



PRAYER

CHANGES THINGS

Do You Pray with Your Heart?

The manner in which you pray is important because prayer is communication with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who gave His life to save you. Do you ever find it to be mechanical words to Someone you aren't even really thinking about? Is it more out of habit or duty than a real desire to encounter the Person of Christ? Wouldn't it be better to pray with your heart? But what exactly does that mean? Let's take a closer look.

As with any important conversation with a spouse, a good friend, a son or daughter, a co-worker or even a stranger needing help, we want to set aside what we are doing in order to be present to the person. We want to be totally focused, having good eye contact with the person speaking with us. It would be rude to continue watching our favorite TV show while acting like we were listening. In essence, we would only be giving our partial attention and the person on the receiving end would clearly recognize it.

In the same way, when we begin our time of prayer, we want to set aside everything to be with Jesus, including the plans for the day, issues at work, strained relationships, worries about bills, fears about a child doing poorly in school, or any of the many other things that can distract us. Except for sudden, urgent matters that demand our attention, most everything can wait while we spend some time in prayer. When we become aware of being distracted, we should simply re-focus on Christ and not waste any time feeling badly or analyzing what is diverting our attention. If it helps, we can name the distraction(s) and mentally place these things before Christ. Going to confession always helps in this regard, allowing us to be unhindered by sins, freeing our hearts to be at rest and to be more attentive in prayer.

In order to give our total focus to the Person of Christ, it is also helpful to have a Crucifix or picture of Jesus and to take a few moments to think about Him, knowing that He is really listening and gazing upon us with love. As with most things, we have to "warm up" in order to pray with our heart. And so, in warming up for prayer, it is helpful to allow a time of silence or pray a prayer such as the Our Father very slowly and think about each word and to Whom we are speaking.

During this sacred time with Christ, we want to have a heartfelt conversation with Him, deepening our friendship, telling Him what we need or are facing, thanking Him for a prayer answered. We also want to listen to Him. As St. Augustine said, "When you pray, you talk to God; when you read Scripture, God talks to you." Pondering a short passage from the Bible, perhaps from one of the Gospels, allows us to receive the very words of God.

We also want to pray with our hearts during Mass. The summary of all that we believe is expressed in the Creed. To pray the Creed with our hearts means to concentrate on each word and to believe what we are actually saying. Singing the hymns during Mass with our hearts means to sing to a Person, to lift up our mind and heart in worship of God and to receive the truth that is expressed in the hymns. While the priest leads us in various prayers, we want to listen attentively and join with Him in what He is asking God for all of us. In praying with our heart in these ways, we will also be better prepared to receive Jesus Himself in Holy Communion, speaking with Him in total sincerity and listening to Him.

It is the Person of the Holy Spirit Who teaches us how to pray. We need to ask Him, with the simplest words possible, for help in this area.

Let us seek to pray with our hearts, responding in trust to the assurances of the Lord who tells us, "When you call Me, when you go to pray to Me, I will listen to you...Yes, when you seek Me with all your heart, you will find Me with you, says the Lord" (Jeremiah 29:12-14).

