For Personal Reflection

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1. How do I pray?
2. When do I pray?
3. What are the things for which I ask God in prayer?
4. How much of my prayer is about me?
5. How much of my prayer is about others?
6. How do the things for which I ask God in prayer help me to be more of the person that God wants me to be?
7. How do the things for which I pray help me in my efforts to encourage and support other people in their desire to be more of who God wants them to be?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew: A Study in Salesian Preaching. Vincent Kerns, MSFS. S.F. S. Printing School. India: Visakhapatnam, 1976.

St. Chantal on Prayer. Rev. A. Durand, PhD. Daughters of St. Paul: Boston. 1968

De Sales

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Yours...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

For the Asking

In a sermon preached in May of 1622, Francis de Sales talked about the nature of prayer...and the need to pray. "All prayer implies asking God for something—his glory or our need. It is our duty to pray, for we are worthless servants, and although God has no need of our prayers, they are useful to us by keeping alive in us the sense of our obligation to him."

"What are the things for which I petition God on a larger, even global scale? National justice and healing? World peace within and among nations? World-wide dialogue?"

Francis clearly takes his cue from the words of Jesus himself from John 12: 23. "Amen, amen, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you."

As consoling as these words of our Savior are to us, they are all the more powerful—Francis tells us—when we consider the context of Christ's promise: "When he had washed his disciples' feet at the last supper and had foretold Judas' treachery and Peter's denial, our Lord gave them a little talk. Full of encouragement were the words he spoke to them, and full of mystery. Among other things he offered them this comfort: though they were no longer to enjoy his physical presence, they would always be surrounded by his loving care. He would always protect them and he would always hear them when they called to him."

Jesus is always with us, surrounding us with his loving care. Jesus will protect us and will always hear us when we call to him! This is good news indeed!

"The very essence of prayer," observed Jane de Chantal, "consists in talking to ourselves and in talking to God." Talking to ourselves? In what way is prayer a conversation with myself? Recall Francis de Sales' conviction that "all prayer implies asking God for something—his glory or our need?" Well, if I am going to ask God to grant a particular need, I first need to know what, in fact, I really need. Even more fundamental, I need to know who I am: I need to have an accurate picture at any given moment of where I stand on the road to salvation in order for me to accurately know that for which to ask.

Do I need to ask for a particular grace to turn away from a particular sin? Do I need to ask for a particular grace to avoid a particular temptation? What do I need?

"And, of course, whatever we ask God in prayer we need to embrace however it is God chooses to answer our requests."

How about virtue? What particular virtue do I need to ask God to help me to practice more faithfully? How might I need to ask God to help me to be more of the person that God wants me to be?

How about others in my life? Family, colleagues, neighbors, friends? Who are the people about whom I need to ask for God's grace to be more patient, caring, kind, forbearing, truthful, straightforward forgiving and loving? At home? At work? At school? In the neighborhood? At church?

"'The very essence of prayer,'" observed Jane de Chantal, "'consists in talking to ourselves and in talking to God.'" How is it akin to talking to ourselves?"

What are the things for which I petition God on a larger, even global scale? National justice and healing? World peace within and among nations? Global dialogue?

So many of the things for which we ask deal with the present or are concerned with the future. We must also leave room to ask for things that deal with the past: what are the things for which I need to be grateful? What are the events about which I still need to ask for understanding, healing or acceptance? What are the things in the past from which I need to learn lessons to better live in the present...and to better prepare for the future?

And, of course, whatever we ask God in prayer we need to embrace however it is God chooses to answer our requests.

We are challenged to accept the reality of who we are in the eyes of God and in relationship to others. To the extent that we know ourselves we are better equipped to know what we need...better equipped to know for what to ask.

Is has been said that the things for which we ask in prayer say a great deal about us: for what will we ask God in prayer today?