Prayer and Our Bodies

Flora Wuellner, pastor, teacher, retreat leader and author of numerous books on prayer realized that “while I always had a few kind words to say about the body and had developed some guided prayers and mediations for physical relaxation… the body was always an afterthought, a sideline. “*All right then, what is my body*?” I began to ask in my prayers. An answer of sure and gentle strength seemed to rise from a deep place, not in words, but in strong, guided thought: “*You are asking the wrong question.”*

I thought this over. The discomfort seemed to focus on the word “What?” *But what is wrong with that”* I thought defensively. Aren’t I a soul, a spirit, a personality who owns a body and controls (or tries to) the complex machinery of the physical self? Was this the wrong interpretation? Was I trying to manipulate my body and therefore depersonalizing it?

*“All right then*, “I responded, “*Then who is my body*? Again I sensed a gentle almost bemused response, “Speak to your body now in my presence, and ask directly who it is.”

I focused on my bodily self, sitting so quietly in the chair: “Who are you?”

Responses rose so swiftly and urgently into my conscious mind that I was almost overwhelmed. They came like answers that had been pent up for years.

“I am your friend and closest partner. Sometimes I am your mother and father. Sometimes I am your child. Always I am your lover and spouse.

“I am the truth-teller. I witness to you your unknown self.

“I am the faithful messenger and recorder of your memories, your powers, your hurts, your needs, your limits.

“I am the stored wisdom and hurts of the ages and generations before you.

“I am a gift-giver. Through me, you live and move in God’s creation. Through me, you have your vital link with the rejoicing, groaning, travailing universe.

“I am your partner in stress and pain. I carry much of your suffering, so your spirit does not need to carry it all alone.

“I am the frontier you have barely explored, and the eager companion who speaks to you every moment.

“I am the manifestation of the miracle which is you. I am the ground of your deep powers.

“I am the microcosm of the community that surrounds you. I am the microcosm of the universe in which you live.

“I am the visible means by which you relate and unite with others.

“I am one of the major ways by which God abides with you, speaks to you, touches you, unites with you.

“Far from separating you from your spiritual life, I open it to you.

“You can pray with me, for me, through me. I can pray also, in my way, when you cannot.

“I am always in embrace with you, though sometimes you ignore me or even hate and try to harm me.

“I will never leave you. I will be with you after death as your risen companion of clearer light and swifter energy in a different form. Only my outer appearance dies.

“Together, in passionate unity, we will become the fully alive human being!”

I sat almost stunned at the door that suddenly had opened before me. Never, until now, had I thought of my body as a companion to be loved and heard, nurturingly, passionately, discerningly…

I realized I could never go back. No longer could my body be to me a prison of my spirit, a beast of burden to be driven, a machine to be manipulated, an opponent to be feared and resisted, a force to be subdued, a slave for my habits, or an instrument to be possessed. God was revealing to me the hidden but deeply responsive companion of my life’s spiritual journey; the one whom many years ago I had wedded “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and I health, as long as we both shall live.”

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