

Part II:



The Way of A Pilgrim

...People long to go on pilgrimages
and palmers long to seek the strange
strands of far off saints,
hallowed in sundry lands...

G. Chaucer



THE PILGRIM'S WAY



“IT IS ONLY BY LEAVING OUR OWN HOME AND TAKING A PILGRIMAGE THAT WE WILL BEGIN TO SEE HOW OUR OWN STORIES ARE INTERWOVEN WITH THE GREAT ROMANCE THAT GOD HAS BEEN TELLING SINCE BEFORE THE DAWN OF TIME.”

-JOHN ELDREDGE

THE DAILY RHYTHM OF THE PILGRIM'S WAY.

On pilgrimage we try to answer Jesus' recommendation to "stay awake" and "pray always:" Neither a small task. So as pilgrims we try to live in such a way as to be always listening, watching and paying attention. As Brother Lawrence suggests, the Pilgrim's Way is an attempt to practice the presence of God, using a rhythm that has been practiced throughout the history of God's people. The daily balance of silence and conversation, community and solitude, stillness and movement, individual and corporate prayer amidst the intentional rhythm of returning to God at fixed intervals, leaves us awake to watch, listen, love, respond, notice and walk with God.

The Pilgrim's Way is really like a life size book of "Where's Waldo?" Each day, just as each page, brings uncertainty yet eagerness in wonder as to where exactly is Waldo to be found in this picture. Likewise as pilgrims we awaken each day with uncertainty and eagerness in wonder as to where exactly God will lead us today and where might He show up? What might He hide today for us to find?

So we practice this rhythm daily as best as we can while still giving the Spirit room to guide and lead. Using practices of ancient and new help us to fall into sync with God's own heartbeat so that we might become fully present to God, ourselves, each other and the path we stand on.

The Daily Rhythm of the Pilgrim's Way.

In some variance

Awaken on own in silence

Breakfast

Morning Prayer

Private Prayer.

Silence is broken.

The days adventure begins

Embracing Holy Ground;

- *A time of learning*
- *A time of silence and solitude*
- *A time to take a reminder and leave a blessing*
- *A time to shop*
- *A time of corporate prayer*

Midday Prayer

Lunch

The days adventure continues...

Dinner

Evening Prayer and reflection time

Mulling Time

Compline

Holy Silence.

WHAT IS THIS PILGRIMAGE THING ANYWAY?

Have you ever thought for a moment that most of the great stories that we love all involve movement? And by movement I don't just mean taking a walk, sitting down, eating a meal or going to work. I mean movement on the inside. What we might call growth. Let's think for a minute about it: Luke Skywalker becomes a Jedi Knight; Frodo becomes the *ring-bearer*; Neo from the Matrix becomes the "chosen-one;" Harry becomes a wizard; Cinderella becomes a princess; the tin man gets a heart, the scarecrow gets a brain and Dorothy learns she always had the power to go home. Now what about others stories that are the roots of our Christian faith and tradition? Fishermen becomes the founders of "the church;" Esther becomes queen; Jacob becomes Israel; Moses becomes the leader; Joseph becomes a dream-interpreter; David becomes King; Mary becomes the Mother of God.

What I've always found so interesting is that so many of these stories and these transformations actually include outward journeys not just inward journeys. The characters not only change and grow inwardly but they change and grow outwardly. And that's what's so great about these stories: they teach us this truth that there is more to life than meets the eye¹. Life is more than what's just on the outside. We have an outward life. But we have an inward life as well. And if we go back to the beginning of our story, back to the Garden of Eden, we learn that God created us and this world to grow. God didn't create a stagnate place. God created a garden with plants and water and animals and humans, all of which must grow in order to keep living. This cool guy back in the days of the early church named Irenaeus said that "the Glory of God is man fully alive." Fully alive means that we're growing and changing and that we're on this journey to be fully alive, to be all that God has made and still calls us to be.

So this movement we find in these great stories is so powerful because, we, too are made for movement: A movement inward and outward. Both are interrelated, interdependent and mutually essentially. Now although the church, throughout her story, has spent time emphasizing one part over the other to varying degrees, the people of God have actually somewhat consistently tried to tie these movements, these parts, these journeys, together into one practice: *Pilgrimage*.

A pilgrimage traditionally is a journey made to places deemed as "holy" for a reason. And traditionally for a spiritual reason. So pilgrimage is something we do outwardly (we go on a journey) to mark something inwardly. Pilgrimage brings these two worlds together: the physical and the spiritual. Now we could easily head out to Canterbury or Jerusalem and get so wrapped up in snapping pics that our journey could be nothing more than a tour of this holy place. On the other hand driving might be a time of prayer and worship, so the daily commute to work could easily become a pilgrimage.

But that's just it really, what it boils down to is this: *where* you go isn't as important as *how* you go. Pilgrimage isn't about the destination, it's about the journey. That being said, more often than not, the destination could be what lures onto the journey. But ultimately it's the journey, the movement, the growth, the convergence of our inner and outer worlds that matter most. Think for a moment back to those great stories we know and love. Let's take Dorothy and Toto: Dorothy journeyed all the way to the Wizard so she could get back home. She arrives to find that actually she had what it took to get back home all along. *But* she needed the *journey* to work that out. The Wizard was the lure but really the journey was all about Dorothy.

We are a pilgrim people. We are a people, who are always moving, always wanting more, never satisfied, never full and never finished. **We are a pilgrim people**, created with pilgrim hearts: hearts to know, hearts to love, hearts to seek the God who made us and walks with us. Life this side of Eden may be far busier, far more distracting, incredibly more difficult and not nearly as beautiful BUT our hearts are still the same. **We are a pilgrim people** because we have hearts that will never rest; never be satisfied; never be complete until we find the God who is at the core of all we desire and seek through this life. We are made to move and to grow. We will never be "fully alive" and we will never make it back home until we start this journey that ties our outer and inner worlds together. So maybe it's time to start this pilgrimage home.

¹ John Eldredge in *Waking the Dead* does a fabulous exposition on this.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, PILGRIMAGE IS

- *A sacrament: an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. A outward journey that marks the inner spiritual journey*
 - “As a form of prayer, the pilgrimage is an incarnational prayer, a prayer of the body.” Edward Hays.
 - “To go on a pilgrimage is not simply to journey to a holy place. There is the inner journey as well as the outer journey. To enable the inner journey to take place we need to practice the presence of God. The physical place is important and so is the physical act. A sacrament is a sign that signifies and gives life. Pilgrimage is a sacrament on foot. The physical journey will in effect a change in us.” O’Malley
- *A journey made for spiritual purposes. Somewhat like a “Vision Quest.”*
- *A journey made to not only see the holy but to sit in it for a while*
- *A journey made to traditionally sacred places*
 - **How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the Gate of Heaven. - Genesis 28:17** *it’s Playing and Praying in the Gates of Heaven*
 - How wonderful it is to walk with God along the road, which holy men have trod. How wonderful it is to hear Him: say Fear not, have faith ‘tis I who lead the way. – T H Kitching.
- *A journey made to practice the presence of God*
 - Busyness, speed, is the enemy of pilgrimage - as Winona Ryder said in Mermaids, "Whoever heard of anyone hearing the Voice of God doing 70 miles per hour down the freeway?".
 - "The most crippling thing that besets a pilgrims heart is simply forgetfulness or more accurately the failure to remember." –Eldridge
- *A journey made in the company of the Saints and other companions*
- *A journey not a destination: it’s not about where you journey but how you journey*
- *A journey of leaving home to find home*
 - And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. – TS Eliot.
 - rediscovering and remembering who we really are; a journey of awakening
- *All people are called to pilgrimage, but not all answer. Not all are called to the same pilgrimage. But the goal of all pilgrimage is the heart of God. -C. Doherty*
- *A journey with waymarks: Wayside crosses served as markers to reassure travelers that they were on the right road and as roadside shrines, where they could offer prayers for a safe journey.*
- *Traditionally*
 - a journey made “to see and touch”
 - a journey made for forgiveness and/or healing
 - a journey made of pleasure and joy
 - a journey made to honor a vow to God or atone for sin
 - a dangerous journey
- *A journey made “so that Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you might be filled to the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:17-19)*

- Today: Pilgrimage is a choice we make. Pilgrimage begins with out intention to do so.

All of life east of Eden can be considered pilgrimage. – Tony Jones

- “The Education of the pilgrim begins with the simplest movement of the foot forward.”
– Brett Webb-Mitchell
- “Pilgrim” comes from the Latin word for ‘resident alien’
 - “We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth” Hebrews 11:13
 - Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is. And walk in it. And you will find rest for your souls. – Jeremiah 6:16
 - For I am a sojourner with you, a pilgrim as all my forbears were – Ps 39:14
- Blessed are they whose strength is in you, who’s hearts are set on the pilgrim’s way. – Ps 84:5

THE PILGRIM OF OLD

- Pilgrim’s were recognized by what they wore and thus were welcomed into monasteries, church’s and homes along their way. What the pilgrim wore ritualized the separation of "sacred time" and "secular time" He or she was leaving the secular time for sacred time:
- Pilgrims bring an offering (it used to be usually money).
- Pilgrims return with a blessing, a “badge” or “brandeau” – or maybe a miracle
- Pilgrim’s had a uniform: a scrip; a staff; a hat; badges; a cloak
- Pilgrim’s would tie up all lose ends before they would set off (including all apologies)
- Pilgrims would see a priest: make a vow to complete their pilgrims and receive a blessing (staff and scrip). *Pilgrimage began at church.*
- Pilgrim’s were a boost to local economies too (food, lodging, souvenirs).
- In 1530, reformers condemned pilgrimage as spiritually useless. In many places they were banned. (Scotland, 1581).

GIVE me my scallop—shell of quiet,
My staff of faith to walk upon,
My scrip of joy, immortal diet,
My bottle of salvation,
My gown of glory, hope’s true gage ;
And thus I’ll take my pilgrimage.

Sir Walter Raleigh, *Daiphantus*, 1604 54

THE PILGRIM’S WAY: *a pilgrim’s rules by Edward Hays.*

- **Travel Simply:** helps us discern what is really essential and what to hold lightly
- **Leave Home:** the journey into the unknown and the uncomfortable requires our trust in God
- **Prayerful Attention:** so as to not give into the temptation to turn the vocation of a pilgrim into a vacation of a pilgrim. So as to not let the adventure distract from the inner-venture.
- **Practice Joy:** it’s a serious about the intention of the journey but the journey is to be enjoyed. Redefining “reverent” from downcast and grim to childlike wonder and awe and amazement. To be reverent is to find the holy in everything, taking nothing for granted along the way.
- **Time to taste, to see, to smell, to listen and to feel:** Pilgrims get lost in contemplation, in absorbing the holiness they find. Busyness is the antithesis of the Pilgrim’s Way so we must travel slowly with plenty of time.
- **Courage for danger:** Perhaps the road itself is not dangerous to us as it was long ago but we are in danger of awakening to God and to life, never to be the same again.



PILGRIMS VERSUS TOURISTS.

The difference between a pilgrim and a tourist is that a pilgrim seeks God not a place.

I have always been struck in Europe at the distinction between pilgrims and tourists. Most Cathedrals have signs that welcome both "Pilgrims and tourists" clearly delineating between the two.

"The difference between a tourist and a pilgrim: the heart which shapes the purpose of the journey. A tourist visits to see, to take in, to learn about; but a pilgrim comes to offer oneself and to share personally with the people who live (or lived) and work (or worked) there in order to further inner journey."

The pilgrim is always seeking that which will draw them closer to their God; they are always on moving from holiness to holiness.

Essentially a tourist visits a place to be able to return home and show others often through keepsakes and pictures that say "hey I've been there"... a pilgrim though visits holy ground to experience the presence of Jesus there ... time must be spent there - time to soak in... Time to feel the cloud of witnesses that have gone before you and prayed in the same place ... a tourist moves simply from one place to the next not really savoring the moment there; often learning what they can and moving on to the next place of their tour. For tourists, the destination is what is most important. For a pilgrim that is negligible. The journey itself is what is most important to the pilgrim. You might say it's not "where" you're going on pilgrimage but "how" you're going.

So can pilgrims take pictures? Can pilgrims buy keepsakes? YES. But how is different. A picture a pilgrim takes comes out of a *response* to their experience of Christ there. A tourist is there to take pictures... a Pilgrim's picture is there as a response to the presence of Christ. The intent of a Pilgrim is different --- a Pilgrim's heart is there to seek the Holy... to see God, himself right then and there. A pilgrimage is about being present and aware and awake to God. It's not about bringing it back when the trip is then over (though hopefully once a pilgrim, always a pilgrim). A pilgrim continues the journey at home continuing to seek the holiness and blessings of God back in their routine.

So a pilgrimage doesn't end like a holy tour. . Souvenirs are a tourist thing -- they help speed things up allowing the movement to loads of places... with something to take back and have a moment later with it ... "Reminders" are what a pilgrim seeks: A reminder of the presence of God in a particular place or through a particular thing ... a reminder of what they found. And so at the end of our time in a holy place we shall take time to collect a reminder or a blessing from that place. Something that is sacramental; something that marks the experience we have had there. So we will take reminders back with us - some we find in a gift shop, some we may find on the ground, some we take with a camera. We can buy, collect, take back the things that help us remember the presence of God and our experience of Christ and His Saints; things that help us to continue the pilgrimage in our daily life and share the holiness we discovered with those around us. And take back things that might share our experience with those we love and have journeyed with us from afar.

Ultimately a tour is about the places you're going. A pilgrimage is all about the journey.

OUR GUIDES ON PILGRIMAGE: THE SAINTS.

If you want to get to know God, then get to know His friends

— James C. Howell

In his holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a pocket handkerchief.

These handkerchiefs are called saints. - F. Buechner

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.

Hebrews 12:1

“I need saints, exemplary women and men, whose courage, faith and hope and action inspire and reshape and encourage me, reminding me of my own calling, stretching me to be the person God intended me to be, so that I may settle for no less than some measure of sanctity in my own life... Saints are never once-upon-a-time characters, stuck in the annals of history. They live and breathe when retell their stories. But more than that, we Christians have this keen sense that these saints, even those who have died, are truly alive. They are with God. They seem mysteriously enough, more alive now than they were during the life demarcated by their births and deaths... Part of what makes saints fascinating is their humanity. And the fact that a real, live human being managed to live in an exemplary way rids us of our excuse, ‘oh, I’m only human.’ The friends of God are not superhuman. Saints do not possess an extra layer of muscle. They are not taller and they do not sport superior IQs. They simply offer themselves to God, knowing they are not the elite, full cognizant that they are inadequate to the task, that their abilities are limited and fallible. The saints are those whose mundane lives have been seized by God and used in ways to which we are wise to pay attention. They are God’s invitation to us to be friends of God and therefore – dare we say it? – saints.” - JC Howell

What is a Mystic?

- Mystic: men and women who insist that they know for certain the presence and activity of that which they call the love of God. Mystics have “direct intuition or experience of God.” – E. Underhill.
- They see God shining through everything: have a clear and certain awareness of holiness

What is a Saint?

- What makes them saints is they were able to see the world as God sees it – Rev. Chris Steele.
- Saints are walking the streets everyday...Saints remind us of what we’re capable of. Saints are ordinary people who hear the Gospel and are led to extraordinary behavior –*Sister Sandra Smithson*
- *The problem: the saints became less as ideals of Christian discipleship and more as miracle workers or heavenly patrons. The saints, it seemed, were more to be venerated than imitated. By putting Saints on a pedestal we imply that their example poses no personal challenge. But when this happens Christian imagination is immeasurably weakened... The saints prove that a certain form of life and activity is a really genuine possibility; they open a path that others might follow in.* - Robert Ellsberg, from introduction to *All Saints*
- We need Saints... we need their witness ... *A saint is proof that the gospel can be lived. That closeness with God can be achieved. That miracles still happen.*

If we listen carefully enough, we can still hear the saints breathing, speaking and sometimes even singing.

THE OPUS DEI

THE WORK OF GOD

THE DAILY OFFICE

THE DIVINE HOURS

For us on pilgrimage: Morning, Midday, Evening and Night Prayer.

"The Purpose of the Divine Office is to sanctify the day and all human activity.'

-Apostolic Constitution

"Let nothing have precedence over the Divine Office'

The Rule of St. Benedict.

The Liturgy of the Hours:

"Fixed-hour prayer is the oldest form of Christian spiritual discipline and has its roots in the Judaism out of which Christianity came. When the Psalmist says, 'Seven times a day do I praise you,' he is referring to fixed-hour prayer as it existed in ancient Judaism." -Phyllis Tickle

The structure of the Opus Dei is intended to promote a conversation between God and his people (General Instructions on the Liturgy of the Hours), which includes both listening and responding, silence and words, Sacred Scripture and poetic texts reflecting Scripture themes, such as hymns... As we are expected to pray in solitude as well as in common, the Opus Dei should inspire our solitary prayer and vice versa. The prayer in solitude will probably have much less structure and ritual, but it is nonetheless a very important part of our life of prayer. We may begin each day with the praise of God in common with others, but eventually we continue in private the dialogue with God begun earlier.

Each day the Opus Dei begins with waiting for the Risen Christ (Vigils), welcoming him at dawn (Lauds), and throughout the day (Little Hours: Terce, 9am; Sext, noon and None, 3pm; and Vespers, 6pm), and finally placing ourselves under God's protection at day's end and the end of our life (Compline). *—The Monastery of Christ in the Desert*

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The purpose of the liturgy of the hours', or the Opus Dei (*the Work of God*) was to sanctify the whole day and all its activities. It answered the call of Jesus to his disciples and of Paul to the church in Thessalonica to *pray without ceasing*². Communities around the world praying the hours in different time zones created a ceaseless blanket of prayer that covered the church and the world. In regularly returning to prayer at the set hours, these communities (and the individuals that comprised each community) were able to carry prayer into all their tasks in between the *hours* increasing their ability to live with an awareness of the presence of God. So the hours themselves became a time of "deepening" since they considered all the hours in-between as prayer, being submersed in the living presence of God.

To help the Opus Dei to be the work of all people (hence the title of "daily office"), the church condensed the hours into four offices: Morning, Midday, Evening and Night (Compline). Even so most people's response to praying the hours is something along the lines of "I wish I had that kind of time." Times have changed. And life is indeed perhaps far busier and more complicated than a thousand years ago. But our resistance to make sacred space in time actually demonstrates a far greater change in our world. The church, as the physical representation and reminder of the living God, the body of Christ, in the world, is no longer found at the center of our towns, our countries, our world and more importantly our own personal life. The church has become periphery to the world. Which is why carving out sacred space in time is far more challenging.

² Luke 21:36; I Thess. 5:17

Why pray the hours?

Because it will help us remember that prayer is so much more than words we say? Prayer is more of a place we go than words we say. So each hour should be like relaxing in a holy bath, soaking in the presence of God. Each hour is a time of returning throughout the day, returning back to our God, our maker, our redeemer, our sustainer. Remembering that God is God and we are not. Each hour is a little refuge in the day; a respite in the shadow of the Almighty's wings.

What or how prayer is offered at each hour is irrelevant. *What is essential, as St Therese of Lisieux offers, is simply the turning of the heart towards God.*

In general God doesn't just turn up when you page Him. He is right where He always is, and what regular, daily-maybe-twice prayer gives us is some hint of just where that is and how to get there, and one of the things liturgy gives us is a way to get there when all our others ways have given there. — Lauren Winner

Liturgy:

Liturgy, which means 'the work of the people,' is a powerful tool in prayer. To echo the same words that have been prayed for centuries joins us to Christ and His saints. (It joins us with all those who have come before us and all who come after us). Common liturgy allows for common prayer. Liturgy also provides ease for prayer and takes off the pressure for coming up with our own words. Besides this, some people are blessed with a gift of writing beautiful prayers that help lead others into the presence of God. So we mustn't be afraid to pray using the words of others. Liturgy, though, does not eliminate the need to be able to voice our own personal cries, petitions and praise in our own words to our ever-present God.

Liturgy leads. Liturgy teaches. Liturgy lingers. Liturgy is the means to an end not the end itself. Liturgy is a catalyst (or a diving board) into the presence of God, into true and deep prayer, that sometimes needs no words at all. So when we pray using liturgy, let us not just say the words but let us see each word of the liturgy as a cathedral³ that leads us into the presence of God. What would it be like if liturgy became more than just words on a page or words said out loud?

So may our liturgy be yet one more companion on your journey. May it be a mere catalyst into the presence of God, into true and deep prayer, that sometimes needs no words at all. May these prayers passed down from generation to generation teach us how to pray and inspire us to find our own words that echo the prayers of our hearts and spirits. And whether you pray them by yourself or in the company of other pilgrims, know that the angels, the Saints, the monks and the nuns, and Jesus, himself, surround you and pray with you. May these prayers change and grow with you as you become more and more like the One who meets you in them.

³ The Greek Orthodox church views each word in their Divine Liturgy as Cathedral.

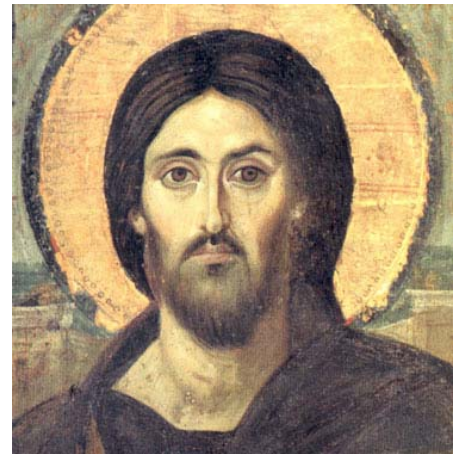
Meditative Singing:

Singing is one of the most essential elements of worship, yet although it is important to prepare it well, song practice should take place outside of the prayer itself. During the prayer, no one should direct the music. In this way, everyone can face the cross, the icon or the altar, for prayer is directed to Christ not to one another. Short songs, repeated again and again, give it a meditative character. Using just a few words, they express a basic reality of faith, quickly grasped by the mind. As the words are sung over many times, this reality gradually penetrates the whole being. Meditative singing thus becomes a way of listening to God. It allows everyone to take part in a time of prayer together to remain together in attentive waiting on God without having to fix the length of time too exactly. And these simple songs then enable us to keep on praying when we are alone, by day, by night and sometimes in the silence of our hearts when we are at work.

Praying with Your Eyes Wide Open: *Praying with Icons.*

Many of us were taught to close our eyes when we pray. Praying with icons is an ancient prayer practice that involves keeping our eyes wide open, taking into our heart what the image visually communicates. We focus not on what is seen in the icon, but rather on what is seen through it -- the love of God expressed through God's creatures.

An icon is not an idol. The word icon in Greek (*ikon*) means image. They are not "art" in the general sense but are a method of prayer. An icon is itself a prayer, a hymn in color. To write an icon is to confess that 'the word made flesh' (Christ) could be seen with the eyes. An icon leads us into the presence of God. *We pray through an icon not to an icon.* An icon is a window into the presence of God. How to choose an icon – does it help you pray?



This is prayer without words, with a focus on being in God's presence rather than performing in God's presence. It is a right-brain experience of touching and feeling what is holy -- a divine mystery. If we sit with them long enough, we too can enter into the stillness, into the communion. And if we listen to them closely enough, with our hearts, we just may discern the voice of God.

Look at the icon as you pray. See it as a point of connection with Jesus and the community of saints. Even though you may feel pressured by the demands of the day, try not to pray in a hurry. Better to pray for a short time with quiet attention to each word and each breath than to rush through many prayers. Be aware of your breathing. You are breathing in life itself, breathing in God's peace. You are breathing out praise and gratitude, breathing out your appeals for help. **Look through the icon** and see what you notice.

"There are many time when I cannot pray, when I am too tired to read the Gospels, too restless to have spiritual thoughts, too depressed to find words for God or too exhausted to do anything. But I can still look at these images."

Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons by Henri J. M. Nouwen, copyright © 1987 Ave Marie Press. *Praying with Icons* by Jim Forest, copyright © 1997 Orbis Books

ENGAGING THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. *Reading God's word as a Pilgrim.*

What exactly is the Bible?

It's kinda of a tough question. The Bible has been misunderstood since its beginning. It's been worshipped, idolized, dismissed, challenged, used and even abused over and over again.

So what's the deal? The Bible at its heart is a meeting ground (not a book of do's and don'ts for life). It's a meeting ground for you and God. Want a guaranteed place to find and meet up with God? Open the Bible. Seriously. Any book. Any page. Any word. Any letter. And get this, it doesn't even matter if you don't understand what's on that page or what that word means, it's a meeting ground for you and God.

Now how is this so? First of all remember the Bible is the collection of the "inspired word of God." Inspired means that it was collected, heard, witnessed and written down by people. So inspired means that we have to have the faith and the trust in God that he had a hand in making sure we got it right, we heard it right, we saw it right (again whether we understand it all or not). Word of God, means just that ... the Bible is full of God's words. Let's take this a bit further for a minute. A group of people way back when who had devoted their lives to living for God, thought of the Bible in this way: they believed that God was hidden in every word in the Bible. And not just every word but every letter. And they thought that this was so cool that they began making these "illuminated manuscripts" of the Bible where they decorated letters and words because God was hidden within.

Ok so God is present in His Words (with me, so far?) And as a result the Bible becomes this guaranteed place that we can find and meet up with God. But there's a bit more to it than just that. Surely God has a greater purpose in the Words in the Bible for us than just hanging out (though that's pretty high in his books, I think)? These words held in the Bible tell a story. All too often we seem to pull out isolated verses of scripture that usually say "do this" or "don't do that." But what we have to remember is those verses are part of a large Biblical narrative that tells the story of our creation, our fall and our redemption. They tell the story of God and His people (ummm yes, that would include you and me, today). The story has a beginning, a middle, a climax, a resolution and it will have an ending (we live in the part of the story between the resolution and the ending – God is still writing the story). The story has been retold over and over again in a thousand different ways: good versus evil; love and sacrifice; running away and returning home; faith and fear; pain and healing; life and death. You've seen it at the movie theatre; you've read it in books; and you've seen it in real life. Because this story is not just written in the Bible, it's written on our hearts. And in this story (here's the coolest bit) you have a role to play. YOU are written into this story.

Now I have to be honest, this story is a love story. And I hesitate to say that because the grandson in the *Princess Bride* comes to mind when he says to his grandpa: *is this a kissing book?* Yes, this is a love story but just like the *Princess Bride* it has *fencing, fighting, torture, revenge, giants, monsters, chases, escapes, True Love and miracles...* So the Bible holds the original love story (the one upon which all others were based): The one where the beloved (ummmmm that would be you and me) keeps getting lost, confused, distracted and disenchanted. The one where the beloved keeps walking away; finds other lovers (often times other gods); gets hurt and broken over and over again; gets into things that are no good at all; puts up walls and fights off the one who really loves him or her. And the lover (umm that would be God) who waits patiently; who won't give up no matter what, who fights for the beloved; who keeps calling the beloved to come back home; and who finds their way through sleet and rain and desert and water to find the beloved and nurse him them back to life again. You know, it's even in *Harry Potter*, the story about the one who lives because of loves sacrifice?

You see one of the coolest and mysterious things about this story that is held in the Bible is that just as this story has been retold in books, in movies, with different characters and different plots over and over again, THE story (the one within the Bible) is retold in our lives over and over gain. Here's the very cool mystery about the Bible: what you read didn't just happen along time ago, it still happens. It isn't just their story, it's our story. *And you have a role to play in it.*

Ok one last thought, what about all those do's and don'ts that are so easy to get hung up on? *Before we get stuck on those moral edicts that the Bible is infamous for, let's remember the whole story being told. The Holy Scriptures are a map of God's reality not merely a code of behavior. They help us return to the created order – the way God created life to be. They point us to the way life was intended to be. "Life outside the created intent destroys us. By contrast, life lived inside the contours of God's law humanizes us and makes us beautiful."* (Lauren Winner) So in essence God's Word helps us to live well and to become all that we are meant to be.

So how do you engage the Bible?

It's so big. So much in it. It can be and is totally overwhelming. And it's not like most books that you can read cover to cover (that's a little rough, it can be done, it is done, but it's not where I recommend beginning). Remember though, it doesn't matter what you read (every *letter* counts, right?) but *that* you read. And if you don't understand it, that's ok, you're not alone. Just don't quit because you don't get it. One day it will all make sense, I promise.

Engaging Scripture through prayer: A daily practice of Listening for God's voice

Read. Reason. Receive . Respond. Rest.

- Find a place to start: The Psalms, The Gospels, a letter in the New Testament .
- Read until you hit a word or phrase that makes you go, huh. The word or phrase that stands out in bold print (prepositions count, too –every LETTER counts). *How much you read at any given time is irrelevant.*
- Then Reason that word or phrase a bit. What does it make you think of? Chew on it a bit or in fancy terms: *RUMINATE on the word or phrase.* Then Listen... ask God what's he saying, what's he speaking to you (personally).
- Then Respond ... write, draw, talk to God – conversation time.
- Then Rest ... just chill with God, remember the Bible is a place to hang out with God. So hang out with God a bit. Don't even have to say anything. Just chill.
- Now just because I close the book, doesn't mean that God is done talking on the matter. Usually God keeps speaking once I open the door. So carry the word with you through the day and see what else God might say through the world around you... *don't let "amen" end the conversation.*
- Now what if you're looking for something in particular, wanting to hear God's words on something specific? Then try the concordance in the back of the Bible ... you look up a word and it lists verses in the Bible that that word shows up in – it's pretty cool. And if you don't find it there, try www.biblegateway.com (they have loads of different translations there as well – try NIV, ESV or the Message).

Remember back to the beginning. Remember when God spoke and there was light. Godspoke and there was land. Remember? God spoke and things happened. Well, God still speaks. And when God speaks, things still happen. What better reason then, have we, to open the Bible and listen for God's words, His speakings.

Engaging Scripture: Questions for Study of Scripture: (Fr. Jerry Smith)

1. What do we learn about the nature of God in this passage?
 - a. What does it tell us about his relationship with the world?
 - b. What does it tell us about his relationship with his peculiar people (the church)?
2. What does this passage tell me about me? How do I see a reflection of my behavior and attitudes here? What unnerves me most in this passage?
3. How does this passage instruct me as I attempt to follow Jesus in my daily life?
 - a. Is there a command I need to learn to obey?
 - b. Is there an example I need to learn to follow?
 - c. Is there an error in thinking or action I need to correct?
 - d. Is there a promise or gift from God I need to learn to appropriate?

The above inspired by Mark Yaconelli, Rob Bell, Lauren Winner, the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, John Eldredge and Fr. Jerry Smith.

The Practice of the Presence of God - Brother Lawrence

"In Christ God has made it very simple for us to have a constant awareness of His presence in our lives."

Since this communion with God was interwoven with his daily labor, which furnished him with substance for it, he did his work with the greater ease. And very far from distracting him from his communion, his work aided him in it.

He says that the presence of God can be reached more readily by the heart and by love than by understanding.

How very much shorter and easier it is to do our common business purely for the love of God, to set His consecrating mark on all we lay hands to and thereby foster the sense of His abiding presence by [constant] communion of our heart with His!

God does not consider the greatness of the work, but the love that motivates doing it. *It is our business my brothers to worship him and love him without thought of anything else.* THE GREAT BUSINESS OF A CHRISTIAN IS PRAYER.

Our communion with Him is so close as to compel us to run to Him at every moment, just like little children who cannot stand upright without their mother's arms of love.

God is everywhere, in all places. There is no place in space or time where we cannot draw near to Him and hear Him speaking in our heart.

Our sanctification does not depend upon changing our works but for doing for God's sake what we normally do for our own.

HIS PRAYER WAS NOTHING ELSE BUT A SENSE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD, HIS SOUL BEING AT THAT TIME INSENSIBLE TO EVERYTHING BUT DIVINE LOVE.

There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual communion with God. Only those who practice and experience it can comprehend it. Yet I do not advise you do it for that motive. It is not pleasure that we should seek in this exercise - we should do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us do it. **I cannot imagine how religious people can live satisfied without the practice of the presence of God.**

Let us think often, therefore, that our only business in this life is to please God, and that anything besides that is foolishness and vanity... An dhow can we often think of Him except by making a holy habit of it? We must know God before we can love Him. To know God we must think of him often.

To worship God in truth is to acknowledge Him to be what He truly is and ourselves what we truly are

The presence of God is thus the life and nourishment of the soul...

To practice the presence of God is to live in the conscious awareness of Our Father, engaging in quiet and continuous conversation with Him. It means we live an inner life of unceasing prayer and we strive for all we think, say, and do to be an outward reflection of what is pleasing to God. To practice the presence of God is to simply and humbly walk the closer walk. It is a closer walk because each day our hope is to get closer, to be closer to Our Lord than we were the day before. Ever closer. As both a direction and a goal, this closer walk is also a very potent, private, and personal awareness of the present moment with God. He lives in us as we live in Him. The Practice of the Presence of God, which Brother Lawrence often referred to as the holy habit, is a way of life where we engage in continual conversation with God; walk with Him in love, humility, simplicity, and faith; and do nothing, say nothing, and think nothing that may displease Him; because that is God's will for us. We see that the holy habit of the practice of the presence of God is a way of life. In other words, it is not an aspect of life or one of the compartments in which lives are often divided, but it is the complete framework and structure on which our life is unified and centered in God. We speak of the holy habit as a way of life and we may also see it as a series of little habits we develop over time and through practice. These little habits finally come together as a unified holy habit that becomes our natural way of being and our way of thinking, saying, and doing.

"There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God. Those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it." ... Brother Lawrence