

## 05. Sharing Jesus' Prayer

God is drawing everyone into divine communion. Prayer is our response. As Saint Augustine says: 'You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you (*Confessions* I.1). God' communications with us are communications of love engage our longing for communion. God has been pouring God's Spirit of love out upon the world since the beginning of time, in every culture and to every person, and there have always been those who have listened and responded. Tragically, God's Self-communication is often not heard and distorted. We thank God for Jesus who listened and responded with all his mind and heart and soul and strength. He became for us God's focal Word, making sense of, giving perspective to, and perfecting all the many ways in which people of every culture have heard and responded to God's Self-communication. In the Prologue to John's Gospel we read:

'All things came into being through God's Word, and without the Word not one thing came into being ... The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth ... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace ... No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, who is in the embrace of the Father, who has made God known' (John 1:3,14,16,18).

The Spirit of God is always being poured out in the world, in every culture and to every person. Jesus' disciples looked on Jesus, his heart pierced on the cross, and opened their hearts to his response to God and to us: a response of love. They experienced the Spirit of love that unites Jesus to the God he called 'Abba'. It is this Spirit that brought healing and meaning to them in a way that transcended any previous religious experience and they found that the same was true for those of the non-Jewish world who opened their hearts to Jesus in the same way. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: 'All are called to union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, towards whom our whole life is directed' (*Lumen Gentium*, n.3).

It is our Christian belief that the risen Jesus, in eternal communion with his Father, is also in communion with us: 'If you love me, my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home in you' (John 15:21). When we enter into prayer, therefore, we are responding to God's Word of love and we are not alone. We are with Jesus. He draws us to himself and takes us to the Father: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself' (John 12:32).

Jesus not only shows us the way to God. He *is* the way (John 14:6), for it is our communion in love with him that opens us to God's love and draws us into God's embrace. In Paul's words, Jesus is the Yes to all God's promises (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus reveals God's faithful love to us by being himself the expression of it. Jesus *is* the way because he is the perfect human expression of God's Word and it is only by responding to God's Word that we can be in communion with God: 'No one can come to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).

In his book 'One with Jesus', Paul de Jaegher SJ speaks of having 'a loving docility to the guest of one's heart' (page 56). He warns against having too great a preoccupation with ourselves and counsels us to keep our eyes on Jesus. He reminds us that it is not a matter of imitating Jesus from the outside, but rather of allowing grace to transform us:

'Formerly we encouraged ourselves in the practice of higher virtues by an imitation of Jesus, which I may well describe as an imitation from the outside. Jesus was our model, but outside of us, a model whose divine virtues we strove to reproduce somewhat after the fashion of a painter who copies his subject. Imitation after this fashion appears somewhat cold and dull. But now Jesus means something very different for us. To imitate Jesus is no longer to copy Jesus, but to be transformed into Jesus, to become Jesus. It is no longer to bring out in ourselves the features of the beloved Model, but to allow Christ to develop and

reproduce himself in us. It is imitation from within. There is no question of merely becoming like Jesus, but of being one with Jesus' (page 50-51).

Jesus' disciples came to see that to know Jesus they needed to enter into his communion with God, into the Spirit that flowed between him and God. They came to a wonderful insight that God is communion in love. Of course we cannot see God or comprehend God, but this communion, this love that is God, is such that it is revealed to us in Word and Spirit. In Jesus the Word is made flesh. In Jesus the Spirit is experienced without reserve. To believe in Jesus is to be drawn into communion of love with Jesus and with his Father and with the Spirit that is their bond of love. It is this communion that brings salvation: salvation from all that holds us bound. We are liberated because of our sharing in divine communion. Since it is the one and only God who is communicating to us in the Word and in the Spirit, the experience of Jesus and of his disciples points to something in the mystery of God's transcendent being. We cannot comprehend God, but we can grow in the knowledge of God that comes with intimacy.

We are invited to keep our eyes fixed on the ways in which God has chosen to reveal God's presence and God's activity in our real history, especially in the history of Jesus. Jesus responded to God in intimate communion 'as the only son of a father' (John 1:14). When we pray we are being drawn into Jesus' own prayer. More than the other evangelists it is Luke who keeps reminding us of Jesus' prayer as the following references amply demonstrate (Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 10:21; 11:1-2; 18:1; 22:41-42; 23:34; 23:46). Watching Jesus praying, we are to remember that, through the gift to us of his Spirit, it is his prayer that is taking place in our hearts. Let us listen to Paul:

'It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:20).

'We are the aroma of Christ' (2 Corinthians 2:15).

'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' (2 Corinthians 3:18).

'The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God' (Romans 8:26-27).

Commenting on Paul's statement that we are the aroma of Christ, Augustine writes:

'When a prayer is sincerely uttered by a faithful heart, it rises as incense rises from a sacred altar. There is no scent more fragrant than that of the Lord. All who believe must possess this perfume' (*Discourse on Psalm 140,4-6*).

James McAuley, calls on Jesus, the Incarnate Word, to raise up people of prayer among us:

'Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,  
Cast flame upon the earth: raise up contemplatives  
Among us, who walk within the fire  
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.  
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land:  
Distracted men that sow their hopes in sand  
Will sometimes feel an evanescent sense  
Of questioning, they do not know from whence.  
Prayer has an influence we cannot mark,  
It works unseen like radium in the dark (from *Letter to John Dryden*).

Let us listen to the prayer of Jesuit palaeontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin:

‘Christ of glory, hidden power stirring in the heart of matter, glowing centre in which the unnumbered strands of the manifold are knit together; strength inexorable as the world and warm as life; you whose brow is of snow, whose eyes are of fire, whose feet are more dazzling than gold poured from the furnace; you whose hands hold captive the stars; you, the first and the last, the living, the dead, the reborn; you, who gather up into your superabundant oneness every delight, every taste, every energy, every phase of existence, to you my being cries out with a longing as vast as the universe: for you indeed are my Lord and my God’ (*Mass upon the altar of the world*).

Finally, a prayer of John Henry Newman (d.1890):

‘Dear Jesus, help me spread Your fragrance everywhere I go. Flood me with Your Spirit and Life. Penetrate and possess my being so utterly that all my life may be only a radiance of Yours. Shine through me and be so in me that every person I come in contact with may feel Your presence in my soul.’

Prayer, then, is the experience of yielding to a mysterious drawing into our own heart and into the heart of creation. We are responding to an invitation to enter more deeply into communion with God. Christian prayer is experienced as a sharing in Jesus’ prayer. It is essential, therefore, that we get to know Jesus ever more deeply, and the way to do this is to immerse ourselves in the Gospels where we can watch Jesus relating and listen to his teaching. Nothing can replace such a practice. As we get to know Jesus more this Gospel meditating will become simpler, but we never outgrow it, for it is Jesus who best reveals God to us, and best reveals us to ourselves.

Some people find this easier to enter imaginatively into a Gospel scene than others, but many are surprised to find that, with persistence, they are able to use their imagination better than they at first thought and that by using their imagination in this way they find that they are less bound into thoughts and more engaged at the level of the heart. Perhaps this way of praying is best explained by an example. The following is a guided meditation on John 5:1-9, adapted from Anthony de Mello (*Sadhana*, Exercise 22).

- Quieten yourself in preparation for the contemplation. Now imagine the pool ... The five porticoes (covered walk-ways) ... the surroundings ... What kind of place is it? ... Notice the architecture ... the weather.
- Now let the whole scene come to life: See the people near the pool. How many people are there? ... What sort of people? How are they dressed? ... What are they doing? ... What kind of illness are they suffering from? ... What are they saying? ... What are they doing?
- You are there. What are you doing there? ... Why have you come to this place? What are your feelings as you survey the scene and watch these people? ... What are you doing? ... Do you speak to anyone? ...
- Now notice the sick man of whom the gospel passage speaks. Where in the crowd is he? ... How is he dressed? ... Is there anyone with him? ... Walk up to him and speak with him ... What do you say to him? ... His reply? ... Spend some time getting as many details of his life and his person as possible ... What sort of an impression does he make on you? ... What are your feelings while you converse with him? ...
- As you are speaking with him you notice, out of the corner of your eye, that Jesus has entered this place ... Watch all his actions and movements ... Where does he go? ... How does he act? ... What do you think he is feeling? ...
- He is now coming up towards you and the sick man ... What are you feeling now? ...

- You step aside when you realise that he wants to talk to the sick man. What is Jesus saying to the man? What does the man answer? ... Listen to the whole dialogue. Fill in the sketchy account of the gospel ... Dwell especially on Jesus' question: 'Do you want to be made well?'
- Now listen to Jesus' command as he tells the man to get up and walk. The first reaction of the man ... his attempt to get up ... the miracle! ... Notice the reactions of the man ... Notice Jesus' reaction ... and your own ...
- Jesus now turns to you. He engages you in conversation. Talk to him about the miracle that has just taken place...Is there any sickness that you are suffering from? ... Physical, emotional, spiritual? ...Speak to Jesus about it... What does Jesus have to say? ..Listen to his words to you: 'Do you want to be made well?' Do you really mean what you say when you asked to be cured? ... Are you ready to take all the consequences of a cure? ...
- You have now arrived at a moment of grace. Do you have the faith that Jesus can cure you and that he means to cure you? ... Do you have the trust that this will happen as a result of the faith of the whole group here?
- Listen to his mighty words as he pronounces the words of healing over you, or lays his hands on you. What are you feeling? ... Are you certain that these words you have heard are going to have an effect on you, in fact have already had their effect on you, even though you may perceive nothing tangible at the moment? ... He knows the healing that you really need and is offering all all the healing that the love of God can offer.
- Spend a while now in quiet prayer in the company of Jesus.

A simple variant on this form of imaginative prayer is suggested by Jean-Jacques Olier (d.1657), the founder of the Company of Saint-Sulpice. It consists of three steps. Firstly, we focus on a scene from the Gospels: we look at Jesus and allow our hearts to go out to him in wonder and loving adoration. Secondly, we place ourselves in the scene and unite ourselves to him in communion. Finally, we listen to him as he asks us to love others as he loves us, and we ask him to guide us to do to others as we have experienced him doing to us.

Let us imagine that we are focusing our prayer on the last supper and the intimacy between Jesus and the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23). We begin by watching the scene; we then relate to Jesus as the Beloved Disciple; finally we take the part of Jesus, asking him to guide us to reach out to others with the kind of intimate love that he has for us.

We might be meditating on the scene between Jesus and the leper (Mark 1:40-45). Firstly, we imagine the scene and allow our heart to go out to Jesus in whatever way we are moved. Then we enter the scene and put ourselves in the place of the leper, once again allowing our hearts to go out to Jesus as we enter into communion with him. Finally, we identify with Jesus and pray that he will turn our hearts towards the outsiders to whom he may wish to send us, and pray to be instruments of his compassion.

Whatever form our prayer takes, we will find our prayer enriched by entering into communion with Jesus through meditating on his life and teaching as presented in the Gospels.