

LESSON: Daily Prayer Is an Essential Ingredient in the Life of Every Christian

From: Gospel

Jesus Christ was **God-become-man** in order to enable the fallen human race to **find its way back to God**.

His human nature was **infused** with the **power** of his divine person.

We see this, for example, in his **miraculous cure** of Simon Peter's mother-in-law, and in his many other miracles and casting out of demons.

Jesus was **true man**, but his humanity was **perfect**, sinless, without any tendencies to selfishness, laziness, or pride.

His **character** was balanced and flawless, firm as the mountains and gentle as a mother's caress.

His **mind** was beyond brilliant, filled with the radiance of divine light and understanding. He had **no emotional scars** from a difficult family upbringing (Mary was without sin too, and Joseph was a saint), no **personality disorders** or imbalanced self-esteem - no lacks, no wounds, no imperfections at all.

And yet, in spite of all that, over and over again in the Gospels we see him go off to be alone in prayer, just as he did in today's Gospel passage.

Christ was perfect, God from God and light from light, and yet **he still needed to reserve time just to be alone with his Father**.

He **needed** to go off and pray. He even had to **get up early** to make time for it.

Sometimes he had to **stay up late** in order to make time for it.

But he always did it, even on the very **eve of his crucifixion**, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

If **he**, who was **perfect**, **needed prayer** in order to fulfill **his life's mission**, what does that imply for **us**, who are so imperfect, so weak, so vulnerable to every sort of temptation and wounded by every kind of sin?

If disciplined, daily prayer was **essential for Christ**, it must be even **more essential** for Christ's less-than-perfect followers.

ILLUSTRATION

Cardinal Van Thuan's Prayerful Endurance

The late **Cardinal Francis Van Thuan** [twahn] gives a good example of this.

As coadjutor Archbishop of Saigon, **Vietnam**, he was arrested on August 15, 1975, soon after South Vietnam fell to the **Communist regime**.

He spent the next **13 years in prison**, moving between forced residences, reorientation camps, and **nine years of solitary confinement**.

As a prisoner, he not only **maintained his faith and his sanity**, but he also **secretly wrote and distributed three books**, converted a series of **prison guards**, and gave millions of Catholics in Vietnam something to **hope** for.

How did he do it? How did he find the strength, the love, the power? - By being a **man of prayer**.

For months at a time he was confined to a prison cell **too short** to stand up in and **too narrow** to lie down fully extended in.

It had no windows and the only **ventilation** was a **rusty, centipede-infested drain** in the floor.

At times the cell was so **stifling** that he had to **put his face against the drain** to breathe, in spite of the crawling vermin.

Throughout his ordeal, **prayer** was his light and his strength.

His prayer became **very simple**.

He would just **repeat short phrases from the Bible** over and over again.

Some of his favorites were:

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

I am the servant of the Lord.

Lord, what do you want me to do?

Lord, You know everything,

You know that I love You.

He would **feed his soul** on these inspired words, **mulling them over**, letting them sink in, using them to make sense out of his sufferings, **letting God speak to him** through them.

He explained:

"I who am **weak and mediocre**, I love these **short prayers**... The more I repeat them, the more I'm **penetrated** by them & I am close to You, Lord."

Prayer was his **lifeline**, as it was for **Christ**, and as it **should be** for us. [Cardinal Van Thuan tells his own story in "[*Five Loaves and Two Fishes*](#)"]

APPLICATION

Overcoming the Fear That Stifles Prayer (linked to First Reading)

We have all at some point made a **personal commitment** to a more disciplined and deeper prayer life.

And so we all know how **hard** it is to **keep** that commitment.

One thing that makes it so hard is **fear**.

Because of our fallen human nature, we have difficulty **trusting God**.

Subconsciously, part of us is **suspicious** of God; we are afraid that if we agree to follow him **more closely**, he will make us **miserable**.

We are afraid that if we let Christ be the King of our hearts, he will take all the **fun** out of life.

We are afraid that we will end up like **Job** in today's First Reading: oppressed, depressed, and distressed.

That fear **holds back our prayer life**, because prayer involves an attitude of docility, saying to God, "**Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done**."

Developing a **mature prayer life** involves **facing and overcoming the fear** that inhibits us from saying that with our lips **and** with our **hearts**.

Jesus can **melt that fear away**, if we let him.

Just contemplate the **crucifix**; it is a guarantee of Christ's love for us.

Look at the **Eucharist**, another proof of his love - he is always **with us**, always **giving himself** to us.

If he loves us **that much**, that **selflessly**, he is **trustworthy**; **whatever** he asks of us will **always** be what is **best** for us.

There is **no need to be afraid**; the **Good Shepherd is on our side**.

And, by the way, Job didn't **end up** in suffering and misery.

He passed through some **temporary** suffering and misery on his way to a deeper, wiser, more glorious and everlastingly **joyful** relationship with his Creator and Redeemer.

Jesus wants to lead us to the **same goal**; daily, disciplined prayer is **necessary food** for the journey.