

Prayer and Detachment

As a youth and now as a young adult I've had many wonderful experiences and encounters with believers and those open to the Holy Spirit. Some have had life-altering moments and others have had gradual and steady experiences leading them closer and closer to the Lord.

Common in all these stories is the birth of prayer in their lives. I too, began my journey with the Lord through prayer. We had family Rosary at 6pm (during the Simpsons) and then we were made to say a prayer before going to bed. In retrospect, as I got older, my prayers became more complex, focused and a lot harder to find time to say. Space for prayer in my teens became scarce and my attention was elsewhere. St Teresa of Avila says that "prayer is nothing else than being on terms of friendship with God." Nowadays, prayer is still as complex and focused, but finding time to pray isn't as hard, and I consider the friendship steady and solid.

The Church teaches (in the Catechism at ##2562-2564) that prayer is like a covenant (a commitment) and is expressed in words or through our actions. Today's readings begin with an act of prayer (Wisdom 7:7) and according to Scripture, it is through the heart that one is able to pray. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as an image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant. Thus, prayer or relationship with God is first found in our hearts. Christian prayer is a covenantal relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of the human person, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.

The Gospel story of the rich young man reveals that if our hearts are divided with temporal attachments then we can only go so far in our relationship with Christ. However, if our hearts are fixed on Christ and ordered towards his Kingdom, the riches that we own are not obstructions to true discipleship – we are able to detach ourselves from them. The implication in our lives might not be as drastic as in the case of the rich young man, but in small everyday acts of detachment. Are we able to sit down and spend some time in reflection and prayer? Are we able to drop our phones to spend time with our families? Are we able to give alms to the poor? The practice of detachment makes one happy and content. St John Bosco encourages and prompts us to "be brave and try to detach our hearts from worldly things" for they can sneak up on us and blind us from seeing true richness, namely Christ himself. Keeping our sights and hearts on Christ means maintaining a healthy prayer life. In the words of St Peter Julian Eymard: "Have confidence in prayer. It is the unfailing power which God has given us. By means of it you will obtain the salvation of the dear souls whom God has given you and all your loved ones. 'Ask and you shall receive,' Our Lord said. Be yourself with the good Lord."