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## Jesuit pray-ers

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## Jesuit Prayers

*Paul A. Soukup, S.J.*

Some trepidation accompanies this account of prayer, for I have long held the Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality in high regard, perhaps too readily canonizing its members and their writings. We entered the Society at the same time, the Seminar and I; from the middle of my tertianship, the Seminar—like my fellow tertians in faith sharing—now asks an account of my prayer.

Prayer and my estimations of it have certainly changed over the years. At one time I envisioned a kind of novice ideal of mystical prayer. Secretly a methodist, I sought to do the right things: the right positions, the right times, the right regulation of breathing, the right topics, the right contemplations. Over the years I have discovered that it is more important to let the Lord teach me how to pray. I have also discovered that praying regularly matters much more than following any particular method or technique of prayer.

Liturgical prayer has consistently helped and supported me. The Eucharistic liturgy and, more and more, the Liturgy of the Hours provide both a framework of prayer for me and an ecclesial context such that all my prayer takes on a much more public dimension than I would have imagined years ago. These public prayers of the Church, together with the usual variety of pastoral work, have led me to intercessory prayer as a regular part of each day. This type of prayer reinforces the lesson that God teaches prayer; I don't own my personal prayer, but share in a much broader hymn of praise and petition.

The Ignatian foundation of my prayer leads to another quality: whatever form the prayer takes—liturgical, intercessory, more contemplative—it has proved important to me to ask for the grace I want. In general I tend to seek a deeper knowledge of and love for the Lord or a sense of God's will. Like everyone else, I suppose, I have asked for peace or for joy or for strength in more specific

moments.

My prayer and my resolve to pray have benefited greatly from my seeing other Jesuits pray. This is nothing fancy: I have seen others celebrate the Eucharist, sit quietly in the chapel, read the Scriptures, ask prayers for others. This praying by others is an invitation and an example for which I am deeply grateful. On those days on which I still wish I could find a method, I am often fortunate enough to find a companion in our Society who will show me his prayer.

Despite the fact that a part of me wants to believe that prayer is something extraordinary, my experience tells me that prayer is the ordinary rhythm of our lives. That's consoling because it means that I can do it.

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## The Prayer of Incompetence

*William C. Spohn, S.J.*

When I pray it is not an experience of competence. For a long time this bothered me; now it seems to have a gracious dimension. Coming to terms with this fact may be early middle age's adjustment to the inevitable. Or it may indicate something fairly common about Jesuit prayer. In the midst of lives of energy and effectiveness, many of us may experience prayer as a sector of incompetence where we have no idea of what the "right moves" are or wonder if there are any right moves at all. During tertianship our director told me that we never know whether we are doing the right thing in prayer, any more than we can be certain that we are doing or saying the right thing in a relationship. We try to be attentive, responsive, and do