



Ignatian Prayer: Do I Dare Tell God how I Feel? A Father's Day 2021 Reflection

In a conversation with a friend the other day, she said, “I am so sad and angry and disappointed that I just can’t pray! I am way too negative now. I’ve got to get myself together before I can pray again.” The situation my friend was dealing with is personal and difficult. I understand she is feeling strong emotions about it. Her words, “I’ve got to get myself together before I can pray again,” hung on and suggested a challenge and several Gospel passages which still linger.

First, I thought of Mary Magdalene, one of my favorite followers of the Lord, weeping at Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning (*John 20:11–18*). Not knowing that she was speaking to Jesus, she told Him she was looking for him. Jesus listened and then revealed Himself to her, breaking into her sadness. And I remembered the disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:13–35*). Like Mary, they did not know that they were speaking with Jesus. They told Him how sad and disappointed they were about Jesus and His Crucifixion and their disbelief that He could have been resurrected. He listened, stayed with them, and then revealed Himself to them after they had spoken as He broke bread with them.

Jesus drew near to Mary Magdalene and to the Emmaus travelers in their grief, disappointment, fear, and skepticism. In fact, He was near to them before they even expressed these emotions about Him to Him. It was, characteristically, only when they expressed how they honestly felt about what was going on in them that the Lord revealed His presence to them.

Throughout the Gospels, we find the Lord Jesus present when things are messy. He deals with the nitty-gritty of daily life; he does not wait until everyone is cool, calm, and collected. Jesus is especially present, it seems, when there is suffering and confusion. And he is not put off by his friends even when they confront Him. After her brother Lazarus had died, his sister, Mary fell at Jesus’ feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (*John 11:32*) The phrasing of Mary’s statement implies disappointment, if not anger, that Jesus was not there when they needed Him. In His response, Jesus weeps with her. His response is authentic, personal, and real. Not only does Jesus respond with compassion to her honest need, but He also performs what is now one of the most famous of His miracles when He raises Lazarus from the dead.

In his book, *Praying the Truth*, Fr. William Barry wrote, “In my experience, people who can tell God their sadness and distress usually sense that God is listening with compassion and understanding.” In fact, he argues, honesty in prayer is essential if one is to develop a deep, sustaining relationship with God.

Pope Francis affirms that we can express our sadness, disappointment, and anger with God: Many times, I have heard people say to me:

“You know, when this happened to me, I became very angry with God!”

— “You had the courage to be angry at God?”

— “Yes, I got angry.”

— “But this is a form of prayer. Because only a son or daughter is capable of being angry at their dad and then encountering him again.

Let us learn from Abraham to pray with faith, to dialogue and to argue, but let us always be willing to accept God’s Word as it comes to us and to put it into practice. With God, let us learn to speak like a child with our “dad” – listening to him, ready to reply and to contend. But always being as transparent as is a child with his or her dad. It is how Abraham teaches us to pray. (Pope Francis, General Audience, 3 June 2020)

It can be tempting to judge the “worthiness” of our emotions before we pray about them but expressing our feelings honestly can lead us to a more authentic relationship with God. Yes, we can honestly lay it all out—and still trust God to be our loving and caring father – and our faithful God! Happy Father’s Day!