

Practicing Prayer on Our Resurrection Walk

Session 3 – Prayer Without Words

The catechism, or Outline of the Faith, in the Prayer Book defines prayer as “responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words” (p. 856). We’re so used, from church, to thinking of prayer in terms of words that it may be puzzling to think of prayer in nonverbal terms. So this morning we will try to suggest some ways to pray that don’t involve words.

Silence and stillness as prayer. Think about your days. How often do you simply sit in silence? Doing nothing. No phone or pad to scroll through. No television, radio, background music, talking heads. Our grandparents, great grandparents, spent a lot of their time in silence. Maybe they were doing things like plowing fields, splitting wood, kneading bread, walking or riding a horse to market. But they did these things in silence. And because they were often physically tired, when they could they usually just sat and rested. In such times of silence and stillness they were not alone, however, because they had learned that in such times God was present with them. It was not necessary to chat with God, to make conversation; it was enough to simply sit there resting in God’s company.

Making time and place for silence. Our modern lives have lost the capacity for this kind of simple “being with” prayer. So we need to be deliberate in setting aside time and place for wordless “practice of the presence of God.” But we can do it, with a little self-discipline. You don’t really need to check for messages; that can wait 15 minutes, half an hour. Tell others in your household what you are going to do and then go do it.

Telling those words to shut up. At first when you try this, words will rush forward to try to occupy your silence. Gently tell them to wait for later. But be patient. Learning to allow space for this kind of prayer takes quite a while of practice because it’s so counter to the way we live our lives. And while you practice silence, don’t try to fill it with God. It is already filled with God, because God is there all the time. If God wants to come into your silence in some way, God will do it. You don’t need to. Just silence is enough. And quite probably, that’s all God wants – just to be with you, his friend.

Contemplation as an aide. Some people find it helpful, however, to have something to contemplate in their silence: a candle flame, a flower, the beauty of nature outside your window, an icon (easily found on Google images!). Gaze for a while at whatever it is, then close your eyes and just be there.

So, just some suggestions. Try them if you like. If you do, be patient. Be gentle. No one is evaluating you – least of all God!