

Prayer comes in as many forms and styles as there are people because individual prayer is personal. If we are happy, it is expressed in a joyful way. If we are sad, upset or angry, we cry out in lamentation. Prayer is sometimes expressed in the silent praise of a beautiful sunset or in seeing Christ in another. Prayer is **listening** to the "Our Father" as we recite it. Prayer is entering into public worship. Prayer is withdrawing to a place of quiet to commune with God.

How do you see God today?

PERSONAL THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

Hélène Davey, delegate

Ascension Parish, French Creek

Prayer is an expression of faith, an opportunity to give thanks. It provides peace and tranquility for me through a greater closeness to Jesus Christ. Prayer provides me with an attitude of openness and wisdom. Prayer opens me to the wonders of God's presence. Prayer provides solitude.

In the church community, prayer brings a deeper awareness of God's love for all of us. It enables us to meet the challenge to live together in unity as brothers and sisters.

I expect the diocese to help me in my prayer life and spirituality by nourishing creative ways of prayer, by providing workshops and seminars on the various forms of prayer and by encouraging the church community to pray for the interests of all humankind.

I can contribute to this by using the **gift of prayer**, opening myself to the presence of God, discovering how to be more aware of God's gift and how to live this gift creatively.

A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Fr. Charles Brandt, reactor
Black Creek

"Integrate spirituality and prayer into life."

- A Synod decision.

In all things there is a "hidden ground of Love". These are the words of Thomas Merton, my mentor in the life of prayer. He was one of the guides who inspired me to live as a hermit these last 25 years.

In my Anglican days, Dom John Chapman's *Letters* taught me Christian meditation, and a protégé of his, Evelyn Underhill, also was a source of inspiration. Later, it was through the writings of Dom Bede

Griffiths, OSB, I found my way into the Catholic church. In 1989, I spent two months in Father Bede's Ashram, Saccidananda, South India. There "the hidden ground of Love" confirmed me in the path of "praying always".

I have come to realize that while we are distinct from this Loving Ground, the cosmic Christ, we are not separate from Him. Here lies the basis for contemplative prayer. On this foundation we build a life of prayer. To seek how to "pray always" is not necessary since this stream of love, is always flowing between Jesus and the Father. We simply have to become aware of this constant Stream of Love.

A Sufi story speaks to this: One day a Lover approached the home of his Beloved. He knocked on the door. A Voice within responded to the knocking: "Who is there?" The Lover answered: "It is I". The Voice within spoke, almost sadly: "There is no room here for me and thee." The Lover went away and spent much time trying to learn the meaning of the words of his Beloved. Sometime later he once again approached the home of his Beloved and knocked. Once again, the Voice within asked: "Who is there?" This time the Lover answered: "It is Thou". And the door opened and he entered the home of his Beloved.

This story in its two parts describes two modes of spirituality. Many of us, I think, move from where we sense we are separate from God to where we realize that, although **distinct**, we are **not separate**. This realization confirms that we are not separate from our brother and sister, nor from the earth.

At first, my spirituality was more about doing than being: more about fulfilling God's will than experiencing it. This spirituality of dualism clearly stressed God's transcendence and separateness from the world.

The second mode of spirituality is less verbal, less speculative. It prefers silence to words. Experience is more important than scholastic terminology. There is a great desire to experience God. It is in forgetting myself that I find God and discover my true self in God. I feel comfortable in saying "It is Thou". I come to realize that God's transcendence necessarily flows into immanence.

Where does contemplation lead one? Since it finds the Ground of Love in all reality, it leads to one's sisters and brothers: it creates a social consciousness; it leads to a deeper unity and love with and for the earth.

Contemplation leads to transformation. Without being unmindful of the need for change in behaviour, the stress is on the need for a change in consciousness, coming to see reality differently.

As Thomas Berry points out, it is necessary for the human community and the earth community to go into the future as a single sacred

community. The key to this is recognition that while distinct from the Ground of Love, we are not separate. Then we realize our unity and communion with every human being, with the earth and with the universe.

SECOND CALLING

Eileen Curteis, SSA, reactor

*When He calls a second time
hasten to listen
and if it is you He is beckoning
let not your face be hidden from Him
but go as wings would have you go
stretching forth your hand
your right hand to meet Him.
And if His voice
in the wind you hear
let love lead you to Him.
Let nothing deter you
no breeze, no storm,
no faulty motion in you
but if for whatever reason
the air be contrary
let it be contrary.
Above all be true
to what you know and feel
in this way
your love shall be proved real.*

LEARNING SCRIPTURE TOGETHER

Frank Camp, reactor
Holy Family Parish, Ucluelet

"Offer workshops and courses of scripture study on prayer on a parish and diocesan level."

- A Synod decision.

For the past few years, members of our parish have met regularly for prayer and scripture study. We look forward to each session, knowing that God's word will reveal a new spiritual insight. Knowledge shared by the group increases our understanding of the teaching of Jesus Christ. The often veiled meaning of scriptures and extensive background information is frequently provided by Father La Plante and Brother Stan.

For many of us complacent acceptance of the traditional church protocol with which we grew up had limited our deeper understanding of God's word. Scripture comes to life the more we examine each reading. The Word promotes open, lively and inquisitive dialogue, which develops a greater sense of faith and of one another.

Thoughts and feelings we have harboured as individuals in our relationship with God are openly discussed and shared because we trust one another. Matters of concern regarding our relationship with God and with the church are brought out. Here, we find the words of scripture guide us.

Very often as a person reads the Bible alone, questions come to mind that are briefly considered but never fully understood. But after group study of scripture, the prophets are seen to have profound meaning. Each phrase or word is dwelt upon and researched and with remarkable clarity the message of God becomes more meaningful.

The secret to each successful scripture session is open and honest dialogue. Each person feels confident to comment and to question. Studying and understanding the messages given us through Jesus, the apostles and prophets is one way to bring us closer together and closer to God's plan for each of us.

PRAYER: THE FOUNDATION OF ACTION

Joyce Harris, OSC, reactor
St. Clare's Monastery, Duncan

"Integrate spirituality and prayer into the life of the diocesan community."

- A Synod decision.

Reflection on the Synod action evokes in me a sense of quiet pride because the Spirit, working through active participants in the Synod process, touched truth in my personal and communal experience of prayer and spirituality.

In the light of their communal vision, Synod delegates affirmed actions such as these: promote and encourage praying with scripture for all members; encourage the practice of Christian meditation; renew the practice of popular devotions and encourage those appropriate to the growth of the faith community; promote and experience retreat experiences; learn about and respect the spirituality of other faith traditions.

In my opinion, if no other decisions were fully implemented and sincerely lived but these, the Synod would have prepared fertile soil for an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this diocese. Do I say this because I am a contemplative Poor Clare Sister whose ministry in the church is a life of prayer? No, I say this because it is a "sign of the times" that "the Christian of tomorrow will be a mystic, one who has experienced something, or will be nothing" (Karl Rahner, SJ). All are called to be mystics, to "see" life events and others as God sees them.

Throughout the ages, ordinary praying women and men have experienced prayer and the fruit of prayer as revolutionary acts — acts which change one's frame of reference. Prayer is not simply a preparation for action, nor is it undertaken in place of other actions. Prayer declares who we are and to whom we belong; it is the foundation of all other actions we take. This contemplative stance allows God to be God within us and among us, stripping us of our illusions, our false gods and our false selves. This is the true God encountered by Moses, Ruth, and Mary.

As benefactors of this sacred heritage, we too, encounter God—the Liberator, who takes us out of our insecurities, ignorances and injustices inviting us to confront and overcome them. If we are not changed by God's transforming love, we might well ask: Are we praying, or to whom are we praying? We are called to be so grasped by God's irresistible love for us, a love made flesh in Jesus Christ, that we, like all the saints, are compelled to embrace fully in our own lives the suffer-

ing, death and resurrection of Jesus. Such is the substance and truth of prayer embedded in the heart of every praying person who desires to be supported and nurtured by these Synod decisions.

My deepest hope is that prayer will become the vibrant source of personal and communal transformation in our diocese; that we will meet the gospel challenge to put on the mind and heart of Jesus Christ. Although many experience that "the pace of modern life often works against the development of spirituality", it is essential that we choose again and again to identify ourselves as religious Christians, as disciples of Jesus, not simply cultural Christians.

My greatest concern is that despite our desire to be men and women of faith there always will be some greater priority, something more tangible and compelling for us to do than pray.

Whatever our lifestyle, the "cost of discipleship" is demanding. It was for Jesus, and it will be so for us. However, as we contemplate the Face of God and experience God loving us, we discover that there is no other response but to love in return.

