



## Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

March 18, 2018 ~ Fifth Sunday of Lent

### *The Third Stage of Discipleship Formation*

Last Sunday, we featured the second stage of discipleship formation, which was realizing that discipleship begins with vocation – recognizing that one's vocation is one's calling in life given by God and received by us, which we discern in prayer and reflection. And the major Christian vocations are marriage, religious life, consecrated single life, and Holy Orders.

The third stage of discipleship formation: prayer. Of course prayer must be crucial part of all of this! We must learn from Jesus Christ Himself how to pray, always keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit absolutely needs to be integral to our lives of prayer if prayer is to be truly effective and bear fruit.

In striving to know Jesus, we rightly ask ourselves Who Jesus is, and inevitably, one answer to that question must be: Jesus is a Man of prayer. How frequently we observe Him in the Gospel going off by Himself to a deserted place in order to pray! The disciples clearly were inspired by this, at least insofar as they ask Him how to pray. These were faithful Jewish men and women, a chosen race of God's holy people who certainly knew how to pray...and yet, they were so inspired by Jesus that they realized that they in very truth knew *nothing* of prayer, and so they had to ask Him. We see Jesus answering their request to be taught how to pray first of all by teaching them by His own holy example: setting ourselves apart in order to be more attentive to the One with Whom we want to enter into conversation – the One, of course, being God. We center ourselves, we calm ourselves, we might even remove ourselves from one certain location in order to place ourselves in a totally other location that is more conducive to prayer. This is the whole reason why we have churches after all: whole buildings constructed and consecrated for the specific purpose of prayer. Yes, it sure is great that we have a huge parish campus that has a school, a hall, a kitchen, various rooms available for various meetings. But the primary purpose of this parish campus is the church that resides at the heart of it all, the whole reason why we have the church is to pray.

Jesus *made* time for prayer. Knowing that He was going to be busy with people all day long, He woke up early so as to pray (see Mk 1:35, for example). He *made* time for prayer; He did not go about His day hoping merely to *find* time for prayer in the midst of busy-ness; He actually went out of His way to *make* time for prayer. And so must we do likewise.

But people often complain that we just never have time for prayer. Perhaps a huge part of our problem then is the fact that we do not actually find prayer that useful. But the stark truth is that until we are convinced that prayer actually is the best use of our time, we simply never will have time to pray. We need to budget time for prayer. We need to make time for prayer. And we need to be deliberate and intentional about it – setting aside appointments in our daily calendar for us to have a meeting with Jesus in prayer, an appointment as crucial for us as any appointment with any other doctor. After all, Jesus is the doctor of our souls, is He not?

Okay, so we know *that* we need to pray...but *how*? Well, *how* we pray is a mystery solved for us right there in the Lord's Prayer. There, we discover that we need to praise God: "Hallowed be Thy Name." We discover that we need to ask God for our most fundamental needs: "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses..." We discover that we ourselves have a duty in

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all of this, and failure in that duty should inspire sorrow for having sinned, for having failed to live up to our Christian duty and vocation: "...as we forgive those who trespass against us." We learn so much about *how* to pray right there in the Lord's Prayer. No wonder then that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them *how* to pray, He taught them the Lord's Prayer!

And *when* to pray is just as important as *what* and *how*. For as we should give not just *any* ten percent of our material gifts as a tithe to the Lord and His Church but that it should be our *first* ten percent and therefore our *best* ten percent, just so, we do well to give our *best* time to god in prayer, which means that avoid praying at the very end of the day when we are most tired and are likely to be totally inattentive to prayer but instead will just fall asleep. When we are most alert – *that* is the *best* time for prayer.

And *when* to pray also involves how much time should we devote to prayer. Well, ideally, all the time that we can muster! But in reality: it is important to keep in mind that we are better off if we pray just five minutes each day – as long as it is *each* day and a *good* and *attentive* five minutes. If we have lofty ideals of praying a holy hour each day...only then to see that we cannot even manage one holy hour any given *week*...then we do ourselves a grave disservice. We do not skip meals all week long and then gorge once a week! Rather, we need little but regular instances of sustenance each day all week long. Just so, we need little but regular (and nourishing) instances of prayer each day, each week, each month, each year, all life long.

~Fr. Lewis