

Prayer: Here & Now

“Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.” (Rom 13.11)

This Lenten season, our theme together is “Right here, right now.” “Here” and “now” are powerful words because they call attention to the place where we actually encounter God—and each other! We oftentimes dwell on the past, and we likewise daydream (or worse, fret) about things yet to come. But reality sits right in front of us. So, to truly experience life, we have to focus on the immediate—the here and now. To do that, we have to practice *being* present, practice *experiencing* God’s presence. And to do *that*, we need to deeply understand *prayer*.

We often think of prayer as asking God for the things we need or want, for ourselves or for others. Yet this is a very thin slice of what the prayer life is about. “Prayer” is more than a conversation with the divine; it’s an attitude or an approach to *life*. One religious thinker defines prayer as “a grace-filled attentiveness to God that initiates and sustains a change of consciousness, leading to deepening love of God and neighbor.” In this way of thinking about prayer, our very lives can be an offering; we can “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5.17). The main ingredient for this approach is to be attentive to God no matter what we’re doing. As we pay attention to God in all things—in nature, our work, each other, or even doing laundry—we begin to see the world in a new way; our very consciousness is heightened and changed. In our text Paul likens this attentiveness to being “awakened from sleep,” an arising that equates to that same new awareness; a new consciousness; a new attentiveness to God in the world. And he tells us that the moment for this awakening is “now.”

In a book appropriately titled *Here and Now*, the pragmatic mystic Henri Nouwen aptly frames the idea:

Prayer is the discipline of the moment. When we pray, we enter into the presence of God whose name is God-with-us [Emmanuel]. To pray is to listen attentively to the One who addresses us here and now. When we dare to trust that we are never alone but that God is always with us, always cares for us, and always speaks to us, then we can gradually detach ourselves from the voices that make us guilty or anxious and thus allow ourselves to live in the present moment...If we could just be, for a few minutes each day, fully where we are, we would indeed discover that we are not alone and that the One who is with us wants only one thing: to give us love.

This Lenten season let’s learn to deepen our connection to the here and now through prayer—by being genuinely attentive to God in everything we do. And we can start this “prayer” practice by simply being present to *each other*. In short order, you’ll realize that you’ve awakened to the very presence of God!

Grace and peace to each of you this week—and always.