

From A Faith Perspective: 'Let life be a prayer'

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A month ago, I was asked to participate in an ecumenical event where people of all faiths gathered to observe the annual National Day of Prayer. Each of us was invited to rise, take the microphone, and offer a prayer in our faith tradition.

I knew that some people would read psalms, others would deliver thoughtfully written personal devotions. This being proclaimed by our president as a national event, many prayers would evoke patriotic themes. Some would be worshipful, others would appeal to the gathering to be loving and kind, and many would pray for Divine intercession to set right a fearful world troubled by war and corruption.

Most of the prayers would be addressed to a deity who, though omnipresent, is somehow separated and must be called upon to listen, to hear our prayers. Like most Quakers, I believe there is that of God in us all, always present, always accessible. That being my personal truth, shouldn't my entire life become a prayer?

A saying, common among Quakers, is, "Let your life speak." This means quite literally to make all you say and do demonstrate spiritual truth. When the microphone came to me, my theme was, "Let my life be a prayer."

Years ago, I asked my friend Timothy Jolly, a Benedictine monk, how I, living in the secular world, could discern my purpose in life. "What are you enthusiastic about?" he asked. "The word enthusiasm means to be filled with 'Theos' or divine spirit." This notion isn't unique to Quakers. It's not a radical idea to let one's life be a prayer. Richard Rohr, Thomas Merton, and Henrie Nouwen have written extensively about integrating spirituality into daily life.

It was a revealing question. It opened for me the possibility that I could do ordinary things with spiritual joy and enthusiasm to be worshipful. One doesn't have to be cloistered in a monastic community dedicated to a life of prayer to lead a prayerful life. I fix computers as a hobby. It's a craft but also a service to my neighbors. I like to think that I make their lives easier and better. I also wipe discarded computers clean of personal information and repurpose them for use by refugees — 200

so far. I'm enthusiastic about this work—it satisfies me. It is one of the very ordinary things I do to live my values of stewardship and neighborly love. Service is a form of prayer for me.

When we pray, we acknowledge our reverence for a divine force or power for good beyond our personal understanding. To join ourselves with the divine, we pray. Prayer calls forth our best selves and refocuses us. We acknowledge our limits, and we seek to be aided and strengthened as we live our lives. We intend goodness. We express gratitude.

Does this sound a bit too idyllic? This world is fraught with major evils: war, hunger, political violence, domestic violence, crime, scams, and other dreadful realities. Passive good intentions and holy thoughts are not an adequate response. When such evils are at our door, how do we live our lives as a prayer?

It's risky to declare your stand and be the voice of foundational ethical and spiritual values. In our personal lives it can strain relationships and trigger hateful behavior. Living life as a prayer may not always be tranquil or comfortable. It cost Martin Luther King, Jr. his life.

Life led as a prayer has a rhythm between engagement and withdrawal. Time spent learning to know ourselves and reflect can give us the strength and perspective to engage evil, seek reconciliation, and restore justice.

In everyday encounters and relationships, I seek to embody the change I wish to see. Our lives can be powerful testimonies. If I can live out values of compassion, justice, peace, and community, I can be a counter-presence for the aggression and exploitation I abhor. I can champion a community life that reflects divine principles.

The solidarity of belonging and contributing to a healthy spiritual community is invaluable to leading my life as prayer. A spiritual home among friends who share my intention of goodness gives me stability, strength, and renewed courage to work with others towards a higher common purpose.

Let us pray.

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