

“Why do you labour for that which does not satisfy?”

Is 55:2

Look around you. Whether you consider the state of international affairs, or the circumstances of your own lives, your workplace for example or the people with whom you mix, it soon becomes evident that many people are not satisfied with the lives they lead and the way things are. Many people are too busy just getting by to think about finding happiness. Others know that they are dissatisfied and are looking for happiness in their careers, or leisure activities, or in their relationships, or on the internet. Some even consider changing their identity. Still others are in earnest about making their lives to be something worthwhile but don't know where to look or how to achieve it.

In fact, the means of attaining satisfaction is more readily available than many people think. The irony is that the much-sought-for satisfaction is rooted not in the frenetic activities of this life but in the contemplation of the next; not in the fulfilling of earthly longings but in the setting of our hearts to long for the things that are above.

‘You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts shall not rest until they rest in Thee’ (St Augustine, *Confessions*).

So, in the midst of our busy lives, how *do* we set about finding happiness or satisfaction?

The first step is to acknowledge that the things of this life – material possessions, an easy life, the fulfilment of ambitions, or even relationships – will not give us what our hearts most deeply yearn for. The first step is, as St Paul says elsewhere, to ‘seek the things that are above, where Christ is’ (Col 3:1). We have to change our mindset, and stop trusting

that the things of this world will bring us happiness or satisfaction. But we have to be prepared to apply effort and energy.

The second step is to start praying, and not just on Sundays, nor just when we happen to think about it, or when we have a few spare moments. Prayer needs to become our priority. After all, ‘there is nothing the devil fears so much, or so much tries to hinder, as prayer’ (St Philip Neri). Prayer is what connects our souls with God. Prayer serves as the channel – the viaduct – through which God’s grace and goodness is poured into our souls, and the aspirations and longings of our souls are raised up to God. And prayer is easier than most people think.

The sort of prayer where you simply talk to God in the secret of your heart and hold a conversation with Him is both valuable and necessary. But this type of prayer is dependent on your mood, your inclination, your imagination, and the time available. In other words, such prayer is chiefly about you and your needs and longings.

By contrast, set prayers – written by the saints, given to us by God’s Church, and laid out in a carefully structured way – can raise our hearts and minds to God¹ and, at the same time, unite us to all the Catholics throughout the world who are also looking for the good things of heaven. Moreover, these set prayers, one way or another, incorporate every human aspiration and longing, every cry from the heart, every act of adoration and thanksgiving, every act of penitence and of supplication.

For this reason, I encourage everyone who does not already do so to take up a formal set of morning and evening prayers, the two hinges on which the day swings. Establish a routine of prayer, so that you can breath every day with the rhythmic breath of the Holy Spirit who breathes within you when you do not know how to pray (Rom 8:23,26).

¹ As St. John Damascene defines prayer.

To this end, buy yourself a Catholic prayer book. There are many thousands on the market, ranging from cheap and handy to costly and beautifully bound. It doesn't matter much which prayer book you use except to find one that has a set of morning prayers and a set of evening prayers which you can get into the routine of praying daily.

Our own *Morning and Night Prayers for every day of the week for busy people* might be a good place to start. They are free, and contain a set of prayers for each day, with just enough variety to cover all the main devotions in the course of a week, and just enough that is unvarying so that you can grow in familiarity with the routine.

Or try *A Simple Prayer Book* published by the Catholic Truth Society and available in the rack at the back of church. Or *A Beginner's Book of Prayer* by William Storey, which includes a set of morning and evening prayers as well as many traditional Catholic prayers for everyone.

More expensive and old fashioned, but containing just about every traditional Catholic prayer you could hope to use, try a book simply called *Blessed Be God*. Or, to tune in with the official prayer life of the Church, and adopt the rhythm of the Divine Office, why not try *The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, a couple of copies of which we still have, but which are selling fast.

Whichever prayer book you choose, try to establish a routine of prayer, in the morning and in the evening, and start to labour not for the things that do not satisfy but for the things that fill the soul, and will lead you to heaven.