

Stay Connected 24/7

Remaining in Perpetual Communion with Jesus Through Prayer

Critics allege that most Christians suffer from a syndrome known as 'dissociative identity disorder'. In normal parlance this condition is known as 'multiple personality disorder', or split personality. Many films have been made on the subject — Psycho, by Alfred Hitchcock, is considered the classic of the genre. The critics claim that we are 'Christlike' on Sundays, while in Church, and become 'of the world' the moment we walk out of the Church door. 'What happens from Monday to Saturday has no relationship to what took place on Sunday,' they say, cementing their argument. I dare not stop to ask whether you agree with these cynics or not, but I do want to emphasise that we need not be what our detractors assert us to be. In today's deliberations, we will briefly examine some of the ways in which we can change our lives, and disprove our critics.

Many present here will recall the frustration we experienced, years ago, trying to make an STD call, or how deplorable matters could be when making an internet connection over a dial-up system. I remember that, after many failed attempts, once you finally managed to establish a connection, the line would drop frequently, forcing us to go painfully through the motions again and again. Those days, thankfully, are behind us; we are now very well connected socially, through the several tools technology has placed in our hands.

Taking a cue from these technological advances, I want to reflect this morning on a few questions. Are we as well connected with Jesus as we are with one another socially? How often do we connect with Him? Can we possibly 'stay connected' to Him at all times?

I want to argue a case for remaining connected with Jesus twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, using two of the several ways available to believers: through the power of perpetual prayer, and by living as the people of Jesus, or with the mind of Jesus. Perpetual prayer is defined as 'the Christian practice of continuous prayer, carried out by a group.' I prefer to define it as 'spontaneous, short-burst prayers a believer might make from anywhere, at any time.' When we try to connect with Jesus through our prayers, we will never hear Him say to us, 'Your call is important to Me, but I am busy with other believers; stay online, or call Me again later.' Jesus has infinite channels open for all of us to connect with Him simultaneously, and He can attend to every single one of us at the same time.

Perpetual prayer, by implication, places us in an attitude of prayer at all times. Just as we should not divide our lives into secular and spiritual segments, wrongly justifying different standards of living in each, so we should not restrict the place or the time of our prayers.

Having said that, here is a necessary restraint: Jesus said, "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men" (Matthew 6:5). Jesus is simply cautioning us that we should not pretend to pray merely to impress others, but that our prayer should be honest and heartfelt. If we recall, Jesus prayed at every juncture of His ministry: while in the synagogue, on a hilltop, sitting in a boat, while performing healings, while raising someone from the dead, and even while nailed to the Cross. Taking Jesus as our example, we too should broaden the scope of our prayer beyond any one room, to the world at large.

Praying is, essentially, time spent being conscious of the presence of God, and desiring to know and love Him more, all the time. Prayer is not a shopping list of demands placed before Jesus; nor is it something set aside for a particular time or place. It is something we can do as we work, run, eat, converse, wait for appointments, and yes, even as we sleep. We shall then find that we can turn to Jesus easily, not only when we most need Him, in our most difficult and critical moments, but even in those moments when we see no particular reason to say a prayer.

Think of it: do we not, at times, call a friend or relative when we have nothing else to do, simply to say hello? Next time you have nothing else to do, say hello to Jesus. In other words, stay connected to Him at all times.

I am aware that there are many ways to define prayer, but I like to use one that I find best suited to the theme before us:

'Prayer is the breathing of the spirit. As the lungs expand to draw in the life-giving elements of air by breathing, so do the depths of our soul open and expand during prayer, and our spirit mounts up to Jesus to be united with Him; and as the oxygen received by the blood is conveyed to the entire body to vitalise it, so the gift received from Jesus fills everything that is in us, and vitalises our entire inner being.'

We never stop breathing so long as we are alive; by the same token, I see no reason why we should not remain in communion with Jesus at all times. The means of remaining connected to Jesus, therefore, is prayer in a perpetual mode. The question that remains is how we pray at all times when we are outside the confines of our local Church or our own homes.

In a society where we are in the minority, we see all around us people of other faiths, seemingly at prayer or performing worship; workplaces are decorated with pictures of their deities. At times, their worship is painful, even dangerous, to the devotees. On a lighter note, just picture our own pastors running about the Church in outlandish attire, of the sort one might find comic in a film.

Christians ought to pray without such outward show or performance. To repeat the definition discussed earlier: praying is essentially time spent being conscious of the presence of God. In other words, we should learn to experience the presence of Jesus, around us and within us, at all times.

And we need not look for Jesus far away. The relationship of a believer with Jesus is both intrinsic and mysterious. Jesus fills all things, and we are also found within Him; He is with us, and also within us (see Matthew 28:20; Colossians 1:27). It works the other way, too: we are 'in Him', and seated 'with Him'. Paul wrote, in Ephesians 2:6, "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Somehow, we are seated with Jesus. By knowing Him, He becomes, as it were, a window onto the things of heaven; and so, as we walk with Jesus in this world, we experience foretastes of what heaven will be like. When we come to Him in anxiety, and ask Him to help us through prayer and adoration, we experience the peace which passes all understanding.

When we know Him in this way, we can offer our prayers to Him throughout the day and night, as we go about our business — sometimes a prayer for help, sometimes a word of thanks, sometimes a prayer for someone else, sometimes an offering of praise, and sometimes an act of penitence. These are usually very simple and short prayers, but they help us to know that we can do nothing on our own, that our Lord is the provider of everything and the protector of everyone. Such silent, short prayers allow us to listen to Jesus, to be conscious of Him, and, in a sense, simply to soak in His presence.

Sadly, we function quite differently in our daily lives, and that is where the charge of a split personality arises. When things go wrong, we panic, and frantically look for our own solutions, when all we need do is say, 'Jesus, I need You.' When we see others in trouble or suffering, we say, 'Poor fellow, I pity him; he brought it upon himself,' or words to that effect, when we could instead say, 'Jesus, he needs You, though he may not know You,' or 'Jesus, make me Your instrument for comforting him.' When we see others succeed, we may feel envious, and say, 'He does not deserve it'; instead, we could say, 'Jesus, let me be glad for him.' When we ourselves succeed, we most often reserve our thanksgiving for Sunday, if we find our way to Church at all. All we need do is say, 'Lord Jesus, this is Your blessing; show me a way to thank You.'

The possibilities are endless. These are not a standard set of prayers we already know; they are prayers that come from within us, spontaneously. There are times when we find it impossible to put a prayer into words. At such a time, simply say the name above all names: 'Jesus.' He knows our circumstances well enough, and needs no explanation from us; He will surely bless us just the same.

Prayer is, at its heart, talking with God. It is simply expressing our hearts, and spending time with Him. It is not a one-way activity: we speak, and Jesus listens to our hearts; Jesus speaks, and we listen. Prayer can be exciting, powerful, and fulfilling.

To live in that state requires a believer to know Jesus intimately, through the study of the Scriptures. It requires the believer to make every effort to live by His teachings and standards, and to remain conscious of Him at all times. Not an easy thing at all.

Nor is it easy to be a Christian outside the confines of the Christian community, especially in a country like ours, where we form only a small minority of the population. Secular ideology is so pervasive around us that we often find it difficult to fit into the culture of our workplaces or marketplaces. Many of us simply 'flow with the tide', choosing to take part in the promotion of secular thought and values, rather than risk being disliked or ridiculed for defending the truth of Christ and the moral character of a distinctively Christian vision and set of values.

Paul, in his epistles, expounds at length the principles governing the Christian's life at the workplace. He asserts that, whatever position we hold — whether as employer or employee — we all serve one Master, Jesus Christ. Whatever the relationship at the workplace, there is a spiritual equality: all of us are equal in the sight of God, and,

in the end, all will give account to Him on the same footing. Just imagine the sanctifying influence this understanding could bring into our workplaces — the impact it might have upon our employees, or upon our employer, once we truly see Jesus as our final Judge, and act accordingly. Some may wish to call this a kind of socialism; but the 'socialism' of Christianity is not the abolishing of all distinctions, but the levelling of all people under Christ.

We also need to understand, from Paul's writings, that as far as Christian principles and values are concerned, no distinction exists between the secular and the spiritual world of the believer. We cannot say, 'This is my business, or my working world, and this is my Christian world.' Paul reminds us that our vocation, whatever it may be, is to be carried out as unto Christ. Living according to Christian principles at home, at work, and elsewhere is not a calling reserved only for those in the full-time service of the Church. According to Paul, we are all in the full-time service of the Lord, for all of us are to work as unto Christ. Everything we do should be done for Jesus Christ, and to His glory. When we do this, even the lowest task becomes a song of prayer and praise to Jesus.

To sum up: praying perpetually should be an extension of the established practice of corporate worship in our Churches and elsewhere. Corporate prayer and worship remain essential for Christians as a community, but perpetual prayer offers so much more. It is also a condition of the heart — a willingness to exalt Jesus, and to yield to His will. All of us long to connect with someone who can identify with our circumstances, and share in our day-to-day lives; prayer is precisely that: a personal experience, and an intimate connection with our Lord Jesus Christ.

We should take Jesus with us wherever we go. We often say a word of prayer before leaving home, and then simply leave Him behind there. If He is not around us, and if we do not learn to experience His presence at all times, then the prayers we say will remain mere words of the mouth, rather than something emanating from within us; and when we run into trouble, we may then find it difficult to connect with Him, even if we wish to petition Him in prayer. So the next step is to take Jesus with us wherever we go, including to our workplaces. Make Him your companion, and keep talking with Him all the time.

May Jesus bless you. Amen.