

JOCELYNE'S RESOURCE-OF-THE-MONTH: March 2018

My Resource-of-the-Month: The Story of Saint Monica at Catholic.org
FreeTruth Web Link → <http://freetruth.ca/catholic-saints-doctors-and-feasts.php>

How to Pray When Your Heart Hurts

For a while now, our Lord has had me pondering prayer and its occurrence and importance in my life. I have been specifically thinking about my most fervent prayers... how they have occurred in the depths of great sorrow, or great emotional suffering. This emotional suffering could have been the result of prolonged and intense physical pain, or due simply to troubling circumstances in my life at the time. And while physical pain is difficult, it is the emotional pain that accompanies it, or emotional pain in general, that I have found to be the most challenging to manage. This is where prayer comes in.

In my experience, when I feel down, when I am grieving, when I feel great emotional distress of any kind, this is when my prayers become most fervent, most heartfelt.

If we look at Jesus' passion, we know that He experienced such great emotional suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane that His sweat became like "drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground (Luke 22:44)." The Gospel says that, because Jesus was "in such agony," His prayers were extremely "fervent," "earnest," or "long," depending on the translation. Synonyms to these words include: burning, passionate, extensive, intense and heartfelt. This is how Jesus prayed during this time of great emotional suffering. Interestingly, many theologians believe that this was the most difficult moment of Christ's passion!

I am also convinced that these heartfelt prayers in the midst of our suffering have great spiritual power. This idea is, in fact, supported in scripture. The letter to James says, "The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful (James 5:16b)." This verse could also be translated, "The continual prayer..." Sacred scripture assures us of the effectiveness of these heartfelt or persistent prayers, and I have found this to be extremely comforting in these painful moments.

If we look further at the passage from the Gospel of Luke that I mentioned earlier, we see our Heavenly Father's response to the fervent prayers of His only Begotten Son. We read that, "there appeared to [Jesus] an angel from heaven, strengthening him (Luke 22:43a)." Likewise, our compassionate Father strengthens and comforts us when we allow Him to be present with us in the depths of our pain.

The best time for prayer, therefore, is during these times of great suffering! In these moments we can pour out our hearts to our loving Father while our prayers have the most power to move Him. Does this mean that God does not hear us or that He does not care as much when we pray under ordinary circumstances? Not at all!

Let me explain this using an example from my own life. Being a parent, I liken this to the experience I have with my own daughter. If she asks me for something, and it is a true need or something that is good for her, I will grant her request. If the timing of her request is inopportune (I happen to be busy cooking dinner, for example), I might ask her to wait a while before I grant it. If however, I hear her begin to wail suddenly in another room, I will immediately drop everything I am doing and **run** to help her in her distress! When our children are emotionally distraught or in pain, does this not entice us to move more quickly in our efforts to help them? In these moments, if there is nothing we can do to rectify the situation immediately, we dry their tears, we hold them in our arms, or offer any other gestures or words of consolation to help them manage the pain (physical or emotional).

And so it is with God, our loving Father, our perfect Parent.

Emotional suffering (grief, loss, sorrow, feelings of abandonment) is certainly not easy, but I find it comforting that as God's beloved children, we can use it to our advantage in order to "pray more earnestly." It is during these moments that the rawness of our heart pain can be truly expressed to the One who loves us more than we can comprehend. And... I truly believe that these prayers hold more weight and can accomplish more than we could ever dream possible!

The bulk of Lent, a time of penance and of the contemplation of suffering, is in March. So, there is no better time than during the liturgical season of Lent to ponder Christ's passion, and specifically His example of how to pray when our hearts are deeply hurting. This is why I have chosen to highlight Saint Monica's story at Catholic.org as my Resource-of-the-Month. She is an example to us of the power of prayer in times of deep emotional suffering.

In fact, when Saint Monica expressed her great emotional distress on account of the actions of her wayward son, her confessor was convinced that this son would eventually repent and experience conversion. He assured Monica that she did not need to worry because, "the son of so many tears would never perish!"

Many parents, of adult children who no longer believe or practice their faith, are deeply concerned for their children. I know that this situation causes their hearts much grief and that many worry that their prayers are not being heard. I know because I have had countless parents mention this to me. When they do, I tell them the story of Saint Monica in hopes that it will bring them comfort.

Saint Monica prayed for years (over a decade) for her wayward son. Her emotional suffering was intense and her tears were many. However, she never gave up praying and, in God's time (this is important; patience is key), her son did indeed repent and experience conversion. But, the story does not end there... his conversion was so profound that this son entered the priesthood, became the bishop of Hippo, and famously wrote a book of "Confessions," a spiritual work of great importance and relevance, even today. Saint Monica's wayward son was also eventually canonized a Saint and Doctor of the Church... the great Saint Augustine! What a wonderful testament to the power of prayer!

Nevertheless, I think it is important to mention that when we are suffering, it is often extremely difficult to pray. I have noticed that it is precisely during these moments of emotional struggle that I have little motivation to pray, or that prayer seems to be an impossible task. I have found, however, that if the pain is so great that I feel unable to think or vocally express myself to God, that if I just invite Him to be present with me, He will provide me comfort and hope.

Prayer can take many forms. In fact, in these intense moments of struggle, if we are unable to do anything else, we can offer our heavenly Father our tears, our pain. We can imagine ourselves in His loving arms. This becomes our prayer. Do this and, I promise you, your Father in heaven will provide you comfort and peace. He will hear and answer you... in His perfect time, and in a way that will be the most beneficial. Never lose hope and never give up!

On that note, I think it's appropriate to end with this quote by the Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen:

"God's delays are mysterious; sorrow is sometimes prolonged for the same reason for which it is sent. God may abstain for the moment from healing, not because Love does not love, but because Love never stops loving, and a greater good is to come from the woe. Heaven's clock is different from ours."

Your sister in Christ,



Jocelyne