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SABBATH HEARTS

As a deacon, I pay attention to the People of God when we gather on the Sabbath. I appreciate women who choose to wear a hat or veil to mass, which remembers a time when hats were worn to formal events. Some Catholics genuflect or kneel before receiving Communion, even though our US bishops say the proper reverence to show is a bow of the head. I still make the sign of the cross myself after the Penitential Act, even though I realize this isn't in the present Roman Missal. I remember watching my father do this as a boy and the gesture feels like it connects me to him through time. These are examples of what we call personal pieties: small acts of devotion that enrich our faith and express our love for God in a unique way.

Jesus knew that rules and traditions were important. But he also invites us to remember what God seeks in a true **sabbath heart: mercy before sacrifice** (*Hosea 6:6*), a love for others that outweighs religious ritual (*Isaiah 58:1-9*) and a readiness to surrender to God our **"broken and contrite hearts"** (*Psalms 51:17*). God's laws exist to move us into deeper communion with him!

—**Joe Kraemer, SJ**, is a transitional deacon of the Jesuits West Province completing his final semester of theology at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. He will be ordained to the priesthood in June 2022.

PRAYER

*Have mercy on me,
O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*Create in me a clean heart,
O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

*O Lord,
open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt-offering,
you would not be pleased.
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.*

—*From Psalm 51*

SOURCE: www.jesuitprayer.org

THE RIGHT WORDS DON'T MATTER

Contemplation is not the practice of saying prayers. It is the growing, overwhelming consciousness of God within and around us, before us and beyond us. It is God embedded in our souls and at the helms of our hearts. It is the awareness of God that is, as Paul says, "*praying without ceasing.*"

What we have come to know about God, we now begin to live in our daily lives: that Black lives matter, for instance; that women are equal to men and as much bearers of the Spirit as men will ever be; that everything we do as individuals, as countries, must reflect the will of God for all of creation. Suddenly we realize that God is everywhere, is alive in our lives, is the light on the road that beckons us on.

Every major religious tradition calls us beyond forms of religion to faith in God, to depth of soul. Then, when the soul is as broad as the sky, we are ready to break down the false boundaries between peoples. We are spiritually mature enough to center ourselves on the fulfillment of the God life within us rather than simply make the things of God our gods.

The deification of things is everywhere in religion. Through this a false orthodoxy—meaning keeping things the way they've "***always been***" becomes the goal and the will of God for creation becomes less of the essence of our spirituality and more like a distraction on the way.

Islam puts it this way: Once upon a time a Sufi made the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It was a long walk for him, and the sun was high. He had come miles without stopping. Finally, in sight of the great mosque at Mecca, sure of the goal now, the old man lay down in the road to rest.

Suddenly one of the other pilgrims shook him awake, rough and harsh in the doing of it. "*Wake up,*" he commanded. "*You blaspheme, Sufi! You lie in such a way that your feet are pointed toward the holy mosque! What kind of Sufi are you?*"

The old Sufi opened one eye, smiled, and said, "*I thank you, holy sir. Now would you be kind enough to turn my feet in some direction where they are not pointed toward God?*"

This is the difference between *prayer* and *contemplation*. *Prayer says the words. Contemplation understands that in the end the right words don't matter.* In contemplation we discover that there is a difference between orthodoxy and the consciousness of God in life.

So often, rule keepers remember to keep the rules because rule keeping is so safe. All I have to do to be holy is to check off the practice, while I forget, if I ever knew, its purpose. Contemplation, on the other hand, goes beyond the spine or structures of a religious community, beyond its customs books or rule books or historical development to its innards, to its mystical end, to the energy that created it and drives it. The contemplative life is more than prayers or rituals or sermons. It is all of those things but more. It is about the experience of God. It is the fullness of the Tradition come to life again in us.

SOURCE: *The Monastic Heart: 50 Simple Practices for a Contemplative and Fulfilling Life*
(Convergent Books) by Joan Chittister

A New
Serenity
Prayer



God, grant me the serenity
to accept the people I cannot change,
which is pretty much everyone,
since I'm clearly not you, God.
At least not the last time I checked
And while you're at it,

God, please give me the courage
to change what I need to change about myself,
which is frankly a lot, since, once again,
I'm not you, which means I'm not perfect.
It's better for me to focus on changing myself
than to worry about changing other people,
who, as you'll no doubt remember me saying,
I can't change anyway.
Finally, give me the wisdom to just shut up
whenever I think that I'm clearly smarter
than everyone else in the room,
that no one knows what they're talking about except me,
or that I alone have all the answers.
Basically, God,
grant me the wisdom
to remember that I'm
not you.

SOURCE: www.jesuitprayer.org

Poem of the Week

From **Vacillation**

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top.

While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blessed and could bless.

—*W.B. Yeats*

SOURCE: www.benetvision.org

We used to be young and beautiful.
Now we are just beautiful.



Words to heal the soul

Pat Brennan