



Time to Pray

Why does the Serenity Prayer have the power to help us accept or confront the challenges that we face? **Janina Gomes explains.**

The Serenity Prayer is popularly ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi and more recently attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr of the Union Theological Seminary, New York City, who prayed it in 1932, as the end of a longer prayer. It has the power to change our attitudes to stressful circumstances. Whether widely used, as with Alcoholics Anonymous or during the current pandemic, or in transitioning

through difficult moments and even facing the diminishments of old age, its value cannot be underestimated. Crosswalk.com, a Christian website, breaks down the prayer into three segments of biblical truths. The first part is: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.”

The commentary says that when life feels out of control, it is easy to work harder at controlling everything and everyone around

us or throw our hands up and give up on the situation or the person. In reality, the only way to find peace is by accepting and submitting to God’s plan for our lives. Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle would call it acceptance of the moment and being present to the moment without our mental commentary on the situation and sometimes the harmful self talk that accompanies it. We no longer seek to orchestrate or manipulate events or people. Lolly Daskal, a leadership coach, says, “Even though accepting the reality of one’s life sounds like it may be easy enough, many people hold on to their own version of reality, which is based on regret, disappointment, denial or just waiting for something better.”

She admonishes us by adding, “There are few better things you can do for yourself than giving up the fictional version of your own life to accept yourself, your life and your reality.” The second part of the prayer: “Give me the courage to change the things I can” calls for invoking the pow-



er of God and the strength of the spirit to give us the courage to move forward towards the full plan God has for our life. This courage was edifyingly displayed by Fr. Stan Swamy when he continued to work for the rights of the tribal community in Jharkhand despite all the hostility he aroused.

Deuteronomy, an Old Testament book of the Bible, states: “Be valiant and strong, do not fear or tremble before them. For Yahweh, your God is with you; he will not leave you or abandon you.” Similarly, St. Paul in the New Testament says: “God did not confer on us a spirit of bashfulness, but of strength, love and good judgment.” Instead of ignoring hard decisions or

running from what seems too difficult, we can face up to even bad situations and learn to handle them with courage and perseverance. The third part of the prayer: “And the wisdom to know the difference” speaks about the wisdom that is God’s gift to those who ask for it. Solomon asked God for wisdom and became wise in the eyes of men and God. We can grow in wisdom and take better decisions when we spend time in prayer and communicating with God.

The Serenity Prayer acknowledges that God is the source of wisdom. The Serenity Prayer can help especially during these days when people face stress from all directions. The iso-

lation people experience, the hard financial situations they are in, the loss of social fellowship are all very challenging. Unemployment may stare us in the face, or loss of income. We need to do something, to help ourselves and change situations, but when we can go only so far and no further, we have to stand still and remain patient till better news arrives.

The efficacy of the Serenity Prayer has been experienced by many alcoholics and drug addicts. It brings them much solace and added strength when they are struggling and have repeated setbacks in their efforts to change themselves. The Serenity Prayer can also be used by the elderly who face many diminishment and the slow loss of many body functions by simply accepting the reality of their situation and in such acceptance one experiences the meaning of surrendering to God, because his plan is the perfect one for our lives. There is meaning and purpose in all of this, we find, as we move through the last lap of our journey in life.