

PRAISING GOD

I have suggested that prayer is the foundation of nurturing of a personal relationship with God and that we should make every effort to set aside time and a special place for Him. Now we are ready to pray!



When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name." (Lk. 11:2). This opening line of the Lord's Prayer helps us understand the proper tone for beginning prayer. The title "Father" alerts us that as we place ourselves before God, we are respectful yet He is approachable as our "daddy." God is God and we are mere mortals, yet He invites us to intimacy with Him.

The phrase "hallowed be thy name." calls us to properly recognize God in His splendor, power and grandeur by offering Him our praise. Praise is a form of worship where we place God above ourselves and offer Him our adoration. Praise is the way we make God number one in prayer. Not only is it the way we begin the Lord's Prayer, it is also the beginning of Sunday Mass. The opening hymn is to be a song of praise for the adoration of God. The priest then calls the assembly to sign themselves with the cross, "In the name of the Father...", and after a brief recollection of our need for God's mercy, we say, "Glory to God in the highest." Thus in song or in proclamation, we begin prayer by extolling the glory of God. Even the Eucharist prayer which provides the form for consecration of the Holy Eucharist is predicated on a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. Therefore, it seems obvious to begin our personal prayer the same way.

Did you know that "Praise" is the most often stated command in the bible? The verb occurs over 1300 times in various phrases calling on God's people to "Praise the Lord." Praise in prayer makes real the First Commandment, "You shall have no other God's before me" (Ex.20:3). For as we praise, we make God first by placing Him above our needs, wants and preoccupations.

Praise also helps fight the distractions. Personally, when I go to prayer, I often have lots of "things" on my mind. As I begin to praise God, prayer focuses on Him and not me or my "things". Indeed, this is freeing because it is so easy to feel trapped by our thoughts and preoccupation. In Praise of God, we are set free!

Praise is also a way to fight the devil. Indeed, he was ejected from heaven because he would not praise God. When people praise God, the Devil is not pleased, nor does he want to hang around. Note the following quote from Psalm 8:3, "... On the lips of children and of babes you have found praise to foil your enemy and to silence the foe and the rebel."

Our praise of God should be centered on Jesus Christ. Because we are Christians, we focus on Jesus since it is he who takes us to the Father, who sends the Holy Spirit. "And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him... we will come to him and make our dwelling with him. The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name will teach you everything..." (Jn.14:21,23,26).

A rich source of inspiration for praising God can be found in the Psalms. There are 150 of them so you have enough to last a very long time. Some of my favorite praising psalms are: 8, 22, 99, 100, 148, and 150. Did you know that according to the Gospel of Luke, Jesus dies praising God? "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." (Lk. 23:46) Did you also know that He is quoting Psalm 22? Did you further know that Psalm 22 was written as a hymn of praise in thanksgiving for escape from distress? Even in the worst of times, the praise of God is a high form of prayer. "I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad" (Ps. 34:1-2).

In my humble opinion, **praise in prayer should account for at least a quarter of our time in prayer.** By beginning prayer in this way, we rightly make God number one in our lives directing mind, heart, soul, and strength toward Him. Indeed, we have drawn close to the living God through the Praise of His holy name.

While there have been thousands of books written on the subject of prayer there are some basic principles will spark your prayer life. Much of my material will be rooted in a wonderful book that is no longer published, Appointment With God, Fr. Michael Scanlan, T.O.R (Franciscan University Press). It is one of the best books I have seen for outlining and forming a life of prayer. If you can find a copy via the internet it will make a great resource for your spiritual life of prayer.

....Fr. Moe