

## REVIEWING YOUR PRAYER

### *Happy the Eyes that See What You See ...*

At the end of a period of prayer, it is useful to take a few moments to look back over the time and reflect upon what happened. This is not meant to lead to a judgement that the prayer was 'good' or 'bad'. It is, rather, to come to a deeper appreciation of what went on between God and me as I prayed, and to notice things in the prayer that I might want to return to the next time I come to pray. The following outline may help this review process.



When you have come to the end of a time of prayer, do something to mark the transition from prayer itself to the review. Stand up and move to another part of the room; go outside for a few minutes' breather; make a hot drink. Then come back and allow yourself five or ten minutes to look back over the prayer you have just done.

First ask God to bring to your mind and heart what it would be useful for you to notice in this review. Then recall how you had entered into the prayer. Were you using scripture, or stillness, or praying spontaneously, or some other method?

What were you hoping for in this time of prayer? Did you enter into it asking God for anything, and if so, what?

How did the prayer go? Was it easy or hard to stay with it today? Were you fully involved, or more like a spectator, bored or engaged?

Notice above all what was at the centre of the prayer for yourself on this occasion. Where did you experience life, or light, or energy, where did God seem close? Is there a word, phrase, or image, which captures something of this central point for you?

Were there times or areas in the prayer that you reacted against, which seemed to turn you away from God, or drain that same light, or life, or energy?

If the prayer led you into any sort of conversation with God, what did you say? How did God respond? With a word, a look, a gesture ...

Lastly, do you have any sense of 'unfinished business' in this time of prayer? Is there anything that you might want to come back to on another occasion?

It can be very helpful to keep a notebook in which you jot down a few reminders from this time of review.



*Moses and the burning bush. (R-60038-CW-V2)*

# KEEPING A REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

*There are many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe ...*

*(John 20:30–31)*



Keeping a reflective prayer journal can be a great aid towards growth in the spiritual life. Over time it offers a record of experiences that you have had, and what you and God have made of them as they happened. This means that looking back it becomes easier to see how and where you have changed, in outlook or in patterns of behaviour. Such changes are often so slow and almost imperceptible that they can easily go unnoticed.

It is good to notice what such a journal is not. It is not simply a diary, recording in more or less detail the events of each day. It is not a list of things to do, or of tasks accomplished. Nor is it a record of the books you've read, the films you've watched, or the insights that have occurred to you. Yet it may contain elements of all of these.

One way of understanding what to record in such a journal is to ask yourself: 'What has stirred me up, has moved me, over the period that I am considering?' This puts you in touch with what Ignatius Loyola would call 'movements of spirits', and which he saw as being indicators of God at work in a person's life. What has moved you might be a conversation you have had; a book that you've read; a situation that you have encountered; a piece of work that you have done; etc. The journal offers you a chance to explore in more detail, with God, what the happening meant to you. It helps to avoid the feeling that T.S. Eliot notes: 'We had the experience, but missed the meaning'.

Some questions that might help you begin to journal:

- ◆ What was the experience that moved you?
- ◆ What went on in you as it was happening?
- ◆ What feelings, emotions, or memories did it evoke?
- ◆ What stays with you now, as you write, from the experience?
- ◆ Is there anything that God might be showing you in all this?

There are also separate exercises, or techniques, that you might want to incorporate into a journal of this kind. Examples would be:

- ◆ Keeping a record of your times of formal prayer
- ◆ Constructing an imaginary dialogue with God, or with someone important to you
- ◆ Working through a question facing you, or a situation challenging you
- ◆ Exploring further a significant experience from your past, in the light of where you now find yourself

A key value in all of this is that you end up with a concrete record 'out there', something tangible that you can repeatedly return to.