

Prayer & Meditation



Notes for the Journey

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INTRODUCTION:

Read Matthew 6: 1-14; Luke 18: 1-8

Prayer is to communicate with God. It is a three way process between God and us as human beings and individuals.

It is the most basic ingredient in the Christian life and, for that matter all religions and certainly the major religions of the world.

Prayer is essential for growing in your faith, believing in God and experiencing God's presence in your life.

There are several basic ways of prayer:

(A) Formal Prayer

(i) Talking Prayer:

(a) Where you talk to God as you would talk to another human being

(b) In tongues which is a form of talking but not one we generally use when talking to one another.

(ii) Meditation: where the main emphasis is on silence, being with God and listening to God.

(iii) Contemplative prayer: where you contemplate passages of Scripture, creeds, ideas, symbols etc. in order to learn more of God.

(iii) and (iv) are sometimes interchangeable.

(B) Informal Prayer

The Way we live our life and practising the presence of God in all we do.

Each type involves the methods of the others to some extent.

Because prayer is one of the most basic ingredients of the Christian life, every disciple of Christ needs to learn to pray. To do this, it is necessary to develop a discipline or habit of prayer; to have a formal time of prayer. Formal Prayer can lead to informal prayer and vice versa.

A. FORMAL PRAYER:

TIME FOR PRAYER

Each person needs to set aside some time each day to pray, preferably at least twice. Usually, morning and evening. This can be when you first get up, or after breakfast, before you begin your daily tasks. The second time should be at evening or at the end of the day, before you go to bed. Some people will be able to put some time aside during the day as well. Jesus used to spend long periods of his time in prayer. "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." (Luke 5:16 (NIV))

THE PLACE OF PRAYER

It is helpful to have a particular spot, although it is not absolutely essential, that you use regularly. This is your holy place. It might be decorated with a candle, a cross or some icon or religious symbol. Sit yourself comfortably, preferably with your back straight and your hands resting upon your lap, although you might prefer other positions such as the traditional prayer one, that is to kneel.

1(A) PRAYER: TALKING TO GOD

Prayer in its simplest form is communicating with God. In this way we communicate with God as we would with one another' sometimes using our bodies as well. The difference is the way that God responds. For God does not always seem to talk back in the way that we do to one another. Some people feel that God does talk back to them. Note the emphasis on seem. Because it might well be that God does, but that we have not really learnt to hear God speaking to us. In the first book of Samuel, chapter 3, God spoke to Samuel, but, at first, he did not recognise, that God was speaking to him, because 'Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.' (1 Samuel 3: 7)

We will be mentioning this passage from time to time. For the moment, note that Samuel thought that it was someone else talking to him until Eli the Priest helped him to recognise that it was the Lord.

WAYS OF TALKING TO GOD

The best way to find out is to do it. Remind yourself that although we cannot see God, God is present everywhere. We are reminded of this every time we share in the Eucharistic liturgy, in the prayer of preparation at the beginning of the liturgy:

**“Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden;
cleansing the thoughts of our hearts**

**by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.”**

This is the basis of all effective prayer, in fact it is the basis for our personal relationship with Him. We would do well to say this at the beginning of every time of prayer.

As we trust in God's presence with us, talk to Him about your lives. People often say that they find prayer difficult and artificial. Yet there is usually something that worries us or that we are concerned about, or something that we are really interested in. These are the best things to start with. Talk to God about them; commit them to God, trusting in God's guidance.

It is important that you talk to God with FAITH, with BELIEF. FAITH and BELIEF that God is present everywhere and sees and knows everything. As you do this, you will find that you begin to experience the mutual love that flows between God and all who believe in him. One of the main limitations to God, is our not realising God's presence in our lives.

Another aspect of talking prayer, is when, after some very significant effort, we clarify an issue that we really need guidance on. We put it to God and listen. This links in with other forms of prayer, such as meditation or contemplative prayer.

This way of communicating with God is the most informal form of formal prayer and needs to be the basis for our prayer life.

USING A STRUCTURED FORMAT OR LITURGY

(i) The Lord's Prayer

(See Matthew 6: 1-9)

When Jesus disciples asked him how they should pray, Jesus said to them:

(i) Do not pray for public show

(ii) 'Go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you' (Matthew 6:6)

This advice has a literal meaning. Spend some time by yourself and pray to God, the God who is invisible, the God who sees everything, and God will reward you appropriately. In other words, God will reward you, answer your prayer in the way that God thinks is best and in the way that God determines.

As well as this it can have a more spiritual meaning. Go within yourself, your own body and pray to God who sees into your innermost being and find a place within yourself where you meet with God. Jesus said that the Kingdom of heaven is within us. St. Paul said that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are like a room that we live in. Consequently, to go within is to close the eyes, separate ourselves from the things of the physical world and pray to God in our Spirit.

(For further discussion of this important point, see later sections)

(iii) Do not use lots of words, God already knows what we need.

This puts the emphasis on prayer as being a way of coming into God's presence and surrendering our lives to God's will. We should commit our lives to God waiting on God for guidance, trusting that God knows what we need before we even ask. We say to God 'you know my life show me your way'. This is reinforced by the Lord's Prayer that follows.

(iv) The Lord's Prayer:

(a) The Traditional Form

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

(b) A Modern Form

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

As this is the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, it is good to use it as a basis for your time of prayer. You might pause at each section using the particular petition to guide your prayers.

(a) Our Father in heaven

In prayer we talk to God as we would to our Father. Note that the word 'our' is used not 'my'. This sets the tone for the whole prayer and for our prayer. We always pray for others, when we pray for ourselves. What we will for ourselves, we will for others. For example, if you want to be rich, you want everyone to be rich. If you want God to heal you, then you want everyone to be healed as well, etc.... etc....

Calling God our Father, does not mean that we take God for granted, but that we both love and respect God Him. It emphasises that there is only one God and that God is our creator, the source of our life. Consequently, God has our best interests at heart. Heaven locates God where God is and the nature of God's existence, namely Spiritual. Reflecting upon the dwelling place of God is an important part of our spiritual journey. In our journey, our quest we learn to understand what Jesus meant by saying in the passage quoted above on prayer, that there is a secret place where we meet with God.

This is also a time when we might pause and express our love, gratitude, praise and adoration to God for creating us.

(b) Hallowed be your name

We reverence God because of who God is. The word hallowed is based on the word 'Holy' which means to be set apart and revered. God is unique and different to any other being. The name of God signifies God's nature and character. As a phrase this petition means that we need to reverence God above everyone and everything.

(c) Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The second phrase helps explain the first phrase. There is a sense where the kingdom of God is wherever the will of God is followed. Jesus often spoke of it. The kingdom of God was and is present in him and was present in all those before him who obeyed the will of God. It is also present in us, if we try to obey God and points us to the day when God's purpose will be achieved. On that day, we will experience the joy of eternal life and the bliss of God's pure love. The darkness will have passed. There will be no more suffering, no more war, no more bloodshed, no more violence. Creation will have been perfected.

Another important consequence of this phrase is that it reorientates our assumptions about prayer and then gives us a new and true basis for prayer.

It reorientates us, by taking us away from the idea of always asking God to put things right, to realising that life is a process whereby God's will is achieved on earth as it is in heaven. This means that most, if not all, the problems that we experience, are the effect of God's will not happening on earth as in heaven.

This then gives us a new basis for prayer in that prayer is seeking God's solutions to our problems and the problems of life. We are not asking God to do what we already know he wants to do e.g. heal people but rather seeking to learn how this is to be

achieved.

This is a time when we pray for ourselves and others. This is called 'Intercession' or sometimes, 'Supplication'. In this time: (i) ASK for God's guidance on any problems that you might have or things that you are learning to do. In other words, seek God's guidance on every area of your life.

(ii) INTERCEDE - PRAY FOR OTHERS that is ask for God's blessing for other people and in various situations. Your family and friends. This will include praying for people who are sick, starving, without homes etc...

(d) Give us this day our daily bread.

This reminds us that we, and, in fact, all creatures, are dependent upon God for all our needs. We should not expect more than we need, or in other words we should have what we need and not necessarily what we want. Asking God for our needs does not mean that we do not expect to work. But rather that we will have the work that will provide for our needs. As with every other section of the prayer we ask this for ourselves and for everyone.

This petition also has a deeper meaning in that we ask for the spiritual sustenance that we need. The Jews, often talked about the bread of God's kingdom- the experience that we tried to speak of in (c) when God's will is done. Jesus described himself as the bread of life. Those who eat that bread do not hunger any more. There is an experience that only God can give us that is truly satisfying. Similar to the experience of having our physical hunger satisfied but far more fulfilling in that is an experience that we know satisfies our very being.

(e) Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

This leads us in to a time of confession where we

(i) confess our own sins, we say sorry to God for the times when we have strayed from God's ways. As to what is right and wrong, we are guided by the teaching of the Scriptures, particularly, the teaching of Jesus; the Holy Spirit and our conscience. As we grow as a Christian we become more and more aware as to what sin really is and the different ways that we sin. (See the later section on contempt of knowing) This awareness should lead to confession.

(ii) forgive those who have sinned against us. Jesus says that forgiveness of others is the main condition for God forgiving us. We reminded of Jesus Christ on the cross forgive them father for they do not know what they are doing'. ‘

This is also a time to thank God for his forgiveness and for what Jesus has done for us through his death and resurrection.

(f) Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil.

The puzzling point of this petition is that we ask God to not lead us into temptation. If it was the devil, then, on the surface, that would seem to make more sense.

The explanation that makes most sense to me, is that the word tempt can mean 'to test

a person's strength'. Abraham was tested by God when he was asked by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Similarly, God allowed Satan to test Job and the Holy Spirit lead Jesus into the dessert to be tempted by Satan. Consequently, we ask God not to test us. But then you might say, 'But I like a challenge. Won't being tested make us stronger?' The reply to this would seem to be, that by praying this petition, we face those possibilities within ourselves, we face the forces within us and without of us that would have us doubt God and so create the need for us to be tested. By asking not to be tested and to be freed from evil, we are affirming our Faith in God and our desire to be freed from any influence of the evil one. The implications of this are very far reaching.

*(g) For the Kingdom, the power, the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.*

This Affirmation of God's sovereignty follows from the previous petition. In it we acknowledge God's right to rule us. That all life power, energy and will power come from God, and that all that we glory in, our various gifts and abilities come from God and that God alone is the one who deserves our praise and adoration.

This Doxology is not included in either Matthew or Luke's version of the prayer but was probably added in the early days of the church.

ATTITUDES OR TYPES OF PRAYER

The Lord's prayer teaches us how we should pray. The Scriptures also point to various types of prayer. The main types can be remembered by the Acrostic Word 'ACTS'.

A - ADORATION

C - CONFESSION:

T - THANKSGIVING:

S - SUPPLICATION: (Intercession)

As you can see from the commentary on the Lord's prayer, these can be woven into your prayer based on the various sections of the Lord's prayer.

SOME WAYS THAT GOD TALKS TO US

The Scriptures record many instances where God seems to communicate directly with a person. For example, the story already quoted where the boy Samuel hears God speaking to him. There seems little doubt from the way that the experience is described that God spoke directly to Samuel, and not only did he speak to him but came and stood beside his bed. The meaning of this particular story is best discovered through meditating on it. There are other examples where God speaks directly through a messenger, usually an Angel. This is regarded as the same as God speaking himself. For example the story of Abraham and Isaac. God speaks directly to

Abraham, but then revokes his command to sacrifice Isaac through the message of an Angel. Ultimately, God communicates to us through God's Word, who is an expression of His very own nature. 'The Word was with God and the Word was God' (John 1: 1-2) Jesus is the Word made flesh. The Word can be communicated to us in various ways.

(a) In your Mind

When you talk to God, stop and listen to God. Here what God has to say. It might be that you think you hear nothing, so then you start thinking about what you had been talking to God about and you find yourself coming up with a solution to what you were praying about. Or it might be that you feel that God is speaking back to you and then suddenly, you stop and say 'I was really only talking to myself. Were you???' The tricky thing about prayer is that sometimes that is all you have been doing, inventing God's answers will; but even that is not so far from the truth; and in other cases God has been speaking back to you in your mind. We need to learn to recognise the difference. You will see later in the section on meditation but while the critical disciplines of meditation is to learn to discern when God is speaking in your thoughts or when it is just your mind rambling on

(b) In our Lives

Another way that God answers prayer is to actually direct the situation that you are involved in so that it works out in the right way. You might have prayed about something and felt that nobody was listening. A little later, someone comes a long or something happens that seems to be the answer to your prayer. **GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS SPEAK TO US IN WORDS, BUT OFTEN THROUGH THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN IN OUR LIVES.**

(c) Through Other People

Yet another way that God answers is through other people, either directly, when the person has felt guided to do something for you or say something to you; or indirectly, when they have been an instrument of God's purpose without them knowing it. Sometimes, the message they give us really challenges us, but we should not be put off by that. We cannot really grow without accepting challenges.

(d) Through the Scriptures

Often God will speak to us through the Scriptures. God will give us insights into who God is and God's purpose for human life, help us to understand our own lives and sometimes the Holy Spirit will apply a passage of Scripture to us often by giving us a passage as an answer to our prayers or a glass to look at our life through.

(e) Through the Church

The ways mentioned above can take place outside the church, that is the community of believers, but is usually more clearly expressed within the church. The Church, through its various processes of discernment, helps to recognise how God speaks to us and makes God's will and purpose known to us both as individuals and as human beings.

(e) in dreams

many of the encounters that people have with God in the Bible, are through dreams. Abraham had dreams of God communicating with him, showing him things, Joseph had dreams that were essential to the fulfilling of God's purpose in his life and Joseph accepted Mary as his wife and Jesus as his son, after God spoke to him in a dream, to name just a few of these instances.

Interpretation of dreams is a complex subject and often where we need the help and support of others. In the limited scope of these notes, it is sufficient to say that we need to listen to the dream and what we feel it means is the foundation of any other exploration of its meaning we might do.

Summary:

God can speak to us:

- (i) directly in our minds, and sometimes as a voice or through our ideas.
- (ii) through other people
- (iii) through the things that happen in our lives.
- (iv) through the Scriptures.
- (v) through the church.
- (vi) by guiding the events of our lives and by answering our prayers in various ways.

SOURCES OF PRAYERS

There are various books of Prayers that we can use to help us pray to God. The Australian Prayer book is one of these. It contains the Orders of Service that we use for our public Worship as well as formats that can be used for daily prayer. See pp18 - 109

You might find that there is a particular prayer that becomes your special prayer.

KEEPING A SPIRITUAL DIARY, JOURNAL OR NOTEBOOK

It is often helpful to keep a spiritual diary, Journal or notebook. It could contain:

- (i) an outline of the things that you include in your prayer time.
- (ii) a record of how you felt God has spoken to you, including dreams as mentioned above, which are a very important way for God to communicate.
- (iii) A note of the passages of Scripture that you have read or are going to read.
- (iv) Notes or questions that you might have of various things that concern:

- * passages in the Bible.
- * teachings of the church.
- * issues that we face as human beings.

1(b) TONGUES

There has been a lot of talk in some parts of the church in recent years about 'speaking in tongues'. Some people have said that speaking in tongues is the only sign of being a Christian and having the Holy Spirit living within our hearts. This is not really accurate. But equally, people who say that you should not pray or speak in tongues neglect the fact that it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. If you find yourself being moved to pray in sounds or in what appear strange words, do it, because that can be the Spirit praying within you and guiding you into a form of prayer that enables you to speak to God in a spirit language and not a human language. As St. Paul says:

"Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the Saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8: 26-27)

personally, I believe that tongues have been overly complicated by a rather sectarian approach to them. Our learning of the human language, as a baby, begins with making sounds. The same can apply to us learning our language of prayer. Just as the baby expresses to its parents and those around it, how it feels through making sounds but not words, so we can do the same in our prayers. Sometimes it can be much more effective to moan, groan or cry to God, rather than just saying I feel terrible.

For more about praying in tongues see 1 Corinthians 12 -14.

Tongues should not normally be used for public prayer, unless there is someone who can tell the others what is being said.

1(c) BODY PRAYER

as suggested above, just as we communicate with each other, in other ways a part from words, so we should pray in other ways a part from words. Body gestures are one of the ways that we communicate without words or in conjunction with our words. Some body gestures when you pray are:

- (i) To kneel
- (ii) To place your hands together
- (iii) To prostrate yourself on the ground
- (iv) To make the sign of the cross
- (v) To stretch your arms upwards
- (vi) To move around, to dance.

2. MEDITATION – SILENT PRAYER

QUIETENING THE MIND - LISTENING TO GOD

Christian meditation has many techniques in common with other forms of meditation: Breathing techniques, use of symbols and the imagination, and inner mystical experiences. The one important difference is that the object or focus of our meditation is the personal God, revealed to us through God's Son, the eternal Word and the Holy Spirit. Meditation should be a part of our normal prayer life.

Unfortunately, many Christians still associate meditation with Eastern religions and as a consequence think that is not a part of Christian spirituality.

One of the problems is our use of words. Traditionally, many Christians have regarded meditation as a spiritual way of reading the Scriptures. This can be part of what meditation is, although, as can be seen later, I prefer to see this as contemplation. But in a sense it does not matter, for one merges into the other. In more recent times, I have often avoided this difficulty by calling meditation, Silent Prayer.

The following schema is a suggested way of using your prayer time, incorporating a period of meditation.

(i) Preparation for Meditation

(a) Your normal prayer time and then conclude with meditation

OR

(b) A brief opening prayer, Meditation, then conclude with your normal prayer time.

OR

(c) moving through the different stages in your prayer time, in a way similar to how a symphony or piece of music unfolds.

(ii) Meditation

(a) Relaxation of the Body

Having begun your prayer time, close your eyes (if you have not already done so), and begin the time of meditation, of holding yourself before God. Let yourself breathe naturally - enjoy just breathing. Feel your heart beat and breath in harmony with it.

For example, breathe in to four beats (or whatever number you find comfortable) of your heart and then breathe out to four beats. If you feel comfortable in doing it, then, hold your breath for four between each inhalation and exhalation. As you do this, check out your body for tensions, energy blockages etc., beginning with your feet (one at a time) and consciously relax. This time of focusing your attention upon your

breathing is important, for the Spirit is often experienced through our breath. Remember what St. Paul said about the Spirit praying within us. Through Jesus we receive the Holy Spirit. When God first created human beings he breathed the breath of life into us.

During this time you might feel an energy moving through your system, let it relax you, for that is your inner life, the power of God that lives in you, the Word of Life, the energy of Jesus, the Word become a human being, given to us through the Holy Spirit (referred to by John in his letter see 1 John 1: 1ff), beginning to work more actively. If this does not happen, wait until it does (even weeks, months, years!) The significance of this experience needs a more detailed study, particularly in seeing how it is the foundation of all major religions.

(b) Repetition of the Name of Jesus or some other meaningful Word

To help you quieten your mind and focus your attention -- on God, and experience the Word of Life; chose a short word such as one of the following:

Lord; Jesus; the 'Jesus Prayer' "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me (a sinner)"; Maranatha (Come Lord Jesus); Alleluia (Praise the Lord) "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" or a more general word such as love, joy, or peace. (Putting vowels to the name of God YHVH, used in the Old Testament is another way*) Repeat your chosen word quietly and easily, waiting upon God in your heart. We will say more about this later in talking about contemplation.

* The way we refer to or speak of God, the Names of God, is fundamental in all spiritual, faith traditions. For the ancients, to know the name of God or how to refer to God, gave them some power over God or at least a relationship with the God they could name. Is this a very complex topic, we can only touch on it in these notes. In the old Testament we need to remember that the people of Israel came to the belief in there being only one God, through a long process of growth and development in their relationship with their God. Without going into the development of this process, we need to know that there was a time when the God of Israel was the greatest of all gods but there were still other gods. As Israel's monotheistic faiths and their understanding of God developed, there were two ways that God was primarily referred to:

(i) Elohim - God in English translations. This name referred to the God who was just and consequently it was in a sense, God is judge mental name. It is important to note that the Hebrew word is plural. Hence in Genesis 1:26, God says 'let us make...' For the early Christians, this was important for our understanding of the Trinity. Elohim is the name used for God in the 1st chapter of the book of Genesis.

(ii) YHVH Elohim - Lord God in English translations. This was God's personal name, God is merciful name. The people of Israel never said it out aloud. When they came to this Name, they would say 'the Holy One, blessedly he'.

This is the name of God referred to in **Gen 4:26** To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

More importantly, this is the name that God gives to Moses, when Moses meets God on the holy mountain, in the burning Bush.

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

I am who I am is in the format of the Hebrew verb to be, which is also the personal name of God, and although it is in the same format it does not mean that we know how to pronounce it. Importantly, the Hebrew verb to be means either ‘I am who I am’ or ‘I will be who I will be’. This vagueness about how the name of God is to be spoken is illustrated later on in Exodus, when Moses asks God to him God’s glory.

God says:

“I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”²¹ And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock,²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by.”²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:19 – 23)

as you can see there is a deep spiritual tradition behind the Hebrew names of God are might be that you use the personal name of God, YHVH Elohim and ask God to teach you how to pronounce it as he pronounced to Moses.

Apart from these 2 primary names of God in the old Testament, there are many others. Usually they describe a particular attribute of God, for example, Shalom – peace or El Roi – the God who sees, the name used by Hagar when God saved her and Ishmael after Abraham had to send them away from his camp at Sarah’s insistence (Genesis 16:13)

for Christians, Jesus gave how to address God a seemingly radical new perspective. As we have already heard in the Lord’s prayer he referred to God as Father (Abba). This does not mean that he walked away from the deep spirituality of the old Testament ways of naming God. For example, in the Last Supper discourse as recorded in John’s gospel, Jesus speaks of his going to the Father and how we can ask the Father in Jesus name, in our prayers; but he also says how he has: ‘revealed your name (the Fathers those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word.’ (John 17:6)

in the acts of the apostles and epistles, Jesus becomes the name by which we can be saved.

Exploration of the Kingdom of Heaven

Meditation is also a time for exploring your inner room, discovering what St. Paul means by saying that a Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit. It is a time for discovering that the kingdom of heaven is within you or experiencing Jesus in the very depths of our being, for St Paul said ‘ That Jesus Christ is in you (2 Corinthians 13:5)’ (Luke 17: 20-21; see also Matthew 6: 5-14)

(iii) The Development of the Meditation

As you become quieter, stiller, you will begin to sense more clearly the life activity around you. Listen to it all for a short time notice the various sounds but do not become involved with them. Just let it all be. You might see images or visions in your mind or with your eyes whilst they are closed; don't concern yourself with these. If any of these are of significance, you will know in time. Similarly, as thoughts come to mind, let them pass, don't dwell on them. (If, they seem to be of particular significance then make a mental note to spend some time in the prayer time that follows to think and pray about them) If people come to mind, repeat their names slowly, holding them before God, that is intercession; then leave them with God. (Again it might be that you need to come back to them and pray for them, again, in your prayer time). If during this time, you come across aches or pains in your system that you were not previously aware of, don't dwell on them; notice them, leave them with God, trusting in Him to work as He will and pass on. One of the most important aspects of the meditation is the gentle way that we deal with any of our problems or things that concern us. We let God's Spirit work within us rather than relying on the strength of our wills. The energy of meditation is -- often called passive energy. Sometimes your meditation will end in deep stillness and you will sense that the Lord, through the Holy Spirit has directed or guided you or in some way has answered prayer. You might even have felt that you heard `the still small voice'(1 Kings 19:10-12). Enjoy the stillness until you find yourself beginning to think about other things. If this experience of peace, the peace which passes all understanding, and a deep sense of the Lord's presence does not come; keep waiting on the Lord, trusting in God. You will find that in time, your life will become more peaceful; even when the outer events of your life are busy.

There are many and varied experiences that can happen to us during our times of meditation. They cannot be spoken of here. In a sense, the bible is a guide to these, in that we find the spiritual experience of others described to us and are able to recognise this experience in our own lives..

(iv) Completion of the time of Meditation and the beginning of a more formal time of Prayer

As you come out of this time, open your eyes and let yourself adjust, and then conclude by either completing your prayer time, if you have not already done so, or by collecting together, your thoughts and experiences from your meditation and then noting them in your spiritual journal.

Although you have finished your formal prayer time, it does not stop there. We need to try and be prayerful that is be listening to God in our heart in whatever we do throughout the day. As Jesus and St. Paul teach us, we should pray constantly.

CONCLUSION

As you grow in prayer, you might find that you are able to put more time aside. If you can; do it: because this is a very helpful ministry that you can exercise to the people of God. You will find that, a part from feeling greater peace in your life, that you are learning to recognise how God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit can dwell within us as Jesus promised he would. You will come to know Jesus as the eternal Word of God, the Word of Life, the power through whom all things were created and the light that shines on every person who comes into the world (John 1)

"Those to whom the eternal word speaks are delivered from uncertainty. From one Word proceeds all things, and all things tell of Him; it is He, the Author of all things, who speaks to us. Without Him no one can understand or judge aright. But the man to whom all things are one, who refers everything to One, is enabled to remain steadfast in heart, and abide at peace with God." (Thomas A Kempis)

B. INFORMAL PRAYER

Formal Prayer can lead to informal prayer and vice versa. Informal prayer is prayer that we share with God at any time of the day or the night in any place and in any situation. This type of prayer can be summed up as:

The Way we live our Lives.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians says:

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5: 16 -18)

Similarly Jesus once told a parable:

"to the effect that they should always pray and not lose heart. (Luke 18: 1)

For many people this seems rather strange, because their only understanding is of more formal prayer either at home or at church and not so much of the 'inner prayer of the heart'. Formal prayer is important and we will discuss this further later, but for the moment, it is important that we understand that one of the basic goals of the Christian

life is to seek to live your life in such a way that you are constantly mindful of the presence of God and in fact, we seek to be energised and guided by God in all that we do. (In some circles this is described as living in a state of God-consciousness.) For example, if you have someone who is a really close friend, then you like to spend a lot of time with them. It is the same with our friendship with God, except there is one important difference - GOD IS SPIRITUAL AND CAN BE PRESENT WITH EVERYONE AT ALL TIMES, whereas our human friendships are limited by time and space.

One form of Prayer, then, is learning to be with God every moment of the day, and let him guide you in all that you feel, think, do and say.

How do you do this?

(i) Learn to be attentive to God in whatever you do. Be aware that God is always with you; learn to experience God's presence, God's energy

(ii) Ask for his guidance in all the decisions that you have to make, and in your various relationships with people. Some examples: I am talking to someone who is unhappy about something. Not only do I try and do something to help the person, but I inwardly ask God to guide them and help them. (ii) I see something tragic on the News on T.V. that makes me feel sad. I ask God to help that person or persons. (iv) I come across an accident as I am driving along the road, or see an ambulance passing at high speed - I pray to God to help that person. (v) I am playing Golf: after setting the shot up I ask God to guide me as I play the shot. etc., etc..... In Star Wars terms, to be a Jedi Knight living in the Force, the power of the Holy Spirit. This can lead us into exploring what in some faith traditions, are called the Chakra's or energy centres of the body. You might pursue this more if you are interested.

The effect of this is not only do you live your life more and more with a conscious sense of God's presence, but you are also serving God in whatever you do.

SOME FURTHER NOTES ON MEDITATION AND PRAYER:

1. The Physiological Effects of Meditation

Scientists have discovered that the human brain emits faint electrical impulses which can be measured in microvolts by an EEG machine. There are four basic types of brain wave:

(i) Beta waves:

13 or more cycles per second. These are the waves that are emitted in our normal state of consciousness. It is associated with focused attention and the active thinking of a mind turned towards the outside world.

(ii) alpha waves:

8-12 cycles per second. These are produced by a state of 'relaxed awareness' with a move towards interiority or what is called 'internally focused states'. These waves are difficult to produce with the eyes open. Hence the eyes are normally closed for meditation. (iii) Theta waves: 4-7 cycles per second. These are produced when we are drowsy and the production of them is often accompanied by dreams.

(iv) delta waves.

0 to 4 cycles per second. These are emitted during deep sleep. Put simply, when our mind is active, it emits these waves. The number of cycles per second being determined by the intensity of the process. If we are worried or tense this can cause our brain to work faster and we will emit higher frequencies. The activity of our mind affects the whole of our nervous system. Meditation is a way to consciously control the speed and type of our brain waves. Through the repetition of the word, we can slow our mind down and consciously experience other states of mind or consciousness, whilst sending harmonious waves through our nervous system. For example, in meditation you can consciously experience the rest of deep sleep, something that we are not normally aware of. Similarly, we can learn to tap the more creative aspects of our mind and as a consequence become more effective as a person.

2. States of Consciousness

No one would deny that the way we experience life during our dreams is often very different to the way that we experience life in our normal waking states. Similarly within our waking state, we have a great variety of experiences. We don't really know whether we all see the world in exactly the same way. What your experience of a rose is might not be the same as mine. We both know that it is a rose and that it is

red, but we do not see the rose through each other's eyes. The fact that we agree that the rose is beautiful points to the fact that there is much in our experience that is the same, but there is still an indefinable level where we cannot really know what another's experience is.

The more we reflect upon this question, the more interesting it becomes. Philosophers have tried to analyse whether the way we see things in the world is exactly as they are; or whether we only see them from our own experience. For example: a trained musician hears much more in sounds and in a piece of music, than someone who has not really received any musical training, whether as a listener or a performer. Yet no matter how trained a person's ear, it is doubtful that we ever, totally, experience anything. There is an area, which is beyond our understanding, partly because 'anything' ultimately points to its maker.

This leads us to the conclusion that the way we experience the world and understand it, is largely determined by our own knowledge and understanding. For example: when we see a tower in the distance, we know that although it appears small, really it is a tower of approximately such and such a height.

It is not our purpose to resolve these issues but rather to reflect upon the question. For it leads us to think about 'Who we are' or to put the question personally, it leads us to ask the question 'Who am I'. Who is it that sees, hears and experiences? Who is it that lives, loves, thinks, feels etc....?

As we ask this question, we can find that there are many levels to each of us and many levels of our experience. Some psychologists have called these different levels; 'states of consciousness'. But beyond all the different states of consciousness, experiences or things that we are aware of; is the person who is aware, the person who sees and experiences. As we develop our consciousness, so the way we experience and the things that we experience are grows.

Meditation helps us to become more aware of who we are, who it is that has the experiences. In meditation, we experience different states of consciousness, but eventually, we go beyond these and experience ourselves as we are; we experience pure consciousness. We experience the 'I AM'. Remember how God reveals himself to Moses as the 'I AM'. 'I AM WHO I AM'. This is a statement of pure consciousness or being and represents an important stage in our spiritual journey.

3. Jesus Christ as the Image of the Self:

The Image of God and Man

As we seek to discover who we are and to experience true consciousness, we find that the more aware we become of ourselves, the more aware become of God. For as the book of Genesis tells us 'human beings are created in the image of God'. As we discover the image of God within ourselves, we also come to know Christ; for he is God's image and likeness. Jesus said: 'If you have seen me you have seen the Father'.

Christ being both God and Man is our pure image and God's true image. Jesus shows us what God is like and shows us what we are really like. As the image of our true self, we see in him a person who lived as God wanted him to. He was a person who really knew himself, who truly knew who he was. A person who was both conscious of himself and conscious of God. His teaching shows us the way and how we should live, to grow spiritually. Meditation is only a part of the process of knowing yourself. It lays a basis for the whole of life to become a process of learning and finding out our own true self and as a consequence finding out the truth of others.

4. The Kingdom of Heaven is Within You

Mention was made of this teaching earlier on.

Christians are often described as pilgrims, as people who are on a journey. Yet often we have little idea, where it is that we are heading to. The theme of the Kingdom of Heaven featured strongly in Jesus teaching. He began his ministry by announcing that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, that the kingdom of heaven was near. Not somewhere far off but right here now. Meditation is a very important way of learning to discover and explore that reality. It helps us to know for ourselves what is meant by the kingdom of heaven.

Spiritual writers emphasised that finding the kingdom of heaven is like discovering another world. A world that we have to learn to live in, just as we have to learn to live in this world. They say that we need to learn to see, hear, taste and experience the things of this other world. We need to learn to use our SPIRITUAL SENSES. For example: Jesus is described as being the Word of God, light and life of the world. Do we experience him as such?

St. Paul in Colossians 1:26-27 (NIV) "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

In 2 Corinthians 13: 5, he says: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you fail the test?"

If this experience of Jesus, has not become consciously yours yet, then, we should be aware that the time might come when this will be a part of our experience.

Similarly, Jesus tells his disciples how he can give them the Bread of Life. Bread after eating, we do not hunger. These images point to the fact that in God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, there are experiences comparable to the sensual experiences of this world. In fact, the two eventually merge.

5. Contemplation - Meditation as a Way of Knowledge

Much of what we have learnt about Meditation, takes us far beyond the practice of a simple technique, but we need to remember, that the whole process is based on a very simple technique. As we learn to use the technique, we learn to discern when to use the `word' as a means of dispelling thoughts and when to leave the `word' and follow the thoughts and feelings that the practice leads us into contact with. Learning to discern when to hang onto the `word' and when to let go, is a very important skill of meditation.

Learning the skill is part of learning to use the technique as a way of knowledge. It can be used with passages of Scripture, as a means of penetrating into their deeper meaning by visualising the scene and by slowly repeating key verses. The method can be used with concepts. Instead of thinking about something, you take the word that refers to the idea that you want to learn about and you repeat it as you would repeat your `word'. An example of this is: Suppose that you want to find out more about `sin'. You take the word sin and repeat it to yourself. A strong sense of what sin is will emerge in your understanding. You will sense, inwardly, what it means; what it means to be separated from God, to miss the mark.

This is a very profound way of learning, but so different to what we are used in our culture. It leads us into deeper experiences of Revelation and the dynamics of how God is revealed to us in many and varied ways. It can lead us to reading less and pray more. It can also lead us into exploring the spiritual value of the cycle of the church year. How the various events of Christ's life celebrated from Advent to Trinity Sunday and then through Sundays after Pentecost ordinary Sundays, and God's way of revealing the deep mysteries of the faith to us. For example, Christmas is not just what we understand it to be in our culture, the celebration of the birth of the human Jesus, whom we believe to be the son of God, but it also is about us experiencing the birth of the Word of God in us. As St Theophan, the Recluse said "the birth of Jesus, God's Word, God's son, of the Virgin Mary in human history, is one thing; the birth of the Word of God in us by the holy spirit is another. As with Christmas, so with Easter, a time to experience spiritually death and resurrection of Jesus, as St Paul says in his prayer to Ephesians to experience the same power at work in us that raised Jesus from the dead. Similarly, one of the best ways to experience spiritually the depths of the Revelation in the Transfiguration is to be presence at the Feast of the Transfiguration.

To sum up: Meditation is a very simple technique than can be used as:

- (i) a means of relaxation
- (ii) a means of prayer and contemplation: of speaking and listening to God.
- (iii) a means of self-knowledge and of developing our awareness or consciousness
- (iv) as a means of developing our personal relationship with God, through His Son and the Holy Spirit.
- (v) As a means of exploring the kingdom of heaven

(vi) as a means of developing our knowledge of things through a process other than by thinking about things.

Summary of Some Scripture Passages

1. Matthew 6: 1-16.
2. Luke 18: 1-9
3. Matthew 21: 13
4. Romans 8
5. Ephesians 1: 15 - 23