

Praying At The Computer - by Sr. Margaret Dorgan, D.C.M.

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PRAYING AT THE COMPUTER

Praying is not only a regular assignment for certain stretches of time set aside each day. It certainly is that but it could be much more besides. Attentiveness to God is the definition of prayer given by St. John of the Cross. That attentiveness can enter into human activity in multiple ways. All the tasks required in human living offer possibilities for a turning to God, brief or extended.

Riding or walking to work, I take Jesus as my companion and speak to Him heart-to-heart. Digging in a garden, making noontime lunch, resting with my cherished puppy or full-grown canine buddy—in all this I can find something that connects me to God. A loving Savior digs in the garden of my being to make the virtues grow, offers me spiritual food not only at lunch-time but with snacks all through the day, lets me relax with delight in a creature made by a divine hand.

Heavenly messages are asking to be unveiled everywhere. Sometimes it does take effort but it is so worth the energy. In our contemporary world, many of us are necessarily involved with computers and all they demand. How can I connect praying to the activity required by a computer, by e-mail, by the Internet? Of course, religious texts are available at Web sites, but what about the activity itself? How do I bring prayer into it as a bit of moisture on a sometimes dry task?

To help prayer have a part in the hours I'm at my computer, I quiet myself and ask for patience when I turn it on. I am sure to need patience. I know that from previous experience. There are pauses long or short as I strike the keys. What I want may come up quickly and I breathe a swift prayer of gratitude. Or no pressure of my finger takes me where I want to go. I'm tempted to curse the whole process. Or I curse my own inability to cope. Why am I so dumb? Don't ask.

Just as we do today, Jesus faced many frustrations based on the limitations woven into earthly existence. The advent of computers lay many, many centuries ahead. Though His temporal journey covered only thirty-three years long ago, the Son of God and Mary is with His human brothers and sisters through every instant of time.

We live in an age of swiftness. Delay of almost any kind is looked upon as a special enemy. Advertisements proclaim greater speed as an irresistible enticement. The computer world especially prides itself on saving time. But here I am looking at a screen which refuses to follow through on my commands. I made a wrong move and now I see that I've lost almost all of what I did this past hour. Anger based on my stupidity rises up within me.

It's a moment to pause, to calm down and open myself to an acceptance of what has transpired. "Guide your heart in the right way," the long-ago teacher in the Book of Proverbs tells me. (Prv 23:19).

"And now, for what do I wait, O Lord?" (Ps 39:8). How often we ask that question. Waiting is not our favorite stance. But I will give myself some seconds of being with God and then return to the task. Surrender to inner turmoil would have kept my mind agitated. And as I look at the screen, perhaps a solution suggests itself.

In this era of the World Wide Web and instant communication, we have been given remarkable tools for making known the Good News of Jesus Christ. Instruments to further God's glory are available although they can also be applied to evil ends. Computers give us a wide range of preferences. The ability to choose is a privilege and a responsibility.

The human mind devises many schemes to further its aims. God created a universe always inviting our mortal race to think up new possibilities. The materials are here, and mental reasoning ponders ever better solutions for the goals challenging us. Human genius is a tribute to the Maker Who first designed our cosmos and favors some few men and women with outstanding intelligence. All this ought to be for the sake of serving the rest of us. Rational prowess should be directed to helping many, not simply to indulge the one who has it.

With its creative technological breakthroughs, our Internet age presents unique challenges, some with moral implications. We weigh the possible gains and losses as we consider choices.

I ask the Holy Spirit to lead me through the variety of processes my computer offers. They remind me of the Divine Designer Who in every century opens up new avenues of wonder. Whatever accomplishments lie ahead for this decade and the ones afterward, a foundation has been cleverly established in cyberspace with God's help. **"Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that people yet unborn may praise the Lord"** (Ps 102:18 or 19).

Praying is the great hyperlink that puts us in touch with Infinite Goodness.

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