

## Commentary to the Seventeenth Sunday n Ordinary Time



“Teach us how to pray,” the disciples asked Jesus. This is the longing of our souls. We want to pray. We want to be with God.

Prayer is what we are about, not just here in Church but as people committed to Jesus Christ. We need to nurture our dialogue with him, our prayer Life. We come to Mass to pray the Lord’s Supper as a community and to reverence the Lord within us in communion. We call out to the Lord throughout our day whether it is simply grace before meals, or speaking to the Lord the three meditations: God loves me unconditionally, God forgives me and God is with me, or whether it is devotional prayers like the Rosary, or night prayer. Our days are meant to be united to God in prayer. Prayer expresses who we are, the People of God.

Recently, I came upon one of the invitations I sent out thirty-six years ago for my first Mass in my home parish, St. James of the Marches in Totowa, NJ. At the bottom of the invitation I wrote, “Come and pray with me.” It seemed right at the time, but I look at that phrase now with a great deal of embarrassment. Now I would write, “Come and let us pray together.” Your prayers strengthen me. The union of our prayers intensifies the presence of God in our community.

We need each other for our prayer life to grow. We need each other so we can really celebrate

God's presence to such an extent that He becomes present on the altar through the gift of Holy Orders. Sometimes, I come upon people who say that they don't attend Church, but they pray on their own. I think it is great that they are praying, but I also know that they are depriving themselves of the greatest prayer, the prayer of Jesus Christ at the Last Supper, on the Cross and at Easter. It is great that they are praying alone, but by refusing to join the community they are depriving themselves of the Eucharist.

Maybe we all need to reflect a bit about the mystery of the Eucharist. We go to communion so often that it is easy for us to forget what we are doing and whom we are receiving. When we receive communion, Jesus Christ comes inside of us. He is closer to us than our skin. When we receive communion, we worship Him within us with our whole being. All of us love Eucharistic Adoration. All of us love reverencing the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, when the Lord is exposed in the monstrance or processed around the congregation. Eucharistic adoration is wonderful. But there is something infinitely better than Eucharistic Adoration. That is receiving communion. No Eucharistic service is better than receiving communion. In a few moments and every time we receive communion we take Jesus within our selves. He is there at the Last Supper, looking at each person here and saying this is my body, this is my blood, take and eat, take and drink. When we receive communion Jesus is present on the cross saying, "My body is given up for you. My blood is yours. Even if you were the only person to ever live, I would still accept the cross for you. I want to be inside you. I want you to have my body and blood." When we receive communion, Jesus is present within us at the Resurrection. This is the food of the new life of the Kingdom, the food of eternity, the bread of angels.

Jesus once told the story about a jewel merchant who came upon a valuable pearl. When he found it, he sold everything he had so he could possess it. We have the Pearl of Great Price offered to us every day. The Eucharist, Holy Communion, the Presence of the Living Lord at the Last Supper, on the Cross and at the Resurrection is within us whenever we receive communion.

"Teach us to pray, Lord," the apostles asked. He taught them the Lord's Prayer, and He gave us the Eucharist. I invite you today, I challenge you today to enter into deep adoration of the Blessed Sacrament every time you receive communion.

For example, some times people will say, "Well, the Church says this or that, regarding some situation or other, but I disagree." Well, it is not a matter of what the Church says, it is a matter of the presence of Christ. It is not merely a matter that the Church says it is wrong to get drunk, it is a matter of considering what this action is doing to the presence of Jesus in our lives. A wise young priest once said to me, "A good way to judge whether an action is moral or not is to ask yourself whether or not you can pray better after the action." Interesting. And true. If after a course of action, we find prayer difficult, then we have probably have driven the Lord out of our lives, or at least we have diminished His presence.

We need to pray. We harbor, we treasure the presence of Christ within each of us, within our homes and in our community. We need to make time every day to recognize this presence within us. We need to pray. We need to stop and hear the Lord in the silence. We cannot allow the many concerns of our lives to hide the only thing that matters, the presence of Jesus—His presence within us, His presence in those we love, His presence in those who reach out to us. We cannot allow anything to

dull this presence, His Presence.

When we make the time to be in His presence, when we join Mary of Bethany in just enjoying the Lord in our lives, we will find ourselves walking a road less traveled, a road of serenity in the middle of hectic activity. When we choose to nurture the presence of the Lord within us, we, like Mary, will be choosing the better part.

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