

In our Bible story today,

Martha is distracted by a list of things she wants to do because a guest has come over for supper. She also wants her sister to help her out.

She is so distracted by her multitasking and her anger at her sister for not helping that she misses how special her guest is!

Mary on the other hand, seems to forget everything she is being asked to do by her sister, by tradition (of hospitality) and by her other hopes for her day. Instead the world slows down and focuses in for her on the words and presence of Jesus.

Jesus commends Mary and gently rebukes Martha for letting the social expectations - that she fully serve and host rather than fully listen and learn – rob her of a time with Jesus. She chooses to focus too on the feelings of anger or resentment – calling Jesus’ attention to them as important – robbing her from seeking her heart’s desire of focusing on who in the room was truly important in that moment - not the wrong Mary had done but the extraordinary person that Jesus was.

Practicing the presence of God is of course easier for her than us given that Jesus literally came to visit her home. We are invited in every moment into that same presence, that same intense relationship of communicating, learning, expanding our faith.

But oh the distractions! Yes there is lists, technology and social expectations that we must deal with but in my experience the greatest distractions to fully embracing God’s presence in the daily lives we lead are...

- a. FEAR THAT WE ARE NOT WORTHY to pray, to practice mindfulness, to be without doing!

That is why it is amazing to hear today the letter to the Colossians found in our Bible. All the things we are certain will separate us from God, or will make us unworthy to just sit with God – and not fret about am I worthy, am I sin-free, am I good enough – and not fret even about others’ worthiness.

This writer notes that we are given the gift of faith which has “securely established us in the faith – there will be no shifting from the hope promised by the gospel.”

We may have once been estranged from being worthy or of feeling God’s presence but: God was pleased to reconcile to God’s very self all things making peace with them so that now all of us are holy blameless and irreproachable before him!!

Imagine the energy this can open in our lives if we trust that we can never pray wrongly, mess up enough or doubt enough to get rid of God’s presence!!

Brother Lawrence, a monk from the 1600, used the phrase *the practice of the presence of God* in his monastic life and letters.

Where did Brother Lawrence come up with such a practice?

Psalms! From 131:

But I have calmed and quieted my soul,  
like a weaned child with its mother;  
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.

The Psalm teaches this delighting in God's presence and also the harm of fretting, worrying and taking on changing the world all alone: here is some of Psalm 37

Take delight in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.<sup>5</sup> Commit your way to the LORD;

trust in him, and he will act.

<sup>6</sup> He will make your vindication shine like the light,  
and the justice of your cause like the noonday.

<sup>7</sup> Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;  
do not fret over those who prosper in their way,  
over those who carry out evil devices.

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.

Do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Where did Brother Lawrence come up with such a practice?

New Testament:

Where I think we can find guidance on the second big distraction!

b. WE DO NOT KNOW THE RIGHT WORDS!

Jesus teaching on prayer is most succinctly found in Matthew chapter 6 commands that we not worry about the next day but only this moment.

Jesus clearly teaches in this chapter:

You do not need or require any special words! Jesus actually hopes you will use awareness of God and faith in God being amazingly God!

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup> Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

The chapter then holds in it the words that we now call the Lord’s Prayer and the chapter ends with this summary about whether to worry and strive OR to be present to today alone.

<sup>1</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

<sup>34</sup> “So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

c. Distraction: there is never any time! Place quiet enough, safe enough...

So we will practice it together.

“Be still, and know that I am God!” (three times repeated with deep breaths)

My eyes are awake before each watch of the night, that I may **meditate** on your promise.

I meditate on your promise to hear my prayer and gift me with Grace.

(three deep breaths)

I commune with my heart in the night; I **meditate** and search my spirit:

I search my heart for my greatest need at this time.

(three deep breaths)

I bring my great need before God at this time.

(three deep breaths)

Be still, and know that I am God!

Be still and know that I am

Be still.

Trusting in God's grace through Christ we pray, Amen.