

Except in Lent, add Alleluia

By [Martha-Lynn Corner](#)

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Here's the thing about committing yourself to a daily discipline. I don't care whether you've vowed to pray or exercise or only eat M&Ms and watch Val Kilmer movies: eventually, you are going to get sick of it.

I mentioned this to a priest friend of mine lately. He's the one who first gave me the idea to pray Morning Prayer every day, in that he did it and seemed to have an admirable kind of hookup to God. *Fabulous*, I thought in early Lent of 2012. This will be my Lenten discipline.

Then that ordinary miracle occurred, in that prayer changed things. Prayer changed me. I say it's an ordinary miracle, because Jesus is just absolutely all over the Gospels trumpeting the value of prayer (John 15:7, Luke 18:1, and several times in the Sermon on the Mount, for starters). Nowhere is he saying that it will bring me the job, or the boat, or the throngs of adoring fans I might think I deserve, but he promises the Father will hear and answer.

And we've all had the answers that feel like silence, or sting like discipline, or hurt like indifference. Every time we open our mouths in prayer we *might* be asking to align our will with the Father's, or we *might* be handing up a kind of cosmic grocery list, but here's the thing—I think God takes every type of prayer we've got under serious advisement. He's not annoyed with us, down on our knees or in our cars or brushing our teeth. He's happy to be there, in the moment, and is far more generous with our humanness than we sometimes are.

So I started this Morning Prayer thing, following the Daily Office in the Book of Common Prayer like a good little Episcopalian. With a few important exceptions, like beach vacations or that time I had to do that thing or those handful of days when I really, really just did not feel like it, I've stuck to this routine. By and large, it is how I begin my days.

So basically, I'm due for a speedbump.

"Do you ever have those times," I asked my priest friend in a casual sort of way, "when you just can't do Morning Prayer anymore?"

"Sure," he told me.

"And...?" I asked, waiting to be let in on the secret.

"And I just slog through," he told me.

Instantly I was disappointed. *Slog through?* Where was the special Dan-Brown-like formula for achieving oneness with the Spirit, passed down from an ancient text and upheld by countless members of an age-old society?

Then I realized I already had it. Absent the crappy Hollywood overtones, that's prayer.

Not that this realization made my prayer time especially revelatory on a recent morning. That day the only thing that jumped out at me was the stage direction "*Except in Lent, add Alleluia,*" and only because I forgot to.

I thought about that, though. I thought about how forgetting the praise is a little like forgetting the salt. I thought about how this might be speaking to the overtired / bored / stressed out morass through which I'd been wading. And voila: even right here in the boring time—in the weeds, in the would-rather-nots, in the place that feels devoid of much faith or inspiration or dedication—here is God, in the italicized print.

It seems to me that the most important things about this praying gig are twofold: that we try, and for God's sake that we bring our distractions with us. Just pile on all of our baggage, sit down with it, and ask for a minute of God's time. He'll give it to us, and on the best of days we will feel him and hear him. On the best of days some word or phrase will shine out and stick with us all day, an little island of peace that might have something to teach us or will just bubble up now and then in the midst of the day's activities.

Sometimes the Office itself is just a doorway through which we walk, when the praying becomes effortless and secondary to God's presence, where we will sit and sit and sit until we're forced to leave it. And sometimes it will cease to be about us at all, but about something larger—about the Body of Christ, and the Kingdom of God, and how we can best be of service.

But on bad days we will squirm like a toddler with pinworms. We'll hit the confession running, race through the Jubilate and the psalm and the readings, gloss over the suffrages and go so hard and fast through the General Thanksgiving we leave skid marks on the page.

God knows that about us. I think he's cool with it. And while it's always best to strive for holiness and devotion, the most important thing is that we make a daily habit of showing up.

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