

The sources and way of Prayer

“There’s an ‘app’ for that!” How many times do we hear this phrase in advertisements?

Over this past decade, it seems as though a whole new language has been introduced to our vocabulary as we yearn for new and better ways of communication. Living in the technological age has afforded us various means to keep in touch with family and friends, no matter where they are in the world. Yet, even with these tools, many people describe themselves as isolated and lonely. The many means of communication do not replace the presence of one human being to another. No matter how many “apps” may appear, we still have the need to set a part of the day for prayer, our communication with God.

In our Catholic tradition, affirmed by the council fathers of Second Vatican Council, the Mass is “our source and summit of prayer.” Our participation in the sacred liturgy moves us closer to God and one another as we are immersed into the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. Nourished by God’s presence in his word and the body and blood of his son, we are prepared for joys, hopes, disappointments and demands of our everyday life as Christians. Our times for prayer during the week help to continue the prayer of the Mass as we reflect on the call of God to us and the response that we give to him. No matter what type of prayer form we use, it is rooted in the celebration of the sacred mysteries.

In our hectic-paced world of high demands, we are often left with the challenge of finding the time for prayer as well as the ways that help us to be aware of the presence of God in our lives. Many priests and religious, myself included, speak of taking time for prayer in the morning before the appointments and phone calls begin and our attention gets diverted elsewhere. It is so important to know the rhythms of our day and the time or times that allow us to be refreshed in the Lord. From my early days in seminary, I was reminded that prayer is a discipline, a habit that needs to be formed over the course of time. One spiritual direction reminded me that we take time for the important people in our lives and as Christians, who can be more important to us than our creator?

We are so blessed that our heritage gives us so many prayer forms. Using the words of sacred Scripture, the Sunday readings or a section of the Gospels can be the basis of rich experience of reflection and allowing God to speak to us. It is a marvel that no matter how many times we hear a passage of Scripture, it can speak to us differently than the time we had previously heard it because we are at a different place in life. Praying with Scripture does not mean we have to read an entire book of the Bible at one sitting, but just a few verses can provide fertile reflection for our day.

Other prayer forms such as the rosary, meditation, repetition of a phrase of praise or intercession or intentional silence are helpful when one is looking for a discipline of prayer. We have hundreds of prayers available to us through books, CD's, online sources (yes, there is an app for the Liturgy of the Hours called i-breviary) and in the lives of the saints. Many of us spend so much time in the car commuting that using CD's of the rosary or religious hymns give us an opportunity for prayer.

As followers of Jesus, we know the importance of being open to the Holy Spirit at work in our lives. By opening ourselves to the Spirit during times of prayer, we allow ourselves to be instruments of God's love in our world. Communication is really the key!

This is the fifth article in a six-week series on the fall session of Why Catholic? Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski heads the St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Vicariate. Next week's article will be by Sharon Bogusz.