

## Palm Sunday – Contemplative Prayer

Pope Benedict XVI's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, comments that "From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly." (paragraph 28). Each person is created with some degree of capacity for both faith and reason. We have been blessed with both a heart and a mind that we can use to know God. Some people are more prone to rely on reason or logic. Others are more heartfelt or empathetic in how they relate to the world and their trials in life. No "person of reason" is complete without having some faith, and no "heartfelt person" goes thru life without some use of reason.

What does this have to do with Prayer? If you are a "person of reason" you may find that the words of a prayer can move your mind, but not necessarily your heart. I am guilty of this.

***While our minds may be in control of our senses, it is our hearts that will lead us either toward God or toward sin.***

Contemplative prayer is the solution that can help anyone become a more "heartfelt person" of faith. It can fill an empty heart, mend a broken heart, lighten a heavy heart, and set a cold heart on fire with God's love for us.

What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: "Contemplative prayer... in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." (CCC 2709). It is an interior form of prayer. "Contemplative prayer is also the pre-eminently intense time of prayer. In it the Father strengthens our inner being with power through his Spirit 'that Christ may dwell in (our) hearts through faith' and we may be 'grounded in love.'" (CCC 2714).

I continually rediscover contemplative prayer when I make time for Eucharistic Adoration. The Catholic practice of Eucharistic Adoration is a unique opportunity for each of us to present ourselves to the true presence of Christ's living, resurrected body on the Altar, as unworthy as we may be, and in total silence, open our heart to God's infinite love for us. There is no script or ritual to define this time for us. Whether we arrive with a list of prayers or scripture to read or simply fold our hands and lift our thoughts to God, we only need to acknowledge His presence for Him to find the way into our hearts.

Eucharistic Adoration is not the only opportunity we have for contemplative prayer. During Lent in particular, we can make some time to be alone, perhaps light a candle, and hold a Crucifix while considering Jesus' pains and the passion He endured for our Salvation. Go beyond words and feel the wood of the cross; place your fingers on the nails and touch the crown of thorns to know how the punishment for our sins was borne by Him. Consider how much He must love us to have willingly put Himself on that cross for us.

The cultural sickness in the world around us today is perhaps best understood as a heart disease. There is too little love of God and neighbor, too little courage to speak out against evil, and no room in our hearts for anyone other than the "me." Hearts can be healed when we open them up to God and simply ask for His Spirit that Christ may dwell in our hearts too.