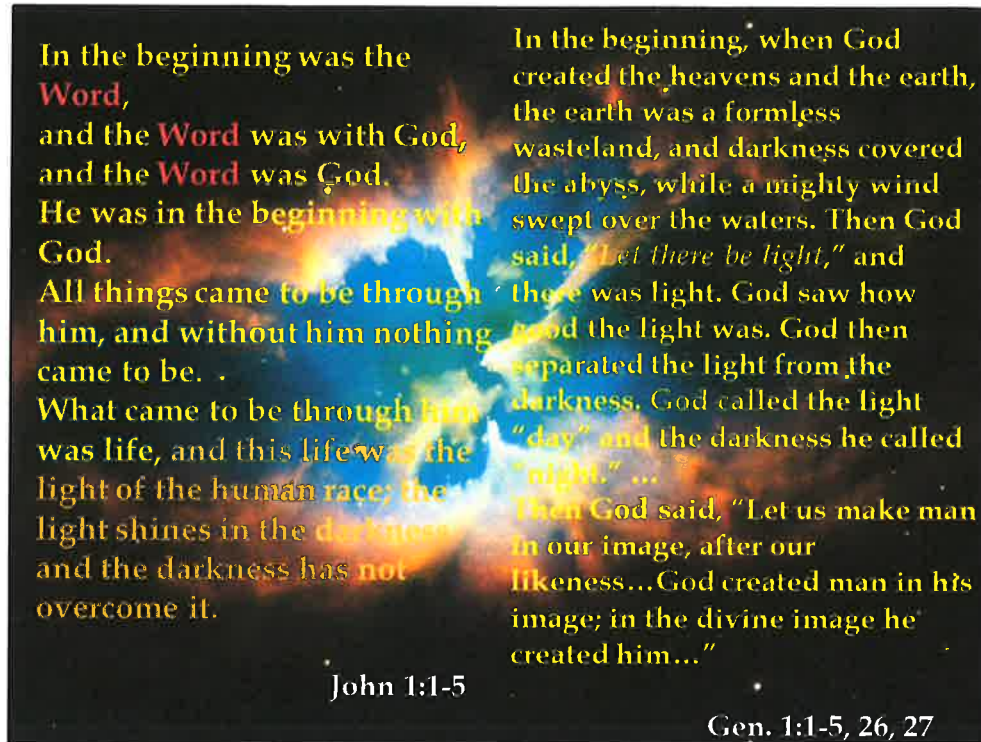


I want to start with a couple of quotations to sort of set the stage.



In the beginning was the **Word**, and the **Word** was with God, and the **Word** was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. . What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw how good the light was. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness he called "night." ... Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him..."

Gen. 1:1-5, 26, 27

(Define "the Divine Spark.")

Notice the emphasis upon light, especially light dispelling the darkness. It is that light, that spark, that God gives us.

God is within us; as He created us to be in his image and likeness, he imparted within us a piece of him – a divine spark.

**The thought of you
(God) stirs (man) so
deeply that he cannot
be content unless he
praises you, because
you made us for
yourself and our hearts
find no peace until they
rest in you.**

Confessions, Book 1, St. Augustine



This quote is also frequently stated as “My heart is restless until it rests in you.” The key word is “restless,” i.e., that there is an uneasiness or a seeking of equilibrium that may be inherent in each human being. Initially, I thought that a more appropriate analogy would be to equate our heart as compliant to Newton’s Law of Inertia, that is a body at rest tends to stay at rest until a force acts upon it. It was that force, that occurrence in our individual lives that awakens us to the existence and importance of God in our lives, that awakens us to the desire – the need – to create a relationship with God. Without spending too much time debating upon the state of one’s heart, our focus is upon the fact that there is something innate within us that calls us to reach out to our Creator – to God.

(Read excerpts from Confessions, pg. 21)

The divine spark is that portion of God that rests within each of us that calls out to him.

When we speak of discernment, we speak of trying to listen to God and being open to the revelation as to what within us comes from God and what does not.

Prayer begins as:

An acknowledgment of God as God

And creates:

An establishment and nourishment of one’s relationship with God

We need to ask ourselves:

1. Do I really want to know God?

1. To hear him, I must be open to him, blotting out all distractions or other influences

2. Am I ready, willing, and able to love God with my whole heart, soul & strength?
 1. If I am unwilling to do this, not only am I incapable, but I may be disinterested in knowing his will.
 2. If I am not all in, something else is more important

There is no easy way, no magic pill. This requires commitment and work – just as anything of value does.

His command to pray constantly does not mean that we recite prayers or even talk to God 24/7, but it means to always be open to his presence – his love.

God may not be in the thunder, but in a whisper.

Goals for this series:

- 1. To understand the importance and nature of prayer**
- 2. To learn diverse ways to pray**
- 3. To practice different prayer forms and styles**
- 4. To examine and evaluate our own prayer lives**
- 5. To apply different prayer forms/styles to meet specific needs**



We have frequently heard from friends or acquaintances:

"I consider myself a spiritual person; I just don't need organized religion to define me and my relationship with the higher power."

What's wrong with this statement?

There are at least 2 major problems with this statement:

1. Our relationship with God is not "me-centered" only. We do not live in isolation but in community – in society. Our relationship with God is both individual and communal. (Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular is not "either – or;" it's "both – and.")
2. We give a name to the "higher power;" we are not afraid to say "God." And God is the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*SPIRITUALITY
&
PRAYER*

Spirituality

- * What is spirituality?
 - Perhaps, it is at the center of humanity's ever searching for the meaning of life – “Who am I really and what is life all about?”
 - Perhaps, it is the response to the unquenchable desire for pleasure. Is it the response to that fire within us?
- * Spirituality is more about whether or not we can sleep at night than about whether we go to church.
- * It is about being integrated or falling apart – about being part of a community or being lonely – about being in harmony with Mother Earth or being alienated from her.

What shapes our actions is our spirituality!

What shapes our actions is what basically shapes our desire. Repeat the quote from St. Augustine found on p. 5 in *The Holy Longing*.

Everyone has a spirituality – that is the first step. (Look at *The Holy Longing*) After the first 2 subparts, go to p. 7.

Spirituality

- ✧ Are we succumbing to multiple desires or can we *will the one thing*?
 - Janis Joplin had passion, but she was not able to direct it towards one thing and she spiraled out of control, overdosing on life.
 - Mother Teresa had passion and directed it towards one thing – God and the poor.
- ✧ **Spirituality is what we do with the spirit that dwells within us.**
- ✧ How do we direct that spirit? How can we *will the one thing*?

What shapes our actions are our desires. Spirituality concerns what we do with desire.
What are our desires – Can we will the one thing?

(In the 2nd main point) Equate “spirit” with the “Divine Spark.”

Spirituality

- * Perhaps the answer lies within the answer to the question Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?"
- * I suggest there are two "truths:"
 - Essential
 - Accidental

Essential Truths

- ✧ Essential truths are:
 1. Necessary, prescribed, and nonnegotiable for everyone
 2. Cannot be ignored or conditioned by temperament, taste, situation or time
 3. Not a matter of personal choice
- ✧ For Jesus the essential truths for a spiritual life were:
 1. Private Prayer and Private Morality
 2. Social Justice
 3. Mellowness of heart and spirit
 4. Community as a constitutive element of true worship

Accidental Truths

- * Accidental truths are:
 1. “Real” truths, but their importance is relational
 2. They can be ignored, i.e., they are not at the core of being a Christian
 - a. For example, the belief in a particular vision of the Blessed Mother, while a truth, is not essential or a core belief to being a Christian.

The Four Nonnegotiable Essentials

1. **Private Prayer and Private Morality**
 - A. **Personal relationship with Jesus**
 - i. **Keeping the commandments**
 - a. Jesus emphasizes keeping the commandments as the primary means to demonstrate your love for him and, by extension, the Father. *You cannot say that you love Him if you do not keep His commandments.*
 - b. Fidelity in keeping the commandments is the only real criterion to tell real prayer from illusion.
 - c. Christianity is more than a philosophy or moral code.
 1. Being a Christian must be "who you are."
 2. Who you are is best defined by "what you do."
 3. It stems from "knowing Jesus" not just "knowing about Jesus."

"Private" Remember the gospel reading for Ash Wednesday and describe private as being from the heart – not done for show, not done for self-aggrandizement. It can lend oneself to doing the right thing for the right reason.

The danger in not having the proper interiority (intimacy with God) and the personal moral fidelity to back up our faith preaching is that we end up turning Christianity into a philosophy, an ideology, and a moral code, but ultimately missing what Christianity is all about – a relationship with a real person.

The question of private prayer and private morality may never be written off or trivialized in any way as unimportant.

If we refuse to take this essential seriously, we run the risk of just going through the motions and will be unable to inspire our own children or pass our faith on to them. (if time permits, go to p. 64 of *The Holy Longing*.)

The Four Nonnegotiable Essentials

2. Social Justice

A. The call to do justice

- i. Justice ≠ Charity
- ii. The character of justice in the land is to be judged by how we treat the most vulnerable groups in society.
- iii. Reaching out, preferentially, to the poor is an essential component of the spiritual life.

B. Not just a question of government and/or politics

C. Failure at this will adversely affect (but not necessarily destroy) your personal relationship with Jesus

i. Ask if anyone can distinguish “justice” from “charity.” Charity deals with immediate needs. Justice goes to the root as to why those issues are in existence in the first place.

ii. Where we stand with God depends not just upon prayer and sincerity of heart, but where we stand with the poor. How we treat the poor is how we treat God. The poor are our neighbors in the sense that we are called to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

C. There can be no real relationship with Jesus when the poor are neglected and injustice abounds!

The Four Nonnegotiable Essentials

3. Mellowness of heart and spirit
 - A. Sanctity has to do with gratitude. To be a saint is to be fueled by gratitude, nothing more and nothing less.
 - B. Sanctity is as much about having a mellow heart as it is about believing and doing the right things, as much about proper energy as about truth.
 - C. In the Gospels, the call to have a mellow, grateful heart is just as nonnegotiable as the demands to keep the commandments and practice social justice.

Remember when I talked about willing the one thing, mellowness of heart and spirit relates to the motivation of the ability to do that. It should come from joy – it should come from love – it speaks to doing the right thing **for the right reason**.

Think about the older son in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He did all of the right things, but he had a bitter heart. We need to acknowledge, appreciate, and share the blessings that God **has** given us.

To have a health spirituality, we must feed our souls through prayer (private and communal), through the practice of justice (caring and loving all of our brothers and sisters), and having those things in our lives that keep the soul mellow and grateful. Only one kind of person transforms the world spiritually, someone with a grateful heart.

Consider this: What good is a trim body, free of fat and toxins, but is full of anger and unhappiness? What good is fidelity in terms of keeping the commandments and practicing justice if we end up as bitter as the older brother of the prodigal son?

God lies at the end of the spiritual quest. He sits in heaven, smiling, completely relaxed looking at us with marvelous sympathy. The best revenge on our enemies and demons is to be madly happy!

The Four Nonnegotiable Essentials

4. Community as a constitutive element of true worship
 - A. God calls us, not just as individuals, but as community and
 - B. That how we relate to each other is just as important religiously as how we relate to God.
 - i. How we show our love for God is how we show our love for each other.
 - ii. **To love God and to love our neighbor can never be separated.**
 - C. In our worship of God in heaven, we must involve ourselves within a worshipping community.

One can only love a God who is love if one is concretely involved with a real community on earth. Love requires an object and if we cannot separate love of God from love of our brothers and sisters, then we must love in community. It must be concrete; not abstract.

(Use the analogy of the cross as an analogy of love.)

Prayer

✧ Let's start with the basics

▪ What *is* prayer?

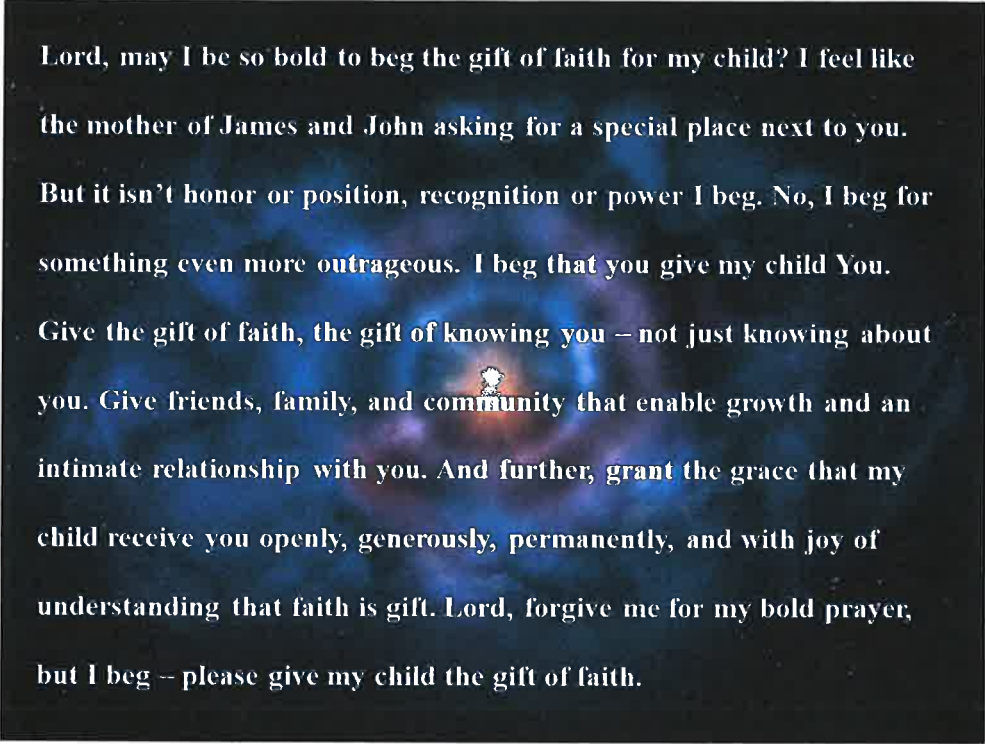
- ✧ Prayer is an honest, personal communication with God
 - Honest - from the heart
 - Personal - creation and maintenance of one's relationship with God
 - Communication - Speaking & Listening

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. CCC¶2559

Prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. CCC¶2565

Elements of Prayer

- * Prayer as communication can be
 - Individual
 - Communal / group
 - In a special place
 - Anywhere
 - At specific times
 - Spontaneous
- * Prayer is for *our* benefit
- * Prayer takes practice
 - Like physical exercise: Easy at the beginning level; higher levels require more effort



Lord, may I be so bold to beg the gift of faith for my child? I feel like the mother of James and John asking for a special place next to you. But it isn't honor or position, recognition or power I beg. No, I beg for something even more outrageous. I beg that you give my child You. Give the gift of faith, the gift of knowing you – not just knowing about you. Give friends, family, and community that enable growth and an intimate relationship with you. And further, grant the grace that my child receive you openly, generously, permanently, and with joy of understanding that faith is gift. Lord, forgive me for my bold prayer, but I beg – please give my child the gift of faith.

Before praying this *Prayer for my Child*, describe how I came to know and pray this and how it can mean different things for different people, i.e., for me it was about my children who have left the faith but I have come to realize that it is just as powerful for a parent to pray for children to instill a faith within them as they develop.