

# Brendan MacCarthaig – Verbalised Prayer or Silent Time with God

*Prayer is sharing our life experiences with one another, and thus helping one another to appreciate the love both of the creator and of one another.*

We do it all the time, pray for some good thing to happen to us or to someone else, for the end of some suffering, for a happy death, though I am intrigued that there are few recognised prayers for a happy life!, and even that the other team loses the match!

There are books of prayers. In all languages, of all religions. There are even positions to be adopted at prayer, places for prayer, dresses for prayer, languages for prayer, people for prayer, vocabularies for prayer, times for prayer, songs for prayer, gestures and postures for prayer.

I suppose it would be true to say that prayer is talking to God, whatever we may understand 'God' to mean. The 'talking' can indicate listening or addressing, asking or praising or thanking – enough! Everybody knows what prayer is.

Bar me.

As a kid we used to have the rosary every night. Prayer, called grace, before and after meals was common, for many it still is.

Stop, I'm not going to do another paragraph of lists. You've been through some or all of the occasions for prayer in your own culture and religion and place.

Here's the nub of my 'bar me' interruption: I told you in a previous 'essay' that I had been given the priceless gift of love when I was 81 years of age, having lived a pretty loveless life. The shape that that experience has taken with me is, to me God is love itself, or love itself is God, all the time. Part of the impossible description is that I find verbalised prayer absurd – yes – except for formal occasions. And so I am content to sit in a park or chapel or just in my bedroom, or – before this lameness halted me – to stroll in some place quiet, and simply to tell this Creator that he's been good news for me, and that all creation I realise is simply the way the creator says I love you.

I mean, love of its nature must communicate, and what it must communicate is love. But love is what it actually is, love that not only loves, but within that communicates all sorts of helpful notions and ideas and challenges and warnings and approvals and remonstrations and nothings – which is what every

one of you has experienced from those who have ever loved you in the flesh, from your parents, hopefully, and lots of others up to now.

### **Spending lots of silent time with God**

Love is something you're aware of, and while you do verbalise it with others whom you love, you don't formalise it. You say to your lover, 'I love you', which is of course very good news, but you don't formalise it into structures. But we have prayers for this and prayers for that, all structured appropriately – and some using archaic language that includes Thee and Thou and so on. Why?

If we are believers in God we are aware that this is a God who knows what we want, who loves us, not somehow in proportion to how much we love God, but because we understand God as our creator. So why these specific details? And then there are formal conclusions, like asking the intercession of some saint, as if this somehow might make the prayer more effective. We have other practices, but again I'll spare you another list, we've enough absurdities in our prayer lives.

You can see my position. I don't believe in formal prayer except for special occasions, like we have family celebrations for this and that. So what am I in favour of, then?

I am in favour of sharing our life experiences with one another, and thus helping one another to appreciate the love both of the creator and of one another. What has happened in religious circles, at least among some that I am acquainted with, is they all say the same formula aloud together, but don't talk to one another – in fact such talk is frowned upon if not actually forbidden.

I am in favour of small meetings, at most four, who share their opinion on their experience of receiving and offering love, of coping with suffering, friction, celebration, the impact of saints in their lives, the significance of current frictional matters on their mutual relations, the recognition that it is all ultimately about love. Use of their religious sources is a great help to anchor such sharings, and occasional input from scholars helps but mustn't take over.

I'm in favour of spending lots of silent time with this strange God, Love. I'm not quite sure why, but I sense it helps me be a better me. God bless.

*Brendan MacCarthaigh, an Irish Christian Brother who worked in India for over 60 years, mostly in Value Education with senior classes and teachers, now resides in Dublin. Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/verbalised-prayer-or-silent-time-with-god/17762>*