

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

Why is it so important to grow in holiness, to grow in prayer? Very often, we look at the Christian life as one way among many to live. We can get bored, sometimes, with the whole ritual thing, but ultimately we might see that it enriches our lives, so we put up with boring homilies and the like. This is not the way to look at it at all. No, to follow Christ is *the* way to live, for it is the adventure of the greatest love story in the world. It is the story of how God has been so in love with us that He has pursued us from the moment we ran away from Him in the Garden of Eden. Following Christ is letting God catch us! It is more than one way among many, but, rather, the whole reason we exist – to be in union with God. Everything else – *everything* – will leave us empty, bored, and lonely. Only in growing close to God can we find our joy and our life.

Prayer is relationship with God. “Prayer is raising one’s mind and heart to God” (CCC 2559) – it is coming close to Him, and being embraced by Him. The Battle of Prayer that I wrote about last week is truly a struggle, and this battle is more than just distractions (which are bad enough), but how we also struggle with our own attachment to sin. Sin, remember, is not merely breaking of law, but hurting our relationship with God. Now, God is *all mercy*, so He holds nothing against us, but if *we* hold onto our sin, *we* are putting a barrier between God and us. This is why we so need the Sacrament of Reconciliation (a.k.a. Confession) in order to get close to God – we need to say we are sorry, and break free from sin and its attachments. If we continue to cling to our sin, we will not be able to grow closer to God.

A good practice to grow closer to God is to do a daily Examination of Conscience. This can help us to identify the things that have separated us from God over the last 24 hours (ways in which we have not loved God, others and ourselves properly; ways in which we have not responded to God’s call; ways in which we have disobeyed God’s loving commandments; ways in which we have not worked to become the best version of ourselves), tell God we’re sorry, ask for His forgiveness, and pray about how we can take our sinful habits and avoid those sins by changing our lives. (One Examination of Conscience we can use can be found at: www.ewtn.com/library/prayer/examconscience.htm.)

Sometimes people come to me and ask how is the best way to pray. I would say the best way to pray is: to pray! Talking about prayer is good, but we need to pray. If we’re struggling getting started, it is good *to pray*, to ask God for help in prayer! The fact that we struggle with prayer should not be a surprise, since St. Paul says, “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26). We need to ask the Holy Spirit for help in praying. That’s okay! But pray.

If you don’t have a routine of prayer, make sure you don’t “bite off more than you can chew.” Make small, incremental steps in prayer. Start with what you know. You can start by praying the “Our Father,” but instead of just rattling it off, you can think about what you are saying and to whom you are speaking. If you do this every day, you will start to develop a relationship with the God who loves you so much that He wants you to call Him “Father.” After you are comfortable with this, you can add intentions beforehand – the things with which you struggle, the problems placed in your lap, the pain of the ones you love – and then hand them to your Father (in the Our Father) who is the One who can heal all of these problems, and give you strength to endure. Then, you might choose to call on Mary, our mother, and pray the beautiful “Hail Mary,” knowing that God has placed so much power into this woman who is “full of grace.”

And so on and so forth. The important thing is to commit to spending some dedicated time with God *every day*, and commit to letting this grow – even if slowly – so that your relationship with God can grow.