

Pastoral Letter on Prayer life of Priests & Religious

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk. 11:24).

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

Thy Kingdom come!

“Be persistent in prayer and keeping alert as you pray, giving thanks to God” (Col. 4:2).

A priest or a religious as an ambassador of Christ is “called and sent” (Mk.3:14) to be a person of God/prayer. For him or her prayer is not ‘a part of the day but the heart of the day.’ Our life becomes ‘worth living’ when it is rooted in prayer (Col.2:7) and bearing fruits of the gifts of the Holy Spirit(Gal.5:22-23). The evangelists articulate beautifully in the pages of the gospels ‘how Jesus prayed’ (Mt.4:1, 2, 12, 8:6, 18, 17, 1Jn.18: 1) etc. Christ spent hours during the day and night in prayer. The apostles and the saints followed the suit. We, the priests and religious, as his missionaries are called to a life of prayer. Prayer first, the rest later, makes our life the best!

Generally prayer is understood as our communication with God - listening and talking. St. Augustine reminds us: “whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst and ours”. However, prayer is more meaningful when it is understood as life in the presence of God or the divine - a God consciousness. Thus, prayer has a wider spectrum of meaning. It is restricted neither to space nor to time. It goes beyond from a text, postures or styles to a great opportunity of communion with God and with one another. Indeed such communion is the core experience of prayer. Here the awareness of the presence of God inspire and introduce one to self-absorption to the divine to serve the neighbour in love, truth, justice and peace. There is serenity within oneself and sensitivity with others. It is prayer in words, prayer in action and prayer in the Spirit. It is, indeed, a comprehensive approach to praying that instills in a person to open his/her potentiality to live ones’ life fully, active and alive. It is an experience of the soul to the core where one’s life becomes simple, humble and exemplary. For a genuine experience of prayer – space, time, posture, manner, text, location, situation/context are immaterial. However, they add taste to prayer depending on our aptitude, attitude and ones’ own personal disposition. As priests and

religious, engaged in missionary activities and social apostolates, living in parishes or religious communities, there are four dimensions of prayer that make better our commitment to Christ and the Church to witness our life itself as a means of evangelization. They are (i) our personal prayer (ii) our community prayer (iii) our prayer with the people and (iv) our prayer for the people:

- i. Personal prayer: “Prayer enlarges the heart until it is capable of containing God’s gift of Himself”- St. Mother Theresa. Jesus had the practice of praying alone in vigils, on mountains and in lonely places (Mt.4:1, 26:36etc.). Personal prayer is an interaction with the divine in mutuality where God awareness in and around is deepened and self esteem in the presence of God is evaluated to become better and set out to serve God and others in a deeper sense of satisfaction. It is making oneself available to God freely to form and transform oneself according to the divine plan. It keeps one feel good and available for any service irrespective of personal likes and dislikes. It helps one to develop the practice of virtues for a better spiritual growth and social human relations.
- ii. Community prayer: “By prayer, community is created as well as expressed”- Henri Nouwen. Those living in community – small or big - must come together a few times a day for common prayers - Church prayers/*yamaprarthanakal*, special prayers or prayer service of spontaneous nature (Mt.18:20, Acts.1:12-14). Such common prayers are important to foster community spirit and team work. It inculcates family atmosphere in the communities - parishes, institutions or religious communities. Strengthening one another, empowering the weak, creating opportunities for mutual sharing etc. are the fruits of such practices. How great is that those live under the same roof come together in praise of God in the union of hearts. It cements mutual collaboration and coordination of community activities.
- iii. Prayer with the people: It is a different experience when we pray with the people/boarders/inmates in our institutions; they are our target group of our mission and ministry. For them we live and their well-being is our joy. To be with them not only make our life happy but also theirs as well. They feel honored. Their self-esteem graph is raised. They become effective and efficient in building up the society/community/parish. Indeed, it can become a step in nation building, besides harmony in the family. They become more productive, loveable, and serviceable to the society and world at large. They help to prevail peace and harmony in the society.

iv. Prayer for the people: “Your prayer for someone may or may not change them, but it always changes you”- Craig Groeschel. To pray for our people or those entrusted to our care is our duty. They value it greatly. In chapter 17 of St. John we read how Jesus prayed for his disciples “I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one” (Jn.17: 9-11). “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn. 17: 15-17). Know that we pray for our people have a tremendous effect of conversion and transformation in them. We shall resolve to do it faithfully.

So dear, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters, we shall take our prayer life sincerely and seriously. The personal prayer, liturgy of the Hours in community/group, the special prayers etc, not only make our life better but also increases and fortify our harmony among ourselves. It is a great self witness of our commitment to Christ, who has called us and sent us to the mission that we are involved in now. All our activities become effective and witnessing by our prayer life. I convey you all my good wishes.

I pray because I believe in the power of prayer.

I pray because I have no doubt that God has answered my prayers.

I pray because God allowed me to wake up to see another day.

No matter what others think or say.... I will PRAY.

God bless you



Yours devotedly in Christ Jesus

† Ephrem Nariculam
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