

“Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes 5:17-18). When you are in love with someone, you want to spend as much time as possible with them. And the deeper and more spiritual your communication, the more fulfilling that time together is.

I am always amazed by the time Jesus spends in prayer, but it makes a lot of sense. Jesus tells us: “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Mt 11:27). We can grow in our love and knowledge of God by following the example of Jesus who always finds time for prayer. Let’s look at the first few chapters of the Gospel of Luke to see how Jesus always finds time to pray and nurture his relationship with his Father in heaven.

The Joyful Mystery of Jesus being found in the temple takes place in Jerusalem when Jesus is 12 years old. The Holy Family had come to pray and give glory to God. Mary and Joseph left believing Jesus was part of the group headed home only to find that he was not with any of the pilgrims from Nazareth. “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers” (Lk 2:46-47). When Mary asks her son about his staying on in Jerusalem, the young boy responds, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (2:49). Although there is a deep bond of affection between, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, “his divine sonship, and his obedience to his heavenly Father’s will, take precedence over his ties to his family” (Note to 2:49).

In the next chapter of Luke, Jesus is 18 years older when he is baptized by his cousin John the Baptist at the Jordan River. “After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (3:21-22).

As we encounter Christ in the sacraments, we can follow the example of Jesus by immediately turning to prayer. I am reminded of a wedding a few years ago. The day before the wedding, the bride and groom spent time in prayer adoring Jesus in the Eucharist. The day of the wedding, their eyes met each other but also glanced lovingly at God throughout their wedding vows.

Lead by the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and spent 40 days in the desert. We are never truly alone; God is ever present. As we take intentional time in prayer, we are more aware of God’s presence. In the silence, we are more open to listening and to hearing God’s direction for our lives. It makes sense that Jesus took this long prayerful retreat so that he could listen to the Father’s direction for his upcoming mission.

Jesus comes out of the desert and we encounter him in the synagogues. He teaches and he also reflects on the Word of God. He read from the Prophet Isaiah in his hometown of Nazareth and explained: “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:21). Pray with the scriptures. The time-tested method of Lectio Divina calls us to prayerfully read and reread short passages of scripture so that the Lord may enlighten us. Although the Sacred Scriptures were written thousands of years ago, they are ever new as we apply them to the concrete situations of our own lives. Be nourished by the rich Word of God.

Today we encounter Jesus in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Luke. He has been proclaiming the good news and curing every disease among the people. Jesus cures a leper which draws even more people to him. “And great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray” (Lk 5:15-16).

Prayer helped to renew and refresh Jesus for his ministry. Prayer helped him to connect with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Let us follow the prayerful example of Jesus with a joyful song in our hearts “giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph 5:20).