

Week following the 5th Sunday in Lent - Addressing God

What is the story of your name? If you have gone by a nickname, or shortened version of your name, why did you prefer being called by that name?

We speak of God as a Trinity of persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Does this help or hinder you in seeing God? Are there other names used for God or ways of speaking of God that you prefer?

In this chapter, Bloom works with the insight of Israeli philosopher Martin Buber, who wrote of moving in all relationships from the attitude of the “I” towards an “It” to that of an “I” towards “Thou,” using the word for a person you know well. For Buber, God is the Eternal Thou. When has prayer moved from the impersonal connection with the wholly other to the personal for you? How might you foster that connection?

Discovering where you stand before God is always an invitation to go deeper? Describe where you stand now in relation to God? What does taking another step look like for you?

An optional discussion for Holy Week - Two Meditations

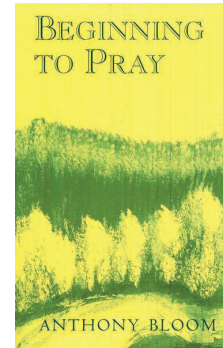
Whether giving money to a person who is homeless or starting a ministry at your church, our actions can be enacting what God wants to happen. When have you taken an action, whether small or big, that on reflection you think was God’s will for you to do?

How do you view Jesus’ Mother, Mary? Have you seen a work of art that captures her rightly? Who is she for you?

Have you known someone that brought out the best in others?

How has praying for the needs of someone else changed you?

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Discussion Guide for Lent

Beginning to Pray

by Anthony Bloom

This classic work by Russian Orthodox Bishop Anthony Bloom (1914-2003), published in 1970, is a simple and powerful book. Bloom was the son of a diplomat and an atheist who came to faith while serving as a physician. Becoming a priest in 1948, he was consecrated as bishop in 1957. He would become an archbishop and metropolitan bishop in charge of the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain and Ireland. At the heart of his preaching and teaching was a person's encounter with God in prayer.

This study is for the weeks from the First Sunday of Lent through the Fifth Sunday of Lent. An optional Holy Week discussion is also part of this discussion guide.

Questions for every week of the study

Each week, the group may use the following prompts as an icebreaker:

How have you seen or experienced God’s love in the previous week? Put another away, what was your moment closest to Christ?

After working through the questions for the week, close with the following questions as time permits:

- What else stood out in this week’s reading?
- How has the book or this discussion changed your understanding of prayer?

Week following the 1st Sunday in Lent - *The Absence of God*

Have you reconnected with a friend after many years? How did that renewed connection come about?

Read Luke 18:9-14 together. Bloom asserts that the publican or tax-collector has had moments of extending mercy that do not fit with his usual behavior. Have you felt a pull to do better, a tug to act in what is, in retrospect, a more godly way than you might?

Bloom describes the stages a woman he knew went through after knowing her disease was incurable. Have you walked with a person who was dying? How did that person relate their experience of the presence of absence of God?

What has been your experience of God's absence and God's presence?

Week following the 2nd Sunday in Lent - *Knocking at the Door*

What is the best gift you ever received? What made the gift precious to you?

Bloom writes, "As long as you are rich there is nothing to thank God for." When have you been moved past a general thanksgiving and repentance, to being thankful to God in such a way as to know you are loved?

Think of a time when you had such a great joy or sorrow on your mind that you recalled it even as you worked and went about your day. Does this assist in understanding the presence of God?

Is there a prayer that has been meaningful to you? Share the prayer with the group and tell how you learned it or when it was particularly helpful. *Expect that not everyone in the group will have a prayer to name.*

Week following the 3rd Sunday in Lent - *Going Inward*

Think of someone with whom you have a real connection. How do you stay connected to this person? How often are you in contact?

Do you tend to prefer spontaneous prayer or written prayers? Has there been a time when the type prayer you don't tend to use has been particularly helpful to you? So if you tend toward written prayers, has there been a time when it was most helpful to just pray, speaking to God whatever came to mind?

What has been your experience of the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer? Are there other liturgical prayers you have routinely prayed?

When have you felt a prayer calling you to a commitment, an action?

Week following the 4th Sunday in Lent - *Managing Time*

If you find you have a little more time than you thought, say an hour or two to yourself, what is your favorite thing to do?

Describe a time when the present moment was all that existed for you, neither the past or future mattering in that moment.

When have you discovered that going slower took less time? What task were you doing? How might this apply to prayer?

What would "knitting before the face of God" look like for you? What could you do prayerfully, but wordlessly, that could be transformed as you are aware of God's presence?