

Saturday Catechism: Lesson 29

Ralph Martin, in *Hungry for God*, examines praying to praise God, possibly a new way to pray.

“I have heard countless people testify to the way they praised God from their hearts for the first time. Prayers of praise are throughout the Scriptures and our liturgical services, but how seldom are they prayed from the heart. Glory to God for the freedom to praise Him! It is good to praise the Lord even when we do not feel like it. Feelings sometimes follow when we are praising Him from our will. Sometimes beginning to pray in tongues can free the Spirit of praise/worship. Praise can be silent or vocal. Often I find it helpful to walk around my office where I pray, clapping my hands and singing. Singing in tongues is a great gift from the Spirit for praising God. Freedom in expressing our praise to God is important. Scarcely ever will it be exactly the same as it was the day before. I would think that every day in our prayer time we should have some time of praising the Lord, whether we feel like it or not. I would suspect that there will be prayer times when that is all we will do the whole time. We will not even have time for reading. How good God is. How good it is to praise Him! 90

“Sometimes after praising the Lord, or before, or during, it seems right just to be silent and aware of the Lord’s presence. It is good to be silent before the Lord. Sometimes that is what the Spirit is doing in us. To try to pray out loud at that time would be grieving Him. Sometimes we may be silent for the whole prayer period, not in the dead silence of vacuity or sleep, but in the full silence of awareness of Him. ‘For God alone my soul waits in silence’, Ps 62:1. ‘Be still, and know that I am God’, Ps 46:10.

“I had an experience that remarkably illustrates how the Spirit leads us at times simply to be still and know that He is God. One day I had come into work in the morning, and wasn’t feeling very well at all. I had a headache, and felt nauseous. Yet I knew I should attempt my regular prayer anyway. Animated conversation from adjoining offices made it almost impossible to concentrate, on top of feeling ill. So I went to a nearby storeroom, and brought in a chair to sit and pray. I could hardly hold my head up straight, it hurt so much. So I leaned forward onto a carton, and just rested it there. I could scarcely think straight, for the tiredness and the pain. But somehow deep in my being I tried to turn to God, and just point in His direction. As I did so, I began to sense that He was there, that He was coming to me and filling me up. In a few minutes, as I held very still, increasingly aware of Him, not moving or able to say words, not really having the strength to pray, He seemed to comfort me with His Spirit and presence. In a few more minutes, the pain had gone away, the headache and nausea were gone, the tiredness was gone, and I was able to joyfully praise Him and sing in the Spirit. This has happened on other occasions, and it seems to be one of the ways the Lord teaches me about holding still and being silent, and letting Him be God. 91

“Sometimes the Spirit causes us to see something in our life that He wants us to take note of. Sometimes He uses our prayer to make us aware of something that is not right. Perhaps an offense against a brother that we must rectify. Perhaps a fundamental thing that pervades our life and is hard to see because we are so much involved in it. Perhaps something that needs to change in our priorities or schedule, or something that needs to change in our relationship to our spouse or children or co-workers. The Spirit is striving to bring forth in us the fullness of the new creation, and shows us things to change. We must be open to this work. Sometimes take time in prayer just to ask Him to show you things, and consider your life before Him, asking for light. 92

“A few years ago, for example, I was praying and I began to have a strong sense that I ought to reflect on my relationship with my wife. The particular area was one in which I was frequently impatient with her. I felt the Lord was giving me a sense, through His Spirit, that it was never helpful or loving to be impatient in that particular way, and that I needed to resolve not to respond like that again. That made a major difference in my response in certain situations, and resulted in real change. I will have a long way to go in being perfectly patient, but I’m grateful for the progress that Lord has helped me to make. Things like that periodically happen, and we need to be alert, and listen when the Lord speaks to us like this.

“The Spirit will lead us in our prayer to pray for needs that we and others have. Sometimes our whole prayer will be taken up with this. At other times, the Spirit will not let us intercede, but directs us simply to praise. We will be saying more about intercession in a later chapter.

“Sometimes the Spirit will reveal to us a new insight into Christian truth, something about the crucifixion or the second coming, or the forgiveness of sins, or our Father, or about Himself. It may come from reading. It may come directly from prayer. We should let it come, receive it, mull over it, let it bring life to us. Truths given in this manner are a special work of the Holy Spirit, and make more difference in our lives than would several theology courses on the subject. The Spirit, as Jesus promised, will lead us into all truth, and recall and make vivid in our minds, what Jesus said. Carry this new truth around with you all day and all night and all week. Rejoice in it. Thank God for it. Share it with others. 93

“I recall, a few months before getting married, sitting on the floor in my room praying, and getting a distinct sense that the Lord was showing me that my life from now on needed to be based on perfect unity with Him and perfect unity with my wife. He gave me a clear sense that this was to be the basis out of which my life would be fruitful. Since then I’ve found this ‘revelation’, which is how I experienced it, bearing very good fruit in my life, and proving to be absolutely true.

“I remember a few months before that, sitting on the same floor praying, and thinking over a talk I was going to give to some college students on the basic Christian message, when all of a sudden the Spirit began to give me a new understanding of the Trinity. This ‘revelation’ has continued to be very important in my personal life, and in how I experience God. I believe the Lord wants to reveal truths about Himself and ourselves to all of us. We need to be prepared to ‘pay attention’ when His Spirit begins to ‘lead us into all truth’, Jn 16:13. 94

“Rejoicing can be a part of the elements of prayer already mentioned, particularly praise, but it also can be a distinct prayer of its own. Being glad about what God has done, what God is doing, what God will do, Who He is, and His mercy to us, is a form of prayer. We should yield to it freely. Sometimes I walk around my office just rejoicing and thanking and praising. Sometimes I walk down the street rejoicing. This is what St. Paul tells to do, not because it is a good idea, but because we have every reason to ‘rejoice always’. That is what the Spirit sometimes enables us to do in a special way in prayer.

“In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to babes. Yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son, and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him”’, Lk 10:21-22

“The method of personal prayer that I suggest is very simple. It involves a simple understanding of prayer and reading, and a reasonable balanced, but not absolute, framework for using them together; a reasonable understanding of the variety we can expect to experience in prayer; and a reliance on the Holy Spirit to lead us to the length and manner of prayer that is best at a particular time. The Spirit blows where He wills, but it helps to have our bearings.” 95

Bro. Brian’s comment: Martin speaks from his personal experience. This experience is very encouraging for us. Martin is right down to the ground, or very simple. He is unique, and expresses things uniquely. You too are unique, and will relate to his experience in your very own way. This personal difference is just what God wants. No one is cloned. Each of us differs. However, each of us travels the same terrain. We are not on the same path, but we cover the same ground. Therefore Martin provides important landmarks along the way. He mentions the main reasons to pray: praise, request, adoration, and thanksgiving. Each person will vary these prayers. Some people specialize in one type, but most of us do all four.

As Martin says, the main improvement we strive for is to say more prayers from the heart. That means with conviction from our deepest desires and decisions. Most of us learned to pray as children. Many of us still pray in that immature way. Martin prayed like a child until the Spirit vivified his prayer. All of us can deepen the depth of our prayers. If we strive to pray from deeper down, the Spirit will accept our desires, and touch our depths. When He does, we shall pray more effectively. Why is that?

As we noted in an earlier discussion, God is Prayer. His activity is praying. The Blessed Trinity prays most simply. Our complicated view of Trinitarian prayer is that the Father prays to the Son and the Holy Spirit,

Who pray to the other Two. Since prayer is uniting with the other person, the Three unite perfectly with each other by prayer. Three-way personal interaction is our inadequate expression of Divine Prayer. But saying it that way helps us to experience it more completely. Like all mysteries, we never finish. Nor do we find adequate expressions for this infinite Prayer. But nothing is more satisfying for us than to try catching up with Infinity.

Prayer is loving the other, and accepting the other's love. When the Other is Infinite Love, we achieve maximum love by letting Him love us. Love expands infinitely, so accepting Love inspires us to love Him in return. This reciprocal loving interaction pours out as praise, request, adoration, and thanks. Prayer gushes upon us. This interaction is unbalanced: God loves more than we love. But we love His love. We love being loved.