

Prayer changes everything

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Something happens when we pray. It may not be what we want or hope or even recognize, but something happens when we communicate with the Almighty.

I remember a Sunday school teacher from my childhood who taught our class how to pray. "It is talking with God," she explained. "Some people talk to God in a very formal way—like the prayers we say in church." That made sense. Why wouldn't one compose his words carefully when speaking to God? "Others," she went on to say, "talk to God as if he were a friend—the same way we talk with those we love." That was revolutionary for me, not because I was thrilled to know that I could talk to God in such a casual, chatty way but because I discovered that people would even think to do that.

Prayer is talking to and listening for God. For some, the radical part of that statement is found in the action. We are able to talk to God?!? And, if we listen to the sounds of our heart and the quietness of our mind, we might hear God speak back to us?!? Communicating with God is a remarkable thing. For me, though, the real amazing strangeness of it isn't found in the talking and listening but in the one with whom that communication is shared. Those who know me at all know that I take talking for granted. That God might listen and that God might invite me to listen is the revolutionary part.

When people tell me that they speak to God in prayer as if they were speaking to an old friend, I find myself baffled. Yes, I understand the premise of their statement, but I cannot identify with the experience. For me, there can be nothing casual about communicating with the Holy One. Although I trust that another opportunity will present itself, I approach prayer as if I were the visionary behind a techy start-up with a 30-second window in an elevator to make my sales pitch to Bill Gates, whose investment could transform my life forever. This is God! No, not every word is carefully composed, but, when I enter the presence of the Almighty in prayer, it isn't a casual chit-chat over a cup of coffee with Motown tunes playing in the background. Prayer takes every ounce of my heart and mind and soul. I want to give it my all

every time—or else I'd better wait for that other once-in-a-lifetime chance to make my elevator pitch.

On Sunday we will read the story of the Transfiguration—the moment when, in mountain-top prayer, Jesus' countenance was changed to a "dazzling white" and he was joined by Moses and Elijah (Luke 9:28–36). We read this story all the time. Not only do we read it on August 6, when the story gets its own feast-day celebration, but we also read it every year on our final Sunday before Lent. In this encounter, we are invited to see the real power of prayer—not that prayer would change our circumstance but that prayer might transform us.

Jesus' face and clothes shone with dazzling white light. In the act of prayer, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James, and John. They get to see how communicating with the Father can draw out evidence of Jesus' inner nature. In the act of prayer, Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah, who represent Law and Prophet—other means of divine-human communication. Eventually, the Father's voice speaks, confirming Jesus' identity as God's Son. And, in all of this, we, too, are invited into the life-changing act of prayer.

Prayer is communicating with God. The act of entering God's presence and being called on by God to speak is remarkable. Usually, in the holy presence of God, the whole world keeps silence, yet we have discovered in Christ that God invites us to speak. And then he deigns to speak with us in reply. This is remarkable indeed! This act of prayer, which we could easily take for granted, is powerful. It has the ability to draw out of us evidence of God's nature. It has the power to change everything because it has the power to change us.

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