The background of the cover is a photograph of a sunset over a mountain range. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm orange and yellow glow that transitions into a clear blue sky above. The mountains in the foreground are dark and silhouetted against the bright sky.

**Foundations
of an
Interior Prayer Life**

David A. Leis

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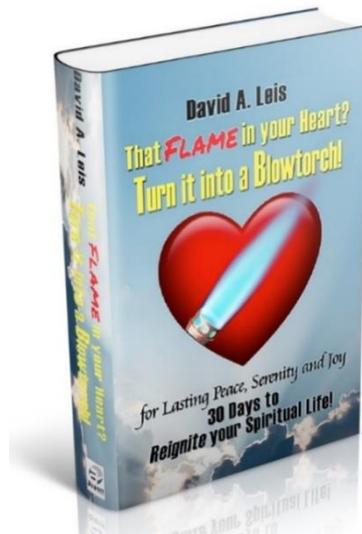


Published by Avantt Press

Princeton, New Jersey, USA

www.turnitintoablowltorch.com

Companion to:



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Published in the United States of America

Foundations of an Interior Prayer Life

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When to Pray

I have been asked many times about the practice of prayer and how to pray to nurture the interior life. In terms of a prayer life, it is the gateway to a dialogue of the heart.

First and foremost, there is nothing more important for you to do in your life than pray. It is more important than eating or sleeping or even breathing.

Only prayer will allow you to develop a relationship with Jesus. Good intentions or knowledge from reading about Him will not suffice. Only prayer will reveal what is in His Heart for you. Prayer alone will allow a relationship to develop and grow. Consistent prayer. Every day. Without fail. No matter what. Quiet prayer. Alone with Him. Contemplative prayer. Meditative prayer. Prayer of the heart. Listening prayer.



Developing an interior prayer life is critical to the life of every Christian. And it is not difficult. There is nothing here that any ordinary Christian cannot do. It is quite simple or I could not do it. The interior prayer life and a dialogue of the heart with Jesus is meant for every one of God's children. It is meant for every soul on earth without exception.

I remember being told about contemplative prayer thirty years ago by the late Fr. Francis Marino, one of the founders of the Anawim Community. Five minutes of contemplative prayer was my goal. Ten years

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later, in Medjugorje, the seers were advocating three hours of prayer a day! At that point three hours seemed out of the question!

If you count, as they advocated, Morning Prayer, Mass, a Rosary, prayer while commuting (not the best quality time for it, but better than the radio), 'exercise prayer', and nighttime prayer, then perhaps it is possible to get there. Any Christian can find forms of prayer to use during various parts of the day, at natural transitions of the flow of the day, to thank God for His blessing on the part accomplished and the part in front of you.



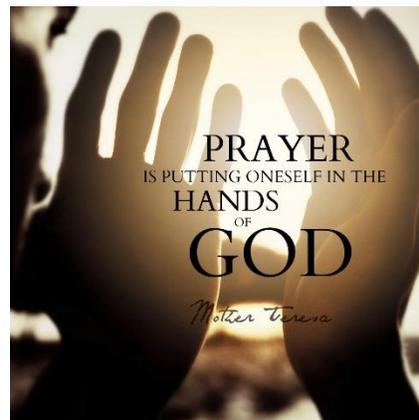
Exercise prayer, you ask? When I exercise, I tend to "run the Rosary" – I am not aware of how far I run, only how many Rosaries I run! Head down and focused, I can get totally lost in the interior dialogue during my running Rosaries. Try it! Again, not the best way to say a Rosary, but if you are exercising, why not pray at the same time? When I substitute an exercise machine in the house because of the weather, I still pray rather than watch or listen to something which seems to be the popular trend.

One other point Fr. Marino taught me: have a particular place, a chair, a reading spot in your home, that is reserved only for prayer and spiritual reading, if possible. I do have it. It is a ratty old easy chair with a foot stool that is out of date and ugly. It should have been thrown out twenty years ago, but it is comfortable and it's my place. I am there every morning no matter what. If I am traveling, no matter where I am on the face of the globe, it is still possible to find the time and space for that prayer, no matter what else is going on. Vacation or working, it is the same routine every morning every day, even on an airplane over the Pacific Ocean.

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A friend, Laura, once told me that when her kids were young and she was always tired from babies interrupting her sleep (she has 6 children) that she was lucky to get in 10 minutes of prayer a day. (Actually, I think she got in 20 hours of prayer!

Mother Teresa would say that, in serving her needy children, she was offering God the best prayer, the finest incense in the temple of the home.) Anyway, she said she felt guilty about that for a long time. And you know what? As soon as she let go of the guilt, her formal prayer time increased! (One needs both kinds of prayer to be a real Christian, according to Mother Teresa and the Gospels.)



A Few Basics

The basics of an interior prayer life begin with silence. And early in the morning, ideally, as Scripture says in so many places: "... very early in the morning He went up on the mountain to pray..." Or something to that effect. Rising early, and moving in silence into a place of prayer without so much as any distractions, so that the first conscious thoughts are the Word of God filling the heart and mind is optimal. Protecting the conscious mind and creating an intentional interior space leaves the soul open to hear the whispers of the Spirit interiorly.

When you are in that space exteriorly and interiorly, close your eyes and become conscious of your breathing and heartbeat, and the sounds of the space around you. And then, when you are fully present to yourself, turn

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interiorly and become present to the Presence of Christ in you! Ah, what an experience, to come face to face with Jesus Christ, Redeemer and King, so full of love for you it pours out of Him in a torrent as water over a great waterfall! Let it wash over you and sweep everything else away for this moment in His Presence, for surely He is completely present to you as He looks with eyes full of love at you!

In this place, the dialogue with Him becomes easy and natural as it would in a secluded place with a dear friend who know you intimately and who you feel you can reveal your deepest secrets. Of course He already knows



them, but He waits for you to address them with Him so you can hear His response which surely will come, but not in a time and way of your choosing but His. We do not come to prayer to get answers as Oswald Chambers would say, but rather to possess Him as the object of our love and attention.

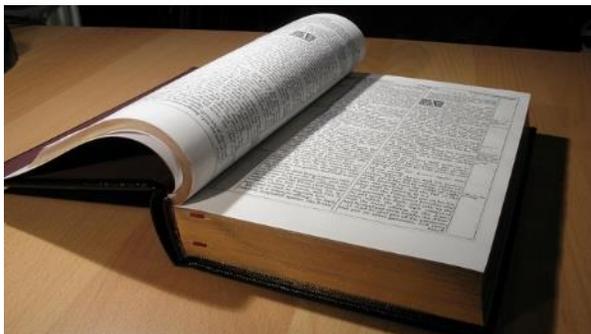
The purpose of the prayer, to touch the Presence of God can be enhanced by breaking open the Word using some source as described below always containing God's Word as found in Holy Scripture.

Sources of Inspiration for Prayer

So to me, the foundation of an interior prayer life starts with a meditative prayer that will eventually progress to contemplative prayer. There are lots of good resources to guide you. And the subject of the start of my contemplative prayer is the daily Liturgy, the scripture readings from the Bible for the day, the Heart of Mother Church as she forms us. How often I have

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discovered that the grace which I needed for that day was contained within the Scripture readings for Mass that day. I have even encountered many of my Protestant friends who use the Catholic daily Mass readings for their meditations as they contain selected passages from the Old Testament, Psalms and New Testament on a 3 year rotating basis with a thematic rhythm according to the seasons of the Liturgical year, such as Christmas, Lent and Easter.



A great resource for Scriptural reflection is *The Anawim Way: Pondering the Word* published by the Anawim Community. www.anawim.com In addition to the readings, it contains a very simple, straightforward meditation and questions for reflection. It is a great resource for the everyday Catholic (or any Christian for that matter).

More widely known is *The Magnificat*. Though it does not have the questions for reflection, it does have good articles. www.magnificat.com And of course, the readings for the day can be easily found on the internet.

The second part of my prayer is centered on the materials from Direction for Our Times as mentioned in the Introduction. www.directiofourtimes.com Without fail, I read the monthly message that Jesus has sent to Anne, which they distribute by email or you can get in book form. I read it every day, over and over again, for the entire month, for a reason.

Like anything we learn, repetition makes it stick. Re-reading the message of Jesus every day makes it sink into my subconscious until it becomes a part of the fabric of my being without me having to think about

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it. Very often, a sentence that I read previously without particular notice will leap off the page and hold me, sometimes for a very long period. And of course there are the Volumes as well as all the other materials from DFOT (as it is called), which I use for meditation.

I recommend reading other things Anne has published. The “Heaven Speaks” booklets precisely address many of the conditions humanity finds itself in. The books by Anne on Heaven, purgatory, and holiness are worthy of meditation.

There are, of course, many other great resources for one’s prayer life, but these are foundational for me. I could not stop without mentioning the Liturgy of the Hours or Divine Office, which has traditionally been the prayer of the clergy throughout the world. It is now widely used by the laity. Published by the Catholic Book Publishing Corp., the set with user guide is readily available from many sources.

One resource most Christians are familiar with and really is unequalled is “My Utmost for His Highest” by Oswald Chambers. Available in book stores and online, as well as <http://utmost.org/> It is a quite remarkable book worthy of any Christian, as long as you can stand its strong medicine.

And finally, the ultimate support for the interior prayer life is daily Mass as well as Adoration. Taking within yourself His Real Presence has no



equal. Being in His Real Presence in the tabernacle has no equal place on earth. Making the effort to avail yourself as often as possible brings huge dividends which only He can and has promised to supply.

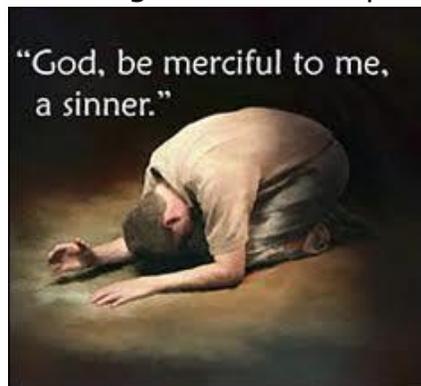
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The interior liturgical life for me has been supported by Sunday Mass at my parish, but also frequent daily Mass at the Shrine of the World Apostolate of Fatima, which was very close to my house. There the liturgy and the homilies are true to the teachings of the Pope and the Magisterium of the Church. Finding a parish that is true is critical, even as I acknowledge that any validly performed Mass contains all the graces and benefits available in any Mass.

Assistance from the Clergy

Still, finding clergy and a homilist grounded in the truth of the Church's teachings is absolutely requisite to knowing the Way, the Truth, and the Life, which is Jesus.

No compromises of today's pop psychology, which has so permeated parts of the Church, can or should be tolerated. I have been in parishes where pleasantries and very humanistic homilies and ministries were the norm. They are dangerous to the spiritual life. I am sorry, I cannot soften the truth. "Feel



goods" will join the wide and easy path to hell, as Scripture says. The way to Heaven is narrow.

This is a very high-stakes game: Eternal life. I want a preacher who will make me uncomfortable in my pew. I know my nature, and it is weak and prone to veering off-course with pleasant sounding ideas. I need and desire constant course corrections. Being offended by piercing truth is good for my soul and an antidote to my normal, prideful, lazy self.

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I cannot end without this last comment. Frequent Confession, no matter what one thinks of the practice, no matter how long it has been, no matter how “bad” the confessor is, done in the humility of obedience and with faith, will have absolutely remarkable effects.

Today even many Protestants are discovering the value of using a confessor. See Days 13 and 21 in the book “That Flame in your Heart? Turn it into a Blowtorch”. It is true that not all priests have the charism of being a “good” confessor. That does not take away from the effectiveness of the sacrament received in faith. Go anyway.

Finding a good confessor or spiritual director, no matter what your faith, is very helpful, though, if you can. Confession will clear away the debris of sin and open the soul to the healing graces of the Savior like nothing else can. John Paul II said that those who frequently go to Communion should frequently go to Confession. Good guidance. Receive Him in a state of grace. Or not, at your eternal peril.

A New Beginning

These, then, I think are the foundations of an interior prayer life as I have come to know them. There are many more, but this is a start.

No matter what your current practice of prayer is in your life, if you are like me, it seems that Jesus is always asking for some change to bring me into His Presence on a more consistent basis. Fr. Francis had a saying that continues to ring true to me: “Be present to the Presence for a



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life of Truth in Love.” What an incredible state of being to strive for, to be continually present to the Presence of Christ within me! He is always calling us forth, anew each day, to a new beginning with Him.

Are you ready for a new beginning?

Come, Holy Spirit!
Fill the hearts of Your faithful!
Enkindle in them the Fire of Your Love!
Send forth Your Spirit!
And they shall be created!
And You shall renew the face of the earth with Your Love!

(adapted from the Catholic prayer Come Holy Spirit)



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David Leis, the author of the book, *“That Flame in your Heart? Turn it into a Blowtorch!”* is an award-winning consultant, author, speaker, trainer, executive coach, and college instructor. For over 30 years, he has spoken to and trained thousands of people in a wide variety of settings, from colleges to the Fortune 500 to small companies and non-profits around the globe. David lives near Princeton, New Jersey, with his two sons and close to his daughter’s family in Connecticut. You may contact him at www.turnitintoablowlowtorch.com