

Becoming a Person of Prayer

A Reflections by David Keller 2012

Prayer is not a sector of life, called upon when needed.

If prayer is the flow of energy between a person and God, between a person and other people, and between a person and all creation, then a person of prayer is a person whose life makes this flow of energy tangible in thoughts, words, actions, and relationships.

Our exemplar in being a person of prayer is Jesus of Nazareth. His life of prayer had four essential dimensions:

- Quiet listening (personal intimacy with God)
- Faithful discernment (listening to the desires of the Holy One)
- Commitment to the scriptures and worship of his Jewish faith tradition
- Compassionate response (making God's desires tangible in his engagement with society)

Jesus' prayer was not disconnected from his actions or his teaching. His prayer was never a sector of life visited when desired or in time of special need.

A person of prayer remains rooted in her or his experience of the risen Christ; this enable a person to be filled with the same relationship with God that Jesus of Nazareth had. Paul describes a person of prayer when he says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

Christian faith communities are not created by human plans, decisions, or policies. Faith communities come into being when persons of prayer are called together by the Holy Spirit. Faith communities exist solely to live Jesus' message, i.e. to be Jesus' life in the world. That means making God's love, life, and desires for all human beings tangible.

A person of prayer is a person whose presence, words, and actions make God present to others.

"And his life was the light of humankind." (John 1:4)

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us." (1 John 1:1-12)

A person of prayer is a person who intentionally desires to hear, see, observe, and touch the Word of Life. This experience was never intended to be limited to those who were with Jesus of Nazareth during his lifetime. (1 John 1:1-2)

Developing a life of prayer

In my experience spiritual formation refers to an ever-evolving development of ***a life of prayer***. The phrase “life of prayer” is inclusive and infers that prayer is not a sector of life separated from other aspects of life such as family, work, recreation, faith community, education, and social issues. A life of prayer is an intentional openness to God whose threshold may include imageless contemplative prayer, meditation and reflection, lectio divina, centering prayer, wonder and gratitude for life, yet is framed by specific spiritual disciplines such as discernment, intercession, praise, body prayer, corporate liturgical worship, self-awareness, spiritual friendship, spiritual direction, openness to self-knowledge, study, creative expression, and a firm desire for constant growth that leads away from self-reliance and self-centeredness. Four aspects in the life of Jesus provide a foundation for a life of prayer: (1) quiet listening (2) faithful discernment (3) Commitment to the scriptures and worship of a person’s faith tradition and (4) compassionate engagement with society and the earth. A life of prayer leads a person deeper into the heart of God and at the same time deeper into the life of the world. A life of prayer opens a person to experience God’s unconditional love and that experience becomes the womb of compassionate love of others. A life of prayer includes a commitment to growing in knowledge that is the fruit of silence and presence to God. This knowledge is different from cognitive knowledge and integrates all other knowledge and experience. Contemplative knowledge is born in the heart and informs and empowers a person’s whole being with the power of love. A life of prayer makes it possible to listen with the ears of the heart and discern with the mind of Christ. A life of prayer requires desire and persistence. It is a sacred “work” that sanctifies all other work. It is collaborating with God in the creation of the world.

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