

How Can I Better Praise God?

The most helpful means to me in developing my own language of praise and adoration is praying the prayers of the saints. As an example, one of my favorite prayers during Lent is expressed in St. Alphonsus Ligouri's version of *The Way of the Cross*. In his reflection at the second station he says,

My most beloved Jesus, I embrace all the sufferings You have destined for me until death. I beg You by all You suffered in carrying Your cross, to help me carry mine with your perfect peace and resignation. I love You, Jesus my love; I repent of ever having offended You. Never let me separate myself from You again. Grant that I may love You always; and then do with me as You will.

The first time I prayed this I felt uncomfortable. I just didn't feel that it was completely true. Yes, I love Jesus, but, I know that my heart is divided. I love him with what seems to me to be a deep love, but I am also very aware of my sin and the fact that my love is not always as whole-hearted as I desire it to be. So, it felt a bit disingenuous saying the words, "I love you Jesus my love." It seemed more honest to pray, "I don't love you as much as I should, but I want to love you far more than I do."

My rescue came in the writings of St. Catherine of Sienna. She relays how it is not possible for us to atone for even the smallest sin (if there is such thing as a small sin). She notes that even though this is true, with God's grace working through us to love him, we are far more capable, by that virtue-amplifying grace, to repent and thus love God more completely. I realized that when I am expressing even the most meager half-hearted and poorly worded praise, that my words are reaching God in a way that has far more beauty and grace than I could ever muster on my own. It is something like little poorly skilled boy producing a painting that expresses his love for God. He works as hard as he can but from a human standpoint the painting is artistically pitiful. However, by God's empowering grace, he receives, in the boy's desire and his own amplifying grace, a painting that is more beautiful than Michelangelo could ever produce.

I was further comforted by the amazing words of a poem written by Saint Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart, O.C.D.

*...How can you say you do not love God when your very desire of loving is love itself?
It is the sweet flame which escapes from the secret furnace of your heart...*

With respect to praying with the saints, there are many good books available. One that I have found a particular blessing is *Divine Intimacy*. For every day of the year, following the Liturgical calendar, there are meditations and very beautiful prayers from Carmelite saints and other holy men and women. Praying these prayers and making them my own has been extremely helpful.

Another approach that I have found helpful is to personalize the treasure of our traditional prayers. For instance, I begin almost all of my meditation times with an adaptation of the Acts of Faith, Hope, and Love. When I first began this practice I simply prayed them as they are. Over time, I began to pray extemporaneously through the ideas and sentiments that they contain. That is, I made these acts my own either in the traditional form or adapted them to personal experience and the state of my heart each time I entered into meditation. This morning I prayed something like this for my act of faith:

*Lord, I **believe** in you. Thank you for being present to me. I am grateful that you desire my presence in spite of my sin. Before the foundation of the world you formed me out of nothing in order to be in communion with me. You sent your son to help me understand that no matter the depth of my sin, there is redemption for me. I believe in your love. Therefore, I **hope** in you...*

When I am feeling less able to express myself, I simply return to the traditional forms and pray them as my own prayer or I just sit in the quiet and gently repeat, "I love you Jesus my love. Grant that I might love you always, and then do with me what you will."

