

## Father John Catoir

# 'Caritas'

There was a period in my life when I gave up meditating because I couldn't stand the boredom. During that dry spell, I simply felt like a failure at prayer. I believed in God, I even felt that I loved God, but love presumes an object, and it carries with it a desire for some response from the beloved.



Feeling nothing during prayer, I became bored and abandoned the effort, at least as far as a formal schedule was concerned.

Then I came upon Abbot John Chapman's simple definition of prayer and I felt a new spiritual vigor. "Pure prayer is in the will," he wrote. "Pure prayer is in the will to give yourself to God."

Gradually I came to see that my boredom was not a sign of failure. I learned to laugh at my boredom during prayer because I realized that I didn't have to force feelings of any kind. When I become bored, I just give the boredom to God along with everything else without expecting special consolations.

I am now 62 and I don't worry about prayer schedules as I once did. I give myself to God in the morning and the evening, but I find myself praying all day long in a way. My awareness of God's presence is a big part of it. "Praying always" is not completely possible, but there is a kind of a habitual self-giving which is quite natural. At any rate, I find peace in the knowledge that I'm praying even if I don't have warm

cozy feelings. When feelings of insecurity come, instead of upsetting me, they remind me that I have to depend more on the Lord and less on myself. With the Holy Spirit as my strength I feel the courage to carry on.

Rabindanath Tagore once said, "Chastity is the virtue which comes from an abundance of love." This is true of all the virtues. We are better able to regulate human love and be better persons when we have gratitude to God for all the love He has given us. In contemplative prayer we absorb His love in order to be able to give it generously to others.

God's love is expressed in Latin as "caritas," which literally means "dearness." Italians use the word "cara" meaning "dear one." "Caritas" in its broadest meaning is an attitude which regards another as dear to your heart. God holds us dear to His heart. He calls you and me "Cara."

Read St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, 13:12 and put the word "God" in place of the word "charity." This is the result: "God is kind. God is patient. God is not jealous or rude. God is not domineering, or resentful. God rejoices in good. God endures all things. God's love never fails."

The saints and mystics down through the ages have learned to stimulate their growth in charity by living God's will in the present moment. Practice giving yourself to God just as you are. Forget about self-criticism and invite the Holy Spirit into your life. The Spirit of Love will dwell in you, and all will be well.

