

July 31, 2022

Dear Friends,

How are you doing with your praying? Last Sunday's gospel was about the disciples asking Jesus to teach them how to pray. At this point in my life I have become a man of prayer, a man who prays every day, a man who believes in the necessity and the power of praying. I believe most Catholics pray but I also believe that many Catholics do not feel at all comfortable with their praying or feel that their praying is effective or even beneficial. Some have tried to learn how to pray and long since decided that they are going to be part of that group of Catholics who can recite an Our Father and a Hail Mary when the occasion warrants but beyond that, not so much.

But go back to that request from Jesus' disciples. They saw him praying. They came to realize that it was his praying that really made a difference in his life, in what he was able to do and of course, how he lived out the person he was as God's Son in our flesh.

But praying is really about relationship. Praying is about connecting. It is about connecting with Our Lord. It is about learning that the Holy Spirit truly does indwell your soul and actually prompts you to do many more things than you will ever realize. That is because most humans do not know how to tell the difference between something that arises from within them and something which arises out of the Spirit dwelling within them. Both tend to feel the same. But they are not the same. AND. It is actually possible to learn how to tell the difference between an inner prompting from my own soul, my own heart and an inner prompting which comes from the Spirit within me.

One of the ways to learn how to distinguish, how to discern what is of yourself and what is of God can be achieved by taking the time to write. Some of you have tried your hand at keeping a journal from time to time. I have on and off over my fifty years in the ministry. Keeping a journal carries a certain discipline with it. It forces you to take the time, to sit and write and to do so with some consistency and regularity even if not every day. I do not journal every day. Presently I journal maybe three times a week. I use a large spiral binder copy book. I only write on one side of the page. I used to write on both sides but that left a long time ago.

When I begin I put the date in the margin and sometimes I will describe where I am or what the weather is like or what is going on in the world (like the pandemic). When I begin writing it is as if I am writing to Our Lord. I will begin by saying "Dear Lord..." or "Lord Jesus." I begin to open my heart to Him. Tell him what I have been doing or experiencing or have concerns about. I thank him for all kinds of things. That is typically how I begin, by thanking him for life or my faith or the significant people in my life or the people of Saint Anthony's. None of this is particularly difficult to do. I just write. One paragraph. Maybe a second paragraph. But then I will sense that there is something specific that is on my heart or something that I sense the Lord wants me to place before him.

But as I write I begin to realize that I am opening my heart to the Lord and holding nothing back. There is a level of honesty. I am not afraid. I am just sharing where I am. I am just trusting him with a rather private or interior part of me. Sometimes it is the better part of me; sometimes the sinful part of me. And I find I am not afraid to do so. It's not like the Lord doesn't already know. The change doesn't happen in Him. The change is in me. And that is where the change is supposed to take place—in me. And I slowly have a sense of the rightness of what is going on. I realize that there is an honesty, a truthfulness that surfaces when the dialogue is between me and the Lord. I begin to trust. And slowly the Lord enables me to be able to tell what is coming from Him and what is coming from me. And knowing the difference truly makes a difference. And somehow, praying has become an actual part of my life. Just by taking the time to write a letter to my Lord.

**In the peace of Christ,
Mgr. McHenry**