

I. Jesus Prayer has its immediate roots in the New Testament:

- Phil. 2:9-10
- Acts 4:12
- John 16:23-24
- Romans 10:13
- Acts of the Apostles – a book of the name of Jesus

*mark*

II. Spiritual Tradition of the Name of Jesus

- Desert Fathers: their private prayer contributed to paving the way for the Jesus Prayer. (200-400?)
- Hesychasm is the spiritual tradition of the Jesus Prayer that spans the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. →
- Hesychia signifies repose: Insists on silence, withdrawal, a separation from the world.
- Hesychia emphasis is on prayer, contemplation and the mystical life.
- Hesychia pursues specific methods of praying and seeks to develop a contemplative technique.

*quiet  
repose  
silence*

III. History of Hesychasm, thus the Jesus Prayer, occurs in two distinct phases, the Sinaite Phase and the Athonite Phase.

A. Sinaite Hesychasm (500-1000) – Saudi Arabia

- Monastery of St. Catherine (527) becomes center of great spiritual influence.
- Is distinguished by a certain affective flavor. *tenderness*
- A tenderness concentrated upon the person of Jesus.
- A certain flexibility and warmth in the prayer form
- Remember: it was on Sinai long ago that god reveals His name to Moses.
- Some Major writings of this period:
  - Hundred Chapters of Perfection by St. Diadochus (458)
  - Ladder of Paradise by St. John Climacus (649)
  - The Centuries, by several authors
    - In this text, we find earliest appearance of term "Jesus Prayer".
    - The Centuries recommends the formula "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
  - Method of Holy Prayer and Attention – Author and date uncertain (900-1000?)
- By 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Jesus Prayer already forms part of the Byzantine Spiritual Tradition. It is not yet fixed in form.

B. The Athonite Hesychasm (1350-1800)

- Mt. Athos is a mountain and peninsula in Macedonia, northern Greece
- From 1346, it is Mt. Athos, not Sinai, that becomes the center for practice and diffusion of the Jesus Prayer.

- St. Gregory the Sinaite (1346) comes to Athos and revives the Jesus Prayer. His major works are:
  - On Stillness and Prayer
  - On Stillness and the Two Methods of Prayer
  - The Century (mentioned earlier) becomes an important spiritual guide for this era, especially the early years.

- Unfortunately, it is on Athos that the Jesus prayer undergoes a change.
  - loses its original fluidity.
  - restricted to a specific formula; no variations allowed.
  - insists on a particular psycho-physiological technique; becomes more rigid.
  - Its original tenderness and spontaneity is lost.
  - In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, because of Palomite controversy, Mt. Athos ceases to be a center for the Jesus Prayer.
- From Mt Athos, the Jesus Prayer spreads to:
  - the Greek East
  - the Slavic world
  - Russia (well established by the 16<sup>th</sup> century)

monks at war with one another over their beliefs too much "magic" was affixed to prayer

- By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Mt. Athos again becomes a powerful center for the diffusion of the Jesus Prayer.
  - Two leading spiritual guides for this renewal are St. Macarius of Corinth and St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain.

monumental work  
She read an excerpt

- Compose an anthology of Hesychasm, more especially of Hesychast prayer and the Jesus Prayer.
  - The Philokalia is the "Summa of the Jesus Prayer".
    - Word consists of several volumes.
    - The word *philokalia* means "love of beauty", here meant in a spiritual sense.

- A very significant and important work?
- A whole series of Russian saints are associated with the practice and development of the Jesus Prayer. *Saint Maximus Theoleptis*

- In 1884, a small book entitled Sincere Tales of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father appeared in Kazan (larger city in Russia).

Author unknown

- The book is known to us as The Way of the Pilgrim.
- With the widespread translation of this book into many languages, the Jesus Prayer has been received by many: Romans, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Calvinists.
- England, more than any Western Country, has given more attention to the Jesus Prayer. *Evelyn Underhill*

Story of a man in Russia seeking a way to "Pray Always" say 300x a day, then 600x



- The Way of the Pilgrim has become a classic of devotional literature.

## THE JESUS PRAYER

Besides this "free" use of the Holy Name of Jesus there should be certain times and places set aside for the formal invocation of the Name. This is especially true for beginners. The following is one method that could be used for these prayer times:

- 1.) Find a quiet place where you will be undisturbed by noise or interruptions. Find a physical posture that is comfortable for you: sitting, kneeling, walking, or lying down. The best posture is the one that affords most physical quiet and inner concentration. Do whatever is helpful to help you relax.
- 2.) Before beginning recall Who it is that dwells within you. Bring all your attention to Jesus. Ask for the inspiration and guidance of His Holy Spirit. The Name of Jesus cannot ever enter a heart that is not being filled by the cleansing breath and the flame of the Spirit.
3. Then simply begin. Begin to pronounce the Name with affection and love. Cling to it. Repeat it slowly and lovingly. Do not think that you are invoking the Name; think only of Jesus himself. Say His name slowly, softly, and quietly.
- 4.) Lev Gillet, A Monk of the Eastern Church writes: "As you repeat the Holy Name, gather quietly, little by little, your thoughts and feeling and will around it; gather around it your whole being.....Let nothing of yourself escape. Surrender your whole self and enclose it within the Name.
- 5.) The repetition of the prayer may be suspended and replaced by times of silent rest and attention. The repetition will only be resumed when other thoughts threaten to crowd out the thought of Jesus. Remember this is a gentle prayer. It is not forced. It does not necessarily have great inner intensity, emotion, nor is it said with great force. The voice of the Lord comes to us as it did to Elijah, "as a small still voice". We have to be still and quiet to truly hear it.
6. Stay with the prayer as long as you are able. In the beginning this may be for only ten or fifteen minutes. As you grow in this prayer you may wish to extend the time to thirty minutes. Try to set such times to pray the Name of Jesus daily.
- 7.) The Jesus Prayer may be prayed in time with the breath. Divide the Prayer at the intake and the out take of the breath as seems comfortable for you. The breath is a great help in helping us to relax and in controlling the thought of the mind. The breath is also a good way for the body to participate in the Prayer. The interplay between the breathing and the words make the Jesus Prayer seem as natural as the act of breathing. In time the one will draw the other with it.
- 8.) In time you will find that the Name of Jesus will spontaneously come to your lips and almost continuously be present to your mind. "Even your sleep will be impregnated with the Name and memory of Jesus. 'I sleep, but my heart waketh.'" (Song of Songs 5:2)

For more advanced contemplatives, it will lead them into the presence of the Lord beyond all words and forms about God, when even the words of the Jesus Prayer will cease in utter silence and the prayer of heart-to-heart takes over, the *ignita oratio* (the fiery prayer) of Cassian.

Through fidelity to this simple prayer that integrates the body, soul and spirit into a prayerful whole person, the Christian begins to enter into the priestly prayer of Jesus Christ and His priestly transfiguring action going on in the world.

The Christian breathes and with his breath he is conscious of breathing forth the transfiguring power of Jesus as Lord of the cosmos. Jesus Christ leads the Christian into a lived experience of the Holy Spirit who in turn reveals to the Christian the meaning of the presence of Jesus as Lord and Healer and also of the Father as *Abba*.

### THE INDWELLING TRINITY

In that living experience of the indwelling Trinity, the Christian begins to experience at each moment the Father begetting His children in Christ Jesus through His Spirit of love. The Christified man of the Jesus Prayer moves out into his busy world filled with love of God and with God's love for His world. He offers himself as a reconciler of the whole world according to St. Paul's vision of the Cosmic Christ.

### A LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS

The Jesus Prayer is, therefore, more than a prayer to be said. It is ultimately a life in Christ Jesus. Grace is no longer a *thing* we pray for, but it is the uncreated Energies of God's presence made known to our consciousness as we humbly cry out in our darkness for the healing power of Jesus Lord.

The name of Jesus called out unceasingly leads us into His holy presence. He sends the Spirit into our hearts to reveal the infinite love of the Father for His children.

This is the prayer of the heart; it is the way to the incessant prayer of the early Fathers. It still has great meaning for us all. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and always." Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.



For more information we suggest:

*The Jesus Prayer* / Maloney, S.J.  
Book

*The Jesus Prayer* / Monk of the Eastern Church  
Cassette

*The Jesus Prayer: A Way to Inner Calm*  
DeBlassie

Dove Leaflets

#15 - *Learning How to Pray* / O'Rourke

#59 - *Aids to Conversational Prayer* / Rinker

#61 - *Centering Prayer* / O'Rourke

#70 - *Living in His Presence* / Miles, OSB

#90 - *The Prayer of Protection* / Miles, OSB

These titles and a wide range of reading on charismatic and spiritual subjects are available from the publishers of this leaflet: DOVE PUBLICATIONS, PECOS N.M. 87552. Write for a free list of titles in stock and for a free subscription to the monthly newsletter, THE PECOS BENEDEICTINE. The continuance and expansion of this ministry are made possible to a large extent by your donations.

DOVE PUBLICATIONS  
Pecos, New Mexico 87552

# The Jesus Prayer

by  
George A. Maloney, S.J.

Among all Christians of the West there exists today a crisis of faith. It is actually a crisis in prayer. How experience God in an ever-growing consciousness of ourselves as persons and God as the Source of all being?

Many in the West, especially among the young, are turning to the Far East and finding in Hindu Yoga and Zen Buddhism a form of meditation that is peace-inducing. Others have turned to a Christian charismatic prayer community and have discovered through the charisms of the Holy Spirit that Jesus is Lord.

### PRAYER IS LISTENING

Still others have found the *Jesus Prayer* of the Fathers of the Desert and the Philokahia tradition. It has become for them more a way of life in Christ than a mere ejaculation. This ancient Eastern Christian way of praying has its roots in the Old and New Testaments. The

Judeo-Christian religion was one of an experience of God who was continually speaking His Word. The Christian *heard* the Word in his *heart*. The semitic concept of *heart* referred to the deepest area of man's being, where he could, upon silencing the clamorings of his own ego-centered desires, hear and respond to God's revelation of Himself through His Word.

### JESUS IS LORD AND HEALER

But the New Testament reveals this Word of God as incarnated, risen from the dead and living within each Christian by Grace, the uncreated Energies of God's divinizing presence. Jesus is Lord, *Kyrios!* He is also Savior-Healer. *Jesus* means the Healer who comes to make us healthy, to heal us of sin and death.

Thus two key New Testament texts that reveal Jesus Christ to the praying Christian are: 1) "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us" (Matt. 9:27); and 2) "O God, have mercy on me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13). St. Peter tells us there is no other name but that of Jesus whereby we shall be saved (Acts 4:12). And St. Paul describes the glory of the name of Jesus "that God has given Him that is above all names so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bend in heaven, on earth and under the earth" (Phil. 2:9-10).

### FATHERS OF THE DESERT

When martyrdom was no longer available to Christians, thousands of men and women went into the desert, as a concrete symbol of their entering into their interior poverty. There they cried out day and night, "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."

This simple Christian *mantra* was synchronized with the monk's breathing. As he

breathed in and out, he associated with that an experience of the Lord Jesus as Son of God. As he again breathed in and out, he cried out in deep humility before the transcendent holy Lord to have mercy and heal him.

In such a simple *monologic* prayer, the early Christian charismatics of the desert psychosomatically experienced the presence of Jesus as Lord and Healer. Jesus came into the deeper recesses of their consciousness and super-consciousness and there healed the roots of self-love.

### APPLICATIONS TO PRAYER TODAY

Can this simple form of rhythmic prayer have any value for busy Western Christians? It employs a basic technique common to all forms of "transcendental meditation." Its efficacy as true Christian prayer lies in the degree of faith, hope and love that the Holy Spirit constantly infuses into our hearts to "know Jesus Christ and to experience the power of His resurrection and to suffer with Him" (Phil. 3:10).

By breathing rhythmically while letting the senses and imagination concentrate on the words of the prayer, the Christian reaches a depth of tranquility wherein his higher self is freed of lesser pre-conditionings to pray on a more nearly total level of self-surrender to the living presence of Jesus Lord.

### TRANSCENDENCE OF JESUS

In all true prayerful experiences, the Christian enters into the awesome presence of God as holy. His transcendent beauty and power overwhelm us. How simply the Jesus Prayer puts it: "Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God." Jesus is Lord of the universe, Creator, Alpha and Omega. In Him all things are created. All things reach fulfillment through

Him. Yet He is also Jesus, Healer. "I have come that you might have life, life more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10). He is *Christos*, the anointed Messiah, the long-awaited Son of God. "God so loved the world as to give us His only begotten Son so that anyone who believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn. 3:16).

### MAN'S SINFULNESS

Man in prayer is convicted by the Holy Spirit to see in contrast to the mountain of Jesus' holiness the valley of his own sinfulness. And so he cries out from the darkness of the bondage that holds him captive, that Jesus have mercy. Jesus is mercy, the *hesed* Covenant of healing given to God's *Anawim* that confess their need of healing. "Lord, that I may see."

### A HUNGER FOR GOD

The poverty felt in the desert of our hearts fills us with a searing thirst for the Living Water. Like pilgrims we cry out hungrily for the Bread of Life. We stretch out to possess the Unpossessable, to encompass Him who is without limits. The Beatitude is a realized experience: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled."

Hence the use of the Jesus Prayer will vary, depending on the degree of advancement in prayer life and interior faith. It can be a simple ejaculation used as we go about our daily work, synchronized with our breathing and thus allowing us to remain conscious of Jesus' presence within us.

### REACHING THE STILL POINT

In our fixed periods of prayer the Jesus Prayer can serve as a means of centering ourselves upon the indwelling Trinity, of allowing us to reach that inner "still point."