

Praying by relaxing...

PALMS DOWN / PALMS UP

'Begin by placing your palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God. Inwardly you may pray, "Lord, I give to You my anger toward John. I release my fear of my dentist appointment this morning. I surrender my anxiety over not having enough money to pay the bills this month. I release my frustration over trying to find a baby-sitter for tonight." Whatever it is that weighs on your mind or is a concern to you, just say, "palms down." Release it. You may even feel a certain sense of release in your hands. After several moments of surrender, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Perhaps you will pray silently: "Lord, I would like to receive Your divine love for John, Your peace about the dentist appointment, Your patience, Your joy." Whatever you need, say, "palms up". Having centred down, spend the remaining moments in complete silence. Do not ask for anything. Allow the Lord to commune with your spirit, to love you. If impressions or directions come, fine; if not, fine.'

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The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.'

fr tim writes

I want to tell the Lord all that I am doing for his kingdom, all the good news, and I want him to tell me how well it's going and how proud he is of his disciple. But what is the Lord's response? "Come away from yourself! Into the desert. Let's start again. You're really not getting it are you?"

In the anonymously written 14th Century mystical work, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the writer teaches that true prayer is praying not for God's gifts, or for any notion of what we may receive from God but simply a praying in surrender because we love God. There are no words needed for this, just intention. Intention to rest in God. *Come to me all who are weary and I'll give you rest*, says Jesus. In other words, "Come to me all you who are trying so hard, too hard. Just stop. *Do nothing. Just trust in me.*"

The "cloud of unknowing" allows us to find our resting place in God. According to the mystic, the way to know God is to let go all thoughts about our own and even God's particular activities and attributes, and be brave enough to surrender the mind and ego to the realm of *unknowing*. At this point, we begin to glimpse the nature and being of God. It is not through our intellect or deeds but through contemplation, motivated by love, stripped of all thought, that we might find our homeful homelessness in God's universe.



Some Exercises in Contemplative Prayer

Praying with Stillness...

BEHOLD, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS

Say the following words from Matthew's gospel out loud or just to yourself:

Behold...I am with you always...

(2 minutes silence)

Behold...I am with you all ways...

(2 minutes silence)

Behold...I am with you...

(2 minutes silence)

Behold...I am...

(2 minutes silence)

Behold...

(2 minutes silence)

Be...

(Keep silence for as long as is comfortable)

Praying with Stillness...

LET YOUR GOD LOVE YOU

Meditate on the following poem:

Be silent
be still.
Alone.
Empty before your God.
Say nothing,
ask nothing.
Be silent. Be still.
Let your God look upon you
That is all.
God knows and understands.
God loves you
with enormous love
wanting only to
look upon you with love.
Quiet,
still,
Be.

Praying with Stillness...

JUST LISTEN

Sit in the silence...Listen to all the sounds in the room, including your breathing...in, out. Now listen to all the sounds outside the room. What can you hear? Ask the Holy Spirit for a similar level of awareness of the voice or the presence of God. Listen...or simply be in the silence. Jot down any thoughts and impressions you receive on a piece of paper. Thank God for them.

Praying with imagination...

The Empty Chair

Imagine you see Jesus sitting close to you. In doing this you are putting your imagination at the service of your faith, for he is truly present. What is he wearing? What does he look like? How does he greet you? What are his eyes saying? Now speak to Jesus. Say what is on your heart. Listen to his reply. Be.

Praying with imagination...

Return to Galilee

Return in your imagination to a place or an event where you have felt especially close to God or experienced his kindness. What can you see and hear, touch and taste? What feelings resurface? Take all the time you need. It is important that you try to relive the event in as much detail as possible, not just recollect it. Take all the time that you need. Stay with the feelings this exercise evokes as long as you can. Speak to God about them. Then return to the present.