

BECOMING AWARE AND OPENING MYSELF TO BE PRESENT TO GOD WHO IS ALWAYS PRESENT TO ME

At times a speaker at a meeting prepares us for the opening prayer in these words, “*Let us enter the presence of God.*” What does this person asking us to do? Namely this: we are asked to dispose ourselves, to stir ourselves to become aware of God *who is always present to us*. And thus we need to direct our attention to acknowledge that God is present to me and so I am asked to respond to be present to him.—who is present.

To illustrate: Radio waves are at this very moment present here to us. They are coming from all ends of the earth—from local radio stations, from Europe, South America and Asia. They are present to us, but since we do not have a radio, to receive these waves and transmit them into audible words or music, **it only seems as if they are not present.** They are present, but it is we who are “out of tune” with them, absent to them. So, coming into the presence of God means being more aware that I am “a receiver” of God’s word. I am asked “to tune in” to him who is already present to me and “in tune” to me.” If God did not hold me in existence; I would not exist at all. St. Augustine prays, “*Lord, you were with me, but I was not with you. You were within me, but things drew me to be outside myself.*”

Some aspects of “tuning in” to the Lord

To tune into the Lord with a listening heart, takes discipline (a word which is akin to “disciple”). We must discipline our restless hearts, curb our need to talk, quiet our curiosity for instant messages from radio, computer, TV, etc. our itch to read the newspaper or magazines, to have background noise, to chat on the phone to waste time on trivial unimportant pursuits that can wait. One very important thing to remember is this: “There is never a good time to pray.” We always seem to come up with other “things” to do. Therefore, we must discipline ourselves by setting aside TIME and finding a suitable PLACE. No relationship is able to grow if people do not have TIME and SPACE for each other.

Prayer is a free expression of love within a relationship of intimacy with the Lord. Therefore, no gimmicks or quick fixes can be used to develop a prayer life. God cannot be manipulated by our agendas. We cannot force a relationship with another person to fit into our own expectations.

However, we can and do need to develop traditional methods and habits of “coming to quite” in our body, our senses, our mind, and our imagination and in our will. Let’s learn methods handed down by spiritual masters to bring ourselves to that stillness in which the voice of God can be heard. Posture of body, attitude of mind, our thoughts, imagination and fostering a desire of the will are all important aspects.

Coming to SACRED QUIET, THE LORD’S SACRED PRESENCE
Some helps. (This may be for five minutes or so. But it is time well spent.)

It is essential to remove myself from the noise around me. Find a quiet place. Turn off the TV. Let me strive to minimize distractions-- to quiet the noise within me by simply focusing on reading a passage in Scripture or a devotional book or pray the Rosary. I cannot hear God in the midst of noise and chatter. **What can I do to help me hear God in the midst of all the noise around and in me?**

How to foster a receptive attitude, an atmosphere and a space around me and then within me.

This begins with an alert and relaxed bodily position. I must also find a place that allows me to quiet my nagging senses. I must find a place in my house, at the office, outside in nature and possibly in a chapel or church that draws my attention inward. The chapel in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is an ideal place. But it may also be a place in nature or a quiet corner in my room with some image of Christ or Mary to help focus my attention. **An excellent entry into this silent center of my being is becoming aware of my breathing and the beating of my heart.** This is God’s sacred place within me. Then let me breathe in a more relaxed way. Sitting in an upright posture often helps me to breathe more deeply. To facilitate this it may be good to loosen my belt, and let my breathing descend into my abdomen—not in my upper chest. Let me feel my lungs be filled with life giving air as I experience my abdomen expand somewhat. As I breathe in oxygen deeply, let me become aware that I am also breathing in the Spirit of God deeply within my inner being. This is God’s time, so am free not to let go of my own agendas and breathe in and **be attentive** to the Holy Spirit breathe within me his word.

This is a quiet effort (never forced or with effort), all while I reflect on the presence of the Lord as I breathe in, and as I breathe out. I repeat the name, “Jesus” patiently with each breath I exhale—patiently waiting on the Lord, open to receive the Spirit of Jesus as I breathe in. Fostering an attitude, and atmosphere, a space within me and around me that begins with an alert and relaxed bodily position, in a space that invites me to quiet my nagging senses and focus my attention. The chapel with the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is an ideal place. But depending on circumstances it may be a place in nature or a quiet corner in my room with some image of Christ or Mary to help focus my attention. Becoming aware of my breathing is an excellent entry into this silent center, this sacred meeting with God. And then let me become aware of my heart, beating ever since I was in my mother’s womb!

Breathing and the beating of my heart is necessary for life for my body. Now I make the application and reflect that the Holy Spirit who ***is life***, the very “breath of life for of my spirit and for my body.” So by using the experience of breath entering my nostrils and lungs and going through my whole body through my blood flowing throughout my entire body, I come to reflect on how the Holy Spirit ***is the source of my life*** who breathes love and peace and wellbeing within my heart. This takes time, patience with myself, a quiet patience (never

forced) and reflecting on the Holy Spirit's presence, the presence of Jesus, the presence of the Father. There is no success or failure in this. Simply a wait-ing, patient returning to awareness of my breathing inwardly saying. "Lord you are here with me."

We are not pure mind or pure spirit.

We should learn to pray as human beings: body, soul, will, emotions, imagination, and memory.

Movies, TV and the internet know this and draw on our senses and our bodily needs. They capture our imagination and appeal to our senses and emotions. The Bible also desires to appeal to our imagination and stir our emotions. This is reflected in the imagery and the emotions expressed in the Book of Psalms, and Jesus teaches us with parables which are stories that capture our imagination.

Unfortunately, we too often pray with an attitude of "thinking thoughts" that keeps us in our minds and ignored our hearts and emotions. We unconsciously "think" our prayers in the head and thus avoid the heart and our feelings and imagination. This ignore the Bibles and Church's rich tradition of prayer. The Church's way to pray is radically en-fleshed because the Son of God, Jesus, the "Word of God became flesh and dwells among us." He became a man, a human with heartfelt sentiments. Jesus preached by giving situations of everyday life that helped people to imagine the Spirit of God alive in their daily lives. He spoke in parables with images of people interacting in daily life and in nature.

Because of the Incarnation, God en-fleshed, the Church has a long tradition and a rich heritage of symbols in her liturgy: in actions, posture, space, images that appeal to inspire imagination by color, music, incense, oil, fire, water, and sacred space. Due to the Enlightenment and Jansenism, there has been an iconoclast tendency, an attitude to simply "think about God" in our relationship with him and in our prayer. We think that prayer is mostly thinking thoughts **about** God. It is that surely, but it is more than that. Although prayer may begin with good and holy thoughts, **prayer should also lead to move us to speak to God and listen to his word in Scripture and hear him speak to us.**

The result is that we let the world capture our imagination. We must learn to pray with our whole person, body, mind, emotions, memory, and allow sacred symbols and imagination inspired by the Psalms and Christ's parables and actions to draw us inward to the heart. To study 'about God' is essential. **But this knowledge 'about' God must serve to lead us into prayer which is God's invitation to each one of us to come to know him personally.** He desires to relate to you and to me and to grow in experiencing who God is personally for me. In response I, in turn, must also speak directly to the Lord. I respond to the Lord personally by listening to him speak to me in Sacred Scriptures, in nature, from memories of his presence in my past life (possibly from childhood), and the Spirit moving in my heart. This is how my relationship with God grows. This is authentic Christian prayer. This is how **every** personal relationship grows. I can forget important moments with him as I forget meaningful moments with people whom I love and who love me. So too with God.