
Prayer on My Dossier

In the notebook, I jot down all the vital statistics of my life. As I note each piece of data, I raise my mind to God my Maker, and praise and thank the Creator for this detail in my life history and in myself. Note: God chose that I should come to be in a particular place and time, of particular parents and race, and all the rest. Am I content with God's choices for me?

- So to begin, I write down my parents' full names, birthplaces, and birth dates. I note my own birthday, where I was born, and any significant medical details. I note my sex, race or ethnic group, hair and eye color, and my physical build. I also note my siblings—name, birthdays, significant details; and I note my extended family of uncles and aunts and cousins. I note the cities and addresses I lived at before I was seven. All this, God chose for me; for all this, I praise and thank God.

- Then I note down a half dozen personal characteristics and qualities that were bred into me before I had a choice. Self-assurance or anxiety, intelligence, the language or languages I speak, habits of study, activities I take pleasure in, even my sexual orientation. I note at the same time a half dozen characteristics and qualities that I have inherited from my parents or my extended family, those that I like and perhaps some that I would just as soon not have. All this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

- If I have time, I go on to note down five or six personal qualities in myself that I particularly like. Perhaps I am quiet, or outgoing, and I like that about myself. Perhaps I am very thorough, or sensitive to others' feelings, or truthful. Perhaps I have lots of energy, or accomplish a great deal. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. For all this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

- Finally, if I still have time, I go on to note down five or six personal qualities in myself that I do not particularly like. Perhaps I am too tall or short, or cannot shake an ugly attitude. Perhaps I have a negative image of myself. Or find it too easy to dislike other people. Or am diabetic. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. For all this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

- Whenever my time is up, I recite Psalm 139. But I remember that God did not finish making me once, long ago, when I was conceived or born. I remember that God continues making me and has hopes for me and desires that I keep growing in love until I love as completely as God loves. ❖

Prayer of Consideration: The Lilies of the Field

Jesus called on His disciples to "consider" the lilies of the field, and we should do that.

- The lily does not choose in which field it will stand. When it grows from seed or runner, it finds itself in this field, with this hard clay or soft loam. So do I find myself on a "field"—the twentieth century, America, a state, city, town, neighborhood. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?
- The lily has no control over what grows around it. When it shoots up, it might have to fight for its life with thorns or clumps of crabgrass. Or it might be outshone by great sunflowers. So have I very little control over what surrounds me. I live in corporate structures, in political processes. I am caught up in earning a living, buying insurance, preparing for illness and old age. I cannot change the stock market or banking practices or taxation. I cannot make the ghettos disappear, or dry up acid rain. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?
- The lily of the field has absolutely no control over the weather—rain or drought, it must simply stand and endure. So have I no control over nations warring on one another, or over international cartels poisoning the air with pollutants. I cannot control whether people around me drug themselves and fill the atmosphere of my life world with fear and violence. I cannot control people feeling prejudice toward me and my kind. I cannot make male chauvinism or strident feminism go away, or stop people from aborting babies or abusing their children. How much of my life world is my making; how much is God's?
- The lily came up a certain kind of lily, of a certain color and shape, and its shapeliness and health depended on the spring and the summer, and whether grazing cattle let it grow. So did I come up a certain kind of person, of a certain color and shape. So were my psychic health and physical shape much influenced by forces around me when I was coming up. And until now, all created things have let me live and even thrive, though many, many threatened and still threaten me. How much of my life growth is my making; how much is God's?
- For all that, not even Solomon dressed up in gold-embroidered brocade was any more lovely than that lily. So for all that has shaped and misshaped me, for all that has given me health and inflicted ill health on me—I am precious in the eyes of God, and honored, and God loves me as I am. Otherwise, I would not be as I am, though God would be glad were I to slough off my selfish sins. But they are trash compared to God's creating love in me, whose love will burn them away like flakes on the bark of a flaming pine log. How much of me is mine; how much can be God's? ❖

The Way Things Are

- Consider first that God the Lord creates all things at every moment. We tend to focus on "the Big Bang" at the very beginning, or on evolving life. But God continues to create at each moment.
- Even as we grow and mature, God continues creating me out of nothing, momentarily. His passionately creative love burns at the core of all my self, my Origin.
- God creates me in the concrete, not in general. God chose my time and place, my parents, my gifts. God keeps shaping my humanness and my personhood and my self.
- God creates "out of love," which means that God wants to share His love, to have others to love and to be loved by. I am intelligent and free so that I can love, as God my Maker loves.
- In calling me to live my special qualities and characteristics, God planted deep in my self an original purpose—the concrete expression of God's hopes in and for me. My life is to discover in myself that original purpose—what my concrete self "adds up to"—and to live it out.
- If I grow to be the person God has been hoping I would become, I manifest God's power at work, God's glory. For the glory of God is a human person fully alive. If I know who God is and who I am, and live out that knowledge, I will praise God in the morning and thank God in the night, and intend to fulfill God's hopes for myself and for my life world.
- All creatures have such an original purpose. I am so to live among created things as to reach my own, using or not using, enjoying or not enjoying others, depending on whether they help me express my original purpose.
- Yet even in this order and harmony, the Creator courteously leaves us with freedom. We are to choose whether to keep the rightness and justness and order. Where we choose not to, we wreak havoc on the earth. God surely knows this. But God's hope has always been that humankind would live out the recognition that God always comes first, and enact that recognition in creating our life together in order and in love.
- God's will is our peace. Not the peace of silence and death, but the quietly humming peace of a dynamic, wonderfully orderly love. This is what God hopes for on the earth. ♦

The Way Things Can Be

- My life world is a welter of things—things that attract me and draw me; things that repel me and fill me with loathing.
- In some ways, I know from myself which of all things around me are valuable to me. For instance, my lungs absorb oxygen and my digestive system absorbs whatever my body needs to keep living and working.
- But I am a free person. How do I know which choices are really valuable to me? What of all the things I can have or not have will bring me to God and make me happy and helpful?
- Nothing in things themselves automatically makes them the right ones for me. No one of these alternatives can guarantee happiness for any person: to make a lot of money, to have no money at all; to have power and influence, to live as just another citizen; to marry, to live single; to be healthy, to be sickly; to go on living long years, to die very young.
- The fact is that God our Creator and Lord decides which alternative is of value to me and in me to my life world. God attends to me; God elects which of all opportunities and alternatives around me bring me to my authentic self. Some things make me more loving towards God and towards others; other things make me more selfish and less loving even towards my own self.
- So whether I find a thing attractive or not, I will choose only those things that lead me to God and toward my most authentic self. This seems obvious and simple, but consider what it entails: I will not have a fixed determination always to choose one alternative over others. For instance, I will not make up my mind that whatever comes along, I am going to choose the alternative that lets me make more money than any other. Can I let myself live just to stay exuberantly healthy? Can I put living in

a certain place first on my list of concerns? No. I will hold myself in balance until I have decided which concrete alternative will lead me to God and to loving those around me.

- This balance can be a matter of life and death in important affairs. The lawyer who allows himself to have an unbalanced desire to be rich may seize an opportunity to take a large sum of money unjustly. The business partner who ambitions too much may deliberately spread grave lies about a colleague in order to beat him to a higher position that is opening up. Their lack of balance before good things and rich opportunities prepares the way for them to act contrary to their original purpose in life and contrary to their authentic self. And if because of this lack of balance we act in a deadly manner one time, what will stop us from doing it again and again, since we remain unbalanced, until we are truly wrecked persons?
- Obviously, this balanced stance proves enormously difficult. Yet, it seems to be necessary if I am to grow in God's love and to reach the Reign of God with all the saints. Suppose God has been hoping that I would marry, and I insist on becoming a priest and then disloyally leave? Suppose God has put a wonderful spouse in my life and I destroy our love because I choose to make it big in my career? Suppose God has hoped that I would create great wealth for the good of others, and I refuse to work all that hard and end up a night watchman? I know that I am capable of wrecking my own life, as others clearly seem to have done, by determinedly setting my own values and trying to force God to agree with me. I know what lasting harm I can do to others if I fail to live true to my self and to what God hopes in me.
- Who can achieve this wisdom and this balance on their own? I need God's power at work in me. All things are possible to God. ❖

Active Indifference

- My life world offers me a welter of wonderful things—careers, places to live, consumer goods, travel, various educations. After I have set my face against anything sinful, how will I decide which among them to go for?

- I could choose in several ways. First, I could simply follow fad and fashion. Hankering after the latest clothes and activities and trips, I could do what everyone else is doing right now.

- Or second, I could simply follow my own native taste. If I grew up loving open country, I could choose to live in a suburb simply because I prefer it and for no other reason. If my natural preferences lead me to pursue some profession, I could simply follow that lead, figuring that God would not make me hanker for something that would do me harm.

- Or third, I could set some definite goal for myself, to bring me to transcend myself, reach fulfillment, and do some real good for others. For example, I could ambition being a federal judge or having total financial security or making some important discovery in genetics. Then I could aim everything toward that goal.

- A fourth way would be more difficult. I could begin with the premise that I will never do anything to break my relationship with God my Lord, but will choose only what my conscience freely allows. Then I will wait to find out what God hopes for in me.

- To achieve this mind-set, I have to believe that I can know what God hopes in me, and I have to hope that I can find that out.

- I will also have to hold tremendously careful balance among all the welter of wonderful things that my life world offers me. I will not

let myself get so stuck on any of them that it will incline me to this or that decision. That would mean that I would not follow the first or second way of choosing—by doing what everyone is now doing, or by merely following my own native preferences—and not even the third—by setting my own life goal for myself without asking God what my Creator wants in me. To put that another way: I would not try to tell God what will make me happy (that judgeship or a heap of money or a brilliant scientific career). I will wait to find out what God has been hoping in me—and live confident that it will make me happy.

- Of course, I cannot sit back and expect God to strike me the way God struck Paul of Tarsus. I have to pray, and consider, and take counsel with trusted friends. I have to attend to what the whole Church now engages in and hopes for, and what the official teachers (bishops and theologians in their own ways) are teaching. I have to try this or that and see how it goes. But I will always be hoping to find God desiring in me, God shaping my life world, God bringing the Reign to reality. I hope to find what God wants first, and then I will decide what I let myself want and what I will choose.

- Holding this kind of indifference among God's almost infinite number of gifts makes a person a great force for good. What a power she is who does not much care where she lives as long as God's hopes are being realized! What a power he is who does not much care whether he lives wealthy or not, only as long as God's justice is being done! Such a person truly finds God in all things—God creating, God raising up justice and peace in all things, God working busily so that no one will be lost, but everyone brought to the Reign. ❖

The Principle and Foundation

Every person in the world is so put together that by praising, revering, and living according to the will of God our Lord he or she will safely reach the Reign of God. This is the original purpose of each human life.

Every other thing on the face of the earth is meant for humankind, to help each person come to the original purpose God has put in each of us.

The only thing that makes sense in the use of all other things, then, is that a person use everything that helps realize that original purpose deep in the self, and turn away from everything that alienates us from the original purpose in ourself.

We can push this a little further: When we are under no obligations in conscience, we

ought to keep ourselves free of any fixed preference for one or other created thing. Instead, we ought to keep ourselves at balance before anything. What does this entail? It means that before we ever face any decision we do not determine to do everything that will keep us healthy and nothing that might make us sick, to be rich rather than poor, to be considered somebody important rather than a nobody, to live to a very old age rather than to die younger. In that way, we would keep a balance before any created thing when the times come for decision.

We set ourselves to live in careful balance, to want to choose solely on the grounds of what leads more directly and more certainly to our original purpose. ❖