

A Prescription for Prayer – Fr. David Jenuwine – 6/9/2010

As a seminary student, I remember being a “prayer machine.” It seemed that before anyone could head to the cafeteria for a meal, there was an obligatory scheduled prayer service in the chapel. Classes on Scripture and various topics of theology kept our noses in the Bible; and while our minds may have been focused on finishing an assignment more than on the Word of the Lord, there was still room for prayer and reflection in practically every class.

Prayer is pretty easy when your life has a routine.

In our home lives, once the children are in school, we may take a few minutes for prayer or Scripture study. But now that summer is here, and children are at home, the habits of prayer that may have formed during the last few months might fall to the wayside.

A possible solution to this is to reflect on St. Paul’s exhortations in 1 Thessalonians 5, and in particular verses 16, 17, and 18.

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing.

In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

To rejoice always requires us to reach emotionally outside of ourselves. We can get caught up in our own feelings, and then expect the rest of the world to cater to us. Yet feelings are fickle and can change without much reason to them. By recognizing in all things God’s gracious gifts to us, we can be better grounded in the reality of God’s generosity in all the gifts of creation – no matter what we might be feeling.

In others words, if we stop taking ourselves so seriously, we can take God more seriously and rejoice in every moment of the day.

To pray without ceasing means to take every moment for God. I often exhort people who say they are too busy for prayer to take up the practice of filling in idle moments with short prayers such as ‘God I love you,’ or ‘Jesus, I love you.’

My own conversations are often peppered with ‘Thanks be to God,’ as I listen to people’s life stories and reflect back to them the presence of God as a confirmation of their own witness to His action in their lives.

The bottom line in this is that while we may have a limited amount of time on earth, we have the opportunity to weave the threads of prayer into every moment of our lives.

The final exhortation is to give thanks to God in all circumstances. Many people seem to expect their prayers to be answered according to their will. But if we are to truly live in the Will of God, we should recognize that even when we don’t get what we want or expect, there is often something better that God wants to give us beyond our own expectations. By giving thanks to God in the good and the bad times, we recognize that our lives are not our own, but belong to the Lord.

God calls us to share in His divine life. He sent his Son, Jesus, to draw us even deeper into that divine life. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is the reality of that divine life in our midst.

St. Paul’s exhortations give us not only the prescription for greater participation in the divine life of the Trinity, but also can be used as a measure of how far we are willing to let God into our own lives.

Structure in our prayer life is a very good thing. Yet I would like to think that the exhortations in 1 Thessalonians calls us to open every moment of our day to God, in order to receive and acknowledge the gifts of grace and love that God pours out on each and every one of us, every moment of every day.