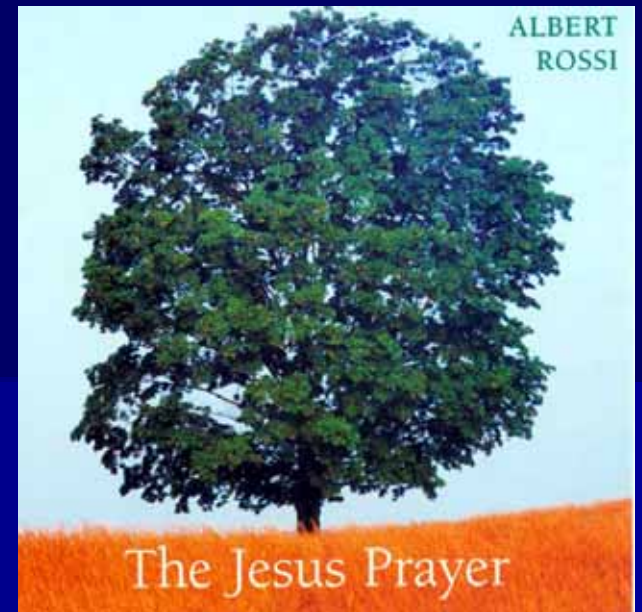


The Jesus Prayer



Sunday, July 2, 2006
9 to 9:50 am, in the Parlor.
Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness



ALBERT
ROSSI

*Based on,
with Audio
from:*

**The Jesus
Prayer.** A
CD of a
lecture by
Dr. Albert
Rossi. St
Vladimir's
Seminary
Press. ISBN
0-88141-
291-0

The Jesus Prayer



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. . . silent prayer. . .

What is the Jesus Prayer?

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- Goes back to 5-6th century Nitria, the desert in Egypt, where monks prayed “arrow prayers”
- This presentation intended to be impressionistic, not a “classroom” presentation
- Talk can be boiled down to one word:
 - Ask ♦

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- The Jesus Prayer is also known as “The Prayer of the Heart”
- An ancient prayer
- One way of opening our hearts to God
- A love song to the person Jesus ♦

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- The classic form, as handed down from 5th-6th century: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner”**
 - *Inhalation*: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God**
 - *Exhalation*: **“have mercy on me, a sinner”** ♦

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- Shorter version: **“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”**
- Monks of old: **“Lord, make haste to help me. Lord make speed to save me.”** ♦

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- The history of the prayer goes back to Diadochos in the late 5th, early 6th century
- Repetition of the prayer leads to an inner silence, called **hesychia**
- In fourth century Egypt, in Nitria, short “arrow” prayers were practiced
 - “Assault” heaven with “arrow” prayers ♦

What is the Jesus Prayer?

- Don't be afraid to pray to Jesus that you love him
 - Another variation of Jesus Prayer: **“Lord Jesus Christ, I love you”**
- St. Paul calls upon us to pray ceaselessly (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- The Jesus prayer is one good way we can “pray ceaselessly” †

The Power of the Name

The Power of the Name

- Biblically, knowing a person's name gave the speaker power over that person. Name was linked with being.
- Jesus explicitly asked us to use God's name in prayer: "Abba," or Father
- Jesus and the Father are one
 - Jesus said, "He who sees me sees the Father. The Father and I are one"
 - So when we pray to Jesus, we also pray to the Father ♦

The Power of the Name

- Jesus tells us, “ask, and you shall receive”
 - Why? So that your joy may be full
- The first half the Jesus’ Prayer stresses the name of Jesus to:
 - remind us of his presence
 - allow us to share in his power †

The Meaning of Mercy

The Meaning of Mercy

- Second half of the Jesus Prayer stresses God's mercy. Mercy in Hebrew *hesed* means:
 - Loving kindness
 - Everlasting love
- Our basic need as human beings is to be loved, and to love
- In praying "Have mercy on me," we are asking God "have your love on me" ♦

The Meaning of Mercy

- The Greek word for mercy *eleison* comes from a root word *elaion* meaning “olive”
- Even today in the Middle East, olive oil is used for healing
- In praying “have mercy on me,” we are asking God to have “warm healing olive oil on my hard soul.” ♦

Facing Crises When Prayer is a Habit ⁺

Prayer as a Hidden Martyrdom

Prayer as Hidden Martyrdom

- Praying repetitively is an inner asceticism
- Praying without ceasing is a “hidden martyrdom,” said St. Ignatius Brianchaninov
 - Our ego does not want to think about God

Prayer as Hidden Martyrdom

- Prayer requires courage; the whole ensemble of nature's energies is in opposition, says Archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov)
- Our call is a martyrdom that:
 - Involves being attentive to the present moment
 - Relying on God's power, and doing God's will ♦

Who Can Say the Prayer?

Who Can Say the Prayer

- Anyone, everyone can say the Jesus Prayer
- One may safely say the prayer without a spiritual director or guide, so long as one limits the duration of saying the prayer (~ 15 minutes at a time) †

Formal and Free Use of the Jesus Prayer

Formal and Free Use

- Two ways to say the prayer:
 - Formally
 - Freely
- Formal use:
 - Posture: seated in chair, eyes closed; or standing at icons
 - Duration: 10 to 20 minutes
 - Say the prayer gently and repetitively
 - Morning or evening recommended ♦

Formal and Free Use

- Free use:

- All other times of day or night when we are not otherwise engaged
- Such as while doing semiautomatic tasks like driving or doing the dishes, walking, or being unable to sleep
- Times of extreme concern or upset ♦

Formal and Free Use

- The voice is God is so delicate, so easy to resist: how can we be “quiet” enough to hear the voice of God in our daily life?
- In the speaking is the listening
- Speak, pray to God in a soft, barely audible, out loud voice
 - Hearing one’s voice makes it easier to concentrate and lowers the level of distraction
 - One way of engaging the body in prayer †

Prayer of the Heart

Prayer of the Heart

- The Jesus Prayer is also called the “Prayer of the Heart”
- In Orthodoxy, the mind and the heart are often seen as “one”
 - St Theophan tells us to keep our “mind *in* the heart” at all times ♦

Prayer of the Heart

- Heart here means:
 - The physical muscle
 - Our emotions and feelings
 - Our spirit or innermost core
- Our heart is our innermost chamber, our secret dwelling place where God lives ♦

Prayer of the Heart

- “The heart is but a small vessel; yet dragons and lions are there, and there are poisonous creatures and all the treasures of wickedness; rough uneven paths are there, and gaping chasms. There likewise is God, there are the angels, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace; all things are there.” (St. Macarius) ♦

Prayer of the Heart

- Our heart is a:
 - dimension of our interior consciousness
 - a sacred space
 - a “field of divine energy”within us †

Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory Prayer

- Is intercessory prayer self-centered?
- Does God hear our prayers?
- *Example:* St. Therese and Henri Pranzini
- Intercessory prayers work in the divine realm ♦

Intercessory Prayer

- It is important for us to pray for others – those around us need us to pray for them.
- God hears every prayer we say for another, and answers each prayer for the other person's good
- *Another example:* St. Monica and Augustine ♦

Intercessory Prayer

- Ways of doing intercessory prayer for another:
 - “Lord Jesus Christ of God, have mercy on [name]”
 - “The following prayers are for [name]:
“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner” . . . †

Silence as a Choice: Inner and Outer

Silence as Choice

- The Jesus Prayer requires an *outer* and *inner silence*
- Silence is a choice
- Christians may be said to order and measure their lives from communion to communion, and from silence to silence
 - There are many lesser ways which we can choose to measure our lives ♦

Silence as Choice

- We order and measure our lives by the things that we choose
- We should strive to make our Lord “the marker” for the ordering and measuring of our lives ♦

Silence as Choice

- Silence at its best is *God-awareness*: we quiet down our outer and inner selves to hear God, whose words are like “the flutter of a bird’s wings”
 - Outer silence is a choice
 - Inner silence can be achieved by substituting one thought for another
 - The Jesus Prayer can override our usual compulsive stream of thoughts and anxieties
- ✝

Technique and Psychosomatic Issues

Technique

- We pray body and soul, which are a single unit. The body has a role in prayer
- How we can involve the body:
 - Breathing
 - In: **“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,**
 - Out: **“have mercy on me, a sinner...”**
 - Inner exploration: following our breath around our bodies
 - Orientation and Posture: face the east ♦

Technique

- Orthodox prayer ropes are soft and made of wool. Their purpose is to aid concentration, not necessarily to keep count
- Praying more is not better; love is not proportional to quantity
 - We do not have to imitate the pilgrim in the famous book *The Way of the Pilgrim*
 - ◆

Technique

- We don't pray the Jesus Prayer for personal benefit, but so we can get closer to Jesus and become more like him
- Every prayer is an act of love, made to the Author of Love †

