

2011 Lenten Reflections

A Reflection on the Second Week of Lent

Every Lent the church reiterates a three-fold call to her members during the observance of this sacred season. We are called to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. For this week's reflection, we will focus on the invitation to prayer.

How do we understand prayer and what place does it hold in our daily living? Prayer has been defined in many ways over the centuries. The simplest definition is an awareness of God. Many Catholics learned from the *Baltimore Catechism* that prayer is "lifting our minds and hearts to God." We can think of it as sharing ourselves and our thoughts and feelings with God, or even wasting time with God. Prayer can be considered dependence on God.

In this moment, let us focus on prayer as relationship—a relationship between ourselves and God that has the potential to become ever richer and deeper. Think about our human relationships.

- What do we consider an "ideal" relationship?
- What are some of the characteristics of such a relationship?

Some responses would probably include mutuality, trust, presence, honesty, forgiveness, understanding, sharing, listening and the ability to be oneself. If we are fortunate enough to have such a relationship, we know that it is not a magic or static reality. We need to work at relationships. We have to commit to what supports and promotes growth if we desire our relationships to last.

These same considerations can, and should, characterize our relationship with God. We need to be present to God in prayer; to be aware of God's presence and action in our lives. In order to do that, we need to take the necessary time. The amount of time is not as important as our fidelity to the *practice of prayer*, so that it becomes a habit—so much a part of our daily routine that skipping it has a significant effect on the rest of our encounters and activities.

Prayerful persons bring a certain dimension to everything they do. They have an awareness of who God is and who they are in relationship to God and to their brothers and sisters. Such persons make a thoughtful, faith-filled difference in their families, workplaces and other circles of influence. Are we prayerful persons? Do we desire to be so?

The season of Lent is an appropriate time to renew our commitment to prayer. We do this in order to grow in our relationship with God, ourselves and others, and to remember who we are in this vast scheme of things: that is, God's beloved sons and daughters. We pray to thank and praise God, to ask for what we need, to listen to God's desires for us and to find rest and refreshment in God.

Important to note is that just as some techniques or practices work better for us in our human relationships, certain prayer styles will suit each of us better than others. Prayer can be practiced in conversation, in meditation and contemplation; it may be public or private, formal or devotional. To explore if our personal prayer practices are indeed achieving the goal of all prayer, growth in our relationship with God, let's ask ourselves these questions:

- How have I committed myself to prayer so far this Lent?
- What has been challenging for me in deepening my prayer life?