

Grace in our Body in Prayer in Companioned Prayer™

Experiencing the Body-Feel of God's Presence

Awareness of the Body in Prayer

In Companioned Prayer we take time to develop an awareness of our physical nature. There are four primary effects from this, as well as from when we frequently allow our attention to go to how we feel in our body throughout the prayer.

First, it helps center us in who we are as a person created by God. Spending time being aware of our bodies helps us gain an appreciation for our total humanness. We are whole human beings with rational, emotional, spiritual and physical natures. God's presence is reflected within all of his creation and we are his created children. Awareness of our physical nature, for example our breathing, can be found in many prayer forms. This contemplative prayer endeavors to offer ourselves to God as we truly are: all of ourselves. This means that if we are tired, if we are sick, if we are tense, we acknowledge how we physically feel. We don't try to change it or mask it. We humbly acknowledge our human condition and relationship by simply being aware of our physical nature as it is at the time of our prayer.

Second, placing our awareness on how we physically feel helps us to remain centered in a frame of mind that is other than analytical. The essence of contemplative prayer is that we stop or slow down our analytical thinking mind's activity enough to just be receptive; to listen and be in God's presence, and to be open to his love and wisdom through his gift of the Holy Spirit. We want to allow ourselves to be drawn into his mystery and his love. But that doesn't readily happen if we are always talking, thinking, analyzing or judging. By initially and periodically letting our attention go to how we are physically feeling, we find we are less caught up in critical thinking and are more open to God's quiet movement felt within us.

Third, our body-awareness also helps us to not be caught into emotional feelings and processes in the same way that it helps us to not be so caught

up in our analytical processes. This does not mean that in this prayer we are to avoid our feelings or those issues that are emotionally important to us. On the contrary, we offer ourselves to God in this prayer with our whole physical, mental and emotional selves as we actually are at the time. For example, if we are upset at the time of prayer or if we are carrying a heavy emotional issue, then that is how we are. We don't adopt an artificial attitude or mood. For example we don't try and adopt a peaceful or serene feeling, or an attitude of purity or sanctity. We pray acknowledging how we really are. But we need to pray in a manner that also promotes awareness and listening to God. Therefore, we often bring our awareness back to our bodies; for example how an issue or symbol feels in our bodies, how we seem to carry it. This allows us to be present to the issue or feeling without being caught up in the emotional content of it. This frees us to be present to our issue while simultaneously freeing us to be receptive to God's grace or presence that might come from within our very need or issue.

Fourth, awareness of our body helps us keep our prayer and our prayer subject in the present. Time spent with awareness of the body, even briefly, brings us back to the present moment. It takes us out of our future and out of our past, and grounds our experience in the here-and-now where God meets us. Significantly, this part of the prayer is a settling in to the rhythm of pausing and simply noticing what is, without intellectual analysis; a quiet attentiveness which continues in all of the remaining movements of the prayer.

When we are invited to notice how we are physically feeling in the *AS WE ARE* part of Companioned Prayer, we should not rush through this, but we should be quietly attentive to how we are physically feeling, allowing our attention to be sequentially drawn to those parts of the body that might have some physical feeling, such as tenseness, soreness, etc. Here the person praying takes a quiet inventory of their body, noticing what their body feels like.

Often we will notice some physical sensation such as tenseness in our shoulders or stomach/solar plexus area that we would not have been aware of if we had not taken the quiet time for this intentional inventory. During this physical inventory the companion is not looking to receive

feedback, except that if led, the person praying may wish to ask the companion to slow down or pause at various places.

The purpose of the inventory is not to achieve a state of quiet or peace, although this often occurs. If we are tense or upset, then we want to notice how that feels in our body. Relaxing is not the focus of this step. Instead, notice how you are really feeling physically right now in your current state. This is the state you are in, the state that our prayer begins in. This contemplative prayer begins in the reality of who we are right now, not in who we might think we should be. We come to God in our real state, which includes our physical condition, whether that be broken, or in joy, or in doubt, or in any other way; even in our tiredness or tenseness.

Throughout these contemplative prayers we frequently bring our awareness back to the body, or back to how our prayer subject feels in our body. Yet when we do so, we retain a sense of mind-body balance. We are not abandoning the mind to attend to the body. Nor do we totally abandon what our body feels like when our attention is more mindful. We try to be fully present to the complete humanness of our prayer experience, which incorporates our created embodiedness, heart, mind, and spirit, as well as the personal gift of God's presence with us. Being present to our body helps us to be grounded in the physical reality of this complete gift.

The Body Feel of God's Presence

God imbued his creation with the Holy Spirit. We are open to living in that Spirit in the wholeness of our being – mind, heart, body and soul – in a special and wondrous way through faith; belief based on revelation, God's revelation through his son Jesus Christ, the prophets, scripture, and the miracle and awe of his creation. The revelation of love given and received with one another, and the revelation of love and grace received of God. Jesus demonstrated this incarnation of God's presence and love in his presence, words and actions. Jesus did not simply correct the old theology. He did not simply try to get us to exchange one set of beliefs or interpretations for a more accurate set. Instead he showed us that the reality of divinity – of the Kingdom of God – is to be realized in all aspects, including through the physical, in the concrete here and now. He wanted

us to understand that the Kingdom of God is to be lived and carried out not just in our minds; but through faith, it is to be experienced and lived in our complete humanness: our minds, hearts, bodies and souls.

Jesus put great emphasis on demonstrating God's presence in the body. He healed the physically sick and the lame; people experienced this. He walked from town to town, and ate with people. He did not just sit in a synagogue or academy and proclaim a new "correct interpretation." He fed the multitudes. And at the Last Supper he said, "Take and eat of my body and drink of my blood." One of the things he was emphasizing was that his real presence – God's presence – is to be experienced and known through our physical bodies as well as in our minds. And that his real presence accepted fully in this way will actually transform us in the here and now; save us from ourselves and open us to the divine, the Kingdom of God. He is telling us that the new Covenant with God through him is real, not just in a mystical understanding but in the fullness and realness of creation and ourselves. He was always bringing the truth of God's Spirit into concreteness; taking it beyond dogma and into the physical reality of who and how we are, here and now, in action and in body as well as in mind and spirit: in our whole real humanness. We are not just to love in the abstract or to worship love; but we are to love our neighbors and our enemies. He gives us examples such as the Good Samaritan, and others. Throughout every aspect of his ministry he proclaims and demonstrates the Good News in the very real and practical life we are living.

It is in this concrete completeness that we are called to experience the Good News, as God reveals himself within us and heals us in Companioned Prayer. As baptized Christians we are the body of Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27) Both collectively and individually, through faith and grace our body is Christ's body, our blood is his blood, as we yield to his will and let his transforming real presence – the loving presence of God – be felt and known in our body. In Companioned Prayer we frequently bring our attention to our physical nature, our/his body. The reason we do this is more than just to quiet our mind and our emotions. When something comes in response to ASKING GOD and throughout the prayers, there is a special sense to what has come that distinguishes it from other things.

There is something more to it, something that can actually be felt. Not felt emotionally, but felt viscerally, genuinely, intrinsically. We can feel it in our body. It has a tangible realness that defies our making it up in our mind or emotions. So when we check inside to sense how something feels in our body in prayer, we are opening our awareness to the Holy Spirit in the reality and concreteness of the physical. In this contemplative incarnational Companioned Prayer, through faith we are open to the tender sense of the Holy Spirit felt in our body, experienced as physically felt; as a gift, not as made up by us.

That the body should have a place in our experience of the Holy Spirit should not be a surprise. Consider how wondrous the body is: how the eyes and sight give us all creation to see; how the ears and hearing give us whispers and song; how our legs and feet give us motion, and our arms and hands give us others to hold; how we can feel the wind, and the cold and the warmth; how our bodies transform food into our nourishment; how even our bodies give us the ability to co-create new life. Our bodies are miraculous, and are inseparable from our humanness, including our ability to grow in God's love and to express his love here and now. It should be no surprise that the body, which God created for his purpose, also has a role in giving us God's love poured out and experienced through the Holy Spirit. "What God has made clean, you are not to call profane." (Acts 10:15) This wonderful human body is a gift of God imbued with his life force. It has more subtlety and gift than we commonly acknowledge. Thus in these prayers we often return our awareness of something that has come to how it feels in our body, in the realness of our humanness, knowing that by doing so we are also nurturing our awareness of God's personal and awesome loving presence. In this gift of God's grace, we begin to understand how our bodies are the body of Christ here, now, personally, and for all of us.

This awareness of God's personal love and care for us in our life, as directly and physically experienced through Companioned Prayer will dawn naturally over time with each prayer experience. In these prayers the act of bringing our awareness to the body has greater implications than simply quieting our thoughts or stilling our emotions. It is not just the body by itself, but it is with our willing soul and the Holy Spirit, that the body is

spiritually whole, and which is sanctified in the Eucharist. At some point when this truth is felt within, the practice of discerning how something feels in the body helps us not only when we pray but also in our everyday life. We find that it is possible to be aware of God's living Covenant and to be guided by Christ in our hearts, so that we too may respond to God's call to love, to abide in him, and to help others in the real needs of all of his people and his creation. And then, in him and with him, we will truly be his hands, his heart, his body, his people, his church here on Earth.