

PRAY ANYWHERE

Matt Kappadakunnel

WITH NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS being pronounced and attempted, many people are looking to bring about a change within themselves through diet plans and exercise regimes. While these goals certainly have merit, a more important resolution would be one to bring about interior change in the form of *metanoia*, or conversion. In the coming year we should consider placing greater emphasis on fostering (and continuing to foster) a daily prayer life.

Choosing to follow through on this resolution might appear daunting. *When would I have time to pray? Where would I pray? How would I pray?* Also, words such as those of from St Paul instructing us to 'pray always' (1 Thessalonians 5:17) might be discouraging. Without discussing, or dismissing, Paul's words, we may find greater ease with this New Year's resolution by making one change in his exhortation—from *pray always* to *pray anywhere*.

Anywhere?

Anywhere. We should pray on our commute to and from work or school; on a park bench during our lunch break; at the beach, standing on the shoreline; on a mountain cycle path; out shopping while resting our feet. Whether in nature, in the city or indoors, God is with us and is eagerly awaiting our response to the invitation to allow God's love to enter into our lives. God will most surely meet us *wherever* we are.

What is being suggested is not novel. Finding God's active love in daily life has been promoted by a variety of saints, including Francis of Assisi, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal and Ignatius of Loyola. Jerónimo Nadal called the spirituality of Ignatius *contemplative likewise in action*. Prayer does not need to be limited to churches, readings and devotions (while noting that these are all wonderful in themselves). We therefore

cannot use the excuse that we cannot pray because we need to be in a conventional place to do so.

The freedom to pray anywhere helps us with another common impediment to prayer—*time*. Finding time to pray is possible when we allow ourselves to be flexible about our place of prayer. It will be the most suitable to each person, according to his or her schedule and individuality. But this place of prayer is most assuredly *holy ground*.

For several years I had a morning commute that could vary from thirty minutes to an hour and thirty minutes. I began to discover the Spirit's presence with me most particularly during these mornings. Perhaps it was the time of day and the regularity of the route, but that became holy ground *for me*. Amid the lane-changing and stop-and-go, I became greatly aware of the movements within my heart as well as God offering me peace, comfort and love that morning—all while I was driving to work. I would often experience God's voice as readily as if I had been praying in a conventionally religious place. On several occasions I experienced the gift of the Spirit in the form of tears, which brought much healing and consolation. The place I chose to pray did not inhibit God from doing a mighty work within me.

How can we find our best place to pray? One suggestion is to use the Ignatian Examen (which, in itself, is an excellent form of prayer). During the evening, we can spend ten to fifteen minutes reflecting on that day—hour by hour, location to location—with the aid of and the eyes



of the Spirit. We can ask the Spirit for the grace to discover not only how God was communicating throughout the day and how we responded to God's invitation, but also what particular place in our day is being set aside by God as holy ground. The burning bush was holy ground only because God spoke to Moses there; otherwise it was just a bush in the desert. When that particular place becomes revealed in our prayer, we can test that place, trusting that God will truly meet us where we are.

St Ignatius describes God as labouring on our behalf in and through the elements and our surroundings (Exx 236). God can and will do a mighty work within us wherever we discern where it would be best to pray. The freedom to pray anywhere allows us to pray more regularly, which will lead to a change that is far more lasting than any diet plan or exercise regime. This is a wonderful opportunity for all of us in this new year. The practice of daily prayer will better dispose us to become 'contemplatives in action' as well as to live St Paul's command to 'pray always'.

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