

Jesus took Peter, John and James – and went up onto a mountain to pray.

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During the 40 days of Lent – we prepare to celebrate the Passover of the Lord – Jesus’ passion, death & resurrection – in the 3 day feast of the Triduum. And – traditionally – we prepare by prayer and fasting and almsgiving: by paying attention to God – by confronting and getting free of what possesses us – and by turning toward our neighbor.

In the gospel this Sunday Jesus is preparing his disciples for his Passover in Jerusalem – and so he takes them up on to the mountain.

And Luke is the only evangelist who tells us why. He took them there to pray.

It was while he was praying that the transfiguration took place. It was while he was praying that he began to change – and he talked with Moses and Elijah – and they all were enveloped in the cloud. Reading the gospel this week I kept coming back to that one detail that only Luke gives us: that Jesus’ prepares his disciples by inviting them to pray.

We’re always being called to prayer – we’re told that we need to pray – here, together at the Eucharist every Sunday – and every day as family around our kitchen table –or with the kids before bedtime - and in our own private prayer.

But WHY? How come? Why do we pray? And how do we know if our prayer is any good? What exactly is prayer for?

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Lots of times I hear people say – and I say it myself – I must not be doing it right – I don’t know how to pray because nothing is happening - I go to Mass and I don’t get anything out of it. I pray the rosary – I try to sit and be quiet – and nothing happens – I don’t feel any different – I don’t feel anything.

OR – I hear just the opposite: Boy did I really pray – it was wonderful! I could have stayed there all day – everything just fell into place.

If you noticed – both those results of prayer happened to the three disciples on the mountain with Jesus:

First – nothing happens – they get so bored they fall asleep.

Then – everything seems to happen at once – and they’re so high that Peter wants to set up camp right there and stay with the wonderful experience forever.

But also - if you also noticed – neither Jesus nor his Father paid any attention to either reaction - Jesus doesn’t come down on them for falling asleep – and he doesn’t take seriously Peter’s homesteading proposal. The reason for praying – according to Jesus and his Father – has nothing to do with either overcoming bad feelings and bad experiences or sustaining or prolonging good experiences – We don’t pray to feel good.

So why do we pray then?

On the mountain - in the midst of this experience – a voice comes out of the cloud – and God says to the three disciples: “This is my Son – my chosen – LISTEN TO HIM.”

The reason we pray – is first of all to know the Lord – to listen to him – to come to know him – to come to have a real relationship with him.

Prayer is not something we do to make us feel better – like going on a diet or running five miles a day. Prayer is something we do to get in contact and to stay in contact with the center of our lives and the meaning of our lives – with the Lord who loves us.

Prayer is not so much like the time spent on the treadmill at the gym or the power walk around Victory Park – but it's a whole lot more like the time we spend playing with the kids – or the weekend we get away with our spouse.

We pray so that we can love – so that we can stay in love.

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But the gospel says even more about why we pray.

Jesus and Moses and Elijah – Luke tells us – and only Luke tells us - were not just talking about the nice spring day on the mountain. They were talking about Jesus' Passover – his Exodus – his journey to Jerusalem - to the cross – to live out his faithful love for his Father and for his friends.

Jesus needed to pray – and he invited his disciples to pray – so that they could live in love – so that they could follow the way of faithful love: and give their lives way for the sake of others.

Unless you stay in contact with your kids and your wife and your husband – you're not going to be able to do the hard things on the hard days – you won't be able to keep at it – you won't be able to live the love you talk about.

We pray so that we can not only know the Lord [ listen to him ] – but also so that we can follow him.

If I want to know if my prayer is any good – I don't look at my feelings – at my reactions – my boredom or my elation.

I look at my relationship with the Lord [ is it growing? – am I listening to him? - am I coming to know him better? ] and I look at my life – at my everyday love – at the way I treat and take care of others. That will show me just how good my prayer is – my prayer here at Mass – my personal prayer every day.

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The Lord calls us to prayer – the Lord invites us up the mountain – but not so that we can just stay on the mountain top and enjoy it – but so that we can live – so that we can know him – so that we can follow him – whoever he lead us.

This week – as we continue our preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Passover – pay attention to your prayer – at Mass, at home, in silence of your heart:

Why do you pray?

To improve yourself or to know the Lord?

To feel good or to do good?

And where does your prayer get you?

Only to the mountain top – or on to Jerusalem?

Stuck in the clouds – or back down the hill and into life?