

Reverend Ed Lamp's talk at the Spirituality workshop at the 2012 National CDA Convention

Spirituality and a liturgy two very different things.

Liturgy is offering back to God what God has given to us. (Prayer Prayer)

BUT WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Spirituality can be defined as “the ongoing endeavor to grow in our relationship with God.”

Let's take a closer look at that definition.

1. First of all, spirituality is an endeavor. It is not simply a set of concepts or beliefs to keep in our head. It is both a vision of life and a way of living in accord with that vision. In other words, it involves choice and it is action-oriented. Spirituality ought to give direction not only to our thinking, but also to our decision-making and actions. How we live and act. Mother Teresa was a spiritual person.

2. Second, it is an ongoing endeavor. That is, spirituality is not something we eventually finish, like a job or a project. We attend to it, nurture it, refine it till the day we die. Like the biblical notion of conversion, spirituality is dynamic and never-ending. Doesn't happen once. Baptism is good example.

3. Third, its goal is growth in our relationship with God. This assumes that we already have a relationship with God. The task is to develop and deepen it, much like any other relationship. To do so requires spiritual discipline, such as Scripture reading and personal prayers. Discipline is the issue!

We cannot do it on our own.

But the blessed message, the good news of the Scriptures, is that God is in search of us. God calls us to Spirituality just as God calls us to conversion.

But he will never force his way into our lives.

We must open the door of our heart to him, and that can only be done from the inside that is, from our own free will.

But if we make that choice, Jesus says, he will come in and share a meal with us. To share a meal in the Middle East is always a sign of special friendship. Once again, we are back to the very essence of spirituality: a personal relationship.

So, first of all, God is always reaching out to us, inviting us. That is the first movement of spirituality. The second movement is up to us: We can choose either to ignore the invitation or

to respond by committing ourselves to a personal relationship with God or with Jesus Christ alone, if we find it easier to relate to him; it really doesn't matter, because one Divine Person will eventually draw us into relationship with all three Persons of the Trinity.

When I say we can choose to ignore God's invitation, I'm not necessarily implying that this is a conscious decision. Most of the time, I think, we are simply too distracted or preoccupied to recognize that we are being addressed by God.

I once heard Anthony De Mello say that our society keeps giving us "drugs" that dull our spiritual awareness: consumer products, forms of entertainment, all-absorbing work, the need to look good, to be accepted, to feel powerful. With our senses and imagination tuned to all this, it is difficult indeed to hear the call of God in the depths of our souls.

After we become aware of our need for God, what may be called our "awakening," the next movement of spirituality is personal commitment.

We find ourselves saying, though maybe not in so many words, "Lord Jesus, whatever it means, I want to surrender myself to you. I don't want to live just for myself. I want you to be at the center of my life. I accept your gift of friendship, and I ask you to help me live as you want me to live."

I fear that the Catholic Church has not sufficiently emphasized this dynamic of personal commitment. Perhaps we have been preoccupied with revising the liturgy, changing church organization, and motivating people to get involved in social justice. These are all necessary, but we have to take care that we do not lose our center.