

Spiritual exercises to help us Our breathing

‘The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, know what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.’ (Romans 8. 26-27)

The word in ancient Greek for breathing/breath is the word in the New Testament for the Spirit (*'pneuma'* -so: *pneumatic tyres, pneumatic drill, pneumonia etc.*)

We can use our breathing as a way of praying, and it is especially helpful when we are feeling tense and anxious – which these present times can make us feel.

Sit on a chair (hard-backed?) with both feet on the ground with your back in an upright position without trying unnaturally to have a straight back. Breathe in and out naturally - no special deep breaths. Become aware of the air as it comes in and flows out of your nostrils. Just concentrate on that alone, breathing in...and out. Other thoughts come into your mind. Put them aside. Just return to concentrating on the breath flowing in and out of your nostrils. Do that for at least two minutes, or five, or longer. This is the basic rhythm, the fundament of this spiritual exercise.. To this you can add variations.

While you breathe in, be conscious of God's Spirit coming into you...

Fill your lungs with divine energy...

While you breathe out, you may imagine that you are expelling your fears, your impurities, your negative feelings

OR you can add the Jesus Prayer.

As you breathe in, say 'Lord Jesus Christ'

As you breathe out, say 'have mercy on me.'

OR another prayer e.g.(in) O God, my God....(out) for you I long (Psalm 63.1)

OR as you breathe in, you are breathing in the Spirit

as you breathe out, you are breathing out love

- and you can go on to use this as intercession, breathing out love to family, friends, those in need, ...to the world

But don't complicate yourself. The basic exercise is enough.

A further exercise is this: **Sensations**

Take up a position which is comfortable but alert (as in the previous exercise).

Become aware of all the sensations in your body.

Go round the body gently – the feel of the clothes on your shoulders....

your back against the chair,

your hands as they rest on your lap,

your thighs as you sit on the chair,

the feel of your feet in your shoes...

and then go round the body again from the top of your head....mouth...shoulders...arms.....to the feet.

Just keep moving gently round for about five minutes.

The exercise should help release tension. Sometimes we get tense because we focus on something which seems to irritate us. If so, note what the tension feels like. If you itch, observe it calmly. You don't have to deal with it. If you feel the draught, delight in the breeze rather than getting up to close the door.

What this exercise helps with is living in 'the sacrament of the present moment', which is the English title of a work by the 18th century priest Jean-Pierre de Caussade: 'Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence.'

Here is part of one of his prayers:

O my God, when will it please you to grant me the favour of living always in that union of my will with your heavenly will -

where saying nothing all is said

and all is done by leaving all to you

where we achieve much by surrendering ever more to your will

and yet are relieved of all toil

since we place everything in your care

and are concerned to trust wholly in you.

Blessed state, which, even in the absence of any conscious faith,

offers the soul an inward and spiritual disposition,

so that, by habitual inclination of the heart, I may constantly repeat,

'Thy will be done.'