

“(With eyes cast downward,) he beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ ”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, there was a wonderful woman by the name of ...Dorothy Day. I got to spend time with her in my seminary-days. Dorothy died 36 years ago in November of 1980 at the age of 84. Reporting on her death, the New York Times called her:

The most influential person in the history of American Catholicism.

Since her death, there's been a movement to canonize her for her personal life and for her amazing work with the poor and destitute of New York City.

In her book, **From Union Square to Rome**, she describes her conversion to Christ. One of her first attractions came in childhood:

“One day, I discovered the mother of one of my girlfriends kneeling in prayer. The sight of that kneeling-woman moved me deeply. I never forgot it. In the days before my conversion, I often spent the entire night in a tavern. Then, I would go to an early, morning Mass at St. Joseph Church on 6th Avenue. What attracted me to St. Joseph's were the people kneeling in prayer. I longed for their faith.... So, I used to go in and kneel behind the back pew.”

Eventually, Dorothy received the gift of faith and entered the Church.

Now, this brings me to today's readings. Both the 1st reading and the Gospel reading talk about people at prayer...as did the scriptures last week. (Remember—how Moses held his arms up in prayer?)

One of the things Jesus underscores in this parable about prayer ...is the posture of the penitent man as he prays. He remains at a distance, casts his eyes downward, and beats his breast.

Note well: it's NO accident that Jesus underscores the **prayerful posture** of the penitent man!

You see, one of the things about Jesus' own prayer life was the importance he attached to the body when he prayed. Jesus not only prayed with his mind & heart, but also with his whole body.

For example, Jesus **knelt** in the Garden of Gethsemane. And, when the prayer became more intense, he prayed **facedown**, that is, **prostrate** on the ground. (^{Mt. 26:39}) (Priest 'prostrates'—on Gd. Fri.)

For example, Jesus also prayed with his **eyes raised to heaven**. He prayed this way before the miracle of the loaves and at the Last Supper. (^{Mk 6:41 & Jn. 17:1})

For example and finally, Jesus prayed **aloud**. We find him praying this way frequently, notably, as he hung on the cross during the crucifixion. (^{Mk. 15:34})

And this brings me to us- all, in this church today, and within the sound of my voice thru cyberspace.

'How do today's readings apply to us, personally?' you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

If we are having trouble praying, maybe it's because we don't imitate Jesus and pray with our **body** ...as well as with our mind and heart.

To understand how praying with our body can help us with our prayer, I will now look more closely at 3 ways Jesus prayed with his body:

1st, Jesus **knelt**.

A teacher of a boys' high school was surprised at the number of young men who knelt to pray. One of the boys said, "**I don't kneel down because I feel reverent. I kneel to become reverent.**"

The important thing in prayer is not whether we kneel or don't kneel. The important thing is that we find a posture that helps us pray better. And this means that we should experiment until we find the best posture.

2nd, besides **kneeling**, Jesus made use of his **eyes** during prayer.

In the 60's, Pope, now –SAINT, John XXIII gave each of our astronauts a St. Christopher's medal. When Ed White, a Protestant, arrived at Launch Pad 19 on June 3, 1965, for the Gemini-4 space flight, he put his medal in a special pouch on the left leg of his space suit.

White said that his Catholic partner, Jim McDivitt, lived up to the popular Catholic practice of hanging his medal on the front, instrument panel of the spaceship. White said:

"Once we got into orbit and were weightless, Jim's medal floated about, lazily, in the cabin on the end of a short chain. It reminded us, not only of the prayer Pope John had said for us, but also of the prayers of fellow-Americans. It's hard to describe the feeling that comes with the knowledge that 190 million people are praying for you. It makes you feel very...humble."

Applying this to prayer, we learn that the position of the eyes, or what we focus upon with our eyes, can help us acquire the attitudes of trust and reverence, which are essential to prayer.

3rd, besides **kneeling** and making use of his **eyes**, Jesus also made use of his... **voice** in prayer. Back in the 60's, TV commentator, Bill Moyers, was President Johnson's press secretary. One morning, the president asked Moyers to say 'Grace' before they began their breakfast together. Moyers had hardly started when Johnson said:

"Louder, Bill, louder! I can't hear what you are saying," to which Moyers said, without lifting his eyes, **"Mr. President, I'm not talking to you."**

That story helps us to realize that we pray to **someone**, not just to ourselves, in our imaginations. Praying aloud can help us pray better, just as it helped Jesus pray better. (Just be respectful to those within earshot...lest they suggest you 'go get some help!'—for apparently [to them at times] you talk to yourself).

So-o, today's Scriptures, the story of Dorothy Day, and the example of Jesus himself, show us how important it is to pray with, not only **mind** and **heart**, but also, with our **body**.

I now close with this prayer:

**Lord Jesus, at the Last Supper, you raised your eyes in prayer.
In the Garden of Gethsemane, you knelt and prostrated in prayer.
On the cross, you prayed aloud.
Teach us to pray as you did, not just with our mind and heart, but also with our whole body!**

May the Tri-une God hear all your prayers and bless you...

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen