

INSPIRED WORD February 24, 2016

TEACHING

This is the second session of the 5 weeks of “Growing Seeds of Holiness” for Lent. Tonight’s topic is **Water and “Son” Light** and our speaker is Matt. Matt speaking: I am going to be talking tonight, in this session 2, about relationships. Last week we talked about holiness and how to be holy. Tonight we will find that one way to be holy is to actually pursue and strengthen our relationship with God. God calls each of us to a relationship. I think that this group is called to a relationship, as well as my Bible Study group, and my men’s group is also called to a relationship with God. God calls each of us to a personal relationship with Himself. What does it mean to have a relationship? It could be with your spouse, with your kids, or with friends. Whether it is with your spouse, family, or friends, it is about spending time and that connection with one another. How can we strengthen that relationship with God? It is through **Prayer, Scripture, and the Sacraments.**

Let’s start with **Prayer**. In a Christian family, we learn about prayer as children from our parents; they demonstrate it, hopefully, and you see it and you model that example. If you didn’t have a parent structure like that, or if you had forgotten what it was like when you were a child, then we can get a model from Jesus through His words and actions. Jesus made prayer a priority in His life – Jesus Himself, one with God and born without sin, made it a priority in His life. We see in **Mark 1: 35**: “Rising very early before dawn, He left and went off to a deserted place, where He prayed.” So Jesus went out to a deserted place by Himself and He prayed. We also know that He prayed extensively before important decisions and before life events. One of the first things He extensively prayed about was who He would choose as the 12 apostles. After He chose those 12 apostles, He went out and preached sermons. In **Luke 6: 12** we read: “In those days He departed to the mountains to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God.” Have any of us ever spent the entire night in prayer? We also have another example which was the agony in the garden, the night before He was crucified. In **Matthew 26: 36**: we read: “Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, ‘Sit here while I go over there and pray.’” But the disciples couldn’t stay awake and kept falling asleep. In **verse 40**: “When He returned to His disciples He found them asleep. He said to Peter, ‘So you could not keep watch with Me for one hour?’” It happened two more times, as Jesus came back to the disciples, He found them asleep. We also learn that Jesus taught us how to pray and that is the “Our Father” prayer. (**Reference: Luke 11: 1 – 4**) Jesus also encourages us to bring our needs to God. In **Matthew 7: 7**: The Answers to Prayers – “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” Jesus is telling us to ask, **ask, ask**, and to come to Him. Then in **verse 11**, it says: “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him.” So not only are we going to bring our needs to God, but this is our promise that God is going to give back to us good

gifts. We so easily forget that In God's infinite wisdom, He knows exactly what we need and exactly when we need it! So we ask and receive that good gift in God's own timing. The next point is that we need to be persistent in prayer. We read several verses in the Bible about being persistent in prayer, and one is about the persistent widow.

(Reference: Luke 18: 1 – 6) We also read about the friend in need of loaves. **(Reference: Luke 11: 5 – 8)** Now we are going to look at what the Catechism of the Catholic Church says about prayer. It says, "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." **(Reference: CCC: paragraph 2559)** It is the raising of our minds and hearts to bring our needs to God. I like this definition in the Catechism a little bit better – "In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father Who is good beyond measure, with His Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit." **(Reference: CCC: paragraph 2565)** The Church also gives us guidance on how important prayer is. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "Prayer is a vital necessity." **(Reference: CCC: paragraph 2744)** When Deacon Chuck gave me this guide on prayer, it took me awhile to reflect on it and I wondered what it meant. What is a vital sign? When you go to the hospital in an ambulance, your vital signs are what is keeping you from death. So if prayer is our vital necessity and we look at eternal life, then it is vital that we pray. The Catechism also says that "Prayer and Christian life are inseparable." **(CCC: paragraph 2745)** The Church also calls us to daily prayer. Just like relationships with spouses, our relationship with God needs to be cultivated. We need to work on that relationship; it is not a one time thing. We need to speak daily to God and we need to be committed to our spending time with God! These are examples of prayer: we have **intercessory** prayer. We read in **Philippians 4:6:** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." The **formal** prayers could be Novenas, Litanies, and Rosaries, to name only a few. **Informal** prayer is having a conversation with God. We also have prayers of **thanksgiving**, **listening** and **praise** in music, which we do here every Wednesday night and that is a form of prayer. The words in the songs that we sing come from the Psalms or other biblical passages. In **1 Samuel 3: 10**, we read of Samuel's answer to God, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." That is a **listening** prayer. You could do nothing but sit and listen for God to speak, and that could be a form of prayer. When we don't know how to pray, or what words to use in prayer, this could be our prayer: "Speak, for Your servant is listening." The words that we read in **Psalms 9: 3** can be a form of **praise** prayer: "I will delight and rejoice in You; I will sing hymns to Your name, Most High." I don't want to leave you hanging after this talk, so I have some resources and apps for you. One of them is: www.pray-as-you-go.org/ - it runs about 5 minutes. Soft music plays in the background and it is a daily meditation on the scriptures of the day. It is an app that can be down loaded. A second one, which I haven't tried yet, is: www.regnumchristi.org/en/daily-meditation. This third one is three minute retreats from Loyola Press – www.loyolapress.com/3-minute-retreats-daily-online-prayer.htm. Another one is: www.praymorenovenas.com/novenas. At all times we must remember this scripture in **1 Thessalonians 5: 17:** "Pray without ceasing." Every action that we do in our daily lives can be a prayer – we can wash dishes and it can be a prayer. Every time that we wash our hands, we can remember that Jesus made us clean; He washed away our sins. If we comb our hair, we can remember that God knows every hair on our head. It

says in **Matthew 10: 30**: “Even all the hairs of your head are counted.” These are all small meditations that we can remember in our lives.

Now we are going to move on to **Scripture**; this is the second part of ‘strengthening of relationships’. We know that scripture is divinely inspired because all scripture is inspired by God. It was written by man, but was inspired by God. That divine inspiration can be our strength in times of temptation. It also helps us to know Jesus. **“Ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ.” (From Saint Jerome)** There is no other place we can find more about Who Christ was and what He called us to do and the instructions for our lives than in the Bible. Scripture and prayer are companions and are meant to go together. God speaks to you in scripture; that is how we receive God’s word; but when we speak and respond to God, we do it through prayer. A lot of scripture is hard to understand, but the Study Bibles are very helpful. It is pretty easy – you can read the scripture passages and at the bottom of the pages there are different commentaries which will help you to understand the passages more clearly. There are **4 steps** in encountering God through scripture – the first is **reading** of scripture. Then you **meditate** on what God is saying through these words in scripture. From meditation, we progress into **prayer**. What do we want to say to God about the scripture passages that we have just read? Then we finish up with **action**. What action are we going to take? The Bible calls us to action.

We will finish up here with **Sacraments**. Most of us here know what the Sacraments are; they are God’s gifts to us. They are encounters with God. They always do what they are intended to do; the power of God is at work in them. **(Reference: CCC: paragraph 1128)** The Church has defined the 7 Sacraments as: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Reconciliation, Matrimony, Anointing of the Sick and Holy Orders. But all of them, as Saint Augustine said, are an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. So it is in things that we do that we are actually receiving that grace. It is the grace that is coming back to us. **But**, the fruits of the Sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them. **(Reference: CCC: paragraph 1128)** The danger for us is to approach the Sacraments without full awareness, out of habit, or unworthily – without preparing our hearts. Examples would be: coming to Communion out of habit, without reflecting on the wonderful gift that it is; making a “laundry list” of sins without taking time to look for root sins. When we go to Reconciliation, we are not telling God something that He doesn’t already know. We are not showing Him something that He does not already see; or giving Him something that He doesn’t already have, which is a broken heart. I would say this is true for almost all of the Sacraments.

PRAYER

Lord, here we are, Your people, gathered together here in this place. We know that we are loved so very much by You. As we give You praise and worship tonight, Lord, let Your Spirit come upon us to mold our hearts, to conform us, to teach us, and to increase our desires to have a personal relationship with You.

PRAYER

Earlier in his talk, Matt quoted the scripture in **Matthew 7:7** which says, “Ask and you shall receive.” But in another Bible translation, it says, “How much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.” So Lord, we are asking for that Spirit tonight, the Spirit of love, to come and touch our hearts in a special way in this assembly. Spirit of God, pour down like rain, let Your river flow through this place, through this temple, and through the temple of our hearts tonight. We are asking, we are asking that You hear us; we are asking and standing ready to receive. We know that when we ask in prayer, You hear us, Lord, and You answer us! Glory to You, Lord; praise You, O Lord!

PRAYER

Hear us, Lord, Your people! We want more of You!

TONGUES

INTERPRETATION

(None verbally given)

IMAGE

I had an image of a shepherd holding a lamb, and God is speaking to us as a Shepherd. He loves us so dearly that He seeks us out and brings us to Himself.

SHARING

I had a couple of words: Father and children.

SCRIPTURE

I think I know the story behind Sarah’s words of Father and children. I think it is this: the people were bringing children to Jesus so that He might touch them and bless them. But the disciples told the children not to bother Jesus. Jesus heard this and said, “Let the children come to Me.” **(Reference: Mark 10: 13 – 14)**

PRAYER

Lord, You give us evidence of Your great love. You call us to Yourself; You sent Your Son, the Living Word, to be our Good Shepherd and to pick us up when we fall, and search for us when we wander. You want nothing to stop us, Your children, from coming to You. In fact, You call us and beckon to us and with Your arms wide open, You embrace us. So Father, we give You thanks! Father, we love You! Jesus, we give You praise! Holy Spirit, we bid You welcome; do in our hearts what needs to be done to bring us closer to the Father Who loves us, and Jesus Who redeems us!

