

## INTERIOR LIFE IN A SEASON OF CHANGE

BY: DYLAN BAUTISTA



**As Catholics, the very basis of our faith is built upon a foundation of prayer.** It is in prayer that we encounter our Heavenly Father and begin to know and love Him. We were taught in ministry that ***prayer is a surge of the heart*** toward Heaven, something St. Therese of Lisieux once said. Our hearts were made to be in communion with God and establish an intimate relationship that is exclusive to each and every one of us. To quote Catholic speaker Mark Hart, “prayer doesn’t ‘help’ our relationship with God. **Prayer IS our relationship with God.**” With this in mind, one’s prayer life can also be referred to as the interior life, since it stems from the heart. Our hearts were made to run on God, like how a car runs on gasoline. The desire to grow in prayer will always stem from our relationship with Christ, and in order for that relationship to flourish, we must turn to our interior lives. **There are two metaphors to describe the aspects of the interior life: as a garden and a reservoir.**

The metaphor of the garden goes like this: **Our interior lives are the gardens of our soul.** In order for it to grow, it needs nourishment and tender care. Find seeds of faith to plant in the garden, even if they are the size of mustard seeds. Water the garden with prayer, for it nourishes the soul. If the seeds fall upon soil that is rocky or filled with thorns, invite Jesus - the Living Water - into the garden of your soul. Work in communion with the Spirit that lives within you, and together you will bear fruit. Jesus taught us that, “for no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6: 43-44). To add on, St. Francis de Sales suggests carrying a “spiritual bouquet” into the outside world. Take a walk through and examine the beauty that is the garden of your soul. There may be certain flowers or fruits that stick out you would want to bring with you and share with others. Find those flowers to make that bouquet, and carry them throughout your day. Your inward roots will bear outward fruits.

The metaphor of a reservoir is as follows: **Reservoirs are built to hold water, and in order to distribute the water that is collected, canals are used.** If the water in the reservoir were to be distributed while it filled itself up, it would run dry, and there would be no adequate supply of water. However, if it were to fill itself up to the top and continue receiving past the maximum capacity, the water would overflow and pour itself out in abundance. Treat your interior life as if it were a reservoir of grace. Allow God to fill up your heart with an abundance of graces, so that it overflows into the hearts of others. ***Empty yourself out with the expectation to be filled up again by God.***



With the start of shelter in place back in March, our lifestyles have changed drastically. The lives we had become so accustomed to carrying out externally now had to be lived out internally within the confines of our homes. For many of us, it was a difficult transition to now attend classes, meetings, masses, and Youth Ministry sessions online. We now had to rely on a screen and a stable internet connection to simulate physically being in a place of learning or worship. For myself, my heart was faced with the struggle of living out the Catholic faith within my own home. I was so used to worshipping in a familiar place like Holy Spirit that I needed to physically be there in order for God to move and reveal Himself. As difficult as it was to accept, **I came to the realization that I had been living a Youth Ministry based faith.** I was the type of person to depend upon ministry to provide me with the sacred spaces, prayers, reflections, and fellowship in order to cultivate my prayer life. The pandemic and shelter in place was an impediment to my faith because I thought I could no longer worship God in the same way again. A hunger and a desire to be with God manifested within my heart, and I didn't know how to respond. Little did I know that what I thought was a roadblock in my prayer life, God saw as an opportunity for grace to enter into.

Shelter in place was put into effect a couple of weeks into the season of Lent. Looking back at it, I am extremely grateful for how this year's Lenten season turned out for me because it was a very opportune time for the Spirit to be working. Given that sudden changes were happening, everyone had to adjust to the new normal on top of prayer and fasting. Among the young adults, a suggestion was made to create a sacred space within our homes, like an altar. This was the first step I took towards cultivating and deepening my prayer life during this Lenten season. Before COVID, my family already set up an altar in our house, which was decorated with rosaries, religious images, and statues of our Lord. However, I realized I could take it a step further and make arrangements in my room for my own personal sacred space. The same way I moved and removed things in my heart to make an open space for Christ, I now needed to do the same thing in my room. I settled on creating an altar right next to my desk, so that when I am struggling on an assignment, I could pray for God's guidance.

Like I mentioned earlier, Youth Ministry provided me with the resources to live out the faith at home, I just wasn't taking advantage of it. I kept a bunch of reflection, journaling, and prayer material over the many years I served, and it was time for me to put them to good use with this new sacred space. On my altar, I placed religious images, a Bible, a crucifix, prayer cards, a journal, some spiritual reading books, and a daily reminder that I need Jesus. Since my room was now the one place in the house where I spent most of the day in, having that space was a constant reminder that even when I am distant from church, Christ is and will always draw near.

The creation of my own sacred space finally allowed me to have that place in my room where I could open up and be authentic with God, without having to physically be at Holy Spirit. Before COVID, my prayer life was lacking in a lot of areas, and it was practically an on and off thing. I did not have any devotions, nor was I being 100% real with God in prayer. In a sense, I was a reservoir that would give to others before I was



filled up, thus causing myself to run dry. As a young adult, I had to accept the fact that I couldn't keep living with a Youth Ministry based faith. I reached a point of spiritual maturity that required me to go deeper than what was provided at Youth Ministry. I had to make the most of my new altar, and so that meant I needed to take up new prayer hobbies.

One new hobby I developed was a result of one of my Lenten promises, which was to lift up a person in prayer for 40 days by praying a daily rosary. I never had a strong relationship with our Blessed Mother, but it was through this Lenten practice that I was able to invite Mary to intercede for others and myself. **It was through Our Immaculate Mother that I was able to draw closer to Jesus.** Even after Lent ended, I continued to pray my rosary, with the hope that she will bring me close to her Son, so that I can trust and fall deeper in love with Him. Other hobbies I picked up during shelter in place include journaling and spiritual reading. Like I mentioned earlier, there are spiritual reading materials, a Bible, and a journal placed on my altar. I was never a big fan of reading in general, but with the amount of spare time I had during quarantine, I had to fill it up somehow. Taking up daily Scripture and spiritual books was another way the Lord would speak to my heart. So far, the books I have read are "Bible Basics for Catholics," "A Second Look: Encountering the True Jesus," and "Yes, There is a God." The books I am currently reading are "Lift Up Your Heart," and "Saint John Paul the Great: His Five Loves." Spiritual Reading has helped plant so many seeds in the garden of my soul, some of which are beginning to bear fruit now. My heart was set on fire for the Lord countless times just from reading the passages that it caused me to have more profound reflections. Most of these reflections I've written in my journal – along with prayer intentions and daily offerings – serve as reminders of significant moments in my faith journey during the pandemic.

Probably the biggest hobby I've gotten into is **cultivating my prayer life by sitting in silence.** After serving in ministry for so long, I always distracted myself with doing ministry for the Lord that I practiced being in His presence. To be honest, sitting in the silence is awkward. It requires you to sit still, be patient, and be vulnerable with the Lord – something that I was not comfortable doing. When it comes to praying, I prefer there to be at least some background noise going on such as worship music playing.

Whenever I enter into prayer, I initiate it by playing a song, having it resonate with my heart and think to myself "I can only encounter Jesus when I hear these specific lyrics." I soon realized that I was not entering into a conversation with Jesus when I prayed; rather, I made the song be my conversation with Jesus. I was not opening up my heart to the Lord as much as I should be, because I was afraid of getting hurt or coming face to face with something I would much rather avoid. One thing I learned over the course of the pandemic was to **think of our hearts as a city: some parts are impressive and extravagant, while others are broken down and scary.** These dark and scary places full of sin and fear (like a low-lit alley) are areas we do not want to go into, and if others saw these parts of our hearts, we fear that they might abandon us. If we look at our hearts by ourselves, we will constantly avoid those dark places, never putting any effort



into fixing them for the better. However, if we enter into our hearts with Christ, He will serve as the light in those unlit places, and offer us mercy in those areas of fear. ***There may be times where we are in the lead, going in head first, but the Lord will be behind us, encouraging us every step of the way.***

For me, I had to intentionally ask the Lord to grant me courage to venture into these dark areas of my life. To serve as a reminder that Christ was with me as I sat in silence, I searched up a 24/7 adoration livestream. I may not have been able to experience adoration physically, but at least I could virtually. **By sitting in the silence with the Lord present right in front of me, I was able to confidently open up my heart, and allow Christ to show me those dark areas of my heart that needed refining.** I've engaged in numerous intimate conversations with Jesus, and it has always left me with a sense of peace. It is in the silence that God speaks the loudest, and it is where I can empty my heart of any fears, doubts, anxieties, and burdens, so that there is room for Him to enter.

The Lord wants to give us something, and if we do not have the time to listen to Him, we cannot properly receive His graces. Calling to mind a quote by St. Jane Frances de Chantal, "In prayer, more is accomplished by listening than by talking." I encourage you to make more time for silence within your day. Give yourself that one on one time with Jesus, so that God can draw near to your heart and speak to it.

One final takeaway is that **there must be a balance between our interior lives and exterior lives.** Yes, times are significantly different than they were before, but we still worship and love the same God; a God that is the same today, yesterday, and forever. Nowadays, our focus is to keep our bodies healthy, but we should also keep in mind that we need to keep our souls healthy as well. Whatever happens to the body happens to the soul, and we must be aware of what is going on within our interior lives, because it is the Holy Spirit telling us to go in a certain direction.

We may not know exactly where we are going, but we know that it is leading us down a more virtuous path. **It is my prayer for you and your families to tend to the gardens of your souls as the shelter in place continues, so that your relationships with Jesus may reach new depths. To allow Love Incarnate to be present within your lives, and to walk with Him throughout the course of it.**

