

When You Pray (by Finbarr Lynch SJ)

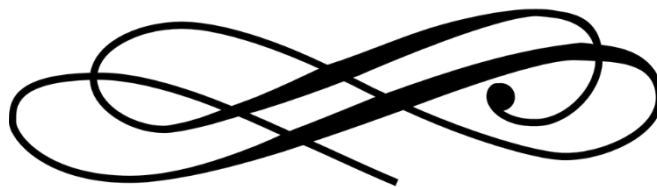
How do you feel about the time you dedicate to prayer? Do you feel that you are doing all the work but getting nowhere? Here your image of prayer can help or hinder you. If you have an unbalanced image, you may decide that the time 'wasted in prayer' could be better used in reading a holy book or doing good somewhere. Thus you give up on prayer. Since God has his own image of what prayer is about, it helps if you can catch on to it. This will help you to cooperate better with the Holy Spirit who is at work in you.

The Holy Spirit – not yourself – is the main person in your prayer, and is at work in you when you pray (Romans 8:26). This puts me in mind of an old Latin tag for an extended time of prayer such as a retreat, namely, 'vacatio Deo': it means idleness for God, emptiness before God, a vacation or holiday with God. The time you spend in prayer is time put beyond usefulness to yourself.

Prayer is not useful: it is of a different order. In order to set aside time for personal prayer you come away from your usual preoccupations so as to be in some respect empty, idle, available to God. What you bring to prayer is yourself, your time and your desire to be with God. You come with your openness to be slowly transformed by the Spirit. All of this is hard work on your part, and it is your contribution to the event of prayer in you!

The other partner is the Spirit, who has an agenda, a divine project for you. The Spirit works deep down, forming you in the likeness of Christ. You undergo God! You are passive rather than active. Think of an artist working on a canvas, or a sculptor chiseling a wooden block. Better yet, imagine yourself in a dance hall, waiting for someone to invite you onto the floor. All you can do is to be there, waiting, desiring. That is enough. The invitation is guaranteed.

(adapted from *When You Pray*, by Finbarr Lynch SJ, Dublin: Messenger Publications, 2012)



God's word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk 4:26-29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking. (22).

(Joy of the Gospel, Pope Francis)