

**REFLECTION**

**Is Laity Too Busy to Devote Time to Prayer Beyond the Liturgy?**

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Is laity too busy to devote time to prayer beyond the liturgy? Yes, and it is probably because they don't know any better. To be even more extreme, I am not sure many Catholics know how to pray. If you asked most Catholics if they considered the liturgy a prayer, they would say no. I strongly believe they would like to learn how, but don't know who or how to ask. It may also be that pride enters the equation, fearful that they might embarrass themselves before a priest. While I have no evidence these statements to be true and I have not taken any survey, I am basing these opinions on the simple fact that I have been on both sides of this question. Because of this lack of prayer, Spirituality books have been the fastest growing segment in the book publishing industry. Evangelical Christians don't have to look far to recruit new members. It is now estimated that only thirty percent of Catholics attend mass. It is a perfect breeding ground. People are looking for something. If only more Catholics were to realize the beauty of the mass and her religion. It is there. But you must go looking for it. Maybe that is why Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone commented on March 20, 2007 that our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI focused the first two years of his Pontificate to "explain faith in a way that appeals to human intelligence in a world of widespread secularism." Cardinal Bertone also stated that Pope Benedict is strengthening "Christian values in a world disoriented by indifference and relativism, which holds that is no undeniable truth and that no one can claim the right answer."

Almost a year ago, I experienced a conversion. It was "*The Story of a Love*," a book written by my good friend Bishop Patrick Ahern. St Therese's book made me realize that what I was looking is all right here. I went to confession after thirty five years. I now tithe at least 10% of my time to God each day. I attend daily mass and pray

for at least thirty minutes. Often, I sit before Jesus in adoration. Also, as you know, I am currently pursuing a Masters Degree in Theology. I can't get enough of it. Sadly, I am not sure it can be transferred that easy. My wife benefits and encourages me. But it is difficult for her to pray.

A year ago, I knew nothing about prayer. Yes, I had been a catholic for almost 52 years. I didn't even know the correct words to "Hail Mary." Yes, I have learned so much and my studies have taught me so much more.

I was so broken and lost, that in 2004 suicide looked like a viable option. I experienced dramatic highs or lows and there was never anything in-between. I was the seed on the rock. These swings would take about eighteen months to complete. I realized I needed to fix what the root cause broke. It was sin. It needed to be removed. I also learned how to forgive and be forgiven. "Obey God and leave all the consequences to Him," is one of Baptist tele-evangelist, Dr Charles Stanley's favorite sayings. That statement was profound for me. I couldn't pick and choose. It had to be all or none. I chose all. Most think it is a Chinese menu. A little here . . .

I also took to heart and believed fervently the following prayer. I am not sure where I found it, but it accompanies me in my pocket and it is recited daily.

*"Take Time for Prayer"*

"No matter how busy you are, take time out for prayer, even if only for a loving glance. It is the wisest investment of your time you can make. The few seconds it requires to raise your mind to Me are richly repaid by deeper peace and keener mental efficiency . . .

Again I say to you: Pray! Pray! Pray!

Do not tell me that you are too busy to lift your thoughts to Me.

Give Me of your time, and I will do half or more of your work.

Give Me of your thoughts, and I will enlighten your mind.

Give Me of your will, and I will return to you My peace.

Give Me of your love, and I will fill your days with joy.

Give Me of your prayers, and I will open to you the inexhaustible treasures of Heaven."

Whenever I am busy, I pray more. My entire life is now clutter-free. I have more time than I know what to do with. It is now filled with God. My mind is clear. On average, I think about God once every five minutes. I turn every day over to Him and have found great peace. Work has become very focused and productive. I am disciplined and organized. My life has been balanced for the first time - ever.

It is interesting to note that I keep some prayers stored on my computer. I was putting some of them up on my web site yesterday. One was the "*Serenity Prayer*." I took it from a prayer card that had a scripture verse attached to it. I find it amusing this now happens more times than I can count.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your intelligence rely not; In all your ways be mindful of Him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)(NAB)

How appropriate for this essay. I now pray daily for the conversion of others, much like I had.