

## GLIMPSE

### Prayer-Time

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There is an amazing chemical which doctors use to put people "under" for a short time for various procedures. They needle your arm and ask you to count backwards from one hundred. I did not make it to one hundred. When I woke up, I got dressed, went home, had lunch, took a nap, and upon waking, could not remember anything since trying to count backwards.

In auto races the time it takes for a car to be gassed up and on its way is a matter of seconds. The fuel is pumped under pressure. Tires can be removed and new ones slapped on in equally quick time. Out at our local airport one of the airlines announce proudly that they promise to have your luggage ready to be retrieved in twenty minutes, that is if they haven't lost it. I do not know yet what they give us if it takes longer than twenty minutes, perhaps a second little bag of peanuts and a sincere statement of appreciating our patience.

Many years ago, upon entering the Jesuits we learned to pray every morning for fifty-five minutes before Mass. Now that seemed like a very long time, but we had meditation books which helped pass the time. There were three major sections call "points". We would pray, or consider, or drift-away for twenty minutes after the starting bell and then a bell would move us from the first point to the second, or the bell would wake a person up or bring that person back from his day-dream. A third bell would ring which would move that person to get serious about this prayer-business. The whole bellathon would end with the final one moving us over to the chapel.

This time-thing seemed very important, which brought to my mind rather quickly the question about why God needed fifty-five minutes! If racecars could get gassed up in ten seconds, couldn't God just zap a guy and move him into the race of religious perfection? Couldn't God help a guy to retrieve his spiritual luggage in less than twenty minutes? When I grew in religious wisdom I figured that a shorter time would be better for me and God as well. I figured that doing good things was kind of a prayer and I could find lots of good things which God would be pleased to see me doing. I could just stop-in for a gracing-up, let God in a bit so I

could then let God out in my many doings. I do smile as I write at what kind of wisdom that was.

So how much time does God need? How much time does a person need? Next Tuesday is the celebration of Mary's being conceived immaculately. The Gospel's account of the angel's inviting Mary to be the Mother of Jesus takes twenty-seven seconds to read. God apparently needs not very much time. Our Jewish ancestors took forty years of wandering to hear and see what God was inviting them to be. God needs lots of time, at times. How much time do we need? The answer is that we need just the right amount of time according to our condition. Mary was apparently more available than her Jewish relatives before her. What is just about the right amount of time for each of us?

The proper amount of prayer-time is the time it takes for me to recover who God claims me, creates me to be and receive. It takes time to let go of the shame of our not being enough in almost every aspect of our lives. Shame is the opposite of gratitude and God's grace works toward our being freed from shame to be grateful enough to come out of any form of hiding or selfish-subtraction. In prayer, God needs the time it takes for us to be moved from hiding to sharing, from negativity to generosity, from fear to availability. Twenty-seven seconds or forty years, it all depends on how long it takes to be humbly honest about who we have been, who we are and who we want to be. We'll know when prayer ends, not with a bell, but a personal sense that there is some good to do some where beyond. We don't "grace-up" but are prepared to "grace-out" and we will know when that sense arrives. When we feel grateful enough, we will be enough for the sending. It is only a glimpse; listen for the interior bell to pray.