

Christian Living

In this new column entitled “Christian Living”, Darren Sylvester focuses on the powerful aspect of prayer in our daily lives.

Introduction:

I hold the view that praying is the most natural thing in the world. God didn't just make us and then walk off and leave us to it. God continually holds us in being, sustaining us every minute of the day. The life we live, every breath, every movement is only possible as God continues to hold us, filling us with his spirit and breathing life into us.

Images of God:

It is contended that many people experience problems in prayer. The main reason for such a problem lies with the individual, and is caused by their preconceptions and/or thought processes of God. Let us be clear that God loves and accepts us and is not a harsh, critical figure that takes offence at our slightest mistakes. In view of this there is no need to worry about what we say or, indeed, the way in which we say it.

When we look at our own relationships, whether they are with husbands/wives; partners; friends; families; children, etcetera, can one common theme not be drawn from them? Can it not be said that with all the examples of relationships mentioned above that all of them will flourish and thrive best when people can be honest with one another? Honesty is at the heart of good communication; and, when praying, the more we can be honest with God, the better our prayers will become.

Praying is not like visiting Royalty:

Prayer is simple: We don't have to be experts in anything in order to pray; we don't need to be great theologians to understand all the teachings of the Church. Praying is not like meeting Royalty when one must be on their best behaviour, self-consciously conversing with formulaic expressions.

Talking to God is more akin to visiting our closest, most honest and most trusted friend whereby we can arrive, put our feet up and really be ourselves. We may wish to cry, shout, laugh, become angry, become sad, all in the knowledge that our friend cares and accepts us and will not be shocked, upset or offended at anything we say or do.

Formal prayers:

The features of prayer are trust and simplicity, however, we can also express ourselves by using more formal prayers, as used in Church. Formal prayers are often very comforting and can be a relief to us when our own words fail us. It can be stated that the poetry and rhythm of formal prayers can often say what needs to be said better than what we, ourselves, wished to express. For example, when Jesus was dying on the Cross he repeated the opening words of Psalm 22:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This psalm expresses the desolation and loneliness Jesus was experiencing, but, at the same time, is a perfect illustration of his unshaken confidence in the Heavenly Father.

The use of the body in prayer:

When we talk to others our body language is important. What we say is effected by how we say it. Whether or not we make eye contact; touch the other person; turn away from them; fold our arms; yawn; stare blankly – all these aspects of our body language can change the meaning of words that we use. Likewise, when we engage in prayer, the use of gestures, sitting, standing, knelling, arms outstretched or held together, can have an influence over the words we use in our prayers.

It is a mistake to ignore the body in prayer. It is an even greater mistake to think that the body is a hindrance to prayer on the grounds that it is material, not spiritual. My body is me. It is the external sign of my soul. What my body performs are my actions. What I receive with my soul I receive through my bodily senses: sight, touch, taste, hearing and smell.

Conclusion:

It is therefore imperative, in my view, to allow the body to cooperate in prayer. If the body is divorced from prayer it is highly likely that prayer(s) will become counter-productive as the body can easily become distracted by other events, noise, or even boredom. Ways of incorporating the body into prayer, it is suggested, are: making the sign of the cross; closing your eyes; knelling; playing soothing and prayerful music; using a rosary; and burning incense.

May our thoughts and prayers be with the association – especially this, its 25th year!

Darren Sylvester is the projects officer of the DONA

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August 2003