

# Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

*A Discipleship Journey*



## **Sermon on the Mount**

Week 18

### **God-Centered Prayer**

Matthew 6:5 - 6

#### Opening Prayer:

Loving Father,

Open my heart to the areas of my life that need to change so that I can carry out the mission you have imagined for my life. Inspire me to live my faith in ways that are dynamic and engaging.

Show me how best to get involved in the life of my parish. Make our parish community hungry for best practices and continuous learning and help us to realize that we each have a role to play in making our parish a perfect place for imperfect people trying to walk with you.

Amen

(from *Rediscover the Saints*, Matthew Kelly)

#### Reflection

We continue reflecting on Jesus' teaching on the three pillars of religious life: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. This week we reflect on the second pillar, prayer.

*And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them. In truth I tell you, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room, shut yourself in, and so pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:5 - 6*

Jesus was certainly critical of hypocrites. Here we find Him focusing on hypocrites in prayer, specifically those who pray loudly and overtly so that they get the attention and approval of everyone in Church. While there may be some who fall in that category, perhaps there are some less obvious yet more common hypocritical approaches that Jesus is hinting at here.

For some, praying mainly consists of reading or reciting common prayers such as the Our Father or Hail Mary. When requested to do spontaneous prayer, some become insecure and self-conscious, being sure to instead say just the right words in just the right way with just the right cadence. Sometimes we get so caught up in doing it right that the fact that it is a prayer gets totally lost. Or perhaps there are times we've prayed a particular prayer so many times we don't even think about the words we say, we just recite it mindlessly.

The basic question that Jesus is getting at in the Scripture above is: "What is the true motivation for my prayer; is my focus on God or on myself?" If our effort is on maintaining the proper posture, saying just the right words in the correct way our attention is on ourselves. If our prayer life has become routine, stale and boring or the prayers are spoken merely to fulfill an obligation, our focus is on ourselves. If we are praying just so that others see us and deem us as faith-filled people, obviously our focus is on ourselves.

Jesus teaches us that prayer, or any spiritual practice for that matter, is ultimately an exchange, a conversation, a dialogue with God. He longs for us to place all our attention and awareness on God, so much so that we aren't even aware of others around us. With hearts entirely focused on God, we don't have to worry about our prayer being perfect or polished for our Father to hear us. There is a time and place for the Christian prayers we've been taught, such as the Our Father and Hail Mary. What is most important is that our whole being is centered on God and God alone.

To keep our awareness centered on God, we may have to exclude certain things. We may have to *enter into that closet* – i.e. go to a quiet place, spend time in solitude or go for a long walk – whatever it takes to eliminate distractions. Jesus wants us to pray for prayer's sake so that our relationship with God is authentic and pure.

*Reflection Question:* Make up a spontaneous prayer. What do I want Jesus to know?

### Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.