

strates the strength of the Jesuit tradition and how it permeates the hearts and minds of students in Jesuit high schools.

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Simple Ways to Pray: Spiritual Life in the Catholic Tradition

Emilie Griffin
Rowman & Littlefield, 2006
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Reviewed by Craig Horning

Simple Ways to Pray: Spiritual Life in the Catholic Tradition by Emilie Griffin is part of the “Come and See Series” from Sheed and Ward, which is modeled on Jesus’ compassionate question: “What do you seek?” and his invitation to “come and see” the world through the eyes of faith. In this spirit, Griffin’s work is a gentle and informative invitation to let down our guard and give ourselves permission to ask such questions as “Why should I pray? What is prayer? What holds us back? How do I know I am really praying?” (p. vii). While these questions may seem elementary, they call us to examine the deepest parts of ourselves and what it means to be Catholic, Christian, spiritual, and human. Griffin’s work is appropriate for those with limited experience in prayer or prayer in the Catholic tradition, as well as those with seasoned Catholic prayer lives.

Griffin’s overarching goal is to provide the reader with a glimpse into the “treasure box” of the Catholic prayer tradition with a focus on accessibility for people in various stages of spiritual development. While she addresses a broad audience—the entire Catholic community in addition to Christians from a variety of denominations and willing non-Christians—this review focuses on the specific application to Catholic education. The book is organized topically by chapter, including a wide range of subtopics from Eucharistic adoration to *Lectio Divina*. Five interwoven themes emerged throughout my engagement with the text. I briefly touch upon each of these self-defined

topics—description of prayer, theological interpretations, historical origins, practical application, sample texts—and then conclude my review with a final summary and reflection on the work as it relates to Catholic education.

I appreciate Griffin's willingness to address the most basic questions such as "what is prayer" with insight and respect. Her descriptions of various types of prayer throughout the book are accessible for those with little background in Catholic prayer while maintaining a maturity and depth that can be appreciated by a seasoned Catholic. Teachers coming from a variety of faith backgrounds teaching a wide range of age groups will find value in her far-reaching approach.

Griffin's theological knowledge is apparent. Throughout her work she references countless spiritual writers, preachers, saints, and more. She incorporates scriptural references appropriately and translates biblical languages when necessary. For the teacher with little background in theology, this book offers a sample of the variety of theological influences behind prayer. When describing different types of prayer, Griffin often explains the historical origins, adding a deep appreciation to the significance of each practice.

Perhaps most important in a book about prayer are numerous practical suggestions of how to engage in various forms of prayer. Griffin is successful in weaving helpful application approaches throughout the book. Not only does Griffin offer ideas on how actually to attempt these spiritual practices, but she concurrently addresses common fears and roadblocks to praying. This invitational and encouraging approach to prayer seems to work well for the reader. As a teacher, adopting a similar approach in a Catholic school setting is important. Religious education coordinators, liturgists, and campus ministers are the usual suspects for applying the suggestions found in this type of book, but Griffin's approach makes this an excellent choice for teachers in other subject areas who are looking to complement academic instruction with spiritual practice when appropriate. Griffin helps to make application easier by incorporating sample texts at the end of each chapter. Ranging from hymns to poems to scriptural prayers, I even found myself spontaneously praying in the midst of my reading. These texts include brief summaries or descriptions about their application, making them user friendly for teachers.

The spirit throughout Griffin's work is greatly appreciated. She walks the fine line of writing about the richness of the Catholic tradition while tending to the needs of readers with limited Catholic exposure with grace. She avoids the use of strong apologetics when discussing delicate topics for non-Catholic audiences such as Marian prayer and heavenly intercessors while describing these time-honored traditions with passion and an alluring tone. One area where I would welcome more attention is in the area of lay spirituality. For

example, I would love to hear Griffin address questions such as “What does a lay spirituality look like?” or “How do we transfer the practices of vowed and cloistered religious to the demands and differences in the daily rhythms of a lay Catholic’s life in the 21st century?” Perhaps this is beyond the scope of Griffin’s work, but nonetheless addressing these questions are imperative for Catholic educators today, as the laity currently accounts for over 95% of Catholic school teachers.

Griffin’s work can be read chronologically or used for reference, but be cautioned. “Reading” a book about prayer can simply open a door—engaging in prayer is where true transformation can begin. Griffin helps facilitate this transition seamlessly. Responding to her invitation to pray and welcoming others to join us is one of the great opportunities and privileges of the Catholic educator. As teachers, faculty, students, and human beings we all can feel inadequate at times asking such questions as: Do I know enough? Will I embarrass myself with the wrong answer? Am I really any good at this? Griffin reminds us that when it comes to prayer, no one is inadequate. In fact, each and every one of us was created for the very purpose of being in relationship with the Creator. This profound truth is at the heart of Catholic prayer and nurturing the inner life. Delving into the depths of one’s soul seems like a lofty endeavor, but to begin all anyone needs is a desire to pray and an inkling of willingness to try. Griffin provides her readers with the perennial nudge that both novice and experienced Christians often need to dig deep and renew their spiritual journey once again.

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