

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.*

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*

though 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.