

Into the Deep Podcast - Fr Theodore Ghaly | Ep 12 | Prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/jm9IEruamHA?si=16oMIUOeUkrLj0tj>

The Disciples and Prayer

When the disciples asked the Lord, they didn't ask "how should we conduct ourselves" or "what should we do" but they asked Him "teach us to pray." And He answered

Prayer is the driving force behind everything the apostles do in the Book of Acts. Everything they do is surrounded by prayer.

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14)

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)

- The roles of the Church are the Eucharist and prayers
- The disciples ordained deacons in order to give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"

The disciples also learned from the Lord Jesus Christ

- Christ would take time to go in solitude and pray
- First thing that gets excluded when/if I'm busy is prayer. But for the disciples and the Lord, they set apart time for prayer

Why don't I feel the presence of God? Why don't I feel powerful or able to overcome temptation? Why don't I feel like God is standing with me? Prayer is that bond with God that strengthens us.

Is Prayer Supposed to be Difficult? Constantly Fighting? Or are we not understanding the point of prayer?

Prayer can be difficult at times... "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" - in my spirit I know that I should pray, but I have other things pulling me in other directions (my flesh - tired, hungry, etc.; my responsibilities and priorities).

The devil fights prayer more than anything else... if a person has a strong prayer life, they cannot be touched by the devil.

When we pray the Agpeya together in the liturgy, or if we're on a retreat and we pray the hours, or in the monastery or convent, no one complains about prayer. But when I'm on my own... I'm on my own. No one sees what I'm doing. They say "character" is what you do when no one is watching. There's no accountability.

When I remove my time from a life of prayer, and from connection with God, there is deterioration over time.

Compare it with going to the gym... you see yourself every day and don't notice the small changes. But if someone sees you after it has been a while, they notice the change.

When can you pray?

Disciples taught that there is a structure and a time for prayer - "Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour." (Acts 3:1)

Spontaneous prayer is good too

I can have discipline in prayer but more important is understanding that prayer is about being constantly connected with God.

St Paul says "Pray without ceasing"

- What does it mean? Does it mean to always be "saying words" (out loud or in your mind?)
- Prayer is connection and communication with God - be connected and communicating with God constantly
- Imagine someone who has a nagging cough - he always has that tickle in his throat, never forgets that he has it, but he's not ALWAYS coughing
- What about when you sleep?
- Someone who I talk to constantly, or daily. You're texting your friends, then a little while later they text you back. Then you text them again... you would say "we talked all day" - you didn't talk every second of the day, but you were in constant communication with God.

What is prayer?

- Prayer is not just asking God - sometimes I only pray when I need something
- The Church emphasizes a particular type of prayer which is PRAISE
 - Praising God for WHO HE IS because HE IS deserving or praise
- Petitions for others
- Supplications for myself
- Asking for forgiveness
- The Church gives us the structured prayer to teach us how to pray in order to develop our unstructured prayer
 - Agpeya sometimes feels boring
 - Agpeya is mostly the psalms which are prayers inspired by the Holy Spirit

- Maybe I'm not in the mood to give thanks today, but when I pray the Agpeya, it reminds me to be thankful today. Gives me perspective
- Maybe it escapes me in a moment that God is deserving of praise. But when I sing the Tasbeha or say "Doxa Patri" in Agpeya, I remember
- Sometimes we say "I don't know what to say to God" or "I draw a blank" or "I always say the same thing"
- Structured prayer produces in you fruitful unstructured prayer
- Stop thinking of prayer as "an obligation I have in front of God to appease Him" - this skews our understanding of prayer
 - If you miss liturgy or you miss a morning prayer, what is the feeling I ought to feel? Many people would say guilt
 - A more mature feeling is that I missed out on something... imagine we are planning to meet up for coffee and I get stuck in traffic and I'm not able to make it so I call and tell you I can't make it. My feeling is that I missed out on something I was excited for. I'm looking forward to the next time I can reschedule with him

Explanation of the Hours of the Agpeya

- The hours are based on the Jewish form of prayer
 - 1st Hour - 6am
 - 3rd Hour - 9am
 - 6th Hour - 12pm
 - 9th Hour - 3pm
 - 11th Hour - 5pm
 - 12th Hour - 6pm
- In Liturgy we pray 3rd Hour because it's that time, and the 6th Hour because we'll probably miss it in the course of the Liturgy
- When you wake up in the morning, it's good to pray the 1st Hour because the prayers are focusing on and surrounding the beginning of the day, and the rising out of bed
- Each hour has introduction, Thanksgiving Prayer, Psalm 50, then 12 Psalms (19 in the first hour), Gospel, Litanies, Absolution and Conclusion
- Prayer before Communion, Prayer before Confession, Prayer before Eating, Prayer before an Exam, etc.

What advice would you give someone who feels like his relationship with God is drifting?

- Prayer is the solution to this
- Maybe there are sins in my life I need to stop, or vices I need to remove, or people I need to distance from... but the journey of our spiritual life is to know God more and love Him more, grow closer to Him, and sin becomes to me unappealing in comparison to the beauty of Christ.
- St Paul says "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." (1 Cor 13:12)
- "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Ephesians 1:17)

- Prayer is the process by which we begin to wash away that mirror
- God is a Person
 - If I don't know someone well, the conversation in the beginning may be difficult, awkward, etc. But when I get to know someone, a little pause is okay, conversation flows, etc.
 - When I go pray for the first time, I can't expect fire to come out of my fingertips, but consider it like I am being introduced to God for the first time
 - **Persevere in prayer**
- When I have a problem in life, I pray. When something good happens, I give thanks in prayer. When I fall into temptation, I pray for forgiveness. Every aspect of my life, I offer up in prayer.
- When He answers my prayer, when He gives me peace, when He gives me comfort - these are me hearing the voice of God.
- When I begin prayer, I am taking a leap of faith - those who prayed before me, the commandment of God, the Scripture says about prayer. When I start to recognize the fruits of prayer and how helpful and beneficial prayer is, I will start to do it out of my love for God and my love for communicating with Him

The Holy Spirit and Prayer

- The Holy Spirit teaches us to pray:
 - "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14)
 - Apart from the Holy Spirit we cannot know God
 - He is the Spirit of Truth, who reveals God to us

Distractions

- Distraction in prayer is common
- Before I pray, let me sit silently or stand silently for a few minutes to allow my mind to go anywhere
 - What do I have to do tomorrow, what did I do wrong today, this person did this or that, etc.
- Don't let the distraction become a distraction in itself
 - I'm praying and then realize I didn't comprehend or listen to anything in the last five minutes. So I start to think about it and dwell on it and the distraction becomes a distraction in itself. Instead, let me ask God for forgiveness and continue.

Prayer Canon

- Personal spiritual rule that your spiritual father sets for you
- e.g. pray something structured in the morning and something structured in the evening
 - Maybe if you've never prayed before and you are starting, Abouna will tell you Our Father, Prayer of Thanksgiving and Psalm 50

- If you've been praying Agpeya since you were very young, you'll have a different canon
- Fasting has canons too
- There's the rule of the church - this is what we ought to pray/fast. And the personal rule based on their particular needs.

Anything we shouldn't pray about?

- I have a test, my car's tire pressure is low
- People who pray about things big and small are enhancing that connection that they have with God
- Sometimes we pray about things that are beyond our control
 - e.g. a Test... I can't control what questions will be on it, what I'll remember in the moment, how the grader will feel, etc.
- People who pray for everything are recognizing that everything is in God's control
- The best prayer is "Thy will be done" - I ask for something but I submit my will to God's will
 - I am praying to accept what God chooses
 - I am praying for discernment to know and understand what God chooses

Expectations about Prayer

- I expect that God hears my prayer. When I have faith that God hears my prayer, I should have solace and comfort that God, who loves me, has heard my prayer and knows my needs. Therefore, I am in His hands. And if I'm in His hands, then there is nothing for me to worry about
- "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"
- When I give the burden to God, now the burden is shared. It becomes much easier.

Advice to Close

- Speak to your spiritual father in particular
- Pray to God in the morning for Him to direct my day and direct my way and to keep me away from sin and temptation
- Pray to God in the evening and recount the day with Him, ask for forgiveness of the sins I committed, for a safe night

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