

PRAYING THROUGH MY WANTS FOR WHAT I TRULY DESIRE

A reflection: *Prayer is a life-long school which awakens my heart to discover my desire for God, and in which God teaches me his desire for me.*

Wants Centered on Myself

Most of us know almost immediately what we want. Our appetites, preferences, expectations and our body cry out to tell us what we want. “It’s too warm in here, I want it a little cooler.” A child sees some candy or a toy in the supermarket and immediately says, “Mom, Dad, I want that.” We see so much on TV that prompts us to say, “I want that.” In fact we are programmed by ads to say, “I want that NOW!” We are urged to pick up the phone immediately and dial an 800 number. **“Wants” in the sense used here** are yearnings for possessions, pleasures, relationships, power, entertainment, positions, etc. that we do not truly need and some may possibly be unhealthy or even sinful, but having them feels so good that **they seem to make life better**. But from experience, with a little patience, curbing of appetite, practicing a little self-control, and going beyond the present moment, **I discover that my life is much better without these “wants” in which I indulged**. (At times it may take years to realize this and only after painful consequences of our choices.)

Often it is difficult for us to detect these “wants” in ourselves, but we see them very clearly in others—most especially in children and teenagers. When we are truthful, we can admit that most of our whims, urge for change, compulsions, pet peeves and ‘self indulgences’ can be classified in this category of surface “wants.” With some reflection and God’s grace, we can detect that we often become irritable, annoyed, angry, hurt, and “out of sorts” if these urgings are not satisfied.

The more undisciplined we are, the more insistently we strive to indulge our ‘wants,’ and **we expect others to satisfy them for us**. Often these surface ‘wants’ are recognized as such in our lives, but if not curbed, some take on the role of seemingly “essential needs.” Left unchecked, life can be unbearable if these wants are not satisfied. Addictions of all kinds—alcohol, drugs, food, sex, work, excitement, entertainment, money, pornography, speed—are driven by uncontrollable wants. We are witnessing a growing addiction to noise—to be plugged into music, hooked on a cell phone, glued to video games or the Internet to be entertained. (Anything but silence which makes us reflect on what is going on inside us.) Commercials blatantly tell us, “You need this.” *But in reality they really want our money, and they need us to supply it. Let us beware lest we become consumers focused on things rather than seekers of truth and persons in loving relationships.*

Some people make life-changing decisions based on these “wants” that masquerade as essential needs. Some people marry, divorce, change jobs, buy and sell property, choose careers—all based on rather superficial “wants” that mask as essential needs. Some people even turn to or away from God based on whether or not their “wants” are being satisfied by God. People intent on satisfying their surface “wants” find it very difficult to be faithful to anyone or committed to a vocation over a long period of time. Loyalty and commitment take an investment of one’s **self**, but the awareness of the **“true self”** is what they lack. The quest

to fill these superficial “wants” blinds them from knowing ***who they truly are***. A perception of themselves based on a “false self” alienates them from the reality of who they truly are and spawns more unhealthy wants—becoming a black hole within, always empty and demanding more.

Whatever satisfies these “wants” is like a ‘pacifier’ that parents give to a cranky toddler. When the pacifier is not supplied, people driven by nagging appetites react impulsively and at times throw adult temper tantrums leading to rash actions and choices. Often it takes a great loss or a painful crisis to wake that person up. When this happens, this is truly a graced moment for conversion of life—painful as it is. However, it takes self-reflection, prayer and at times counseling to change. **The Sacrament of Confession on a regular basis** is of great value. It is extremely helpful to speak—even briefly—to a confessor about a painful experience that is forcing us to look more deeply into our lives.

Surfacing this “wound” often reveals something deeper within us than we realize. If we fail to do this, there is a tendency to try to escape facing what must be faced by indulging ourselves with more of the “surface wants.” In taking this path, the situation only grows worse—the black hole becomes more empty.

Thus far the term, “wants,” has been used to describe those that are unruly and that can lead to dangerous or even sinful choices. However, it is obvious that wants can also refer to “essential needs” that are good and healthy. ***Discerning the difference between superficial unhealthy wants and good essential human needs is a crucial step in growing to be a mature human person.*** To grow to be a mature human person is a life-long process, and the Lord who created us in his image is intimately engaged with us and in us. He enlightens, guides and strengthens us throughout our entire life. We are not alone in this. God sent his Son who shed his Blood for our salvation and breathed his Spirit into us, so that we “*may have life and have it more abundantly*” (John 10:10).

Discernment and discipline are part of the process. Growing in the awareness of essential needs and choosing them wisely and foregoing the unhealthy and indulgent ‘wants’ are the fruit of a life lived in communion with God in prayer. In the spiritual journey we must face unhealthy “wants” that sap the energies of life. Meaningful prayer includes asking the Lord for **wisdom** to detect these nagging wants and the **strength** to combat and overcome them. It also includes cultivating **God-given desires** rooted deep within our hearts—waiting to be awakened.

Desires Inspired by the Holy Spirit Stirring within My Heart

Jesus turned...and asked the two disciples of John who were following him, “***What do you seek—what do you desire?***” (John 1:38). By these words Jesus confronts them and us with a question that hits a chord deep in the heart. He evokes in them and in us a challenge to consider seriously where we are going in life. As they struggle to answer, he simply invites them, “***Come and see,***” to where I live. *He begins a relationship with them—and with us—and with me!* Scripture reveals that all of creation is God’s gifts given to me **to draw me to himself**.

He desires me with a passionate love. His invitation prompts me to ask myself, ***“What do I desire?”*** This question reaches deep beneath my “itching wants” to a place in the heart where my *“true self”* dwells, hungering for God. At the very core of this longing stirs a desire for meaning purpose and direction in life. If I have the courage face myself, I confront my spiritual poverty, my many weaknesses, failings and sins. I am forced to admit that I am not free. Christ alone can save me from myself. His invitation draws me to himself.

If I begin to pay serious attention to this inner appetite for God, it grows ever deeper. Something more is awakened within me. The Lord’s question ***“What do you seek?”*** beckons me inward. Saints traditionally urge us to pay attention to what springs from this “felt need.” As I ask for a particular grace to satisfy this hunger: 1) I become more aware of areas of my heart that were hidden to me, and 2) As I petition the Lord to satisfy this newly felt need, it ignites a burning desire that reveals or uncovers deeper desires arising from ***the mystery of the Lord’s desire for me.*** This is the fruit of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within me who awakens me to experience God’s personal love for me.

Desires are hard to articulate; they move subtly in the realm of dispositions and attitudes of the heart. Upon hearing the Lord’s question, *“What do you seek?”* I may be lost for words, as were the disciples. But as I hesitate and ponder, his invitation, ***“Come and see”*** demands a response. This is the moment of grace to go ‘as I am,’ in whatever state, and spend time with Jesus. It takes courage to face him and the inner stirrings within me, What hesitations? What fears? What tough feelings may I want to hide? Yet I do desire to sit at Jesus’ feet and listen—to allow myself to become aware of his gaze upon me that touches the inner core of my being. As I respond to the desires of his heart, I need his grace to soften my resistance to receive what I myself also deeply need and desire.

A conflict lurks within me. I resist the very deepest desires for which I hunger! I am a mystery to myself! This resistance in me has many roots: pride, past wounds, disappointments, a false independence, sin! Yet, God’s desire for me is more persistent. This struggle is the crucible of love purifying my prayer to grow into new dimensions of meaning and purpose. I must give Christ permission to transform me. ***Then the Spirit stirs within me to claim “who I am.”*** *The Father has breathed his love within my heart at the very beginning when he created me in his image. Christ, my Brother, redeemed me in his Blood. I have been born again in the Spirit and in water.* Thus I grow in the discovery of my “true self.” God’s purpose and meaning for my life gradually transforms me to become more like Christ, his Son, and to love myself and others as he loves me.

Asking for what I desire” acknowledges that ***growth in prayer is God’s gift and not my work. It puts me in the position of “receiver” rather than that of “doer.”*** When I pray for a grace I leave that part of my heart and my being open to receive what I ask for. I make a certain area of my life ***available*** for God’s action. In making myself dependent on God’s gifts to me, in giving him the lead, prayer becomes a school in which God himself is my teacher. It is out of this awareness that the disciples ask Jesus, *“Lord, teach us how to pray”*. Not only his words, but ***“who he is”*** teaches us. ***As Christ, my God, is en-fleshed, truly human, so my prayer also must be en-fleshed.*** All of ***“who I am”*** is to be engaged. I desire that the Lord transform my heart, imagination, memory, my emotions, body, sexuality, thoughts, as well as my

relationship. **Heartfelt prayer engages my entire humanity in a relationship of love and service.**

Time and perseverance are crucial. Prayer is meant to cut through the onslaught of quick results. Prayer quietly and persistently disciplines the “rush” for immediate gratification. Prayer is the settling of the heart and soul to find its center, so that my **“true self”** can experience something like osmosis of allowing my heart, body and soul to be permeated with the very Spirit of God. Time for silence and inner reflection starts to become part of my day. So too does the need for inner discipline when resistance to be changed rears its head, for all this goes against my wounded human nature. Yet, the Lord persists to stir the inner appetite for his peace. ***“Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.”*** Growth in prayer is often silent and goes unobserved like a mighty oak that sinks its roots deep into the dark earth to find the wellsprings of water that never dry up. ***I realize the need to ask God for the patience and the grace to savor the peace and joy—often subtle but powerful—that his presence bestows. It also begins to dawn that even in times of dryness he is a hidden stream within me.***

Therefore, prayer is God’s way of teaching me about my deepest needs and desires. As I pray persistently for a grace, I will find that the Spirit of God purifies and deepens my desires, for I become more united with the Spirit praying for me within my heart (Romans 8:26-27). When a grace is received, it brings with it an invitation to grow ever more deeply. My desire becomes more unified, more in touch with the one great desire that God has for me. My prayer becomes more focused and energizing. Scripture reveals that Christ is praying in me and for me before his Father (Rom 8:34 and Heb 7:25). Subtle intuitions of his prayer for me begin to dawn. Life’s purpose, meaning and direction grow more unified, hope-ful, and joyful as I grow in intimacy with Christ, his Father and their Spirit. Then Paul’s prayer becomes more alive and meaningful, ***“May you have strength to comprehend and know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”*** (Eph 3:19). Paul states this truth clearly. Ultimately, God desires to give me his very self—**his true self**. ***Prayer then, is a school, which awakens my heart to receive the Father’s love for me, experienced in true happiness by a life fulfilled in being a channel of his love flowing in and through me to others. But God can only fulfill his greatest desire for me if I deeply desire for myself what his fatherly heart desires for me.***

“Father give me the grace to be generous to receive and to experience your overwhelming love for me, I who am your beloved child.