



Father John Catoir

To Pray Is to Love

Christians have traditionally set aside the season of Lent as a time of self-denial and preparation for Easter. However, giving up things is only part of that preparation. Lent is a time for growing closer to God; it is a time for prayer.

Jesus often invited His disciples to "come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while" (Mk. 6:31). That invitation is given to each of us, especially during the lenten season.

ONE PERSON who accepted that invitation is Carlo Carretto, a member of the Little Brothers of Jesus of Charles de Foucauld. At the age of 44, he left Italy to go into the desert to pray.

But is it really necessary for us to go to a desert to pray? I don't think so. Carlo Carretto himself believes that "to pray is to love." In his book, "In Search of The Beyond," he wrote, "Prayer transcends space and can be lived anywhere, since wherever you love, Love is there, for God is love."

Think for a moment of the power of love. It's the only thing in the world that holds us together. I think of it as a spiritual force, like cosmic energy itself, holding all the world's atoms in perfect proportion.

To pray is to love, and pure prayer is in the will. It is expressed in the will to cling to

God in all circumstances, and is most perfectly realized in the will to love. "Love is the highest form of prayer — it is the fullness of prayer," says Carretto, and I agree.

IT ISN'T SO much what you do in life; it's what you allow God to do through you. If you are open to the spirit of Love, He will lead you away from self-preoccupation, "Along paths you would not have chosen for yourself." (Evelyn Underhill) Love is not always easy or pleasurable because often it is bound up with the cross, but true love can make the crosses of life easy to carry.

This Lent, resolve to grow closer to God by expanding your love. Set aside time for private prayer. But remember that prayer is love; it happens whenever the love of God flows through you. You don't need to go off for a week in the desert to pray in silence.

Let your work, your leisure time, your encounters with the people around you, be acts of loving kindness. In that way, you will fulfill the ideal expressed by St. Paul, who encouraged us "to pray always." Perhaps he could have said, "to love always."

[For a free copy of the Christopher News Notes, "To Pray as Jesus Did," send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to The Christophers, 12 E. 48th St., New York, N.Y. 10017.]