

Prayer Life

Different features

Introduction about prayer

According to the early fathers, prayer is a life and not merely a daily practice. This life requires regular and steadfast training that has a specific purpose. The purpose is that prayer would be a channel that connects us with the throne of God; so that, the life of God may flow in us, progressively transforming us into the image of His Son –the image on which we were created.

When this image was marred, the Son of God redeemed us; and hence, it became possible for our redeemed image to be transformed into HIS image. We can thus be conformed to Christ, as Apostle Paul says: *'to be conformed to the image of His Son'* (Romans 8: 29).

This transformation essentially requires obeying the gospel, the good news of salvation and the commandments of eternal life. Of course, this always requires the help and strength of the Holy Spirit.

In the early Church, prayer was the means of the renewed infilling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they said: *'Prayer is the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit is prayer'*.

Yet, as I have just mentioned, this pattern or manner of spiritual life requires steadfast training; therefore, the early fathers have set for us an approach to prayer.

This approach includes:

- Prayers of the Psalms

- Prayer with unveiled face

Prayers of the Psalms

The book of Psalms is considered the book of prayer given to us by God. It is like the manna that nourishes us –like the old Israel who were nourished by the manna.

According to the early Church, the Psalms are the preparation for prayer because prayer is a free conversation between God and man.

Yet, the bible teaches us that in actual truth *'we do not know what we should pray for as we ought'* (Romans 8: 26). However, the word of God promises us that *'the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses'* (Romans 8: 26) and that the Spirit Himself *'makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered'* (Romans 8: 26).

Yet, in order for the Spirit to have a free chance to intercede for us and groan inside us (so that His inspirations would lead us in prayer in our free dialogue with God), we first have to shake off anything that has clung upon us from the spirit of the world in which we live, day after day. Also the activity of the flesh in us should cease; this includes the activity of the mind, the thoughts, and the desires of the soul. Therefore, the Psalms are the preparation for prayer. They give us the ability to shake off the spirit of the world and they stop or annul the activity of the flesh and the mind, even temporarily. As a result, our spirit is revived –since the Holy Spirit dwells in us. At this point, the work of the Holy Spirit can start in us.

Therefore, the fathers of the Church taught us that there is another aspect of prayer, after this preparation, and that is:

Prayer with unveiled face

This is what we call free prayer or the free dialogue with God.

The verse in 2Corinthians 3: 18, reveals to us the reason behind calling this part of prayer '*prayer with unveiled face*'.

'But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.'

This free prayer is the transformation.

But, how? And, why?

It is because we encounter God face to face, a person to person encounter. According to the original language, the word '*face*' signifies '*person*'.

Yet, how can this happen?

Before explaining the main features of the transforming prayers which makes us encounter God in such a way, I would like to clarify an important point about the prayers of the Psalms.

- *Psalm prayer*

The Psalms has a special and amazing mystery as a prayer book. It is a spiritual food, like the manna –as we said. Yet, this food is mystical and wondrous because it can be a food for the spiritual *infants* and the *mature* at the same time.

This is truly wondrous and amazing for *how can the same food be suitable for the infants as pure spiritual milk (1Peter 2: 2) and at the same time be solid food suitable for the spiritually mature (Hebrews 5: 14)?*

This is because the Holy Spirit, the author of the book of Psalms, is the One who prays these Psalms in us and opens their treasures inside the human soul, according to the spiritual stature of the person praying.

Therefore, for the *spiritual infants*, He brings forth spiritual milk from the Psalms prayer. This milk makes the person experience spiritual comfort and joy and inner spiritual fervency which is sometimes accompanied with spiritual tears. This continues during the spiritual infancy stature.

Then, when the person grows to the stature of *spiritual manhood*, he may suddenly find that the spiritual comfort in the Psalms' prayer has stopped. At this point, one may start to feel perplexed and wonder why this has happened and why has the Psalms' prayer changed for him.

Here lies the mystery!

At this point, the Psalms' prayer has changed from the *pure spiritual milk* accompanied by spiritual comfort into *solid food* which is given to the spiritually mature. In this case, the Holy Spirit would have opened for that person a new depth in the treasures of the Psalms. Thus, the prayer seems for that person that it has become heavy and requires concentration; he may also feel that he does not experience the strengthening which he used to receive from the prayers before.

In such situations, the spiritual fathers of the Church teach us that despite what the person senses at that point, the Psalms' prayer still does two important things at this new spiritual stature. These two things are:

- a. It frightens the spiritual enemies (an external work).
- b. It builds up the inner soul (an inner work).

It is true that one may experience distraction and lack of fervency and even sense as if he is not praying. However, this is the war of the enemy who has started to realise that that person is receiving the solid food of the spiritually mature.

At this stage, the worshiper has two responsibilities. These are:

- a. To diligently focus and concentrate in the words of the psalms, with perseverance and without feeling frustrated or failing –no matter how long this may take.
- b. To have another prayer time, in addition to the Psalms prayer, and that is a time of free prayer or the prayer with unveiled face.

This is because at this spiritual stature, it is not sufficient to only pray the Psalms together with some prayer requests, as one used to do at the infant stature. But, there is a need at this stage for the prayer with the unveiled face because God desires to deal with the person inwardly. He desires to speak to his heart; transform his image; reveal to him the mysteries of His Kingdom. Therefore, one should have this personal time with the Lord in addition to praying the Psalms.

Features of the prayer with unveiled face

There are three important features which we need to pay attention to if we truly desire to be men of prayer according to the spirit and revelation of the New Testament. These features are:

1. Praying in the Spirit
2. Praying in the Heavenly Places
3. Praying in the Holy of Holies

1. Praying in the Spirit

First of all, we need to remind ourselves that we do not know how to pray as we ought to; therefore, we should start by seeking the Spirit of God (according to the promise in Romans 8: 26).

We should ***seek Him calmly, repeatedly, and in humility*** until He draws near anew and lead us in the prayer.

The Jesus prayer, calling unto the name of Jesus, helps us enter into praying in the Spirit.

One should also ***lay aside his responsibilities and preoccupations***. Every time a thought comes to distract the person, he should turn the matter into prayer and surrender it to the Lord.

We should also realise that praying in the Spirit requires a person who knows how-to walk-in Spirit, as Apostle Paul teaches us in Galatians 5: 16 – 26. Therefore, it is important to ***beware of and avoid any conduct according to the flesh***, like idle words (Matthew 12: 36, 37) or coarse jesting which is not fitting (Ephesians 5: 4).

The quietness and stillness of the soul and its surrounding is an important factor for the true prayer in the Spirit. Therefore, ***it is essential to wake up early to pray***. If one delays his prayer time and the noise starts to spread everywhere, even if one totally isolates himself in a far place where there is no one, the noise will still hinder him –even if he neither hears nor sees anyone at that time. This is something related the sphere of the spiritual realm. Therefore, one should start his day early while people are still asleep. It is fitting for the worshipper to be the first one to wake up.

Let us refer to the prayer of Jesus:

'Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed' (Mark 1: 35).

We also read:

'And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea' (Matthew 14: 23 – 25).

This means that Jesus prayed from 4p.m. to 4a.m.! We have seen the same thing with the worshippers of the Scetes desert of Egypt who started their prayer at sunset and ended it at sunrise of the next day.

In Luke 6: 12, we read that Jesus *'went out to the mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God'*.

Practically, one should start by calling on the name of Jesus and seek the drawing near of the Spirit of God.

Through one's fellowship with the Holy Spirit, a stir or a movement starts in the heart which then becomes words in the mind. When the lips, that are anointed with the Spirit, utter these words, they come out as prayer words bearing the power of the Spirit. They are manifested as life and light, the life of the Son of God and the light of the Spirit of God.

Though those around me may not know anything about my spiritual diligence to acquire praying in the spirit and have the words of the Spirit, these prayers will revive and illuminate others. This is a very important thing for prayer meetings.

As mentioned earlier, praying in the spirit totally depends on the fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

Among the things that strengthen this fellowship are:

- To be sensitive to sin and live a repentant life.
- Crucifying the self and living a humble life.
- To be free from the material world; so that it would not have dominion over me. I can use it; but, I do not let it enslave me.
- Keeping the commandments and living in the righteousness of God; *'the just shall live by faith'* (Galatians 3: 11).
- Living a life of faith because *'without faith it is impossible to please Him'* (Hebrews 11: 6).

2. Praying in the Heavenly Places

This means that one would not be present in the earthly sphere; but, the Spirit of God would lift him to the heavenly sphere.

How can this happen?

There are some important truths that we need to understand in this respect:

The earth is surrounded by thick dark clouds because of the activity of the evil spirits. This is also due to the numerous and continuous sins of the evil people, rejecting God publicly, and defiling the sacred things.

This causes the worshiper to sense that there is something heavy, dark, and suffocating around him, hindering his spirit from being released upwards to soar in the heavenly realms.

Yet, there is another sad matter; and that is, there is another heavy and dark cloud which is not because of the evil people but because of the believers who live according to the flesh. They fill the atmosphere with fleshly prayers consisting of words coming from the mind without any stir in the heart or inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

As a result, the worshiper needs to breakthrough two clouds: the cloud of the evil one and the cloud of the fleshly prayers.

The breaking through these clouds can never be possible without the fellowship of the Holy Spirit: calling upon the name of Jesus and seeking the nearness of the Holy Spirit.

The reviving inspirations would then come. They are like a piercing arrow that breaks through all clouds. As a result, the worshiper is lifted up by the Spirit to the heavenly places to enter before the throne of God where our prayers are proclaimed and answered.

There is another important point related to praying in the heavenly places; and that is, realising our heavenly citizenship:

'For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ' (Philippians 3: 20).

This is based on what Christ has done for us in His resurrection and ascension as He *'made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'* (Ephesians 2: 6).

This practically means that we should live as strangers and sojourners on earth, journeying towards our heavenly hometown and not making earth our hometown.

This understanding is revealed in the bible in both Testaments. Since the time of the Law, the Lord said: *'for you are strangers and sojourners with Me'* (Leviticus 25: 23). Also, the Psalmist says: *'For I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were'* (Psalm 39: 12). And in the first epistle of Peter, we read: *'Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul'* (1Peter 2: 11).

Another important matter in this respect is that we should not forget that we are called to worship in fellowship with the heavenly assembly/hosts/family.

All of us together are *'members of the household of God'* (Ephesians 2: 19).

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we read:

'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel' (Hebrews 12: 22 – 24).

3. Praying in the Holy of Holies

This is different from the point above; yet, they both complete one another.

Each of these three aspects of prayer (praying in the Spirit, in the heavenly places, and in the holy of holies) has its specific fruit and results.

- When we pray in the Spirit, there are specific fruit.
- When we pray in the heavenly places, there are specific results.
- When we pray in the holy of holies, there are certain privileges as well as certain responsibilities.

What is the prayer in the holy of holies?

This is one of the gifts of the great redemption.

Christ has made us ***priests*** and ***kings***.

We have been granted an inner spiritual priesthood¹, which we read about in 1Peter 2: 5 and in Revelation 1: 6.

'You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1Peter 2: 5).

'And has made us kings and priests to His God and Father' (Revelation 1: 6).

This means that we are called² to enter into the heavenly holies where there is a heavenly altar which is unseen for us.

Yet, the prophets and apostles saw it.

The prophet Isaiah saw it:

'Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar' (Isaiah 6: 6).

Amos, the prophet, also saw it:

'I saw the Lord standing by the altar' (Amos 9: 1).

Apostle John also saw it in his vision (refer to Revelation 8: 3; 9: 13; 14: 18).

¹ The writings of the Church distinguish between this general spiritual priesthood which is granted to all the believers and the special priesthood of the Church ministers who are set apart to serve the people of God (St Jerome and others).

² If we learn to be in the Spirit, worshipping in the heavenly places.

There, at this heavenly altar, Jesus ministers the mystery of our salvation, the salvation of the whole world, the salvation of the believers and churches (Hebrews 7: 25).

There also, we minister with Him as those called for the mystical priesthood ministry.

Yet, we should perceive the mysteries of this calling and understand its privileges and responsibilities so that we may be prepared and qualified for it.

There, around this altar, we find other priests from different churches and nations. There is a global perspective where we all work together through the guidance and control of our High Priest, Jesus. We first perceive what is in His heart; and then, we minister this with *one spirit* before the heavenly altar.

This is a mystery and it is the foundation of the *intercession ministry*. The Lord may sometimes reveal the wounds and suffering of His own heart; and so, *we serve Him as He has served us*. We should perform our priesthood role for Him and before Him on behalf of the various needs. These needs could be men of God who are besieged by Satan or who are weak and need restoration. There could be churches in a state of spiritual weakness or division. It can be an intercession ministry on behalf of nations and peoples to be restored to the Lord. All is done according to the guidance of the High Priest and also according to the spiritual stature of each one ministering with Him.

What is the difference between these three aspects of prayer, in terms of their variety?

Praying in the Spirit builds up the soul, ignites the spirit, and changes the atmosphere in the prayer meetings. It encourages the believers as it touches their spirits and awakens their hearts in the prayer meetings. It grants inspired thoughts from the Spirit of God which destroy the darkness of the evil one and his false and deceitful thoughts (1John 4: 6); so, the truth may be proclaimed and the will of God revealed.

Praying in the heavenly places lifts up our requests, allowing them to enter into the presence of God and receive their answer without hindrance from the enemy. The enemy lurks to the prayers of the saints trying to keep them delayed and seem unanswered. This can drain the faith; it is written: *'hope deferred makes the heart sick'* (Proverbs 13: 12).

Also, the lack of answer of prayers hinders God's purposes in the life of the children of God and it hinders the work of the Kingdom of God. An example of this is Daniel and how the answer to his prayers was delayed 3 weeks because of the evil powers (Daniel 10: 13).

Praying in the holy of holies: These are the intercessions which the Spirit of God does in us and through us, according to the purpose of the Son, the High Priest who calls us to work and minister with Him.

In the heavenly altar, priests from all nations and peoples stand around Him to pray on behalf of the believers and the men of God, on behalf of the needs and spiritual battles of the churches, and on behalf of the nations and peoples to wake up and seek the Lord again.

It is a privilege and a responsibility.

On the one hand, this is in accordance to the spiritual stature of the person. On the other hand, it is in accordance to the person's stature of faith, his understanding of this truth and believing it, the broadness of his spirit, and his preparation for this work. There are some who can pray on behalf of individuals or groups and there are others who can pray on behalf of churches or nations. And this is controlled according to God's plan and ec