

A grade-school kid and a teenager live in a different moral universe in many ways from the father or mother of a family, a parent, a grandparent, a civic leader, or someone who runs a business. It will be easier to have confidence in moral decision-making at each stage of our life when we have incorporated practices of prayer into it. My predecessor as President of Notre Dame, Fr. Ted Hesburgh, C.S.C., used to recommend to people who came to him for counsel that when they faced a difficult decision of whatever kind they should simply pray, "Come Holy Spirit." They could then be confident that they had available to them the very best assistance possible. Good habits of prayer are an acknowledgement that in our moral decision-making we are never operating alone. We will always have available to us the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the assistance of trusted advisors. This puts us at a great advantage over others who may think that they are completely isolated and need to make decisions alone.

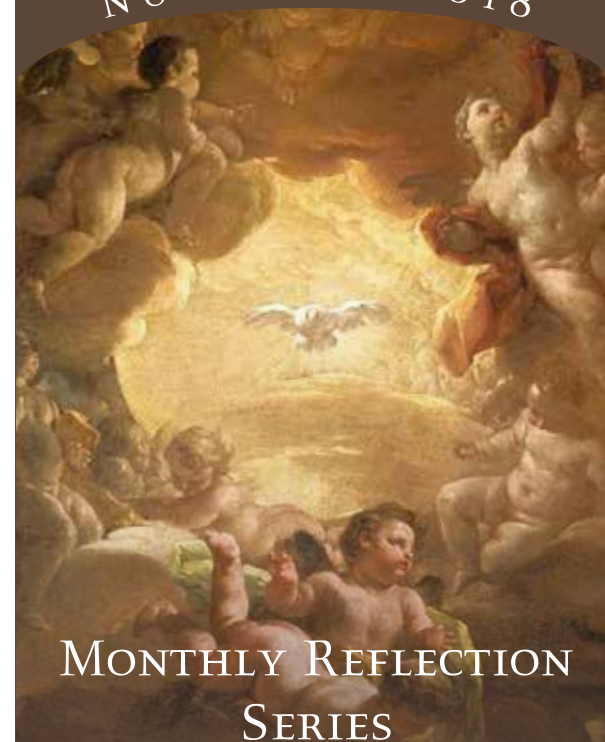
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Rev. Edward "Monk" Malloy, C.S.C., completed his 18th and final year as President of the University of Notre Dame on July 1, 2005. Fr. Malloy entered the Holy Cross community in 1964 and was ordained on April 4, 1970. He has been a member of the faculty of the University since 1974 and continues to teach, mentor and support students. After his retirement as president, Fr. Malloy published his three-volume memoir, *Monk's Tale*, followed by the book, *Monk's Musing Faith, Life, Notre Dame*, a collection of brief reflections on numerous topics of interest to Fr. Malloy.



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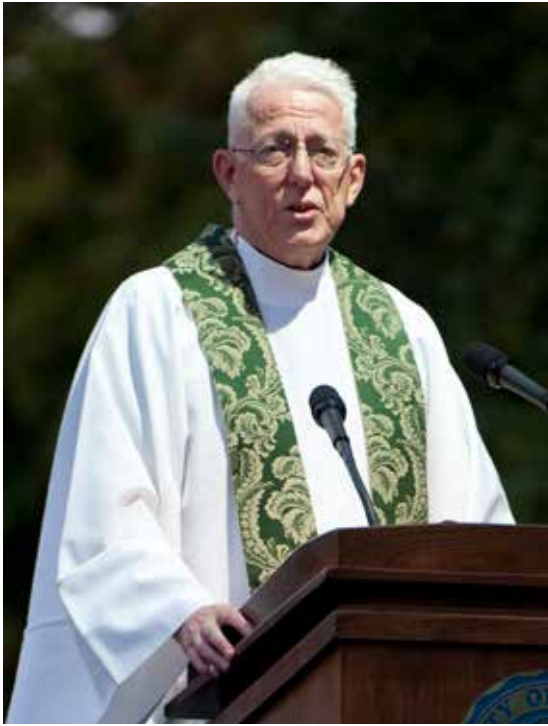
## MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

# Prayer and the Moral Life

by Fr. Edward Malloy, C.S.C.



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For a Christian believer, participation in the life of prayer is both an opportunity and a necessity. It allows us to keep rooted in the God who brought us into existence, who nourished us through the power of the spirit, and who yearns to welcome us home to eternal life. A simple definition of prayer is a conversation with God. We know from the Scriptures and from Christian theology that God is always attentive to each of us as individuals and that he knows us each by name. He never tunes us out or affects an attitude of indifference to our situation. On the other hand, it is more challenging for us to be in conversation with someone we cannot see directly. That is why the practices of prayer, like the Sacraments, are opportunities for us to listen to the

Word of God, to respond to its call, and to achieve a greater sense of God's presence in our lives.

While prayer is essential for the Christian life in general, it is also crucial for good moral decision-making. Through our intelligence and human freedom, we have many opportunities to choose well instead of poorly, to enhance our dignity as a human person, and to be of assistance to people in need. In trying to live a virtuous life, we can draw upon our previous experience and what we have learned from the examples of the holy men and women who have gone before us in the life of faith.

I think there are certain qualities that flow from the commitment of the whole self to prayer that can affect moral decision-making. First, we need a sense of confidence in God's benevolence. God is on our side. God is not out to get us. God understands the perplexity under which we sometimes have to make choices. If we strive to do our best and have given ourselves enough time for proper reflection, we can simply trust that God will understand when everything does not turn out exactly as we hoped.

Second, moral decision-making can be improved in prayer by recognition of the ambiguity of appearances. The world is sometimes opaque, so sometimes we are faced with decisions that have no clear answer. In prayer, we can try to get to the heart of the matter, to dispel the clouds that obscure what is really going

on. Sometimes our motives might be mixed and we may see that as an obstacle. And yet, that is the way we are made as human persons and we need to strive for the best intentions possible under the circumstances.

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**“ First, we need a sense of confidence in God's benevolence. ”**

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Third, prayer can cultivate in us an attitude of social interdependence. We are never entirely alone, either in our relationship to God or in our relationship to our family members, friends, companions, and the fullness of humanity. In times of grief, or failure, or disappointment, our spirits can often be buoyed by the presence of others who abide with us even when things do not go right. Reciprocally, we can do the same for others so that we continue to reinforce our sense of family, community and Church.

Finally, prayer can give us a sense of patience with the rhythms of life. Each of the stages of development as a person will have different levels of responsibility.