

Deepening Our Spiritual Lives

Broadly defined, spirituality seeks to give meaning to our lives through a personal relationship with God, while religion is the formal practice of our faith or beliefs. At the core of this search for meaning is the desire to transcend the ordinariness of life and to grow, develop, become all that we can possibly be as human persons, to reach beyond the person we are today to an ever emerging, ever transformed person tomorrow. We cannot do this alone. Consciously, or even subconsciously, we know God's Spirit is constantly calling us into relationship.

As a result of this call, spirituality is part and parcel of the human person. It is absolutely essential for our total sense of well being that we include the spiritual dimension. One reason is that our Judeo-Christian heritage teaches us that we are spiritual beings. The word "spirit" comes from the Hebrew word "ruah" which means "breath." When we stop breathing, the human spirit ceases to be present in one's body. We are dead when we have no breath or spirit within us. It is also from our Judeo-Christian heritage that we come to identify this life spirit with God. When we say that we are spiritual beings we mean that we are capable of possessing the presence, the very Spirit of the life-giving God within and around us. Think what this could mean for us if we could believe with all our hearts that God deeply loves us and is present to us at all times, even in our darkest moments.

The Catholic Church teaches by reason of baptism, all are called to be holy. We become holy when we develop as a whole person, i.e., when we develop all aspects of our lives including the spiritual dimension. Wholeness is related to holiness. We become holy to the degree we become whole as we grow into all God created us to be. This is a lifetime process. It is a continuous call to transformation, growth, conversion. It is something we work at consciously and consistently with God's grace.

Holiness happens where we live right now in the midst of our ordinary lives. It involves how we try to love the people we encounter each day. Seeking holiness is a process where we honestly deal with all the parts of us that sometimes get in the way of this loving. It means honestly assessing and eliminating all blocks to our growth and wholeness. Holiness or wholeness also involves being open to all of life's circumstances and using them as opportunities or challenges for growth-filled living. The good experiences we encounter, and even the struggles we have, call us to growth and transformation toward wholeness. In other words, our work of seeking wholeness or holiness is an ongoing process that lasts a lifetime. God is at the center of this movement.

For these life situations to be graced moments leading us to growth and wholeness, we have to be aware of them as special moments. Sometimes this happens as the experiences occur, but most often it is in retrospect that we see the profound meaning of the events of our lives. Significantly, it is often in our quiet moments, our reflective moments that this realization occurs. Those quiet, reflective moments are times of prayer. It is almost impossible to be reflective if we do not take time to be quiet, to let God speak to us, to recognize that there is some Power or Energy in this world beyond our control. In most

religious traditions taking this time and being open to God's presence is prayer in the deepest sense.

We are unique creations of God called to holiness and wholeness. We are persons who need time for personal prayer and reflection to discover our gifts and the significant moments of our lives that reveal God's presence in our lives. These realizations are not possible without prayer and reflection. In order to be prayerful and reflective we must take time to do so. Quiet time is absolutely essential to integrated growth and transformation.

Our spirituality is all about this personal relationship with our loving God.

– Maureen McCarthy, OSU

Reflection Questions:

What is your personal spirituality like? Do you take time for quiet reflection/prayer to develop or deepen your spiritual life? Do you consciously and honestly try to eliminate blocks to your spiritual life? What have been the most significant moments in your life? Did you ever consider them as graced moments when you experienced God or a power greater than yourself?