



January 30, 2019

WHEN WE DON'T KNOW HOW TO PRAY

"I don't know exactly what a prayer is," the late Mary Oliver wrote in her poem "The Summer Day," capturing a thought that almost every person has had, except perhaps the strict prescriptivists who are always sure of everything, and the holy ones who have the faith of children and the wisdom of elders.

The rest of us have wondered "what a prayer is."

Is it best to say words that are official, like the Lord's Prayer, or a familiar mealtime grace, or a prayer printed in a church service? Or is it best to say our own words, and not worry about how nice they sound?

Is it necessary to say words at all – or should prayer be silent, in reflection and meditation?

Should I focus on my own life – or should I pray for other people?

Should prayer be full of joy and hope – or can it be full of sorrow and grief?

Yes.

One of the best ways to think about prayer is that prayer is a way of paying holy attention. You're paying attention right now, I bet, which means that you are praying.

Mary Oliver wrote:

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention.

Here's my prayer for today:

Holy God, when we wonder how to pray, when we wonder what prayer is, know that our wondering is, itself, a prayer. May you meet us in our wondering, and by your steadfast love comfort us and help us to love you in return. Amen.

Peace,

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