

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Prayer for Busy People"



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Mary D. Ford

With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit." (Eph 6:18)

Prayer is the heart of our personal relationship with our God. God's continuous invitation of love to each of us, which allows us to respond in prayer, is an unfathomable gift, given to us moment by moment.

Many of us desire to grow into a deeper loving relationship with God; the question is how to integrate daily prayer into our busy, often hectic schedules. What does our Salesian tradition say about praying "at every opportunity"?

"They who wish to thrive and advance in the way of Our Lord, should, at the beginning of their actions, both interior and exterior, ask for his grace," (Spiritual Directory of St. Francis de Sales, p. 23)

An essential element in our daily prayer life is the awareness of God's presence with us. Because we can easily get caught up in the "nitty-gritty" of the day, Francis de Sales recommends that as soon as we awaken we unite ourselves with God in loving praise and gratitude, and offer to Him in advance all that this new day may bring — the opportunities for doing good, as well as the difficulties which we may encounter. Feel rushed in the morning? Some practical suggestions from our Salesian lay group that meets once a week: set your alarm a few minutes early and take advantage of your "special time" with God until the

snooze alarm arouses you once again; use your shower time to talk with God or to sing songs of praise; if you're a mental organizer, place God in your plans for the day as you are getting dressed.

"Make spiritual aspirations to God by short ardent movements of your heart...present your soul to him a thousand times during the day." Introduction to the Devout Life, Ryan, 98.

Francis de Sales urges us to reinforce this "direction of intention" throughout the day with short aspirations or prayers that lift our hearts to God. If you drive to work, reflect on the words of the psalmist for yourself and all those on the road: "The Lord will guard your coming and going both now and forever." (Ps. 121:8)

Take time, too, to notice the beauties of nature — let your heart echo spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving to God for the mountains and hills, rivers and streams of water, birds and trees and flowers — "Let all the earth cry out to the Lord with joy!" Try playing tapes in the car — of praise music or of Salesian topics available from the Oblates of Francis de Sales. As in all things, our Salesian saints would encourage us to use "liberty of spirit".

Once engaged in the work of the day at home or in a business environment, continue to lift your heart to God by the use of short prayers: "Oh, Jesus, I am yours"; "Draw me, and I will run"; "Holy Spirit, guide my work." Have a point of focus

which will refresh you periodically during the day — a picture in the corner of your desk or room or a small cross in your pocket.

For those who work at the computer, let me pass on a suggestion that I have found helpful to remind me of God's presence during my work; I set the alarm of the computer so that it flashes the name of Jesus on the screen at periodic intervals (every 45 minutes or an hour). And if you have a break during lunch, there are multiple web sites containing prayers or suggestions for reflection; two of my favorites are Sacred Space, the prayer site run by the Irish Jesuits, and Awaken to Prayer, How to Pray as a Catholic.

Finally, Francis urges us to make the time each day for quiet meditation or contemplation, simply listening to God in the depths of our hearts. Setting aside the time each day requires discipline and commitment; initially spending 10-15 minutes alone with God is a wonderful practice.

Reflecting on a particular gospel passage, saying familiar vocal prayers, or allowing yourself to listen quietly to God in an attitude of openness and surrender are all ways suggested by our Salesian saints. Perhaps St. Jane de Chantal's advice succinctly summarizes the best approach to all prayer: "*Draw near to God with the greatest simplicity you can, and be certain that the simplest prayer is the best.*" (Exhortations, Conferences, and Instructions)