadeth Me*, “... true prayer is a communication — and it occurs only when two people, two minds are truly present to each other in some way.”



FIRST MEDITATION

Prayer as a Response

Another lesson he learned points to a second characteristic of Christian prayer that comes out clearly in the Gospel passage we are considering.

Prayer is not only a relationship, but it is a response to God's initiative. Here's how Fr. Ciszek put it:



... God himself has initiated this conversation by inspiring us to set aside time for prayer, and... he appreciates our efforts to respond, and he blesses them.

The entire Christian life, in essence, is a response to the action of God. God created us — we didn't create ourselves. And God redeemed us — we didn't redeem ourselves. And God entered into our lives with his grace, and continues to enter into our lives, calling us to know him, to love him, and to follow him.

Prayer itself is a gift he has given to us; he makes himself available to us through this gift; he waits for us, eagerly, to come and spend time with him. As St. Mark tells us, "Jesus summoned those he wanted..." Prayer is our response to God's summons.

The Catechism puts this beautifully when it calls prayer a "covenant drama." In that context, it teaches us:

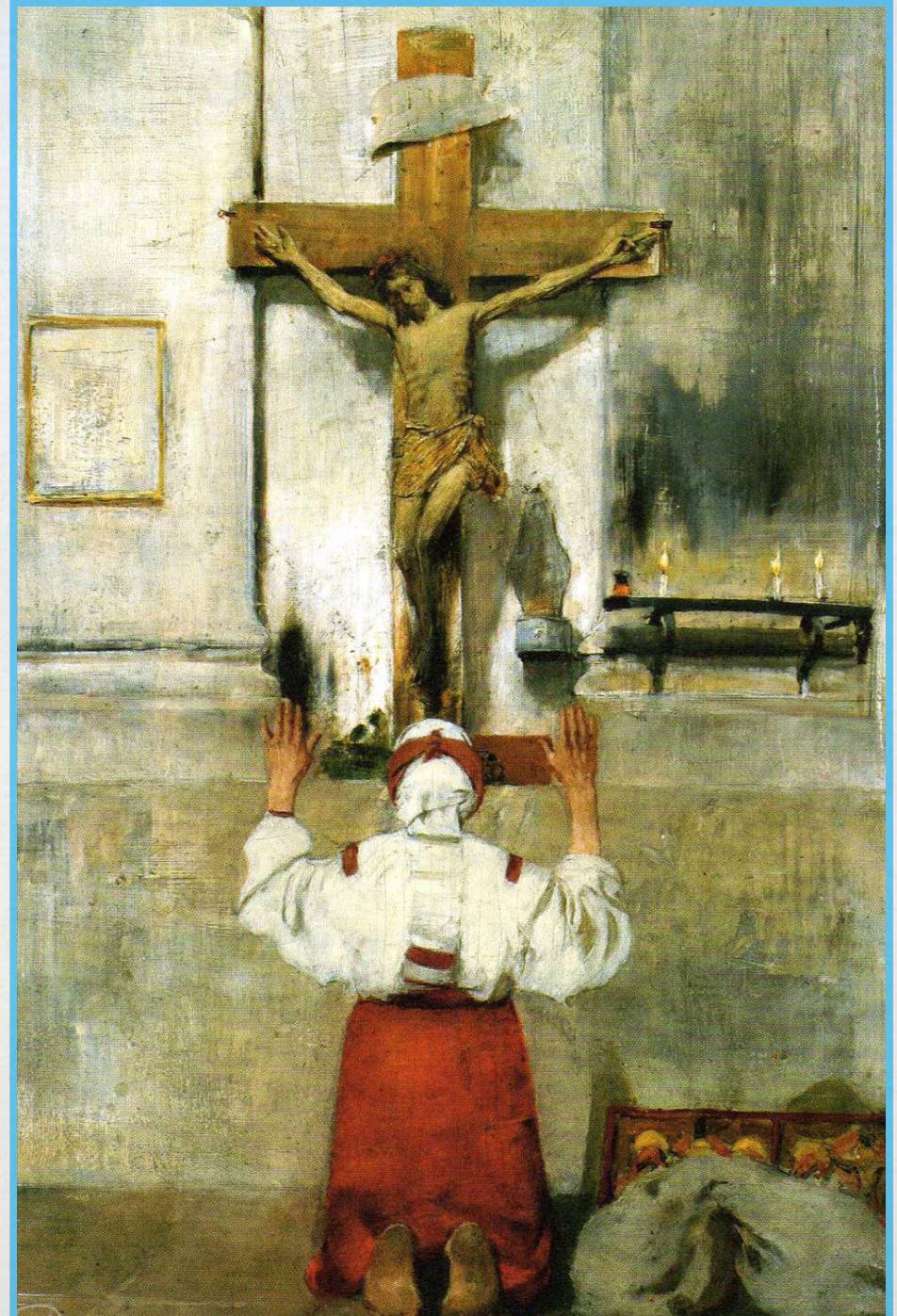


God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.

— CCC 2567

God is always summoning us, calling us out of the hustle and bustle of our lives to "be his companions."

Developing the contemplative dimension of our Christian lives involves developing our capacity to hear this summons, in whatever way it comes.



FIRST MEDITATION

The Decision to Pray Daily

So what does a healthy prayer life look like for today's Christian?

Plenty of websites and prayer books can help you get a picture of that, and we will recommend some of them at the end of this Retreat Guide. But none of those resources can pray for you.

Each one of us has to decide, every day, how much God matters to us, and pray accordingly. And it has to be every single day. We wouldn't eat only on Sundays. We wouldn't breathe only on Sundays.

Well, prayer, this intimate exchange between our heart and Christ's heart, is as essential for our souls as eating and breathing are for our bodies. As we grow in our spiritual life, prayer comes to accompany us more and more throughout every moment of the day.

But to get to that point, and to keep growing even when we have arrived there, we also need to set aside specific times to pray, to "be alone and converse with the one we know loves us," as St. Teresa of Avila put it.



The Catechism makes this point forcefully in its section on prayer:



Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all. This is why the Fathers of the spiritual life in the Deuteronomic and prophetic traditions insist that prayer is a remembrance of God often awakened by the memory of the heart. We must remember God more often than we draw breath. But we cannot pray at all times if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it. These are the special times of Christian prayer, both in intensity and duration.

– CCC 2697

If you feel that your prayer life could improve, don't wait to do something about it. Right now, at the end of this meditation, renew your commitment to this first pillar of our Christian living, to "being Christ's companions."

And if you don't know where to start, ask God to show you; how could he refuse such a request? In the end, we really learn to pray by praying.

And the single most important factor in our life of prayer is our decision to make prayer an integral part of our life.

FIRST MEDITATION

Conclusion: The First Dimension

Jesus summons us to be his companions, to develop a life of prayer, where we can get to know him intimately, heart-to-heart.

This is the first dimension of a complete Christian life.

The importance of this dimension was perhaps the most insistent theme of the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI, and so I will let him have the last word in this meditation.

Only if we are able to turn to God, to pray to him, do we discover the deepest meaning of our life, and the daily routine is illumined by the light of the Risen One.

— Pope Benedict XVI, 25 April 2011

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- 1 How would I describe my life of prayer as it is now? How would I like to be able to describe it?
- 2 What one thing could I change in my daily/weekly schedule that would have the most positive impact on my growth in prayer?
- 3 Recall some personal experiences of prayer that made a deep impression. Savor them, thank God for them, and try to learn from them.



Biblical Passages to Help Your Meditation



When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

– Matthew 6:5-8, NABR



Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

– Matthew 11:28-30, NABR



Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

– I Thessalonians 5:16-18, NABR



And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

– Ephesians 5:18-20, NABR



SECOND MEDITATION

Introduction

It's easy to miss the second core element of Christian living in this passage from Mark's Gospel. The first and third elements are clear and obvious:

Jesus summoned his Apostles to “be his companions” — that's our personal relationship with Jesus, nourished primarily through prayer. And he also summoned them “to be sent out to proclaim the message” — that's our apostolic action, which we will talk about in the conference. But he didn't summon them or send them out all alone; he called them into a group, a community, a fellowship.

Although each one of us has a personal relationship with God, that relationship takes root and grows within a larger network of relationships, within the Church.

In other words, there are no Lone Rangers in Christianity — in fact, even the Lone Ranger had a companion in Tonto; we too are called to live the Christian journey together with others.

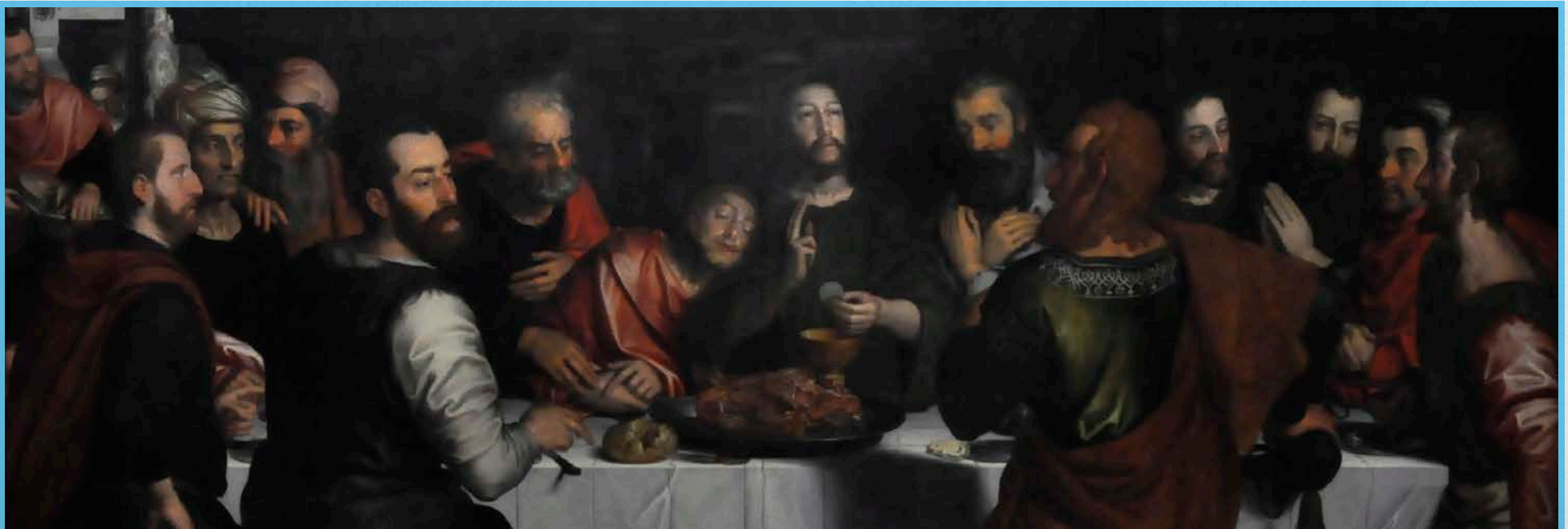
When Jesus calls us to follow him, and when we are baptized, we are inserted into his mystical body, we are made members of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own,” as St. Peter reminds us in his First Letter (1 Peter 2:9).

This fact — that we are called to be Christ's companions, in the plural, to walk with him in loving fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the Church — is so important to Jesus that he made it the main identification badge of all Christians.

During the Last Supper, he told his Apostles that to be his disciples meant following his commandments, and he reduced those commandments to one: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

And he went on to say that the world will recognize us as his followers precisely through our fellowship, through our living in love and faith-filled union with each other: “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

This loving fellowship is the second core element of our Christian living, the second word in our motto: *amare*.



SECOND MEDITATION

The Importance of Fellowship

Why is this such an essential element in our Christian living? There are theological reasons, and there are practical reasons.

The key theological reason goes back to the very beginning, when God created us. He created the human family “in his image... in the image of God he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

And God’s core identity is a Trinity: one divine nature and three divine persons. He is a community, a family — a unique one, because he is only one God, not three gods. We can’t completely understand this mystery, but we can accept it and contemplate it.

If God is by his very nature a communion of persons, and we are created in his image, then we too are meant to live in a communion of persons, in loving fellowship characterized by multiplicity of persons and harmony of relationships.



This fellowship is so essential to our identity as human beings, that it was the very first thing to be damaged by original sin.

After Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, in disobedience to God’s command, the first thing they did was cover themselves with clothing — hiding themselves from each other. They no longer trusted each other, as they had before they sinned. The fellowship, the communion of persons that they were called to live, in the image of the Triune God, was damaged, broken, divided.

The work of salvation and redemption that God took up after that is in large part the work of reuniting this divided human family, of bringing them back into the loving fellowship that is proper to them because they are created in God’s own image.

That’s an important theological reason why Jesus doesn’t call us just to be his companion, but to be his companions; not to be Lone Rangers, but to be members of his spiritual family and mystical body, the Church.

Here’s how the Catechism expresses this theological reason for the importance of loving fellowship:



[God] calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as the Redeemer and Savior.

— CCC I

But there is a practical reason too. And it’s simply that we need each other. We can’t finish our Christian pilgrimage alone; we need the strength, the light, the guidance, the encouragement, and the help that comes from traveling with other pilgrims.

Just as a newborn baby can’t reach human maturity without the care and help of other people, so none of us can reach spiritual maturity without the care and help that comes from Christian fellowship.

This loving fellowship, this “amare”, this second essential element in our Christian living is so important, then, because it reflects who we are and helps us become who we are meant to be. But what does it look like in day-to-day life?

SECOND MEDITATION

The Role of the Sacraments

The first and fundamental manifestation of Christian fellowship comes in the worship of the Christian community, and this is expressed most intensely and fully in the celebration of the sacraments.

Christian fellowship is only Christian because its core is Christ himself. This is why Jesus summoned his first Apostles to “be his companions.”

He is the Savior; he is the Redeemer; it was through his passion, death, and resurrection that the Church — the renewed communion of mankind with God and in God with each other — was born. The celebration of the sacraments, and the whole liturgical life of the new People of God, is like the heartbeat of that Church.

Here’s how the Catechism puts it:



The word “liturgy” originally meant a “public work” or a “service in the name of/on behalf of the people.” In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in the work of God. Through the liturgy Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through his Church.

— CCC 1069



This is the objective dimension of Christian Fellowship. We come together to worship and to receive God’s grace through celebrating the sacraments of the Church, in which Christ himself continues to build up his Kingdom.

We are called to be Christ’s companions, and that involves walking with him and with his other followers along the objective path of grace, which is paved with the sacraments.

The Sunday Eucharist is the center of all the Church’s liturgical life. But the other sacraments are also opportunities to live and grow and benefit from this fellowship.

- We go to confession for God’s forgiveness and also for reconciliation with the community that we damage by our sins.
- We comfort the sick and dying by bringing them Christ’s holy anointing.
- We gather with our fellow Christian pilgrims for baptisms and confirmations, for marriages and ordinations, supporting and being supported by one another even as we open up the floodgates of God’s grace into every corner of human experience.

And the primary place for this sacramental fellowship is the parish — the local incarnation, in a sense, of the universal Church.

Staying plugged in to our parishes or our religious communities is the bread-and-butter of Christian Fellowship.

More than once Pope Francis quoted a famous phrase from Pope Paul VI that illustrates how being Christ’s companions — being Christians — necessarily involves entering into companionship with the whole Christian family.

Pope Paul VI wrote that it is an absurd dichotomy to claim “to love Christ but without the Church, to listen to Christ but not the Church, to belong to Christ but outside the Church” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16).

To be Christ’s companions involves living where he lives, and that’s first and foremost in the Church, in the sacraments.

SECOND MEDITATION

The Role of Family

The Christian family is another place where this loving fellowship is meant to be lived out. In fact, ever since ancient times, Christians have called the family the “Domestic Church.”

The natural bonds and affection that flow from familial relations are bridges, so to speak, over which God’s grace can flow in wonderful abundance, if we consciously build our families around their true center: Jesus, and his truth, his love, his mission.

It has never been easy to do this, because the effects of original sin are still with us, and our selfishness and woundedness make healthy family life a demanding work in progress.

But in a post-Christian culture, where family life is under attack legally, economically, educationally, and culturally, building the Domestic Church is even harder than normal; it takes heroic effort. But it’s worth every sacrifice.

Pope John Paul II wrote a *Letter to Families*, in which he called on every Christian family to take up the challenge of living the love of Christ in the home. And he pointed out that only through vibrant Domestic Churches will the Church of Christ be able to fulfill its mission of creating a civilization of love. He wrote:



The history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family. In these pages I have tried to show how the family is placed at the centre of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good, the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man. Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that... the family will be “strong with the strength of God”.

– *Letter to Families*, 23

Our families, as imperfect as they may be, are a primary arena in which we are called to live the loving fellowship at the heart of our Christian identity.



SECOND MEDITATION

The Role of Faith-Based Friendships

We can be pro-active and courageous in how we live the sacraments and family life, but they are both arenas of fellowship that are given to us — we don't really create them; we receive them. There is a third area of fellowship, though, which we can choose more directly: faith-based friendships.

Friendship is one of the most beautiful of human experiences, and Jesus himself praised and prized it: “I no longer call you slaves,” he told his Apostles at the Last Supper, “because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15).

Friendship has been valued and praised in every period and place of human history, even long before the time of Christ. It is another manifestation of our being created in the image of God, created to live in communion of life with other persons. It gives us joy, comfort, inspiration, and even meaning. But with the coming of Christ, even this beautiful human reality was changed, altered, elevated.

A faith-based friendship, a Christ-centered friendship, is a deeper, stronger, and longer-lasting friendship than any of the ancient philosophers could have imagined, for one simple reason: Christ himself is part of it.

In fact, he promised that he would be, in one of the most beautiful verses of the New Testament:

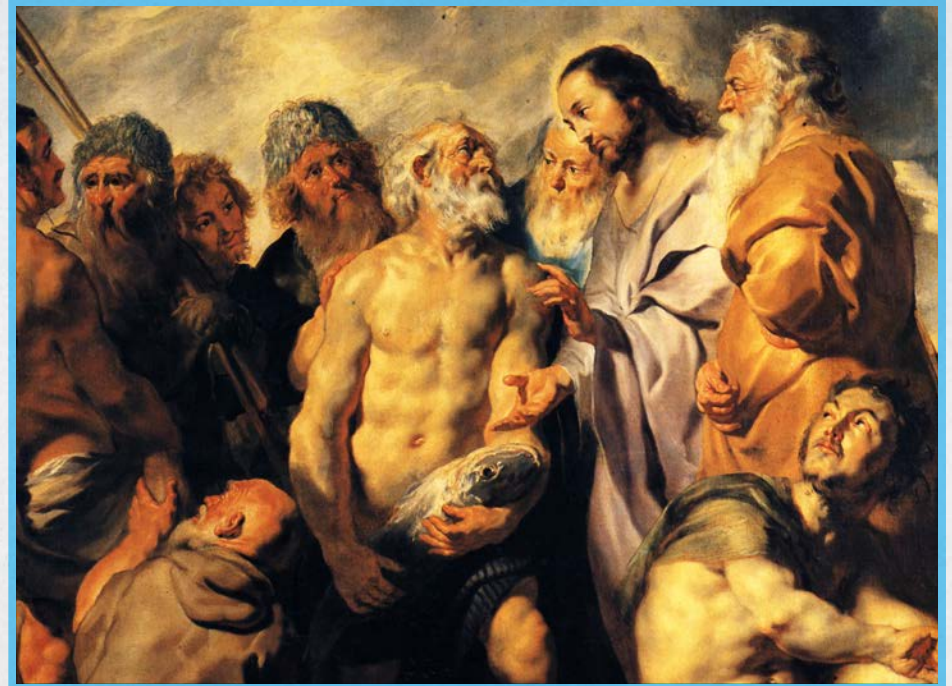


For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

— Matthew 18:20, NABR

When we invest in friendships with people who share our faith, living that friendship under the banner of Christ, the Lord himself joins us.

This is why C.S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist from the twentieth century, could pose the question: “Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?”



Faith-based friendships are an important aspect of Christian Fellowship: they help keep us accountable, they help support us in times of temptation, they spur us on to growth in virtue, they delight and comfort us at the deeper levels of our soul, and they help keep Jesus close to us.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we aren't allowed to have non-Christian friends — not at all! Pope John Paul II cultivated life-long friendships with non-Christians, even with atheists. But we need to make a point of investing in some friendships that are built with natural and supernatural ties.

If our faith is our highest priority, we will feel the need for friends who share that priority. And if we don't look for them and invest in them, we may gradually find our priorities getting confused.

St. Paul gave a warning in this regard to the Christians in Corinth: “Do not be led astray,” he wrote to them, “bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

SECOND MEDITATION

Conclusion: Embracing the Call to Fellowship

Jesus summons us “to be his companions.” This involves living in intimate friendship with him, through a vibrant life of prayer. And it also involves giving up the temptation to be a Christian Lone Ranger and choosing to embrace the call to loving fellowship.

We do that through being active members of his spiritual family, the Church, most especially by embracing the sacraments, through joyfully building our natural families into Domestic Churches, and through investing in faith-based friendships. It may seem like a lot to do — but it really isn’t.

We are all already members of a parish and a family, and we already have friends. Embracing the call to fellowship just means living those realities more consciously, more lovingly, more faithfully, more wisely — always starting with the unfailing help of God’s grace.

Those are the first two core elements of Christian living, the ones contained in the phrase, “Jesus appointed them... to be his companions.” But he also appointed them “to be sent out to proclaim the message,” and that’s what we will talk about in the conference.

But for now, let’s take some time to thank God, in the quiet of our hearts, for this call to loving Christian fellowship, and to ask him how we can answer it better and better.

The following questions and Bible verses may help your meditation.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- 1 What characteristics of my daily life make it hard for me to have meaningful fellowship? What one thing could I do to improve this aspect of my Christian living?
- 2 What have been my most meaningful family experiences? What can I do to contribute more to building up my family as a Domestic Church?
- 3 Reflect on the friendships that have been most meaningful in my life. Thank God for them. What friendships am I really investing in these days? What does God think about them?



Biblical Passages to Help Your Meditation



As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended.

— 1 Corinthians 12:12-18, NABR



I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

— Ephesians 4:1-6, NABR



Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them. Those who fear the Lord enjoy stable friendship, for as they are, so will their neighbors be.

— 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, NABR



But I shall show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

— 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, NABR



CONFERENCE

Introduction

Jesus summoned his Apostles, the ones he wanted, and he appointed them to be his companions.

To follow that call required a commitment to prayer and fellowship — *orare* and *amare* — for those first disciples of the Lord, and requires the same from us, so many generations later. But Jesus also appointed them for a task. St. Mark describes this task as being “sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils.”

This is the task of the whole Church and every Christian, the mission received from the moment of baptism: to roll back the powers of evil and sin that have made such a mess of the world, and to spread the redeeming truth and goodness of Christ’s everlasting Kingdom. In other words, we are called to courageously give to others what we have received: the Good News of Jesus Christ, and the grace to live in harmony with that Good News.

This courageous giving, this “*dare*” — the third core element in our Christian living — is traditionally called “apostolate,” or apostolic action. The word “apostolate” and “apostle” both come from the Greek root word that means “to be sent out.” And that’s the word St. Mark uses to describe the Christian mission: being “sent out to proclaim the message, with power to drive out devils.”

Every Sunday, when we affirm our faith in the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” we are also renewing our commitment to this mission. Here’s how the Catechism explains it:



The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is ‘sent out’ into the whole world. All members of the Church share in this mission, though in various ways. The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well. Indeed, we call an apostolate, every activity of the Mystical Body that aims to spread the Kingdom of Christ over all the earth”

— CCC 863



CONFERENCE

Every Christian Is Called to Be an Apostle

We need to stop and reflect on that statement, especially the part that reminds us: "The Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well."

We are all called to engage in spreading the faith, in sharing with others what we have received from God. Every single one of us.

Sometimes we can think that it's just priests, nuns, and consecrated missionaries who are called to spread the faith, and the rest of the Church is just supposed to passively hold on to the faith. Not true.

The Church's mission is shared by every member of the Church; we are all missionaries. And that mission is to spread the faith, to bring every person into friendship with Jesus Christ, to open channels for God's grace to free them from their sins and lead them along the path of redemption and holiness.



CONFERENCE

Here's how the Second Vatican Council explained it:



On all Christians therefore is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world

— Apostolicam Actuositatem, 2

Remember what happens at baptism? The baptized person receives a candle whose flame was lit from the Easter Candle. What are we supposed to do with that?

We are supposed to let it shine! To use it to light more candles wherever the light of Christ hasn't yet cast out the darkness of evil, sin, and ignorance. Jesus told us this in no uncertain terms:



You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

— Matthew 5:14-16

This is our fundamental mission in life: not making money, not winning championships, not even living a just, peaceful and moral life - those things are fine and good, and the last one is even necessary, but as followers of Christ, we are called to more.

We are called to be his co-workers, his messengers, his apostles, spreading his Gospel and rolling back the powers of evil that do so much damage to the human family that Jesus died to save. Every single one of us is called to that mission. Here's how Pope Benedict XVI explained it:



Christianity is the present. It is both a gift and a task, receiving the gift of God's inner closeness and — as a consequence — bearing witness to Jesus Christ.

— Jesus of Nazareth II, 282

CONFERENCE

Getting Practical

But how? How are we supposed to engage in this mission?

In a sense there are as many forms of apostolate as there are individual Christians. God wants his redeeming grace to penetrate every corner of time and space, so he guides each one of us to carry that grace into our unique circle of influence.

The Catechism reminds us of this too, when it tells us:



In keeping with their vocations [ordained ministers and lay people], the demands of the times and the various gifts of the Holy Spirit, the apostolate assumes the most varied forms.

— CCC 864

This is why the first requirement for carrying out our apostolic mission is to be good listeners, to listen to the whispers of the Holy Spirit directing our desires, our hopes, our thoughts, our actions.

But the Church has identified three general categories of apostolate. In fact, the Second Vatican Council published an entire Decree describing the apostolate of the Church, especially of the laity, called *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.

Understanding these general categories will help us be better listeners and more effective apostles. Let's take a look at them, one by one.



CONFERENCE

Our Way

The first arena of apostolate is simply our way of living. As Christians, we are children of the Eternal King; as apostles, we are messengers of the Everlasting Lord. This is who we are, and it should affect the way we do everything we do, the way we relate to other people, the way we react to every situation that life throws at us.

Because we have received the Spirit of Christ, our manner of behavior should be like Christ's: full of humble dignity, generosity, responsibility, openness, and simple elegance. In what we choose to do and say, and in how we do and say it, God's grace can help us be a living example of the goodness, love, and wisdom of the Lord.

How do you think Jesus worked in the carpenter shop with St. Joseph? Lazily, sloppily, irresponsibly? No chance.

How do you think the Blessed Virgin Mary would have interacted with the other women of Nazareth at the town well? Self-centered, self-absorbed, impatient, judgmental? Hardly.

As we mature in our faith, we are filled more and more with God's grace, and this shines out in the way we live, the way we do things.

As the Second Vatican Council put it:

The very testimony of their Christian life and good works done in a supernatural spirit have the power to draw men to belief and to God.

— AA 6

There should be something different about Christians, something intangibly luminous about the way they do the ordinary things of life, because after the Incarnation, after God himself lived out the ordinary things of life for 30 years in a small town in Galilee, those ordinary things have been touched by grace and turned into windows of glory.

Br. Marco taught me this lesson in our novitiate. One morning during housework we were both assigned to fold laundry. There were over a hundred seminarians living in the center at the time, and there were mountains of laundry to fold. I strongly disliked folding laundry.

As we worked, I was getting mad, and frustrated, and tired, and resentful, and full of self-pity. I was carrying on a vibrant conversation with myself, telling myself that I hadn't joined the seminary in order to fold laundry. And the more self-absorbed I became, the slower and sloppier my folding became.

About half-way through our hour of housework, I looked up and noticed my fellow novice, Br. Marco. Br. Marco was working about twice as hard as I was, and folding clothes about ten times better than I was. I kept looking at him. He was working with attention to detail, sincere effort, and a look of calm determination on his face.

Finally, I interrupted him. I asked, "Br. Marco, don't you hate folding laundry? Why are you pushing yourself so much?"

He looked up, smiled, and said, "I don't much like folding laundry, but I very much like working for the Lord." His love for God was reflected in his way of working.



After the three wise men found Jesus and Mary in Bethlehem, worshipped him, and gave him their gifts, St. Matthew tells us that they went home. They went back to their normal lives. But, the Gospel writer tells us, “They departed for their country by another way.” Another way — a different way.

After encountering the Lord, we live all of life in a different way, and that different way becomes a magnet to draw others towards that same transforming encounter with Jesus Christ.



St. Paul understood this and repeated it over and over again in his Letters. Here's how he explained it to the Christians in Colossae:



Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

– Colossians 3:12-15

CONFERENCE

Our Words

Our first apostolate consists simply in reflecting God's goodness in the way we go about the business of daily living. Our second field of apostolate has to do with our words. Here's how the Second Vatican Council puts it:



... a true apostle looks for opportunities to announce Christ by words addressed either to non-believers with a view to leading them to faith, or to the faithful with a view to instructing, strengthening, and encouraging them to a more fervent life. "For the charity of Christ impels us" (2 Cor. 5:14). The words of the Apostle should echo in all hearts, "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor. 9:16).

— AA 6

Some members of the Church are ordained in order to preach the Gospel in an official manner. But every single one of us is called to be able to explain our faith to others, and to look for opportunities to do that. St. Peter put it like this in his First Letter to all Christians:



Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope.

— 1 Peter 3:15, NABR

Of course to be able to explain our faith to others, we have to understand it ourselves. We have to make an effort to understand the reasons behind what we believe, and the implications of our faith for every aspect of the human drama.

This takes study, conversation, and reflection — not just reading the latest headlines and following the latest blogs. The Second Vatican Council urged us to take this apostolic opportunity to heart when it said:



... this sacred synod earnestly exhorts laymen — each according to his own gifts of intelligence and learning — to be more diligent in doing what they can to explain, defend, and properly apply Christian principles to the problems of our era in accordance with the mind of the Church.

— AA 6



Words are powerful things. St. James illustrates this by comparing the human tongue — our primary organ of speech — to the tiny rudder of a huge ship, and to a small match that can set an entire forest on fire (cf. the Letter of St. James, Chapter 3).

St. Paul also recognizes the power of words, and gives a beautiful, though strict, standard that the Christian should live by in our speech:



No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

— Ephesians 4:19, NABR

Words that impart grace and edify, words that build up those around us and help draw them closer to God. That's the second arena of apostolate, the apostolate of bearing testimony to God through what we say.

Of course, that doesn't mean that we should only talk about spiritual things all the time. That would be inhuman.

Nor does it mean forcing people to listen to personal sermons all the time. That would be disrespectful and counterproductive.

But it does mean that we are called to be Christ's messengers, and we need to be ready and willing to impart the message when God gives us the chance. And he will.

Not too long ago, I was getting into a car in one of those huge parking lots near a shopping mall. As I was getting in, I noticed a man running in my direction, dodging through some parked cars about five or six rows in front of me. By the time he reached me, I had already sat down in the driver's seat, but he stopped and asked if he could talk to me.

So I opened the door and got out. And he explained that he had just been sitting in his car, leaning against the steering wheel, praying for help. And he looked up and saw me walking through the parking lot, and he thought that was the answer to his prayer. He went on to tell me that his mother had just passed away, after a long, complicated, and drawn out illness. A couple weeks had passed, and he wasn't at peace. He wasn't sure he had made the right decisions about the treatments the doctors had recommended.



So I asked him to tell me the whole story. We stood there for a while, and he explained the entire situation. And together we talked it through. And I explained the Church's teaching on end-of-life issues, and together we applied that to his mother's situation. And as we talked, I could physically see the tension and the anxiety drain away, and peace and joy come over him.

This is an example of the apostolate of the word, of speaking the truth in love, of being "sent out to proclaim the message."

CONFERENCE

Our Works

Our way of life, and our words are the first two arenas of apostolate. The third is our works. This has to do with projects and activities that we engage in so as to spread the message of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council identifies three basic modes of this kind of apostolate. First, we can engage in projects and activities directed towards instructing and sanctifying people in the faith. This involves catechizing, teaching, and inviting people to participate in the life of the Church.

A powerful example of this kind of apostolate can be found in the advertising campaign created by “Catholics Come Home” (www.catholicscomehome.org).

Tom Peterson, the Catholic layman who started this apostolate, used to work in secular advertising. The Holy Spirit gradually stirred up in his heart a desire to use his knowledge of communications to bring non-practicing Catholics back home to the faith.

These campaigns have been used successfully by numerous dioceses, and their Internet reach has helped hundreds of thousands of people rediscover the beauty of their faith.

Besides those kinds of evangelization projects, we can also engage in activities that improve and perfect what the Church calls “the temporal order.” That term that refers to human society in all of its multiple dimensions. Here’s how the Second Vatican Council explained it:



The laity must take up the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation... the good things of life and the prosperity of the family, culture, economic matters, the arts and professions, the laws of the political community, international relations, and other matters of this kind, as well as their development and progress...

– AA 7

Renewing the temporal order means building a society that reflects and protects the truth of human dignity in all of these spheres.

In another place, the Council put it like this:



Since the laity, in accordance with their state of life, live in the midst of the world and its concerns, they are called by God to exercise their apostolate in the world like leaven, with the ardor of the spirit of Christ.

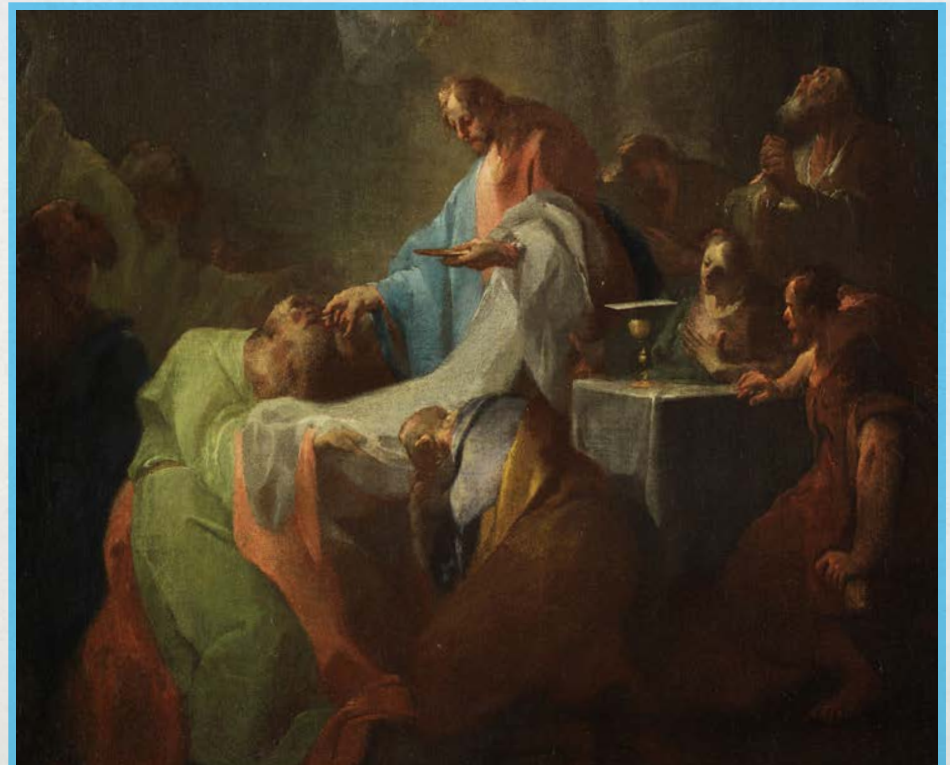
– AA 2

This is the arena of apostolate most characteristic of the laity, as opposed to the ordained clergy. The Council made this very clear:



The apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others...

– AA 13



We all know that western civilization is no longer Christian, but if we who are Christ's apostles form a strong enough subculture and penetrate with God's light and grace the different sectors of civil society, we can gradually re-Christianize it, or at least protect it from further decay. This is a key element in what recent popes have called the New Evangelization.

Today's faithful Catholics who bring their Christian wisdom and knowledge to bear in science, politics, business, education, and entertainment can follow in the footsteps of the very first generations of Christians, who converted the pagan Roman Empire from the inside out, like leaven in a lump of dough.

Besides works of evangelization and works that renew the temporal order, there is a third arena of apostolic works: projects and activities dedicated to mercy and charity, helping to show forth the love of God to those who are in need and can't help themselves.

Orphanages, hospitals, schools, and other social initiatives taken up to serve the poor and underprivileged are a powerful channel through which the Church spreads the message of God's redeeming love.

The Second Vatican Council stressed the central role of this kind of apostolate when it declared that



... pity for the needy and the sick and works of charity and mutual aid intended to relieve human needs of every kind are held in highest honor by the Church.

— AA 8

Works by which we start or join projects dedicated to evangelization, to renewing the temporal order, and to Christian mercy — this is the third category of apostolic action.

We can do all of these apostolates as individuals, or as groups and associations. But in each case, we should always be in harmony with the rest of the work of the Church — never acting contrary to the loving fellowship we are called to live as Christ's companions.



CONFERENCE

Conclusion: Answering the Call to Give

Answering this call to spread Christ's message, rolling back the darkness of sin and evil, through our way, our words, and our works, is one of the most powerful ways to experience the joy that only Christ can give. He pointed this out when he said; "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving" (Acts 20:35).

To give — "dare" — to give to others what God has so generously given to us, and what he continues to give! This is the third element in our Christian motto of prayer, fellowship, and apostolate, of *orare*, *amare*, and *dare*.

But in reality, they aren't three separate elements. They are more like three interconnected dimensions, or the three sides of a triangle — you can't really have one of them, authentically, without the other two. Because Christ himself is the source of all three dimensions, and wherever he is, he brings them all.

The Catechism reminds us of this when it tells us:



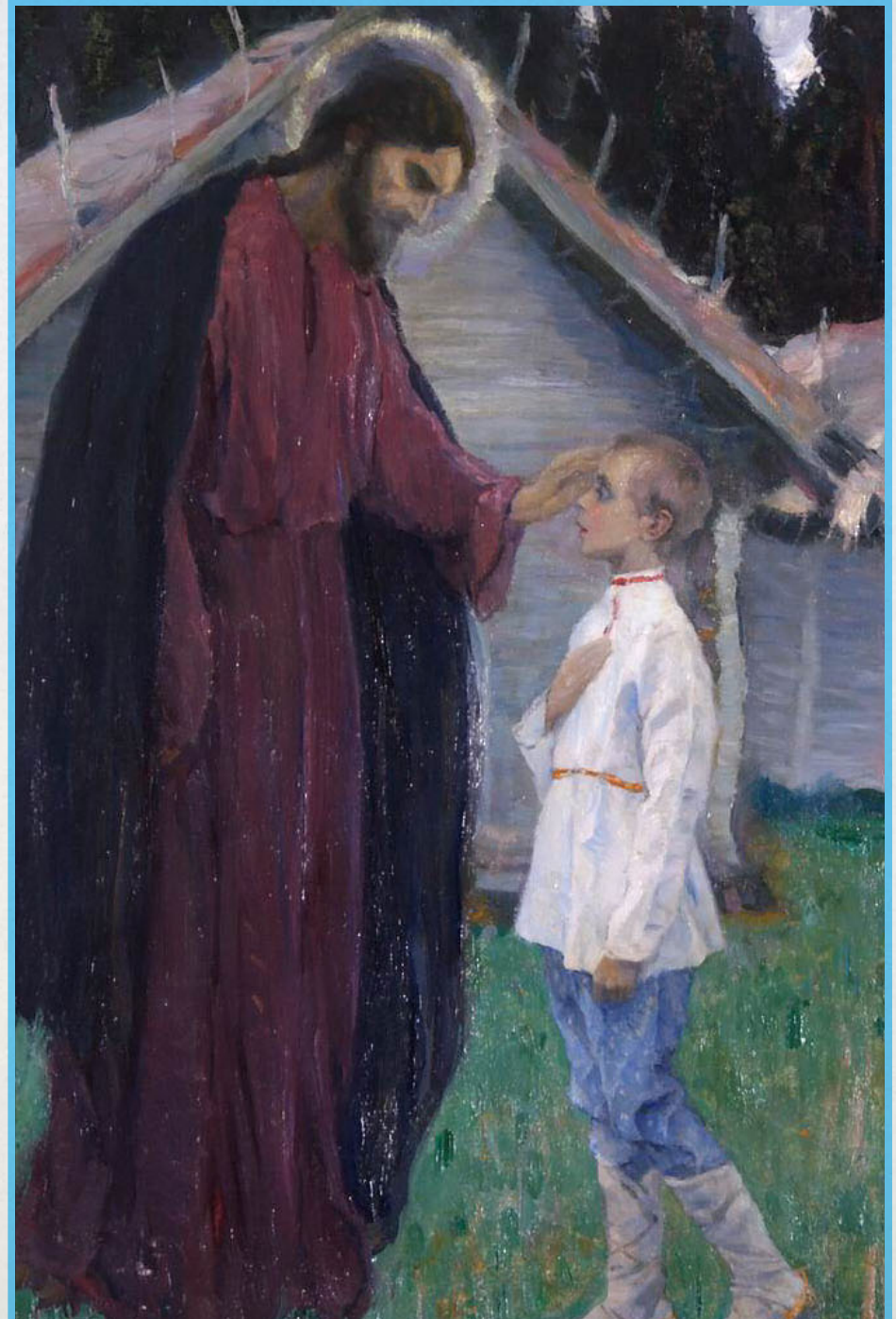
Christ, sent by the Father, is the source of the Church's whole apostolate; thus the fruitfulness of apostolate for ordained ministers as well as for lay people clearly depends on their vital union with Christ... But charity, drawn from the Eucharist above all, is always as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate.

— CCC 864

Vital union with Christ — prayer. The charity drawn from the sacraments — fellowship. And apostolate. It's not a bad motto for someone who wants to be a complete Christian.

Take a few minutes now to go over the ten questions in the personal questionnaire. Do it prayerfully, taking your time.

It's not meant to be a quiz, but a tool to help you tune in to whatever the Holy Spirit wants to tell you about your Christian life right now.



Personal Questionnaire

- 1 How did I receive my Christian faith? What apostolic activity did God use as a means to bring it to me?
- 2 How well is Christ reflected in the way I carry out my daily duties (school, work, family life, etc.)?
- 3 What one area in my life needs the most improvement as regards to giving good Christian example through my way of living?
- 4 Who has inspired and encouraged me by the Christ-like example of their way of living? Thank God for that person.
- 5 How well prepared do I feel to explain the faith (and its practical implications) to others? What should I do to improve my preparation in this area?
- 6 How deeply do I respect the power of words for either good or bad? What personal experiences have helped increase this respect?
- 7 When was the last time I explained or defended my faith with words?
- 8 What types of apostolic works have always attracted me and why?
- 9 What apostolic work have I engaged in that has been most memorable for me?
- 10 Am I sufficiently involved in the apostolate, or am I a bit off balance in my Christian living, with plenty of prayer and fellowship, but very little apostolic activity?



FURTHER READING

For Reflection & Prayer

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

- *An Introduction to the Devout Life*
by St. Francis de Sales
- *A Handbook of Spiritual Perfection*
by Fr. Philip Dion, C.M.
- *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (Actuositatem Apostolicam)*
Second Vatican Council
- *Christifideles Laici*
by Pope John Paul II
- *The Soul of the Apostolate*
by Jean-Baptiste Chautard

CONTACT US

How Are We Doing?

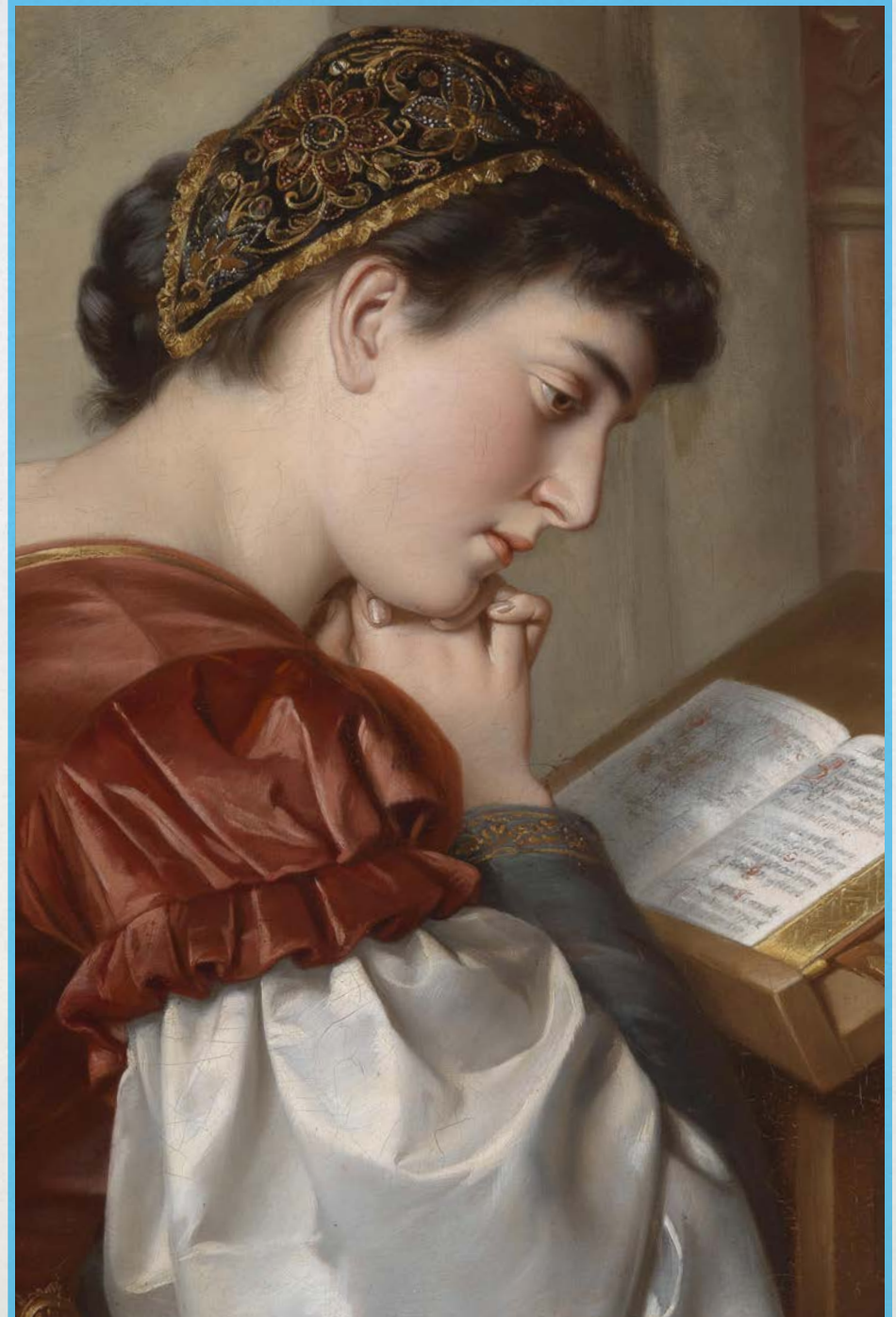
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APPENDIX

Resources for Growing in Prayer

Book Resources

- *A Guide to Christian Meditation*
by Fr. John Bartunek, LC
- *In Conversation with God*
by Francis Fernandez
- *Prayer Primer*
by Fr. Thomas Dubay, S.M.
- *Prayer for Beginners*
by Peter Kreeft
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
(Part IV, paragraphs 2558-2865)

Internet Resources

- www.RCSpiritualDirection.com
- www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers/

APPENDIX

Types of Prayer (from www.vocation.com)

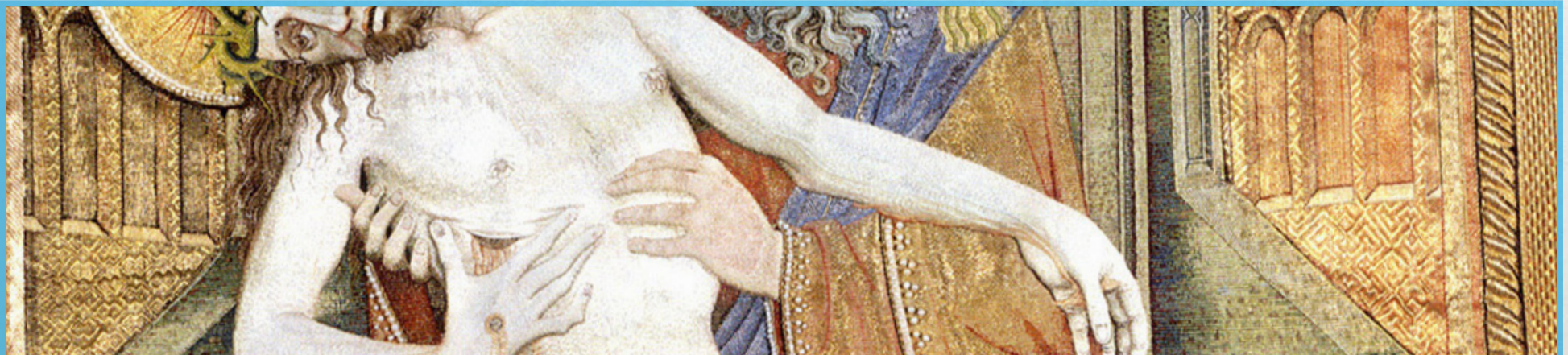
The Church recognizes many different kinds of prayer, which can be grouped together under a couple of general categories: vocal prayer, and mental prayer, which can be either meditative or contemplative.

Vocal prayer consists in reciting, either out loud or to oneself, the words of previously composed prayers, and aligning one's thoughts and desires to their meanings.

Meditative mental prayer combines personal reflection on a text from the Bible or from some other spiritual work with words of one's own, spoken to God in a heart-to-heart conversation.

Contemplative mental prayer brings the soul into more direct contact with God, often without words or ideas; it is the prayer of being in the presence of God, loving him and knowing you are loved by him.

Prayer has as its ultimate goal to praise God and to receive his grace, to deepen our personal communion with God and strengthen the Church. The time we spend in prayer should awaken in our hearts attitudes of adoration, wonder, gratitude, petition, and contrition.



HOW TO PRAY

From www.vocation.com

We learn to pray by praying. The single most important factor in our life of prayer is our decision to make prayer an integral part of our life. If God matters to me, I will make time for prayer. If he doesn't, I won't.

Prayer, conversation with God, should accompany us throughout our entire day. We should invite God to be a part of all our joys and sorrows, our struggles and concerns, our projects and decisions. He is a loving Father who longs to be "let in" to his children's lives.

Nevertheless, the hectic pace of life requires us to set aside some time to be alone with God. We need to "tune in" to him frequently each day, so that our activities don't end up crowding him out, so that we recognize his action in our daily lives, and so we never impede the grace that he wants to give others through us.

To maintain a healthy prayer life, and therefore a healthy relationship with God, experience has shown the following prayer commitments to be helpful (most Catholic prayer books will have texts for these different prayers):

- Starting the day with a morning offering
- Ending the day with a brief prayerful reflection on how the day went
- Dedicating 10-15 minutes each day to mental prayer
- Praying the Angelus
- Praying a decade of the Rosary sometime during the day
- Regular confession (every month or every two weeks)
- Going to Mass during the week in addition to Sundays
- Praying before meals
- Visiting Christ in the Eucharist

No prayer book, however, can pray for you. God will never force his way into our lives; what kind of friend would? Each one of us has to decide, every day, how much God matters to us, and pray accordingly.

