

Praying with the eye of the soul

Kathy Coffey | Jan. 31, 2012 Soul Seeing

Soul seeing reminds me of a visit to the eye doctor. She tries various lenses with different degrees of fuzziness until one finally reaches clarity. "That's it!" we say in delight. Suddenly, we can see. If we look through the right spiritual lens, we may also recognize times of prayer where we hadn't noticed them before. Some prayerful moments are as dramatic as bounding across a stage, others as humble as laundry. The common denominator is the spirit of the Creator stirring within us and our response to that voice.

Here are people fully engaged with their lives and praying with the eye of the soul:

- The husband who watches beside the hospital bed of his wife. He says nothing. He holds her hand, as he has for the past two weeks.
- The mother who rises to nurse the baby for the third time that night. With half-opened eyes she bumbles toward the crib, scoops up the infant and feeds him sleepily.
- The student who completes a week of final exams, three term papers, a group project, and the organization of a canned-food drive. He dives into bed but pauses for a moment before falling asleep. Words addressed to the mysterious Holy One come muffled by exhaustion: "Thanks. I got it all done."



- The business executive who knows that a long day looms ahead. She faces the window and lifts both hands in an eloquent gesture. "Thank you for a new day," her hands seem to say. "I am yours, O God. Help me to be kind as well as efficient."
- The two friends who meet over coffee to talk through a dilemma that concerns them both. They listen carefully, lean across the table toward each other, joke and respect each other's truth. They leave knowing clearly what action they must take; the caffeine was in the conversation.
- The protester who takes a deep breath and steps across the line at the nuclear weapons plant, thinking, "If I go to jail, I go to jail. But I can't let conscience lie down and die."
- The artist who launches a new project, excited about its potential while still aware that it will take many long hours to complete. Still, a tantalizing intrigue hovers over the beginning. How will this look when it's finished? What will emerge?
- The older sister who knows it's drudgery, but does it anyway. "Just this once, Sam," she tells her younger brother. "I'll throw your jeans in the wash with my dark load so you'll have clean ones for the party." They grin at each other in the easy camaraderie of people who know they'll fall again, and once again,

they'll bail each other out.

Do you recognize yourself in any of these moments of prayer?

These are not the long, uninterrupted stretches with books and formal words that many would associate with prayer. Instead they accord with Jacob's surprise: "Surely the Lord is in this place -- and I did not know it!" (Genesis 28:16). Or as Dorothy Day once asked, "Since when are words the only acceptable form of prayer?"

In reflection after or during the event mentioned, these folks may recognize God's presence there. God is delighting in them. And they resonate with God's dream for them, becoming wiser, more generous, bold, creative, active or contemplative -- whatever God desired at their creation. So they consecrate their actions to God who is everywhere. An attitude of prayer requires two parts, like two hands clapping or two wings beating. Bringing God into daily life means a constant movement back and forth between action and reflection.

Surely this rhythm marked Jesus' days on Earth. He never said, "Today I multiplied loaves and fishes, I don't need to pray." Instead, he entered solitude to be with God. His prayer fueled his ministry and deepened his compassion.

Prayer is larger than any formula, holding a splendid range of possibilities. The God who creates unique fingerprints, snowflakes and more than a million kinds of insects must love variety. God relishes all the different voices of God's children, no matter how stumbling they may sound. Furthermore, God starts the conversation, coming to us in a myriad of ways, tailored specifically to the individual. Some may find God more in events, like liturgy or health care, others in people, inspiring places where nature is saturated with God's affection, or nurturing things -- flowers, stained glass, hot coffee. The human response is sensitivity to God's initiative, alertness to God's activity. Praying with the eye of the soul is simply responding to God's grace in our lives moment by moment, what Jesus meant by "praying always." As many spiritual writers say, the only way to fail at prayer is to not show up.

[Kathy Coffey is the author of many books such as Women of Mercy, Hidden Women of the Gospels and God in the Moment: Making Every Day a Prayer. She has four children and gives retreats and workshops nationally.]

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