

# 7 FORMS OF SOLITARY PRAYER

There are various forms of scriptural prayer. Different forms appeal to different people. Eventually, by trying various methods, we become adept at using approaches that are appropriate to particular passages and are in harmony with our personality and needs. Several common forms are described below.

## 1. MEDITATION

In meditation one approaches the Scripture passage like a love letter; this approach is especially helpful in praying poetic passages.

### METHOD

Read the passage slowly, aloud or in a whisper, letting the words wash over you and savoring them. Pray with the words that especially catch your attention: absorb them the way the thirsty earth receives the rain. Keep repeating a word or phrase, aware of the feelings that are awakened. Read and reread the passage lovingly as you would a letter from a dear friend, or as you would softly sing a refrain from a song.

## 2. CONTEMPLATION

In contemplation, we enter into a life event or story passage of Scripture. We enter into the passage by way of imagination, making use of all our senses. Theologians tell us that through contemplation we are able to recall and be present at the mysteries of Christ's life.

The Spirit of Jesus, present within us through Baptism, teaches us, just as Jesus taught the apostles. The Spirit recalls and enlivens the particular mystery into which we enter through prayer. Just as in the Eucharist the Risen Jesus makes present the paschal mystery, in contemplation he brings forward the particular event we are contemplating and presents himself with that mystery.

### METHOD

In Contemplation, one enters the story as if one were there. Watch what happens; listen to what is being said. Become part of the mystery; assume the role of one of the persons, look at each of the individuals. What does he or she experience? To whom does each one speak? What difference does it make for my life, my family, for society, if I hear the message? In the gospel stories, enter into dialogue with Jesus.

Pray with him and for him. Want him; hunger for him. Listen to him.

Let him be for you what he wants to be. Respond to him

### 3. MANTRA

One means of centering prayer is the use of the "mantra" prayer word. The mantra can be a single word or a phrase. It may be a word from Scripture or one that arise spontaneously from within your heart. The word or phrase represents, for you, the fullness of God. Variations of the mantra may include the name "Jesus" or what is known as the Jesus prayer, "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner."

#### METHOD

the word or phrase is repeated slowly within oneself in harmony with one's breathing. For example, the first part of the Jesus prayer is said while inhaling; the second half, while exhaling.

### 4. CENTERING PRAYER

"In centering prayer we go beyond thought and image, beyond the senses and the rational mind to that center of our being where God is working a wonderful work."

, Centering prayer is a very simple, pure form of prayer, frequently without words; it is an opening of our hearts to the Spirit dwelling within us. In centering prayer, we spiral down into the deepest center of ourselves. It is the point of stillness within us where we most experience being created by a loving God who is breathing us into life. To enter into centering prayer requires recognition of our dependency on God and surrender to God's Spirit of love.

"The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness ... the Spirit ... expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words ... "(Rom 8:26) "The Spirit of Jesus within us cries out "'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15)

#### METHOD

"Pause a while and know that I am God ... " (Ps 46:10) Sit quietly, comfortable and relaxed.

Rest within your longing and desire for God.

Move to the center within your deepest self. This movement can be facilitated by imaging yourself slowly descending in an elevator, or walking down flights of stairs, or descending a mountain, or going down into the water, as in a deep pool.

In the stillness, become aware of God's presence; peacefully absorb God's love.

### 5. JOURNALING

"If you read my words, you will have some idea of the depths that I see in the mystery of Christ." (Eph 3:4)

Journaling is meditative writing. When we place pen on paper, spirit and body cooperate to release our true selves. There is a difference between journaling and keeping a journal. To journal is it

to experience ourselves in a new light as expression is given to the fresh images which emerge from our subconscious. Journaling requires putting aside preconceived ideas and control.

Meditative writing is like writing a letter to one we love. Memories are recalled, convictions are clarified, and affections well up with us. In writing we may discover that emotions are intensified and prolonged. Because of this, journaling can also serve in identifying and healing hidden, suppressed emotions such as anger, fear, and resentment.

Finally, journaling can give us a deeper appreciation for the written word as we encounter it in

## METHOD

There are many variations for the use of journaling in prayer. Among them are the following: I Writing a letter addressed to God I Writing a conversation between oneself and another (The other may be Jesus or another I significant person. The dialogue can also be with an event, an experience, or a value. For I example, death, separation, or wisdom receives personal attributes and is imaged as a person with, whom one enters into conversation)

Writing an answer to a question, for example, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51) or "Why are you weeping?" (John 20:15) Allowing Jesus or another scripture person to 'speak' to us through the pen.

## 6. MEDITATIVE READING

I opened my mouth; he gave me the scroll to eat and said, ' ... feed and be satisfied by the scroll I am giving you,' I ate it, and it tasted sweet as honey." (Ezek 3:2-3)

One of the approaches to prayer is a reflective reading of Scripture or other spiritual writings. Spiritual reading is always enriching to our life of prayer. The method described below is especially supportive in times when prayer is difficult or dry.

## METHOD

The reading is done slowly, pausing periodically to allow the words and Phrases to enter within you. When a thought resonates deeply, stay with it, allowing the fullness of it to penetrate your being. Relish the word received. Respond authentically and spontaneously as in a dialogue.

## 7. REPETITION

"I will remain quietly meditating upon the point in which I have found what I desire without any eagerness to go on till I have been satisfied." Ignatius of Loyola

Repetition is the return to a previous period of prayer for the purpose of allowing the movements of God to deepen within one's heart. Through repetitions, we fine-tune our sensitivities to God and to how God speaks in our prayer and within our life circumstances. The prayer of repetition allows for the experience of integrating who we are with who God is revealing himself to be for us.

Repetition is a way of honoring God's word to us in the earlier prayer period. It is recalling and pondering an earlier conversation with one we love. It is as if we say to God, "Tell me that again; what did I hear you saying?"

In this follow-up conversation or repetition, we open ourselves to a healing presence that often transforms any sadness and confusion which may have been experienced initially. In repetitions not only is the consolation (joy, warmth, peace) deepened, but the desolation (pain, sadness, confusion) is frequently brought to a new level of understanding and acceptance with God's plan for us.

## METHOD

The period of prayer that we select to repeat is one in which we have experienced a significant movement of joy or sadness or confusion. It may also be a period in which nothing seemed to happen, due, perhaps, to our own lack of readiness at the time.

- Recall the feelings of the first period of prayer.
- Go to a point of entry, use the scene, word, or feeling that was previously most significant.
- Ask the Spirit to direct the inner movements of your heart during this time of prayer.