

The Fruits of Prayer:  
A Personal Prayer Story  
By Nicolas  
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(translated from French)

My name is Nicolas. I have attended the Carmelite school of prayer twice. Three years ago, I took the beginners class, and the following year, the intermediate level. So, it is really fresh in my mind.

What's important to remember is that I am going to share my personal prayer testimony with you. It isn't a class on prayer, and actually pretending it was would be a bit pretentious of me.

In other words, what you are going to hear from me is both unique, precious and poor. It's at the same time precious and poor. So, take it for what it's worth.

Let me begin by telling you a bit about myself. I'm a family man and live right here in the neighborhood which explains why my wife and I went through the school of prayer twice.

I come from a practicing Christian family. As a child and then as a young man, I was very influenced by the Scouts. I had a thirst for adventure and for purpose.

Growing up, I went to Mass regularly with my parents and said the prayers but it was a bit rote.

It was only in the Scouts that I first heard about having a **personal relationship with Christ**.

Let me tell you a Scout story that happened when I was around 20 years old to illustrate just how poor we really are.

I participated in a Scout camp. As a part of the daily activities, we had a quiet hour that could be used for personal prayer or reading, but not for sleeping.

I was in charge of 6 or 7 scouts. One day after lunch I told them to take their quiet time reminding them that it wasn't for sleeping even though we had walked all morning.

When I woke up an hour later, I had 6 Scouts staring at me. We got a good laugh out of it but you can see how poor we are. We'd like to think of ourselves as being principled, but maybe not so much.

The **second gift** I received from Scouting, and I remember it 20-30 years later, is that prayer is a **time of friendship with Christ**. I had never heard that before. I heard it again of course when I discovered silent prayer with the Carmelite friars.

That really made an impression on me. I had never thought of **prayer** as being a **time of friendship with Christ**. It had always seemed to me to be a **vertical relationship** not at all **horizontal one**. So, began my **daily meetings** with Christ.

Three years ago, we moved into this neighborhood. Our home is a stone's throw from the Carmelite monastery, and so we decided to attend the school of prayer.

Getting back to the word '**time of friendship,**' I think prayer is really a **personal and loving meeting with Christ.** I often come back to the image of Christ with the **Samaritan woman** next to the well. It's the **meeting** of a person with the Christ who is **seated, welcoming** and most of all **available.** He's tired from walking and he even begs a little water.

That scene next to the well is one that I can easily imagine. It really represents for me what prayer is. Christ takes His time. He's expecting something from me and vice versa. It's a time to be **present to the Presence;** a time to be with the Lord.

Remember too that it's a loving time. I'm married and so of course I lived a period of engagement with my now wife. The encounter with Christ is a bit like an engagement period. At that time, I was living in Paris. I would set up a date with my fiancée. When we met, it wasn't to talk about a thousand things; it was really just about being together. The time of prayer is a bit like that. Once we were together, it wasn't about having deep discussions. For me, the meeting with the Christ is a bit like the love between a man and a woman.

With prayer, it's about letting Him invite Himself to come to me. It is about the state of my heart. I welcome Him, after He has welcomed me. It is important for me to

make a bit of room for Him which isn't always easy. There's the notion of **combat** and **perseverance** too, in all Christian journeys. In other words, there will be experiences that will upset you in the practice of silent prayer.

There is also the need for **regularity.** I think it is good to come before the Lord every day.

It is also important not to **judge** your prayer as it can be very discouraging. In fact, we don't know the **fruit of our prayer.** We don't know, we just believe by faith. We do the best we can. We believe the Lord is acting, but the fruit doesn't concern us.

It is also important not to lock yourself into a **method.** As I said, regularity is important. I suggest choosing an hour during the day for prayer, for me it's in the morning. There are of course those who prefer to change the time they pray. When I go on vacation, my routine changes and sometimes I don't pray. Theoretically I should have more time on vacation, but being out of my routine throws me off.

I am more of an artist than an intellectual, I might be saying stupid things, but it seems to me that prayer is an **impulse of the heart** towards the Lord. All that would lock us into a '**method**' of prayer would go against this **freedom to follow this impulse.**

God is always available to us. I have so many distractions but He remains always available to me. This is not so with my spouse or colleagues. It's a real blessing too.

You can see just how **out of balance** it is but that's the way it is.

Before getting into the specifics of my prayer, there is something that helps me to enter even deeper into prayer. Let me just remind you that the friars are our neighbors. So, upon completion of the school of prayer, on most Mondays, I began to attend morning prayer with the friars.

I usually arrive a few minutes in advance.

The friars are already in prayer.

When I enter the chapel and see all the friars in the dawn's early light, I'm reminded each time that there is something palpable going on here. It inspires me. It really situates silent prayer for me.

I don't mean to say that we should be like the friars as their lives are different. But it really situates silent prayer. It's serious, you can feel it. It's not serious, that isn't the right word, perhaps **peaceful** as if **life had stood still, come to a stop.**

I get there at 7 a.m., the hussle-bussle of Toulouse is already underway. Then all of a sudden, and it's dark on top of it all, you see the silhouettes, it really makes an impression. It really is something. It helps me and I offer my week to God. I really do try and keep the Monday morning meeting but of course certain mornings it's not possible. We aren't always in prayer mode and so the quality of our prayer isn't always the same.

The morning is my time after my shower. I spend 15 minutes in a quiet place in the

house. The shower wakes me up. During the shower I begin to make myself available to God.

Let me share something that was given to me recently, as you never know what can help someone. It was pointed out to me that in the shower we are **naked before the Lord**. You can begin by saying to Him, "Alright Lord, I'm here. I'm half a sleep. I'm waking up."

The shower is helping me to be more present and available. The shower is the first thing. I think it's a good idea. Of course, sometimes I am lost in thought but at other times I think about the shower cleaning me up, waking me up and about being before the Lord in a position where I couldn't be 'more' naked.

To begin, find a **humble posture**. Right now, I have a bit of a back ache so I have to change positions. You need to find a position that will allow you to exchange with 'the other.' ... be it my brother or my spouse or the Lord. When I talk with my wife I'm not completely sprawled out on my bed. It's the same thing with the Lord. You have to find the position that will show the person, Christ, in this case, that you are there. The position is important for you to be relaxed.

I always **begin** with: "Lord come to my assistance, make haste to help me..." You might also be inspired to call upon the Holy Spirit ...

I wanted to talk about **distractions** because in my work I do a lot of thinking, so, it seems to me that I often have a lot of distractions while in prayer.

I don't have a recipe to deal with them except to come back to the Lord as soon as possible. I usually try hard to just let them go, but there are mornings where I am a lot more **present to the Presence** than other mornings. Sometimes I am distracted the whole time I am in prayer. I find myself looking at my watch for example.

There are also **techniques** that can help us be present and relaxed. You could light a **candle**. Being in the right **surroundings** helps too. But there are days where its hard to stop the little bicycle in my head. Yesterday, for example, was a tough day but I think we shouldn't make ourselves feel guilty about it.

I try to enter into listening mode before beginning to talk to the Lord. I turn my life over to the Lord. It's mainly about a listening exchange without body expression.

I initially try to welcome the Lord and remain there with Him for a time in silence. Since I am a musician, what helps me is to listen to **music**. I find music centers me and helps me enter into a **deeper intimacy**.

At times I **read the Gospel** and try to absorb the **Word of God** because I find fifteen minutes of listening for the Lord a bit long. If I understood the school of prayer, the Word of God is not the center of prayer. The

**center is the relationship or the friendship with God.**

So, I read and focus on a **sentence to dilate my heart**. With all the help available to open your heart, you shouldn't hesitate to take advantage of it...be it music, the Word of God, a picture or something else.

I simply offer my day. It may be a time of exchange. It is not pre-planned. Or it may be just a time of **being present**. I am here. You are here Lord. Lord, it is for you that I am spending this time in prayer. He already knows our hearts but it shouldn't stop us from turning over our week, our day or even people if need be.

There you have it. I finish with the **Our Father** or the **Hail Mary**.

To conclude, if we are having trouble or are tired and just can't hang in there, well we are all a bit like that and it isn't important.

Don't deprive yourself either of '**fast**' **periods** of silent prayer during the day or even of times of **praise** because this can bring you back to Him. I know this because I recently became a grandfather and when I see small children in the street I want to praise the Lord.

Every opportunity should be seized, a silent moment during the day that brings us back to Him. It's worth its weight in gold.

And there you have it what I wanted to tell you about my practice of silent prayer.

Amen