



## A message to the faithful of the archdiocese from Archbishop Michael Jackels

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**29 January 2019, 4:03 PM**

### **Summary reflections on the U.S. bishops' retreat: personal prayer**

The following is a summary reflection of the first talk given by Father Raniero Cantalamessa to the US bishops during their 2019 retreat.

The plan is to share a similar summary reflection of each of the retreat talks. As it is said: what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Aren't all people who glory in the name Christian called to ongoing repentance and conversion, and in need of encouragement, just as the bishops are?

I call these summary reflections, because they are as much my own reflections as they are a summary of what Fr. Cantalamessa said:

Our focus has to be on Jesus, and on Jesus as a person, albeit a Divine Person, and not a mere personality, like a celebrity that we know about, but we don't know personally.

As a person, we are invited to have a relationship of close friendship with Jesus, which is expressed in the daily, frequent conversation of personal prayer.

Prayer as conversation with God might express love for God, thanksgiving to God, sorrow for sins committed, or trust that God hears and answers my petitions.

The conversational give and take, speaking and listening of personal prayer are indispensable for cultivating and persevering in a relationship of friendship with Jesus.

When I was still in seminary, I remember a sermon that impressed upon me, that if I were to neglect personal prayer, someone or something else would fill the void, taking the place of Jesus in my heart, and maybe even take me away from my vocation.

I have been committed to daily, personal prayer ever since, not out of fear, but in a desire to commune with God, to touch the transcendent, to be transfigured by glory.

Daily, personal prayer should be a priority for a follower of Jesus in his Catholic Church.

Indeed, we should aim for continuous prayer, to pray without ceasing. Sounds impossible. And how would we get anything done?

But we can be active while praying without ceasing; this kind of prayer is deeper, on the level of desire.

Prayer without ceasing is like lighting a votive candle in church: I want to stay longer, but duty calls, and so I light a candle, whose flame burns like the desire in my heart.

Another way of understanding continuous prayer is that my activity is subordinated to my prayer. This sentiment is expressed in a prayer attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola:

*Direct, O Lord, all our actions by your holy inspiration, and may we carry them out by your gracious assistance, that all our work may always begin from you, and by you be happily ended.*

Michael Jackels

Archbishop of Dubuque