

## **The Primacy of the Interior Life, Part 2**

### **Dr. Edward Sri**

Hi, I am Dr. Edward Sri. And this is part two of our reflection on the Primacy of the Interior Life. In the last session, we talked all about how we really want to make our interior life, a faithful commitment to daily prayer, the top priority. Because all that we do flows from our interior life. And our work is dependent on our interior life, our friendships, our family life, our marriage, all that we do flows from what's happening on the inside. And if we're not making that the priority, those other things are going to end up suffering. Now we worship first and foremost, we pray for our relationship with God. But we've been talking about the wonderful blessings that come when we make Christ the priority in a daily faithful prayer life. Then Christ can radiate through us, and people can encounter not just us, but Jesus working through us. That's what we did in the last session.

### **Daily Prayer**

Now I want to paint a picture, more of what that looks like, and some of the challenges of trying to cultivate an interior life. When we're busy, we're busy at work, where we have so much going on in the home front, we feel like we're just drowning in life. And how do I have a faithful prayer life? And what does that really look like?

Well, I want to talk about what I mean, first of all, by daily prayers. When I talk about daily prayer, I'm talking about more than just saying prayers. I'm talking about more than just like vocal prayers, Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be. I'm talking about more than devotions, like the rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplets. I'm talking more about than like Magnificat Prayers or Divine Offers, morning and evening prayers. I'm even talking more than the mass. And the mass is the highest form of prayer, right? It's the worship of Jesus Christ on the cross. The Father made present to us and we participate in that. It's the highest form of prayer. And yet we really need an interior life if we want the mass to bear fruit in our lives.

### **Heart To Heart Connection**

I remember meeting many young people where they would ask the question, I'm really busy and I'd have to choose between mass or taking time for meditation, you know, and prayer, what should I choose? Should I choose mass because mass is the highest prayer? You know, is it mass or meditation? And I would just say, that's a bad question, that's a bad question. You know, it's kind of like in marriage. I'm using marriage just an analogy here, but in marriage, imagine if there was, you know, a husband saying, well, should I have intimacy with my wife or should I talk to my wife? I mean, that's just a bad question.

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You know, a marriage, you know, involves intimacy of course, but I'm hoping that, the Church teaches that husband and wife should be sharing their lives, heart-to-heart having conversation together. You know, yes, the sexual act is a profound expression of love between husband and wife. The physical union is meant to point to this deeper, personal, spiritual, kind of heart-to-heart connection between husband and wife. But if there's not really a heart-to-heart connection, like if you don't really know what's going on in your wife's heart or the wife doesn't really know what's going on in the husband's heart, they're not connecting heart-to-heart, day-to-day. You know, you can go through a physical act that isn't really that meaningful and it's not that profound because it's lacking that heart-to-heart connection.

And the same is true in the spiritual life. That, yes, the Eucharist is the body, blood, soul, divinity of Jesus Christ and objectively, we receive His very real presence into us in Holy Communion. And it is the highest form of worship in the mass. That's all true. But we have to realize that those graces may not bear much fruit in our lives if we don't have that heart-to-heart connection with Jesus. That's why I need intimate conversation with the Lord. I need to share my heart with the Lord, daily. I need to, and not just share my heart, I need to listen.

I want to listen to His heart. What's on His heart for me? What is it that He desires for me? How is He inviting me to change? To repent? To overcome a sin? To say sorry for something we've done that's wrong? To imitate His love more, to be encouraged by Him more, to follow His plan from my life more? To surrender to Him more, to love Him more, to trust Him? Like those are the things, like heart-to-heart am I talking to Jesus each day? Do I have time for that intimate conversation with the Lord? You know, whether it's using methods of prayer, like Lectio Divina, or Ignation Meditation, or, you know, the Church calls us to this kind of daily prayer life, and what happens is without a daily cultivated prayer life, without a daily interior life like this, the effects of the sacraments are stunted.

### **Follow Him Daily**

That's why some people wonder like, I receive communion all the time, but I still struggle with the sin and I still, I can't change. Well, maybe there could be many reasons, but it could be because all those graces aren't meeting with the fertile soil of a deep interior life. So, let's be faithful to daily prayer. And making time, not just to talk to God, not just to read things about God, you know, and turning my holy hour into study hall, you know? Do I take time to listen to the Lord? Do I take time to put myself in the biblical scene, to meditate, to reflect? To ask Jesus, how are you inviting me to live more like You? How are you inviting me to die to myself? How are you inviting me to live the cross in my life? Is that a question you regularly ask Jesus? If you're not asking Him that, you're not close to Him on the cross.

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Jesus is looking for souls that are willing to pick up their cross and follow Him daily. Because we find that when we pick up the cross and we follow Jesus, we're uniting ourselves to His model of what love is and what life is all about, which is total self-giving. I find myself when I make myself a gift to others. And that's only found through sacrifice on the cross.

And so, by looking at Jesus, reading the gospels or reading the lives of the saints or some good spiritual devotional book, that's not just encouraging me. Yes, I hope I get those things too, but it's challenging me. Challenging me to live the virtues of Jesus and to love like Him, to serve like Him, to forgive like Him, to be patient like Him, to be generous like Him. And am I striving to imitate Christ? That's what meditation could do for us.

### **Faithful Over Feelings**

Another thing I want to highlight here though, is it's more important to be faithful to prayer than it is to get feelings from prayer. Do you ever hear people say "I had a great time in prayer today" you know, what do they mean by that? I think what they mean is I felt close to God. I sensed His presence, or, you know, I got some good insight for my life, I got some encouragement or some clarity and direction, you know, I got something out of prayer. I feel like I got something out of prayer. And please know, of course, that can happen. And it's wonderful when we receive those consolations, receive those insights, that sense of closeness, we should thank the Lord for it, it's beautiful. But faithfulness to prayer, faithfulness to prayer is so much more important than any feelings we get from prayer. So much more important than any benefit I think I get out of prayer.

I mean, think about it. Do I want to have that kind of relationship with God where it's just about what I get out of it? That's never love, right? I think about my kids, you know, especially when they're really young and they're just so cute and cuddly. They just want to hug you. They run into your arms. Isn't that so fun? Those of us that are parents have experienced that, it's just a great blessing, I love my kids. You know, when they're so cute, they're like "daddy, daddy," and they just want to hug you. You know, it's so, so fun.

But when the little kid is screaming in the middle of the night at 2:30 in the morning. I don't have those warm, fuzzy feelings with my child at that moment, you know? I have other feelings, the kind of feelings you need to bring to confession, probably, you know. But I don't get a lot out of that, at 2:30 in the morning, the child is inconsolable, and I got to rock the baby. I'm trying to like, get the baby down. I don't get a lot out of that. I don't have a lot of warm, fuzzy feelings at that moment, but I have to still love, I have to be faithful, I have to serve still, - that's what real love is.

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Real love is not about the feelings, in a dating relationship, in parenting, and certainly not with God. And there are many Christians today that they measure their prayer life based on feelings. They measure their interior life, "I've got to have that closeness, and they do things, I got to get that closeness, I got to get that feeling again, going to go read that book I read a long time ago because it gave me those feelings. I'm going to go pray in that chapel, where a long time ago I got those feelings. So maybe that'll help me get those feelings again." And that's really dangerous.

You know, faithfulness is so much more important than feelings. Mother Teresa went decades without feelings in prayer. Now that was a unique experience. And that's a talk for another time about the dark night of the soul. Love to present on that another time. But today I don't think most of us are going to go that long. But we may go a few days, a few weeks, a few months. We may go a couple of years of feeling like I don't really feel close to the Lord. But in those moments, really believe. Saint Faustina says that "Those moments when I don't feel close to the Lord, but I'm still faithful, I still show up. I get my body to that chapel. And I sit in meditation for 30 minutes, but I just feel like I'm just staring at a wall. Or I just feel like I'm just not there. I'm just going through the motions, but I'm faithful."

Here's the truth, your faithfulness in those moments, when you don't feel anything may be more meritorious, more glorious to God and the angels may rejoice all the more than those moments when you prayed when it was fun and there was consolation and it felt really good. You see, we don't want to be those kinds of utilitarian Christians that only pray when it fits their schedule. Only prays when it's interesting, or when they feel like they get something out of it. That's a utilitarian relationship. You know, I pray when I get something out of it. And again, I hope that there's many blessings that we perceive.

But we actually have to believe with the eyes of faith that even if I don't have those feelings, God may be closer to me now than He is when I had that moment of great consolation. That's what the saints tell us. That God may be doing deep, deep work within us that we can't sense, we don't notice it. But He's drawing out of us a deeper love, a deeper loyalty. He's calling us to persevere and that perseverance through the darkness, through the emptiness, through the aridity is doing something really powerful in us.

You know, He entices us early in our spiritual life with all that sweetness, but then He's going to start eventually to ask, are you going to come even if I don't give you the nice candies? Are you still going to show up here? Are you coming for Me? Are you coming for what you get out of Me? And we want to be great lovers. Lovers of Jesus. So, let's go and be faithful. Faithfulness is so much more important than feelings.

## **Making Time For the Essential**

Okay, last thing I want to talk about is the problem of time. You know, some people are just like, but I'm just so busy. You know, I don't have any time and you know, there's so much going on and I just don't have time to pray. But as one spiritual author once wrote, "No one ever died of hunger because they didn't have time." You can imagine, oh this man just was so busy had so much going on at work and with his children, he just died of hunger because he couldn't have time to have a meal, you know? No, no, we make time for the things we know that are essential. You're going to make time to have water. You're going to make time to have a meal at some point.

You know, I realize, I know many moms that are like, you know, my wife will many times say it's six o'clock and I haven't had a chance to eat anything today. You know, but she will eat eventually. But we make time for the things we value the most, the things that we view as vital. And so, if we really believe that the interior life is most important, that we depend on Jesus, we need Him. We really need Him to lead us, to radiate through us. That He's the vine and we're the branches. And we just want His life kind of shaping everything about us. If we're really convinced of it, we're going to make the time.

You know, we waste a lot of time on social media. We waste a lot of time, quite honestly, can I just say this right now? If you haven't prayed today, maybe just pause this video right now and go take time to pray. Because God talking to you is more important than me talking to you. Just going and doing a devotion is maybe not as important as you just taking time for meditation and time to listen to God, to go heart-to-heart with Him. Many resources out there about how to pray that you can turn to.

## **Prayers During Difficult Seasons of Life**

But I want to say a word to those who, particularly, to parents out there just for a moment. And then what I'm going to say next can apply to single people as well in certain seasons of life. Whenever you have those seasons in life, where you're just, you really are stretched maybe your prayer life is going to look different. What I'm going to say is applicable to everybody. But I want to speak especially to parents. I meet many young people who, you know, they love Jesus. They used to go to daily mass, they used to go to holy hours and then they have a baby and they're not able to go as often, but they're still going. Then they have a second baby, and now it's really hard. And they just feel like I don't pray like I used to. And how do I fit it all in? And you know, I don't have time to even go to the bathroom. I've got four kids at home and I'm just drowning. How am I going to get prayer time in?

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Here's the thing I want to say to you. Be flexible, but faithful. Be flexible, but faithful, be flexible. You may not get to the chapel every day. You may not be able to get to daily mass. You know, like you're recovering from, after having a baby, don't feel like you have to like rush and get to mass right away. If you can, some women, they recover a little bit faster, go for it, you know, when you can. But be patient with yourself, be flexible. Realize I may not get to a daily mass for a few weeks or maybe a few months, that might happen. So be flexible. You might not be able to go to do a holy hour as often as you used to, but you can pray home, be flexible.

My wife talks about, she gives talks on this all the time to young moms, really encouraging them. You know what sometimes you're praying when you're nursing the baby. You know, that's okay. It's not as beautiful maybe as you know, or at least perceived beautiful as when you used to be able to go to a Eucharistic adoration chapel, but in the eyes of the angels, I bet it's very beautiful.

So be flexible. It may be if you have to pray, get up early, you're getting up later. The kids are down for a nap, you get 15 minutes in now. And then you pray when you're nursing the baby 15 minutes later, you know, like be flexible. But be faithful, be faithful. It's sad, there's many people, even spiritual leaders. I hear some priests sometimes will say things like, to a mom, "oh, your children are your prayer life, you don't have to pray." And my wife just, when she hears that, she says, "no, Father, no, I need you to encourage me to have an interior life. Yes, my children, I encounter Jesus in them, that's true. But I need to love them more. I need you to challenge me Father, to have a daily prayer life still." And so be faithful, be flexible, be creative, be patient with yourself.

I can remember doing my prayer life, you know, holding a baby for a couple months and I'm pacing back and forth in my living room, reading the Imitation of Christ. And I've got this crying baby, the baby's spitting up. I mean, it was the only time, we had just moved, I started a new job, we were unpacking, and we just had a baby, and I was like all the big moves, all the big changes all at once, you know? But my spiritual director, I remember telling my spiritual director 'I'm just so frustrated, I can't get my holy hour in my prayer life is ruined, what happened?' And my spiritual director says, 'you're doing your holy hour. You're living your vocation. You're praying in the midst of your vocation. You're loving your son. You're loving your wife by taking care of the baby early in the morning. And you're doing your best to get your prayer life in.'

So the key is, it's going to look different, be flexible. But never, never allow yourself to cut off from prayer. That's what the devil wants you to do. Always be faithful. No matter what season of life you go through, do something. Tell the Lord I want to get back to my prayer life, you're doing something to be faithful. I hope this has all been helpful for you. I know it's always encouraging for me to think about these things.

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So, thank you for giving me the chance to ponder the priority of the interior life for my own soul. I'll pray for you, please pray for me and my family. God Bless.