



MEETING PLANS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

PRAYING THE WORD

**Extra
Optional Meetings
after meeting 2
and before meeting 3**



Introduction

PRAYING THE WORD

Introduction

After the second meeting plan (Hopes and Dreams), meetings 3, 4 and 5 give the opportunity to consider the three hallmarks of the Christian Life Community, namely Community in meeting 3, Spirituality in meeting 4 and Mission in meeting 5.

In each of these (and all the subsequent meeting plans) there is **material for prayer** to use in your own time on the days between the meetings. Usually there will be a **short article** for prayerful consideration, to use first, because it points the way. Also there will be some **passages of scripture** to use, one at a time.

Some people may find using this sort of material for prayer unfamiliar and may ask, “*How do I pray with a scripture passage? How can I use an article for prayer?*” These extra meeting plans are designed to help those who feel like that.

Therefore, depending on the experience of the people forming your new CLC group, you may wish to use these extra meeting plans, before you go on to Meetings 3, 4, 5 etc, since there are Scripture passages and articles provided in each of them as material for prayer.

People who have been on a **Retreat**, or have had an experience of a **Week of Guided Prayer** in their parish, or something similar, may already be familiar with the content of these extra meetings, but they may find them very good to do anyway.

Even if those in your group are very used to praying with scripture and they feel they don't **need** these extra meeting plans, it is beneficial to at least spend some time with **Extra Meeting 3 – “Praying an Article”**, if only to remind themselves of the advisability of praying each of the articles in the subsequent meeting plans. Also the material given for prayer in these three meeting plans are well worth the time that will be spent on them.

- **Extra meeting 1 – “Sacred Reading”**, describes a way of praying with a psalm or a prophecy, the method sometimes called the “The Benedictine Method” or, in Latin, “*Lectio Divina*”. Inset into the meeting plan are some useful scripture passages to ‘practice’ on, including a prophecy from Isaiah and two Psalms.
- **Extra meeting 2 – “Imaginative Contemplation”**, describes a way of entering into a Gospel scene which is sometimes called “Ignatian Contemplation” since it is one of the methods of prayer recommended in “The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius”. In this leaflet you are recommended to pray some Gospel passages and to try to meet Jesus in them.
- Finally, in “**Extra meeting 3 – “Praying an Article”**”, is a method of praying with a piece of text or one of the Epistles. Inset in this are some short passages of spiritual reading by well-known authors for you to pray with. One of the CLC General Principles has also been included.

Before you start to use these meeting plans, remind yourself that each one can be used for **more than one meeting**. **Please don't rush them**. Often it is in the second (or even third) fortnight that most profit comes from praying a meeting plan.



Finally we wish you well with **all** the meeting plans. Enjoy them!!

This set of optional extra meeting plans has been produced by the Literature Review Group from material provided by Tony Horan, S.J., (2005.)

AT THE MEETING

OPENING PRAYER

We begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting ourselves in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in our mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God. *Some communities use the CLC opening prayer, or some other formal prayer, to conclude this brief time of stillness. Others use a minute or two of suitable music.*

GRACE: We ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to listen to God.

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 43: 1-7 (Ask someone to read this or one of the other passages aloud)

SILENCE: A time (10 minutes, perhaps) spent in silent prayer remembering my life and prayer since the last meeting. How have I found the prayer this last fortnight? What events in my life and prayer do I wish to share with my community?

SHARING AND LISTENING

- Remember that this is a listening, not a discussion, group.
- Include a second round of sharing if there is time. At this time we share what we experienced as we listened to others sharing.
- It's good to conclude this time of reflection with a short time of silence, praying for each other, and with a formal prayer, such as the *Glory Be* or the *Lord's Prayer*.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER, if wanted and there is time.

PRACTICALITIES

This is an opportunity for reports (eg from members who have attended a CLC event), for questions, for discussion about any concerns, for news about any work in which members might be involved, or for any business.

REVIEW OF THE MEETING

What was good for me in this meeting?
What was not so good? What would I have liked to be different?
What do I want to take away with me?

CLOSING PRAYER (Many communities use the CLC closing prayer.)



MEETING PLANS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Extra meeting 1
after the second meeting

PRAYING THE WORD

Part 1: Sacred Reading



PERSONAL PRAYER BEFORE THE MEETING

The suggested stages of prayer ...

Find a comfortable position for prayer, relaxed, not tense.

Take time to still your body and mind so that you can begin, to centre your whole person. *Try using the sounds around you, so that instead of being a distraction, they become part of your prayer. Try to listen to them, not as this sound or that, but as an orchestra of sounds. Begin by focussing on those outside, like the car noises, trying to listen to them just as sounds amongst other unnamed sounds. Then add on the inside sounds, such as those in the room, and then perhaps those within yourself. Be content just to concentrate on this medley around you. If you can't hear any sounds, try to concentrate on the silence. You may ask: where is God in this exercise? Well, God provides and sustains it all. You are inviting God into the resulting quiet of mind and heart.*

These preliminaries are to help you to come to an awareness and conviction of faith that you are about to listen to the living word of God, intimately present to you. You are not just reading some words; you are becoming more aware of God speaking to you in his Scriptures.

Preparatory Prayer. Begin in the usual way with the **Preparatory Prayer:**

O Lord, guide all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer, all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; may everything be for your greater service and glory and to my growth in the Spirit. Amen. (Also see page 4 in the Welcome leaflet)

Asking for what I desire. I ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to listen to God.

Material for Prayer. Use the following suggestions, on separate occasions, staying with each one until you are ready to move on. Don't worry if you don't manage to get through all four before the next meeting.

Isaiah 43: 1-7 1 John 4: 7-11 Psalms 23 Psalms 139: 3-13 (adapted)

Talking with the Lord. Ensure that at the end of your prayer, you spend some time talking directly with the Lord. You may like to end the Prayer with a *Glory Be* or the *Lord's Prayer*.

Review of Prayer. Afterwards, look back over your prayer and make a brief note or two.

Way of praying the Scripture Passage you choose:

- ⊕ **Read the passage slowly** and attentively line by line several times, not trying to think about it. Take your time, even if it is only five or ten minutes.
- ⊕ **Give the Lord all your attention**, no rush. It is better to hear one word deeply, in a transforming way, than to collect a lot of words and information that does not touch the heart and which will probably never bear the fruit of faith.
- ⊕ A word, phrase or image may attract your attention, then **stay with it as long as you feel drawn to do so. Ponder and relish it**, perhaps repeating it over and over to yourself, or just simply rest with it.
- ⊕ Believe that these words and images are **God communicating with you now**.

The suggestion is that everyone tries this method of praying between meetings. When you come to the next meeting, those who wish are invited to share with each other about their experience in praying one or more of the passages. How did you find this method? Was it helpful to you? Can you say something about the fruit of your meditation? What thoughts did you have? How did you feel?

SUMMARY

Reading and listening to the Word of God. (*Lectio**)

Reading the passage slowly, letting your heart linger over any word, phrase or image that especially speaks to you.

Meditation. Reflecting on the word. (*Meditatio*)

Repeating the word or phrase you have chosen. Reflecting on its meaning for you. Allowing the word to sink into your heart.

Prayer. The Word touches the heart. (*Oratio*)

A spontaneous movement of the heart, when responsive to the leading of the Spirit. This might be talking to the Lord or just being in silence before God.

Entering the Silence "Too deep for words." (*Contemplatio*)

The goal of all prayer. God's pure gift

[*This way of praying goes back to the early and medieval church and is known as '*Lectio Divina*', i.e. Divine or Sacred Reading – hence the stages referred to here as '*Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*']

Extra Meeting 1

THE TEXT FOR THE SUGGESTED READINGS

Isaiah Ch 43: 1-7:

Israel, the Lord who created you says:

Do not be afraid - I will save you.

I have called you by your name, you are mine.

When you pass through deep waters, I am with you,

Your troubles will not overwhelm you.

When you pass through fire, you will not be burnt,

the hard trials that come will not hurt you.

For I am the Lord your God.

You are precious to me and I love you

and I give you honour.

Do not be afraid - I am with you.

John's First Epistle Ch 4: 7-11

My dear people, let us love one another since love comes from God

and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.

Anyone who fails to love can never have known God,

because God is love.

God's love for us was revealed

when God sent into the world his only Son

so that we could have life through him;

this is the love I mean: not our love for God,

but God's love for us when he sent his Son

to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.

My dear people,

since God loved us so much,

we too should love one another.



Psalm 23

The Lord is my Shepherd

I have everything I need

He lets me rest in fields of green grass

And leads me to quiet pools of fresh water.

He gives me new strength

He guides me in the right paths, as he has promised.

Even though I go through the deepest darkness,

I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me.

Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.

You prepare a banquet for me,

Where all my enemies can see me,

you welcome me as an honoured guest and fill my cup to the brim.

I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life,

And your house will be my home as long as I live.

Prayer To The Father (An adaptation of Psalm 139)

Father, you know me better than I could ever know myself.

You know in all truth what I have been, what I am, and what I will become.

You know me when I am loving and when I am selfish.

You know when I succeed and when I fail. You know everything about me.

And yet, Father, you love me more than I will ever know.

You don't hold it against me that I fail, or am discouraged.

You try also to show me that I should not hold it against myself,

Because by doing so I will fail to love more.

You are forgiving and loving. It is beyond my understanding.

I read your word and am inspired,

But then immediately feel its poverty in my own life.

But Father, if I do try to escape you, really where can I go?

Deep down I never want to escape you, but at times I try.

Help me to realise that at these times you will support me,

You will send the light needed;

You will send your consolation through another;

You will send your strength and courage.

God, my Father, know my thoughts. Guide me to you.

You know what I desire even though I do not always move towards my goal.

Source unknown

AT THE MEETING

OPENING PRAYER

We begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting ourselves in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in our mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God. *Some communities use the CLC opening prayer, or some other formal prayer, to conclude this brief time of stillness. Others use a minute or two of suitable music.*

GRACE: We ask to meet Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19: 1-10 (Ask someone to read this or another passages aloud)

SILENCE

Ten minutes silent prayer remembering my life and prayer since the last meeting. How have I found the prayer this last fortnight? What events in my life and prayer do I wish to share with my community?

SHARING AND LISTENING

- Remember that this is a listening, not a discussion, group.
- Include a second round of sharing if there is time. At this time we share what we experienced as we listened to others sharing.
- It's good to conclude this time of reflection with a short time of silence, praying for each other, and with a formal prayer, such as the *Glory Be* or the Lord's prayer.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER, if wanted and there is time.

PRACTICALITIES

This is an opportunity for reports (eg from members who have attended a CLC event), for questions, for discussion about any concerns, for news about any work in which members might be involved, or for any business.

REVIEW OF THE MEETING

What was good for me in this meeting?

What was not so good? What would I have liked to be different?

What do I want to take away with me?

CLOSING PRAYER (Many communities use the CLC closing prayer.)



MEETING PLANS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Extra meeting 2 after the second meeting

PRAYING THE WORD

Part 2: Imaginative Contemplation



PERSONAL PRAYER BEFORE THE MEETING

The suggested stages of prayer ...

Find a comfortable position for prayer, relaxed, not tense.

Take time to still your body and mind so that you can begin to centre your whole person. *This time try using **the sensations on the surface of your body**. First concentrate on your feet. Are you aware of anything touching your feet? Can you feel the ground? Then gradually move up your leg noticing what there is to notice. Where do your clothes touch your legs? When do you become aware of the chair if you are sitting down? What do you notice as you concentrate on each part of your trunk. When you get to your shoulders, move down the left arm, always noticing. Are your hands, fingers touching? Continue up your right arm. Notice the back of your neck. Does that feel tense? If so stay with the tenseness for a little while. Then move over the top of your head to your face. Forehead, eyes, cheeks, mouth, what do you notice? While you concentrate like this your mind becomes quieter. As you practise this you will notice far more. Again you are inviting God into the resulting quiet of mind and heart.*

PREPARATORY PRAYER Begin in the usual way with the Preparatory Prayer: *O Lord, guide all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer, all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; may everything be for your greater service and glory and to my growth in the Spirit. Amen.* (See the Welcome Leaflet Page 4).

ASKING FOR WHAT I DESIRE I ask to meet Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit.

MATERIAL FOR PRAYER Use the following suggestions, one at a time, staying with each one until you are ready to move on. Don't worry if you don't manage to get through all three:

Luke 19: 1 - 10

John 8: 1 - 11

John 2: 1 - 12

TALKING WITH THE LORD

Ensure that at the end of your prayer, you spend some time talking directly with the Lord. You may like to end the prayer with a *Glory Be* or the Lord's prayer.

REVIEW OF PRAYER: Afterwards, look back over your prayer and make one or two notes.

Using our imagination in prayer

* **Our imaginations** enable us to meet Jesus just as his friends and relations did two thousand years ago. Time and space are not barriers to the risen Lord.



* We all have imaginations, though they differ. How do you remember past events? Remember something now. What is vivid? Notice how you can be present to it all, though not all of it may be clear. Imagination in prayer is just like that, too.

* God can be very active in us through images and symbols produced in our imagination. God uses them to heal, enlighten, forgive, energise, or direct us.

* It is good to identify with the people who met Jesus, to meet him as they did.

* We can often profit by 'letting the imagination go'. But we can control it when we need to. We can exercise a sort of discernment about what is happening.

When praying this way, it is good to hear what is said, and also to hear *how* it is said, and to 'sense' the accompanying facial expression (often we can't see it, but we know what it is). We try to identify with how the gospel characters are feeling. Understanding their fears, hopes, desires, and worries makes the

event real to us. We don't just think about the Gospel story; we experience it, at least to some degree.

* In all prayer, our main work is in preparation, and in moving in and out of prayer; the prayer itself can be left to God. One way of moving into imaginative contemplation is with these guiding points:

1 The first is **CONTEXT**. Where did this incident take place? What sort of scenery was it taking place in and how much attention do you need to pay to it? (Knowing that sometimes the Jews of Jesus' day ate while lying on couches, with their heads to the table, helps to understand Luke 7: 31-50.) What sorts of people are in the story? (In the account of the Samaritan woman in John 4, it helps to know a little about how Jews and Samaritans regarded each other; elsewhere that tax-collectors, also known as publicans, were regarded as traitors to both religion and country.)

2 **PEOPLE**. Who are they? Where are they in relation to each other? Why are they there? What are they feeling?

3 **IDENTIFY** with someone in the scene. Enter this event by imagining yourself as one of the participants, so that what happens, happens to you; what is said, is said to you.

The suggestion is that you try this method of prayer regularly between the meetings and then be ready to share on your experience. Was it good?

Other readings suggested for imaginative contemplation

Again, the versions used here are from Nicholas King's new translation of *The New Testament* (Kevin Mayhew2004). You may prefer to use your own version.

Extra Meeting 2

An example of an Imaginative Contemplation



And he entered and passed through Jericho. And look! A man called Zacchaeus; and he was a head tax collector; and he was affluent. And he was trying to see Jesus ('which one is he?'); and he couldn't, because of the crowd, because he was small in stature. And he ran on ahead, and went up a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass by it. And when he got to the spot, Jesus looked up and said to him 'Zacchaeus! Quick – down you come: because today I must stay in your house.' And he came down in a hurry, and joyfully gave him hospitality. And they all saw it, and complained, 'He's gone in to stay with a man who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there, and said to the Lord, 'Look, Lord; I'm giving half of my possessions to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I'm giving it back fourfold!' Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man is also a child of Abraham; you see, the Son of Man came to look for the lost, and to save them.'

Taken with permission from Nicholas King's new translation of The New Testament published by Kevin Mayhew2004.

Read Luke 19: 1 – 10

Consider the **CONTEXT**: Jesus has just entered the walled town of Jericho and is surrounded by a crowd, eager to see and hear Him..

Read Luke 19: 1 - 10 a second time.

Now put the **PEOPLE** in the scene: Zacchaeus is a leader of the hated tax-collectors and too short to see Jesus because of the crowd, which he dare not push into. "He is anxious to see what kind of man Jesus is." Perhaps he has heard that one of Jesus' closest disciples was a tax-collector. What do you suppose he is feeling?

Read Luke 19: 1 - 10 a third time.

Now put yourself in the scene. Whom do you **IDENTIFY** with? Zacchaeus, one of the crowd, Zacchaeus' wife? It is good to be someone in the scene who will enable you to observe and listen to Jesus, to get to know him and respond to him. You don't want to be just a spectator. The ideal is for the incident to happen to you. You can be one person in one prayer time period and someone else next time; or even switch roles in the middle.

Are you ready to let the scene unroll?

When you have entered into the scene and identified with the people, it is important to close your prayer by spending time with Jesus, opening your heart to him, especially about anything that has happened to you through being with him in this gospel event.

Tony Horan sj

John 8: 1 – 11

And early in the morning he came again to the Temple, and the whole people came to him. And sitting down, he began to teach them. But the scribes and the Pharisees lead [in] a woman who had been detected in adultery. And standing her in the middle, they say to him, 'Teacher, this woman was detected in the act [of] committing adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone women like this. So – what do you say? (They were saying this as a test for him, in order to have something to accuse him of.) But Jesus bent down, and with his finger drew figures on the ground. But as they persisted [in] asking him, he straightened himself and said, 'Let the Sinless One of you be the first to throw a stone at her.'

And again he bent down and wrote on the ground.

But they heard; and they went out, one by one, beginning from the elders. And he was left alone, and the woman who was in the middle. And Jesus straightened up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?' And she said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you. Go – and from now on, sin no longer.'

John 2: 1 – 12

And on the third day, a wedding took place at Cana of the Galilee. And the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited, and his disciples, to the wedding, and when the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus says to him, 'They don't have [any] wine.' Jesus says to her, 'What is that to me and you, woman? My hour has not yet come.' His mother says to the servants, 'Whatever he tells you, do [it].' Now there were six stone water-jars standing in that place, in accordance with the purification rites of the Judaeans, going up to two or three measures. Jesus says to them, 'Fill up the water-jars with water.' And they filled them, right to the top. And he says to them, 'Now draw and take to the master of the feast', and they took it. And when the master of the feast tasted the water, which had become wine, he didn't know where it was from, although the servants who had drawn the water knew, the master of the feast calls the bridegroom and says to him, 'People generally set out the good wine first, and [then] when people are drunk, the inferior. **You** have kept the good wine till now.'

This first of the signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum, and his mother and brothers and his disciples, and they remained there for a few days.

AT THE MEETING

OPENING PRAYER

We begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting ourselves in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in our mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God. *Some communities use the CLC opening prayer, or some other formal prayer, to conclude this brief time of stillness. Others use a minute or two of suitable music.*

GRACE: We ask for help to understand what God is saying to us through the text we are praying.

MATERIAL FOR PRAYER: Reading 4: General Principle 1 (Ask someone to read this, or one of the other passages, aloud)

SILENCE: A time (10 minutes, perhaps) spent in silent prayer remembering my life and prayer since the last meeting. How have I found the prayer this last fortnight? What events in my life and prayer do I wish to share with my community?

SHARING AND LISTENING

- Remember that this is a listening, not a discussion, group.
- Include a second round of sharing if there is time. At this time we share what we experienced as we listened to others sharing.
- It's good to conclude this time of reflection with a short time of silence, praying for each other, and with a formal prayer, such as the *Glory Be* or the *Lord's Prayer*.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER, if wanted and there is time.

PRACTICALITIES

This is an opportunity for reports (eg from members who have attended a CLC event), for questions, for discussion about any concerns, for news about any work in which members might be involved, or for any business.

REVIEW OF THE MEETING

- What was good for me in this meeting?
- What was not so good? What would I have liked to be different?
- What do I want to take away with me?

CLOSING PRAYER (Many communities use the CLC closing prayer.)

When you feel reasonably happy about the ways of praying suggested in these three Extra Meeting Plans, you can go on to 'Towards Meeting Three: "Community"'. Use what you have learnt in this Meeting Plan to pray the article in that leaflet.

Hopefully, these three Extra Meeting Plans will help you use the material provided for praying in preparation for each of your future meetings.

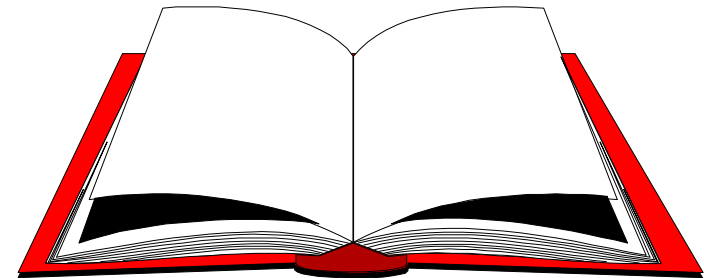


MEETING PLANS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Extra meeting 3
after the second meeting

PRAYING THE WORD

Part 3: Praying an Article



PERSONAL PRAYER BEFORE THE MEETING

The suggested stages of prayer ...

Find a comfortable position for prayer, relaxed, not tense.

1. Take time to still your body and mind so that you can begin, to centre your whole person. *This means being aware and noticing: perhaps starting with your breathing, then the sounds around you and finally the various sensations you can feel on the surface of your body. Just spending time noticing like this quietens the mind and body and helps us then to listen to what The Holy Trinity may be trying to say to us. It takes time but is worth it. Some find appropriate music helps.*

2. Recognise the presence of God within you. St Ignatius liked to speak of God looking at us lovingly. Just take a moment to absorb this and to respond with love.

3. Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit. If we are uncertain, it is all the more important to seek help.

4. Then, dedicate the time you are spending in prayer to God through, what Ignatius called **Preparatory Prayer**. Begin in the usual way with the **Preparatory Prayer**:

O Lord, guide all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer, all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; may everything be for your greater service and glory and to my growth in the Spirit. Amen. (Also see page 4 in the Welcome leaflet)

5. Asking for what I desire, also called, praying the grace: I ask for help to understand what God is saying to me through the text I am praying

MATERIAL FOR PRAYER On this occasion you are being offered for prayer three articles including one of the CLC General Principles. Don't worry if you don't pray with all of them. Perhaps one is so important for you that you should stay with it.

TALKING WITH THE LORD

Ensure that at the end of your prayer, you spend some time talking directly with the Lord. You may like to end the prayer with a *Glory Be* or the Lord's prayer.

REVIEW OF PRAYER

Afterwards, look back over your prayer and make a note or two.



Praying an Article, Part of a Book or a General Principle

1. There are two slightly different approaches: some prefer to read **the whole text** and then go back and either start reading again or just go back to the parts they remember struck them on the first reading. Others **read until something strikes** them.
2. Then, whether it is something you like or dislike, it is good to read that part of the article **again and again**, preferably out loud and then bring it to God, asking why he brought it to your attention. What is he trying to say to you through it? It is good to notice what you are feeling and bring these feelings to the Lord. Be particularly on the look out for any guilt feelings; these are likely to come from the enemy and not from God so bring them to Jesus and ask him to heal them.
3. It may be that parts of the article help you to **get in touch with experiences** of your own or that you have read about, perhaps in scripture – stay with those, reliving them. The article may describe situations that you can enter into and be part of - do so and then bring what happens to the Lord.
4. Don't be surprised if the first time you pray an article, just as the first time you pray a passage of scripture, nothing happens. It may be when you come back to the same words the next time, or the time after that, that the Lord will speak to you through it. Also you may need to wait on the Lord in silence, for him to speak in his time, not yours.

Tony Horan sj

IN SUMMARY-- PRAYING AN ARTICLE

Remember the four R's:-- Reading, Reflecting, Responding and Resting

1. **READING** or getting to know. Read the passage you want to pray slowly and deliberately. Try to really listen to what you are reading. If there is no one else around, try reading out loud. What word, phrase or sentence seems to have a special meaning for you?
2. **REFLECTING** or savouring the message! Repeat again and again the word, phrase or sentence that you have chosen. If it is a sentence or phrase you may find that the kernel of the message is in just a few of the words. Let them speak to you. Keep repeating them. Let God speak to you through them. Notice what you are feeling.
3. **RESPONDING** from your heart to God's message to you.. Speak to the Lord as a friend expressing all that you feel. It may be that your feelings are negative, anger for example. Then express that to God as strongly as you need. It is a mark of friendship to trust someone enough to be angry with them.
4. **RESTING** in God in a silence too deep for words. Just be with the God who loves you. It may well be that he will have some reply for you. So try to be still but be aware of all that is going on in you. Sometimes God's response comes later in the day when you are doing something quite different.

Conclude with an appropriate short vocal prayer, such as the '*Glory be*'.

The next time you come to prayer return to any part of the previous prayer where you were deeply moved. God may still have more to do for you through these words. Remember too not to run away from negative feelings towards God. By re-reading and repetition you will find yourself becoming more at home in the text you are reading.

Reading 4: Christian Life Community General Principle 1

GOD LOVES US AND SAVES US

The Three Divine Persons, looking upon the whole of humanity, and seeing so much selfishness, greed, violence and indifference to the needs and rights of others decide to give themselves completely to all men and women and to make them free from all that drives them.

Out of love, the Word was made flesh' and born of Mary, who relied, not on herself, but on God.

Jesus, choosing to live among those who had nowhere to lay their heads invites all of us to give ourselves continuously to God and to work for unity within our human family.

This gift of God to us and our response continues to this day through the influence of the Holy Spirit in all our own personal experiences and circumstances of life.

Therefore we, the members of the Christian Life Community, have composed these General Principles to aid us in choosing to imitate Jesus Christ and to take part through him, with him and in him in this loving initiative which expresses God's everlasting faithfulness.

(Taken from The General Principles of Christian Life Community— a paraphrased version for England and Wales. Christian Life Community, St Joseph's Watford Way, London NW4 4TY)

Extra Meeting 3

Readings for use with PRAYING AN ARTICLE

READING 1: Prayer as fostering our relationship with God.

Does God want us to be consciously in relationship with him? Old and New Testaments and the experience of men and women down through the ages testify that he does. The Bible is a record of how God continually tried and tries to awaken human beings to the full reality of who they are, namely his beloved children. Moreover, he wants us so awake and aware for our own good. Human beings who do not know their real father or mother, for example, suffer a lack that will probably show itself in a sense of rootlessness or of not knowing who they really are. So, too, unawareness of the God who is so intimately in relationship with us may show itself in occasional anxiety about the meaning of life, or in a frantic search for answers to life's mystery, or in overwork or overindulgence of some kind. Knowing who we are- in our depths- is salutary and freeing even if a bit daunting. So God does want us to be in conscious relationship with him. And conscious relationship is prayer, another way of saying that prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God.

The remarkable thing about God is that he will not force himself on us. He continually tries to arouse our interest in him, to invite us to awareness and a deeper relationship, but he leaves us free to blind ourselves to his presence if we wish, or to refuse to respond even if we are aware of his presence.

First, however, let us say a few words about how God tries to arouse our awareness of him. You are riding in a car with someone else driving and you turn around and are stunned by

the beauty of a sunset. You pick up a two-week old baby and feel a sense of awe and wonder as you touch her tiny hand. Your husband has just had a heart attack and is hovering between life and death in the intensive care unit; you start to pray for him, but find yourself blurting out to God, "You don't give a rap for us!" and you sense a presence there in sympathy with you. You and your wife have just made love after a great evening together; as you lie beside her you are filled with a gratitude for all of life that brings tears to your eyes. You see a picture of an emaciated Ethiopian mother and child; your heart seems to stop beating for a second and you wonder what you can do. In these and many other ordinary events of your life God may signal his presence and his care.

As noted earlier, we are free to pay attention to these experiences, these possible overtures or communications of God, or not. We can let them drop out of awareness as quickly as we forget a stomach cramp when it goes away. Or we can wonder about the experience and its meaning. For example, I might note how I felt when I saw the sunset and realize that spontaneously I had whispered "Wow!" and meant it as praise of God. I still feel rather exhilarated and have a desire to recover a relationship with God that has been on the back burner in recent years. In other words, such experiences may lead us to realize that we have been missing something in our lives and that we want something more.

(An excerpt from "God and You: prayer as a personal relationship" by William A. Barry S.J., Paulist Press, New York)

Reading 2: The Courage to Accept Acceptance

I am accepted by God as I am— *as I am*, and not as I should be. To proclaim the latter is an empty message because I never am as I should be. I know that in reality I do not walk a straight path. There are many curves, many wrong decisions that in the course of life have brought me to where I am now and scripture tells me “the place on which you stand is holy ground”(Exodus 3:5). God knows my name: “See I have branded you on the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:16). God can never look at his hand without seeing my name. And my name— that’s *me!* He guarantees that I can be myself. St Augustine says, “A friend is someone who knows everything about you and still accepts you.” That is the dream we all share: that one day I may meet the person to whom I can really talk, who understands me and the words I say— who can listen and even hear what is left unsaid, and then really accepts me. God is the fulfilment of this dream. He loves me with my ideals and disappointments, my sacrifices and my joys, my successes and my failures. God is himself the deepest ground of my being. It

(An excerpt from “As Bread that is Broken” by Peter G. van Breeman S.J. Dimension Books, New Jersey.)

is one thing to know I am accepted and quite another to realize it. It is not enough to have but just once touched the love of God. There is more required to build one’s life on God’s love. It takes a long time to believe that I am accepted by God as I am.

How often have we been told that it is important that we love God. And this is true. But it is far more important that God loves us! Our love for God is secondary. God’s love for us is first: “This is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God’s love for us” (1 John 4: 10) This is the foundation. Karl Rahner once made the remark that we live in a time when there is so much interest in Church politics (e.g. the pill, the reform of the curia, celibate priesthood). This may be the sign of a deep faith. It can also be the sign of a lack of faith. The basic faith is that I know myself to be accepted by God: “We ourselves have known and put our faith in God’s love towards ourselves” (1 John 4:16). This is the content of our faith— “God’s love towards ourselves.”

Reading 3: Childhood: The Beginnings.

After thirty years of detours and dead-end seeking, St Augustine found, in his moment of surrender all that had previously eluded him. “Our hearts,” he said, “were made for you, O God, and they shall not rest until they rest in you.” Augustine knew in the end what the poet Goethe expressed in his line: “All human longing is really longing for God.” Augustine, like so many of us, lost his childhood version of faith in order to find God in a sadder but wiser middle age.

His own reflection on those lost years was this: “Too late have I loved you, O Lord, too late have I loved you. Memory is indeed a sad privilege.”

Very early in life, as I now remember, this shape of the human heart, a frail vessel painfully empty until it holds God’s

(An excerpt from “He Touched Me My Pilgrimage of Prayer”. By John Powell S.J. Argus Communications, Illinois 60648)

presence, was somehow clear to me. I am sure that my child’s faith was largely an echo of my mother’s but there was something else; there was the ever gentle touch of God, like a soft hand caressing the face of my soul. And there was a hunger. I used to think that when my mother and father turned out all the lights in our house and went to bed at night, the throb of life throughout the whole world also shut down. Everybody slept at once. And so God would not be quite so busy at this time. He would be able to listen more attentively to me. I don’t remember how often this occurred, but there were at least a few times when I felt cozy in the thought that I had God all to myself.

There was also a sense of God’s nearness that stirred in me when I was in sacred places.