

Lenten Journey with Henri J.M. Nouwen – Reflection 1

Introductory Bible passage:

In your prayers do not babble as the gentiles do, for they think that by using many words they will make themselves heard. Do not be like them; your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Mt.6: 7-8)

From the writings of Henri J.M. Nouwen:

For many of us prayer means nothing more than speaking with God. And since it usually seems to be a quite one-sided affair, prayer simply means talking to God. This idea is enough to create great frustrations. If I present a problem, I expect a solution; if I formulate a question, I expect an answer; if I ask for guidance, I expect a response. And when it seems, increasingly, that I am talking into the dark, it is not so strange that I soon begin to suspect that my dialogue with God is in fact a monologue. Then I may begin to ask myself: To whom am I really speaking, God or myself? ...

The crisis of our prayer life is that our mind may be filled with ideas of God while our heart remains far from him.

+

Deep silence leads us to suspect that, in the first place, prayer is acceptance. A man who prays is a man standing with his hands open to the world. He knows that God will show himself in the nature which surrounds him, in the people he meets, in the situations he runs into. He trusts that the world holds God's secret within it, and he expects that secret to be shown to him. Prayer creates that openness where God can give himself to people. Indeed, God wants to give himself; he wants to surrender himself to the person he has created, he even begs to be admitted into the human heart.

Prayer:

Why, O Lord, is it so hard for me
to keep my heart directed toward you?
Why does my mind wander off in so many directions.
And why does my heart desire
the things that lead me astray?
Let me sense your presence in the midst of my turmoil.
Take my tired body,
my confused mind,
and my restless soul into your arms
and give me rest, simple quiet rest.
Amen.

(Adapted from *Show me the Way – Readings for each day of Lent* by Henri J.M. Nouwen)