

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS

A Column by Fr. Tom

Learning to Pray - the Beginnings

How did you first learn to pray? Most people would respond to that question by saying that their mother or father taught them. In addition, most would also say that they learned to pray using what the Church calls “formal” prayers. These are the prayers that someone else composed and that we memorized. For example, when you first learned to pray, perhaps your father knelt beside you at bedtime and began, “Now I lay me down to sleep....” During these formative years, we also learned the prayers of our faith tradition, such as the *Hail Mary*, *Our Father* and *Doxology* [Glory be...].

A more subtle lesson was also learned during these years as well. We learned that we are supposed to pray every day. Every night before we went to bed, as sure as our mothers would remind us to brush our teeth, they would also remind us that we needed to say our prayers. What our parents were trying to teach us was that our spiritual health is just as important as our physical health.

Now that we are older, these prayers should still be an important part of our spiritual life. As we grow, some families choose to pray the *Rosary* together as a family. Perhaps you remember Fr. Patrick Peyton’s slogan, “The family that prays together, stays together.” In the rosary, we combine

some of the traditional prayers of our faith to allow for a longer meditative devotion for Our Blessed Mother’s intercession. Those who were able to attend Fr. Pat’s parish mission in February remember how he told us that the rosary changed his life.

There are other formal prayers of our faith tradition too. Many of the saints have composed prayers that can speak the praises and supplications to God that we can’t seem to put into words. For example, St. Francis gives us the *Peace* prayer [Lord, make me a channel of your peace...] and St. Ignatius gives us the *Suscipe* prayer [Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty...]. These are not just songs, they are beautiful prayers. Many people pray the *Anima Christi* [Soul of Christ, sanctify me...] after Communion or the *Act of Contrition* as part of their daily examination of conscience.

While these formal prayers may be the first prayers we learn, we do not graduate away from them any more than we throw away basic math when we learn algebra. These prayers are the foundation of our prayer life. In the next columns, we will explore how we can build on them.

