

Prayer

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Forward

I was blessed to spend a week in the town of Fortuna, Costa Rica in the spring of 2006.

Most of the week was spent sitting around in small bars and cafes drinking Costa Rican coffee, reading, watching the locals mill around the town square, and lighting votive candles in the small yellow church off the town square.

Between the time to think, the great books I had with me, and the strong coffee, it was a wonderful retreat.

I spent a great deal of time in quiet reflection and thinking about what I am doing when I am silent.

This little book is one of the fruits of that time, gathered from the scribbles in my journals or random blog entries.

It is a work in progress, inevitably growing and developing, which is what I hope I will do as well.

This is not a scholarly text.

I don't even know if it is a conversation.

It is more a reflection, partly free form, as prayer sometimes is too.

Most of it is written as instruction for myself (in the first person). This is not because I am an egomaniac, but instead is an effort to avoid stating that I know what is best for you.

Much of the time I don't even know that for myself, let alone you.

These words are an effort to try to wrap my head around something I am still learning how to do.

They are not the best words.

Not the final words.

Or the only words.

They are just my words. My reflections at one point on my journey. The reflections here are helpful to me right now, where I am.

I hope there is something helpful in them for you as well.

Peace,

Gene

Pray Without Ceasing

I have been taught the goal is to pray without ceasing. That every action should be a prayer offered to God, in every thought and action.

I am a distracted person. I am (too) involved in myself. Because of this, I need discipline. I need to carve out time to pray. Carve out time to be with God.

If I do this well, my prayer time will spill over into the actions of my daily life.

If I get really good at this, then I will begin to pray without ceasing.

The truth is, we are already praying without ceasing. The problem is that I am not always saying what I want.

Prayer in over-simplified terms is nothing more than a conversation with God. If God is ever present, then we are always talking with God, whether or not we think about it.

Pray is not a telephone. We don't pick up the phone, call God, have a conversation, and then end our conversation until the next time we pick up the phone.

God is always there. Always listening.

Our thoughts are always in the heart of God because he is in our heart. Our actions are always done to God for his body is everyone and everything we encounter in our day.

We are talking to God through our thoughts and actions every moment of our life.

I need to be reminded of this constantly.

Prayer Time

Does this mean I need to give up my prayer time?

NO! (At least not for me.)

I need discipline. I need to take time out of my day to quiet the noise. But this quiet, this time away, is not for God. It is for me.

God has already made time for me. God is already listening.

Every time.

All the time.

I need the time to remind myself that I am forever in God's presence. I need to take time to remind myself that I am part of His body and everyone I encounter is His body.

I need the time to listen. God is always communicating to me through His spirit. Sometimes in the moment I hear Him gently tugging at my heart to love or to act in some way.

Often I miss this so I must carve time out. I need to quiet the noise in my life.

I try for this in the morning and the evening. Before and after meals. When I am stuck on the subway.

I am trying to remember without ceasing so that I am more aware of God in my life and in my heart.

I am trying to remember without ceasing so that I am more aware of the fact that the conversation is always happening, so that I know He is always listening.

The Words Are For Us

God does not speak English.

Or Spanish.

Or Hebrew.

Or Pig-Latin.

God simply knows our heart. Oftentimes better than we do consciously.

God knows our hopes, desires, and fears even before we can put words to them.

The words we use in prayer are not for God. The words we use in prayer do not serve God. The words we use in prayer mean nothing to God.

But the words mean everything to us.

The reason we need words in prayer is to help us understand our heart's desire, what we are giving thanks for, and the praise that we are offering.

Words are abstract. They are concepts. They are nothing in themselves except for the meaning we bring to them. We can use five words to describe one thing and one word can mean six different things.

I may desire peace in my life, in my family, or in the world. That desire for peace is a specific feeling in my heart. Something no words could do justice to in scope, magnitude or beauty.

In order for me to understand more fully what that desire is, I use words to articulate its meaning to me. This is important to know when I am experiencing the peace in my life or how far away I am from that peace at another moment.

The words I choose in prayer represent the processes of moving my thoughts, desire and praise from my soul into my conscious mind.

The place where I can start to act on them.

Someday, maybe I won't need the words. I will simply feel that connection with God with my soul. But for now I need the words to help to understand where I am disconnected and where I am longing for more connection.

In my words I am able to name where I am blocking God's abundance in my life.

I hope these words will help me remove these blocks and allow His spirit to flow in me the way he created it to be.

Power of Gratitude

The most powerful prayer I have encountered in my life is *"Thank you."*

In this prayer I say many things.

I say: I understand that all good and wonderful things come from God. Everything is blessing.

My life.

My family.

My friends.

This moment.

All blessings, with many more to come.

By giving thanks, I change my disposition to understand that, as I take time in prayer, I have so much.

Simply by counting my blessings and performing this action of thanks, I see all that is good.

I say: I am worthy. It is impossible to receive the gifts of God's unconditional love if we don't believe we are worthy of them.

There is a difference between being worthy and deserving. I am not saying I should have these blessings, I am saying I am worthy of the gifts that are being given.

For the longest time I struggled with receiving. I would think, *"I have enough." "I can provide for myself." "I should be doing the giving."*

When I have these thoughts I cannot fully receive the gift that is being offered. I am blocking someone else from sharing what they have. I am blocking them from loving.

The only way God can be giving and blessing is if He has someone to give to and to bless.

I am a prince in the kingdom of God. I am worthy of His blessings.

My favorite prayer:

"Thank you for the blessings I have received and the blessings I am receiving. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!"

It would be really cool if...

One of my favorite lines to begin my prayer with is, *"You know God, it would be really cool if..."*

I use this line to remind myself to be open.

Open to different.

Open to bigger.

I have a tendency to underestimate the grace and blessings that are possible in my life. Too often, I get so wrapped up in my own desires that I miss the other blessings in my life, which are often greater than my original desire.

By not clinging too tightly to my desire and simply stating how great it would be if a prayer is answered, I find myself open to other possibilities.

Only Give Power & Thought to What You Want

There are so many things in this physical world I could do without.

Death.

Suffering.

Disease.

Pestilence.

When I think of the ills of this world or of my life, it brings me down.

Not only does it dampen my mood, but it brings me down physically.

The only good that comes from giving thought and energy to the things we don't want, is to understand what we don't want. Beyond that it does us no good to think about sorry, sad, or sick states.

Once I know what I don't want, I put all my prayer energy into what I do want.

I don't pray (or give any thought) for a friend's sick kidney. All my prayers are for a happy, healthy, pain-free friend.

It does me no good to think of sickness. If nothing else, it can cause distress in my heart to see my friend in that state. It gives me hope seeing them well.

I am not running from the truth. The world is as it is. In this example my friend is sick, for that there is no doubt.

Why dwell on it?

Why not start moving towards the opening of grace and healing in their lives?

See health happen in prayer.

See them not as their temporal body might seem in this moment. See them as the perfect creation that God made.

I no longer pray for the war torn. I pray for peace.

I no longer pray for the victimized. I pray for strength, safety and empowerment.

I no longer pray for the end of disease. I pray for health and healing.

This Or Something Better

I have been described as a dreamer. As a person who thinks big.

When I am confronted with a problem, I force myself to think even bigger.

But my thoughts, my hopes and my dreams are shaded by my experience and my beliefs.

My playing field might be slightly bigger than others, but I can only think as big as what I think is possible.

There are paths that are truly beyond my wildest dreams.

I don't want to limit God's desire to bless me by my own imagination and limited beliefs of what is possible in my life and in this world.

For this reason I add these words when pray:

"This, or something better."

Again, these words aren't for God. God knows better is possible and wants it in my life.

These words are for me.

To remind me that my vision is limited.

To remind me to be open to what God might have in store.

To help me to look beyond what I have asked for.

To help me to be ready to accept something better if (and when) it does arrive.

In my experience God continues to out-do my expectations.

I continue to receive *"something better."*

Bring It In A Way I Would Never Expect

I am not going to lie. At times I think very highly of myself.

Not that I shouldn't think highly of myself. I should.

I am powerful beyond my wildest dreams because I am part of the Body of Christ.

But sometimes I forget where my power comes from. There are times I mistake grace for myself.

When I am offering prayers of intention, I add the line, *"Bring this to me in a way I would never expect so I know your hand is in this."*

If grace is given in some way that I might miss, then it would be easy for me to take credit for it.

Asking for it in an unusual way is an out. It helps me to make sure I will give credit and thanks for where that grace truly came from.

When I see this happen and see grace in amazing and unexpected ways, it gives me courage to come back to the Father in prayer.

It gives me confidence to continue to expect grace in my life.

In the end, the proper response to grace is not awe, but thanks.

We Are The Body In The world

In college I was scolded for a paper I wrote in one of my religion classes.

The charge? I was being too flippant about a serious subject.

I compared the way many people (myself included) approach intercessory prayer to ordering food at a fast food restaurant.

Into the clown head-shaped speaker at the drive-in: *"I would like heath for me and my family, financial prosperity, the Broncos to win the Super Bowl, and a side order of world peace."*

Was I being too cute? Yes.

Do I still have the same concern? Yes.

My fear was that I was approaching prayer as a simple consumer.

I have a need. Please fill it.

I have come to know that my prayer is not the end.

I am asking God for something. I am part of God's body in this world. So I have asked myself on some level to be part of the solution.

This was brought home to me on a beach in San Diego.

I was visiting a friend. We had grabbed Chinese food and headed to the beach to eat.

Jason said grace: *"Thank you for this food. Be with those who will never know a meal this fine."*

That is such a great line, "those who will never know a meal this fine." I forget to be thankful not only for abundance, but the quality of the abundance.

The next night we were going somewhere and Jason asked if we could make a quick stop.

The stop was a soup kitchen where once a week Jason paid for all the food and then helped to serve it.

He prayed a prayer, and then did his part to be the answer to that prayer.

When we offer prayers of intercession, the answer to that prayer isn't usually delivered by the UPS guy.

Most of the time it happens in this world through the actions of God's body here.

Us.

It is a challenge for me to be open to all the ways a prayer can be answered.

Grace comes in many forms. Often the most unexpected.

I simply try to be open to the quiet prompting of the spirit in my heart.

Sometimes it tells me to make a call, or pick up a book, or walk a new way home.

Sometimes it gives me a new idea, or gives me ears to hear the wisdom of a friend.

When God talks to us, sometimes he throws pebbles and sometimes he throws boulders.

My hope is that I am constantly vigilant listening for that grace, prompting me to act, no matter how loud the prompt is.

My hope is to be the answer to someone else's prayers, and the answer to my own.

No Matter What Happens

The last line to every prayer I offer is *"No matter what happens, I know only good will come."*

Once again, these words are meant for me.

If I truly believe the faith I profess, then I know only good will come into my life. At times it might not look that way, but it will.

There are times of difficulty that in hindsight that were the best thing for me at the time.

I am not one who believes that God is bringing struggle into our lives to teach us something.

I believe our God only wants peace and blessings for us.

With this thought, we know, only good will come.

We just miss that fact and therefore we struggle. We miss God's grace in our lives.

Sometimes I need to remind myself that only good will come.

Listen

So far I have gone on and on about how I pray and my approach to it, the words I say and things I try to remember.

Prayer is not a monologue. *(A point I need to keep reminding myself of.)*

It is a conversation.

It is give and take.

One of my favorite movie scenes about prayer is in *The Apostle*. Robert Duvall, playing The Apostle E.F., ends up in his bedroom screaming at God. "God, I am mad at you! We are in a fight!"

Not that I want to fight with God, but prayer is conversation and that means give and take.

I struggle to make my prayer that way.

I am good at the talking part.

I don't always listen.

On my first trip to Iceland, the words that rang repeatedly in my head were, *"Be still and know that I am God."*

I didn't need to ask questions to learn something.

I didn't need to prove my worth with my actions.

I was being called to just be present in God's love.

Still.

Quiet.

Listen.

I don't do any of that well.

When I Have No Words

There are times when I come to prayer tired and distracted. I can't find words to say and I am unable to listen because my mind is wandering. In these times I offer a simple prayer.

I let my breathing slow down and try only to think of my breath. In. Out. In. Out.

Then on each exhale I think of one of these phrases, rotating through them in no particular order. Sometimes I just think the same phrase over and over again. They come from the tradition of Ho'oponopono

"Thank you."

"I love you."

"I'm sorry."

"Please forgive me."

As I think of these phrases, I allow whatever needs to be expressed to bubble up.

I say thanks to my God. For my God. For my friends. For my life.

I offer love to my God. To others. To the world. To my family. To myself (by far the hardest).

I say sorry to my God. To others. To the world. To myself (again, the hardest).

I just think of the phrases by themselves. Letting their power course through my soul, through my life.

"Thank you."

"I love you."

"I'm sorry."

"Please forgive me."

Some Words I Use

Sometimes having the words of others to guide us is useful. When I need guidance I always come back to these words.

I have them saved in my phone so I can pull them out at any time. You might recognize the first stanza. It is my favorite prayer from my childhood.

The rest are just reminders that I need to hear. What I know I am called to be.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Humble Mother, help me to recognize my achievement and be humble enough to see myself as co-creator.

Gentle Mother, help me to be gentle and charitable with others and especially gentle with myself.

Helper, help me to be open to be help to others. Help me to be open to the help I need graciously.

Full of Grace, help me to move through my day and all my interactions with grace and ease.

Fountain of Beauty, help me to recognize beauty in the world today and to see God's hand in that beauty.

Model of Virtue, help me to remember that my words and actions are serving as a model to others, even when I am not trying to do so.

Transformed, help me to be transformed into the new creation I am called to be.

Cause of Our Joy, help me to see joy in big and small places and help me to be joy to the joyless.

Champion of God's People, help me to be the champion for those who have no advocate.

Queen of Love, teach me to be love.

Queen of Mercy, teach me to accept mercy.

Queen of Peace, teach me to know peace.

Mother Most Pure, may I be of pure heart, mind, intention, and action in all that I do today.

Mother of Good Counsel, let me seek wise counsel. Let me offer unbiased and unselfish counsel.

Gentle In Mercy, help me to not be jaded and recognize mercy in the world.

Mirror Of Justice, help me to be the justice for those who aren't able to seek justice.

Shrine of the Spirit, help me to be the reflection of Christ's love.

Refuge of Sinners, let my smile offer a kind refuge for the heart broken.

Our Lady of Confidence, help me to be confident inside my own skin, knowing I am enough and worthy of God's love.

Tabernacle of the Lord, help to to recognize that I am a worthy tabernacle.

Temple of the Most Holy Trinity, help me to see the Father's love, know the Son's lessons, and be guided by the Spirit's inspiration.

I have also created a podcast based on this prayer, where I take one line at a time and explore what it means. Search for Our Lady of Podcast where ever you listen to audio OR you can find all the past episodes here: OurLadyOfPodcast.com

Gene Monterastelli

Gene grew up in Wyoming and is Brooklyn based. He can get out of a straitjacket, pick off little green army men with a bullwhip, ride a unicycle and a mini bike, juggle five balls, eat fire, hypnotize people, and do a handful of card tricks (not all at once).

He is on the road over 100 days a year between performing, speaking, and just wandering around. The only place he would rather be than on the road is on the back of a horse.

He has a small private practice in which he helps people eliminate self-sabotage from their lives.

He is the host of Our Lady of Podcast, which can be found at OurLadyOfPodcast.com

When he is not on the road, he visits his few worldly possessions (mostly art work he has collected from around the world and the printer for his computer) which at present can be found in Brooklyn, NY.

Gene loves to hear from people who read his work and meditations (even if they don't like them). He can be reached at gene@pascomedia.com

