



EMBRACE THE YEAR OF MERCY

The importance of commitment

When I was young my parents helped my four brothers and three sisters and I to include prayer as part of our family life. We prayed our meal prayers together always before we started eating and a decade of the Rosary during Advent and Lent. At times, it became difficult with all of the sports practice, but my parents remained steadfast with their commitment. Before bed, we would kneel down, to think back through the day about the times we were unkind and selfish and then we prayed an Act of Contrition with our mother until third grade, and then after that by ourselves. Looking back now, I recognize that these are essential habits that form an important foundation for every child.

Unfortunately, in college, all of these habits went out the window because I did not want my roommate to know that I was praying. I had this fear that she would think I was weird. Therefore, I would crawl into bed, and begin to examine my conscience with the intention of also praying the Act of Contrition – definitely needed during that time of life – but fall asleep shortly after getting started.

Many years later, as I faced difficulties in life, I came to recognize, through the grace of God, that my laziness of crawling into bed and starting a prayer before falling asleep was really not having a conversation with the Person of Christ. One day, as I had no idea how to move forward in making one of the most serious decisions of my life, I knelt down next to my bed and prayed, “God, I don’t know who You are or where You are, but will you help me?” That prayer was immediately answered and has not stopped being answered. Another result of that prayer was that I became convinced that God really knows me and wants me to know Him and that He wants to give me everything that is good.

Shortly after that important prayer to God for help, I decided that I wanted to “learn how to pray” as an adult and be committed on a daily basis. The only problem was I overlooked a few of the basics. Exactly one year later,

I realized that I was waiting for “free time” in order to pray and so I had never even started. I finally figured out that if I did not decide on the exact time that I would pray, it just wasn’t going to happen. Thankfully, from my sports background, I knew that it was necessary to start out small and then slowly build. So I decided on a specific time and committed to five minutes a day. My commitment was to pray three Our Fathers, three Hail Mary’s and three Glory Be’s very slowly, thinking carefully about the words. I would close by thanking God for three things. Sometimes this led to simple conversation with Jesus about what was going on in my life and the help I needed. After six months of being faithful to five minutes, I added two more minutes.

Since that time, I have learned that the Holy Spirit is the “interior Teacher of Christian Prayer.” Therefore, when I don’t even have a desire to pray, or want to cut my prayer time short because I am “too busy”, I ask the Holy Spirit to give me a desire to pray and to teach me how to pray with my heart. He always answers that prayer, in changing my attitude and leading me to different forms of prayer so that my friendship with Jesus is dynamic and grows stronger.

Let us recognize that our commitment to prayer really rests on choosing a time, much like we set aside time for meals, sports, hair appointments and other personal priorities. Even Christ did the same: “Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and slipped to a solitary place to pray” (Mark 1:35). If we want to spend eternity with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Heaven, we must get to know them now through a commitment to daily prayer!

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