

Prayer as Communication

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Where do you park?

You know the significance of the single and double yellow parking lines. The single line says you can't park at all, while the double line says you can't park at all, at all!

In our relationship with our spouse whether as couple, priest to people, religious to community, there are certain areas of single yellow lines! We would rather our partner would not park there but move on - areas like money, work, family, sex, celibacy.

From my experience with couples, priests and religious, the area most likely to have a double yellow line is that of our prayer and God. We are generally slow to discuss the topic, certainly very loathe becoming personal in our sharing when it comes to revealing to our spouse the content and feeling of our prayer.

Who is my God?

On our Weekend, this simple but profound statement was made "To be open to our spouse is to be open to God". As a result of our Weekend, we found God had become more real to us, His presence stronger in our lives just as surely as our spouse's had.

Mass, Prayer and Scripture may have meant more to us. We may even have had a greater freedom in sharing prayer with others, whether at Mass, around the remnants of the supper or at the end of a sharing evening with couples. We probably have sung the lines from the Song of Ruth - "Your people will be my people, your God will be my God too". But, have we realized how unifying it would be for us if we dared to live out those words, to communicate to our spouse who our God is, what our faith people mean to us?

Hearing Jesus through you

We all look into the eyes of the same God; but, it is only when we dare to share who my God is to me today that our spouse can begin to know our attitudes, our feelings and our needs in this area. When we listen to our spouse telling us who their God is, then we can begin to take on more of our spouse.

The "I" and "You" become "Us", and "He" becomes "Our God", "Our Father" Likewise, when I, as a priest, share with you, my faith people – the Body of Christ, what you mean to me, how much you are part of me and when you do the same for me, then we are sharing our Jesus with one another and we are made more one in Him.

What is true prayer?

This is a plea for us couples, priests and religious who have had the Weekend experience to discover ways to live out the relationship aspects of Prayer. My prayer can be a definite married single activity. Rather than share my troubles, hurts and joys with you, or trust you with my needs, I go and share them with "my" Jesus. It's so much easier to ask "my" Lord to forgive me than it is to ask my spouse. So I shut you out.

The Church - our faith people

Yet on our Weekend; we discovered God and our faith people, the Church and their longing for us to be in total relationship. We began to hear for the first time the great trust God has in us, the dignity He gave us. We, being in love, reveal that God is love; we, being a Sacrament, declare the faithful love He has for His people; and, more profoundly, the love Jesus has for us His Body, the Church.

So, how can we afford to continue to make our prayer a private matter between me and God? We have to learn ways to pray in relationship. God wants us to come to Him as a couple or a community in our prayer. Our Little or Big Church praying should be "us and we", rather than "I and me" praying.

Is my prayer private?

When we break into this area powerful results follow. The couples that risk in communicating their prayer and faith life with each other radiate a totality in their relationship. There is a joy and strength about them. Why not? In such a couple, community, or parish, the Prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper is being fulfilled. John 17:21-23

Barriers to true prayer

Firstly, we talk (we priests are particularly guilty here) about bringing the spiritual element into our lives as if it was an infection coming from without. We separate the spiritual and the human. Surely the reality that "Open to Spouse, open to God" reveals is that the spiritual dimension is already there in our relationship.

What we couples, priests and religious have to do is to identify that dimension and thus share our faith journey with our spouse. By this means we achieve the total unity of the spiritual and the human which Our Father wishes. We don't have to invoke Jesus into our relationship drawing Him in from the skies – He is already there! Where are two more truly "gathered in His name" than in Matrimony?

Me and God

Secondly, we have mostly presented prayer as a private matter between the individual and God. Prayer is my communication with God. Couples have been mostly led to pray as if they were unmarried, trained to go alone to Jesus. They may be side by side but they pray as individuals. Priests and religious likewise go to Him without their spouse, the Church, in their hearts or prayer. So often a husband or wife may know that their spouse is a very faithful, prayerful person, but they certainly don't experience or share that prayerfulness.

Poor self-image

The third block we have to combat is our poor self-image in prayer. Just as with sex, we would rather not talk about ourselves in prayer or our relationship with God. Because we go alone, we judge ourselves inadequate. The experience of sharing ourselves in this area can be mixed with fear, hesitation, embarrassment, inhibition, superiority; also with hope and longing. So what's new? Isn't this true of every area of risk? Let's die to the double lines to gain new life for us.

How can we communicate in Prayer to build Charity?

I have chatted with a number of couples and priests on this question and here are a few lived suggestions. Priests and religious can apply these suggestions to their own particular relationship. When we speak of sharing together we suggest that the couple be sitting together, or lying in bed together feeling each other's closeness, taking time to be aware of God's presence.

1. Dialogue and discuss

Dialogue on and discuss regularly God and Prayer. Perhaps the ice has to be broken, one spouse may judge themselves a lifetime behind their partner in this area.

Dialogue on how the poor self-image affects our Prayer; on what our hopes and dreams are for our Prayer life: on who the people are who have touched our lives in terms of faith; how do I see God, etc. There is a great need to drop superiorities here.

2. Give time for Couple Prayer each day, along the following lines:

To start, pray aloud as a couple. Begin with oral prayers together, e.g. The Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, Decade of the Rosary, etc. Then share what that has meant to you.

Move into more spontaneous prayer - pray in relationship terms - for the graces you both need to grow in unity.

Pray face-to face with each other praying for the specific graces you need to help you change for the sake of unity. It's not enough to pray you be closer. You may need to pray for a forgiving heart, to let go of a hurt, for passion, for tenderness, for the grace to listen, etc. Ask your spouse to pray for the graces she/he thinks you need

Support and encourage each other to also pray alone during the day. We are adults, so it's time we took prayer seriously

When praying alone never pray without bringing your spouse into your prayer. Perhaps begin by facing with the Lord how you have been in and out of relationship with your spouse that day.

Share the content of your prayer, e.g., quiet adoration before the Blessed Sacrament or meditation, etc. with your spouse. What did you say to God; what did God say to you?

3. Scripture-based prayer

Read together a passage from the Scriptures, the love letter of our faith people. Share what those words are asking of you for your unity: Scripture dialogue: share your feelings - Share how the Scripture passage or homily may have led you back to your spouse, or caused you to change

Go to Prayer Meetings together. Again, be conscious of each other so that a sharing or witness will be spoken in terms of your relationship. Our Jesus is flesh and blood, not just a historical figure or a spiritual unreal Jesus. How sad it is to hear a husband/wife share what Jesus is saying to them and never relating that to their spouse

4. At Mass, where the stress should be on Community, you can do a lot to communicate with one another as you worship:

Go into Mass with each other on your mind, asking your spouse to pray for a specific grace you need. Share the content of your thanksgiving to Jesus in the Eucharist with your spouse.

Let the kiss of peace be truly that - a kiss. Where else do you shake hands for goodness sake? Proclaim your joy in your sexuality for the sake of God's people.

Look at each other during the latter part of the Our Father.

Listen to the Scripture Readings and the Prayers to see how they affect both of you.

To make "your people will be my people" a reality, share with one another those who have helped you grow in the faith. These are the Saints in our lives - our parents, grandparents, relatives, friends, teachers, and neighbors. Some may be living; others are of the heavenly part of our Church. We are called to be Saints, sinners who are learning to grow in love

To all who read this, can I ask you to try it and enjoy. We, your people, will be truly graced by you.