

Reflection for 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B

The picturesque scenes that have been portrayed after the heavy snowfall that many parts of the country have experienced this week, are on the one hand inviting but on the other are equally challenging. From a distance, it is the perfect picture: close up, however, it can prove to be dangerous and frightening. While some parts of the country have felt that it has been a return to the Beast from the East, other parts have escaped with a relatively insignificant fall of snow. The impact on travel, livelihood and peoples' lives varies across the country as the emergency services make every effort to keep the country moving. While the pictures can offer a feeling of warmth to make us feel comfortable, the harsh reality of being out in the wintry weather can tell a different story. It influences how we feel. It can also lift or dampen our spirits depending on what is going on in our life. We are all probably struggling with the effects of the pandemic without having to deal with the adverse weather conditions, even if from a distance, the landscape or the horizon may appear attractive.

Sometimes, when we look at the landscape or horizon of prayer, we can easily fall into a similar attitude. We can have very idealistic, even so-called holy notions of prayer which are very removed from our experience of life. There is always the temptation to think that priests and religious men and women are experts in prayer. It is quite easy to be convinced that they have all the answers to prayer and are experts in the life of faith. Nothing could be further from the truth! We can all struggle with prayer as we do with faith. The pandemic has challenged us in our prayer and in our faith. We have tried to seek light in moments of darkness and answers to our apparently never-ending questions. The fact that we want to pray is a good place to start. It is from that place of faith that we can build our life of prayer. Like the adverse weather that we have recently experienced, we have had to adapt to the changing conditions in our lives of faith and prayer. We all know that has presented its own unique challenges over the last year.

This week, the Church starts the season of Lent with Ash Wednesday. Lent is going to be different this year. So why not take up a different challenge this Lent? Look at your life of prayer! Give it some time and space! Ask some difficult questions – do not be afraid of the answers. To help you through your pilgrimage this Lent, why not take these few words by James Martin, an American Jesuit who has recently published a book on prayer.

“Many people have the same experience: their knowledge of prayer is frozen at the stage of childhood understanding and practice. There is nothing blameworthy in that. We can know only what we have been taught or have experienced. But imagine translating that practice to any other part of life. Imagine trying to navigate adult life with the emotional maturity of a child. Imagine living a moral life with the wisdom of a ten-year-old. Imagine trying to make it through life with a fourth grade understanding of maths.

Or imagine trying to live an adult life with a child's understanding of language, with its limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. At different points in your life, you would be profoundly hindered, you would be unable to express complex emotions; you would be tongue-tied in complicated social situations; you would feel confused when you read books written for adults. You might feel sad when you listened to others talk, not understanding them or being unable to participate in the conversation. You would feel inadequate to the task of living an adult life.

Our prayer life is different. It's hard to live as adults if we lack an adult spirituality. Imagine facing a difficult situation and relating it to God in the same way you did in grammar school or having a profound spiritual experience as an adult and not knowing how to respond.

That's where I found myself at age twenty-five. I understood little about what it meant to pray other than what little I remembered from Sunday school. That is the situation in which many of us find ourselves. The good news is that there's a lot more to prayer and it's easy to learn.”

James Martin s.j, “**Learning to pray: a guide for everyone,**” page 42