

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Prayer... Wasting Time with the Lord

Someone has suggested that prayer means "wasting time with the Lord." Most of us have experienced the feeling... there is so much to be done... so many demands on our time and abilities. It is difficult and sometimes frustrating to force ourselves to be quiet and simply pray. It seems to us that the really influential people... the ones who make a difference in this world... are the doers. At the same time, prayerful people often seem to us to be unproductive, powerless people. They seem to be wasting time in a world that cries for action.



In her book POUSTINIA (Ave Maria Press, N.D., Indiana, 1975), Catherine de Hueck Doherty tells an incident from the life of Dorothy Day which illustrates my point. Dorothy went to Rome during the Second Vatican Council. When asked what she did while the Council was in session she replied that she had simply taken a room in a poor quarter of the city, and for ten days she fasted on bread and water and prayed for the Council. "That was all she did! Then she returned to New York the way she had come — on a freight boat! Maybe this was the reason why the Council was so successful. In the eye of God, who knows?"

The Scriptures are filled with the lesson of taking time to simply listen to the Lord. The Psalmist speaks of letting the Lord do his part:

"If the Lord does not build the house, the work of the builder is useless; if the Lord does not

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protect the city, it does no good for the sentries to stand guard. It is useless to work so hard for a living, getting up early and going to bed late. For the Lord provides for those he loves while they are asleep..." (Ps 127)

The famous story of Martha and Mary in Luke's Gospel (Lk. 10:38-42) also underscores the importance of time wasted with the Lord. Martha was so busy trying to please and impress her special guest that she had no time to spend sitting and listening to him. The incident speaks to the priority of prayer in our lives. It doesn't mean that we sit still all day... but rather that prayer is the heart of the whole day. Mary knew this. She had chosen rightly "the better part." She was willing to waste time sitting and listening to the Lord.

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Jesus, Himself, was very busy. In one scene in Mark's Gospel (Mk. 1:32-39) Jesus is busy about many things. The whole town is gathered to hear Him preach. He is casting out devils. He is responding to His impatient disciples. But in the midst of all this activity there is quiet and prayer... "Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of town to a lonely place where he prayed."

Perhaps the real secret of Jesus' ministry is in that lonely place where He is able to get in touch with His Father and with His mission. Father Henri J. M. Nouwen suggests this in his little book, OUT OF SOLITUDE (Ave Maria Press, N.D. Indiana, July 1974 p. 26).

"When you are able to create a lonely place in the middle of your actions and concerns, your successes and failures slowly can lose some of their power over you. For then your love for this world can merge with a compassionate understanding of its illusions. Then your serious engagement can merge with an unmasking smile. Then your concern for others can be motivated more by their needs than your own. In short: then you can care. Let us, therefore, live our lives to the fullest, but let us not forget to once in a while get up long before dawn to leave the house and go to a lonely place."

May the summer bring us the setting, the time and the courage to pray or simply said... to waste time with the Lord.

More Opinions

From 4 Readers 'Not Laughing'

Editor:

We too, were not laughing at the cartoon you published 7/5/78. We are thankful the Office of Family Life said so effectively why we felt unable to express (7/19/78).

We are part of a Pre-Cana team in Wayne County. Currently, our reservations are only five shy of being full, and that is why this letter is being written. Our Pre-Cana is scheduled for Sept. 9 and the majority of the couples calling for reservations are being married in September and October. In fact, some are actually planning to be married the week after the Pre-Cana! We find that upsetting to say the least.

As a team, we prepare to present Pre-Cana for months in advance. It seems a bit sad that the couples coming to us are waiting until the last possible minute to make their Pre-Cana. Perhaps this has something to do with why we found the marriage cartoon discouraging, and in poor taste for a Catholic newspaper.

We would like to ask what are pastors thinking

of when they allow couples to make their Pre-Cana as little as one week prior to their wedding?

Doesn't anyone other than the Office of Family Life and those involved in Pre-Cana ministry realize that we take our ministry seriously? For many of us, Pre-Cana is our primary apostolate and we spend many hours doing the very best we can for the good of those engaged couples coming to us. Hasn't anyone told our priests that Pre-Cana should be made at least before wedding invitations are ordered? We need the support of our priests if the Pre-Cana program is to accomplish what it is meant to accomplish.

If the engaged couples make Pre-Cana simply because it's the only way they can get the use of the church building for their wedding, and church weddings make parents happy and provide a nice setting for pictures, then perhaps these couples should find another building for their wedding.

Pre-Cana is a good program if taken advantage of far enough ahead of the wedding date. We think it's time the Church of Rochester, and we don't mean just Monroe County, started giving Pre-Cana the kind of priority it deserves.

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The Voice of Silence

During the general audience held on July 12, Pope Paul delivered the following address.

In this short talk, which characterizes our audience, we are thinking of the double state of mind which lays hold of the awareness of the man on a holiday. There is a state of mind of general relaxation, which results spontaneously from release from one's usual duties, both scholastic and professional. This seems in conformity with the very nature of holidays, and of the recovery, though only for a short time, of one's own freedom. Are not holidays precisely a period of enjoyment of one's own time and the loosening of the bonds which normally confine our action? Are not holidays a period of spontaneous life guided by the pleasure of living and resting?



For others, on the contrary, and often in the same individuals who propose to grant their holidays a spontaneous life style, inspired by their own tastes and their own fancies, another state of mind occupies interior consciousness. It is the desire to take advantage of the holiday period to give their own freedom a useful employment, sometimes a more intense one than the attitude that binds them to their ordinary work; almost a haste to take advantage of the relative freedom granted to do something they like, even if it is very exacting, such as reading, a treatment, a journey or a reflection.

Well, we wish to everyone holidays that are really holidays, for rest, for recreation, for a revival of strength and serenity. But we will give attention to this second state of mind — the one that is anxious to profit from the relative freedom which the time freed from one's usual duties grants — for a new "awareness" with regard to one's own life and for a possible reorganizations of one's thoughts and of one's duties.

This second state of mind now interests this reflection of ours, to remind us how little we are masters of ourselves, and that the more our ordinary occupations keep us busy, the more we are obliged to live outside ourselves, dominated by the pressure of duties which we have introduced within us and which oblige us to live in a way that is not personal, not conscious, not free and sometimes not good.

Holidays should serve the purpose not only of physical rest but also of spiritual work. And the more they lead us to grant ourselves recreation, an absence, an escape from ourselves, the more they should have moments of interiority, personal reflection, active consciousness, moments of the voice of silence, listening to the whole development of our life. We think we are not going against the trend of the psychology of intelligent persons who set themselves, especially if they are young, the problem of self-direction of their way of life. We invite them, in fact, to grant themselves a few days, a few hours at least of meditation, some moments of revision and planning of their own existence. This need of concentration is often awakened precisely in the best moments of the contact of the spirit with the revelation that the picture of nature makes of itself. It obliges the spectator to accept the impulse to go beyond the view of the picture itself, and to go back by the ways of thought, which has become contemplative and almost ecstatic, to perception of the mystery reflected in things and which seems to precipitate in them.

This act of concentration, for those who are fortunate to have faith, easily leads to interior prayer, leads to listening to a voice, not completely unknown to each of us Christians, but nearly always repressed and muffled: not an imperious voice, but a voice calling, "Come, follow me." That is: the utterance of a demand, which may have different gradations and even more ways of being followed, but in any case a voice that seems to mark out in the time of our life a straight and courageous way — that of a true Christian life.