

EMPTY SHELLS

*From: Stories, Parables and Fables of life of
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‘LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY’ (Lk 11/1)

“When you pray **do not use a lot of meaningless words** as the heathens do. **They think that God will hear them because of their long prayers.** Do not do be like them. ” (Mt 6/5-9)

Parable:

There was a holy man living in a deep forest. He spent his days saying prayers. He believed that the more prayers he said, the happier God would be. So, he kept on muttering over and over again many prayers.

It occurred to him that it would be a wonderful thing to keep a count of the many prayers he said so that at the end of his life he might offer them to God. Thus, every time he said a prayer he kept a walnut inside a big jar.

He carried on doing that until there was line of jars lining up outside his hut. As the line of jars was lengthening, the happier he was and, of course, so he thought, the happier God was too.

One day an itinerant Monk passing by asked him what all those jars were doing there lining on the road. With great pride the holy man replied: **“They remind me and to God, of course, of the great number of prayers I said”**

The Monk replied: “Kindly take a stone and crack all these nuts one by one. I am sure; God will teach you a little lesson about prayer.

Our pious man did as he was told, just to find out that the kernel of each nut had dried up. When he finished cracking all the nuts, the only thing that remained on the ground was a heap of empty shells!

Then, the Monk, asked him: **“Is not God teaching you a lesson or two about the emptiness and uselessness of your prayers?”**

Food for Thought

- No one can ever strike an intimate relationship with anyone without time spent together and exchanging meaningful and loving words.
- Beginners in love – as young couples- need lots of words and time together to communicate their love to one another.

- Older couples, however, after many years of living together, need fewer words to maintain their relationship alive and express their love for one another.
- **A true and deep relationship with God – this is prayer - cannot be built and maintained with just words and more words spoken in a routine way and without the heart getting involved.**
- Beginners in prayer life need many vocal and formal prayers to start their journey to God. Yet, this stage cannot last forever.
- **Those more advanced in prayer life need fewer prayers (in plural) and more communication with God - more prayer (in singular)**
- There is a world of difference between **“Prayer”** in singular and **“Prayers”** in plural. **Prayers in plural are only means, no ends to grow in “prayer life”**
- **Even Jesus, being human, like us, used to say “prayers” in plural. Yet, his true and deep prayer life did not consist only of mere vocal prayers, but mostly of “prayer”**
- Too many “prayers”, as too many words, may block our communication with God.
- Mere **compulsory routine prayers**, however abundant, **will finally turn in to ‘empty’ shells.**
- **Prayer life**, as all types of life, has to keep growing; otherwise it will die. “Prayers” in plural, if coming from the heart, are true means to grow in “prayer life”.
- Yet, we have to go beyond them and pray more with our heart. **The heart of prayer is to pray with the heart.**
- As our relationship with God grows more mature, we have to talk less and listen more.
- **In prayer what counts is “quality” not “quantity”.**
- Prayers are like the rungs of a ladder taking us to God. The closer we are to Him, the fewer rungs we need to reach him.

Teachings of Jesus on Prayer:

Mt	6/5-14	Pray in privacy. Use few words, Right attitudes
Lk	11/1-4	The Our Father
Lk	11/5-8	Insistence and perseverance in prayer is a must.
Lk	11/9-13	Ask, Knock, Seek
Mt	6/25-34	God and Possessions: Trust your Heavenly Father

Examples of Prayer In the life of Jesus

2.

Mt	14/18-20	Multiplication of Loaves and Fish.
Mk	1/35	Jesus goes to a lonely place to pray

Mk	14/32-42	Jesus in the Garden of Olives
Lk	6/12-16	Jesus chooses his disciples
Jn	17/1-19	Jesus prays for his disciples
Jn	17/20-24	Jesus prays for us – His future disciples
Mk	15/34	Jesus on the Cross-. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Lk	23/34	Jesus on the Cross-. Father, forgive them, they...