

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.