

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

Pray Like a Dog

We do not always have to read books on spirituality in order to learn something about prayer. One of the greatest lessons I ever learned about prayer came from a book about dogs. Jack London's novel, *The Call of the Wild*, is about a dog, Buck, that is trained as a sled dog. A man named John Thornton becomes Buck's owner, and the two of them gradually build a great love for one another. In one particularly moving scene in the book, Buck is laying beside John's desk watching him work. Jack London describes the scene:

...Bucks' love was expressed in adoration. While he went wild with happiness when Thornton touched him or spoke to him, he did not seek these tokens... He would lie by the hour, eager, alert, at Thornton's feet, looking up into his face, dwelling upon it, studying it, following with keenest interest each fleeting expression, every movement or change of feature.

So, what does all of this have to do with prayer? Everything! The very same way Buck showed his adoration for John is the way we should show our adoration to God. Prayer is, ultimately, our willingness to lie at the feet of our Master and be attentive to His movements. We sometimes get caught up in saying and doing a multitude of things during prayer and forget to simply be present. It is easy to fill up our prayer time by telling God everything we think He should know and do, rather than listening to and watching what He might be doing. "Be still and know that I am God," is His command to each of us (Psalm 46:10, RSV).

Like Buck, we do not lay at our Master's feet in order to receive rewards, but because nothing brings us greater peace and contentment than to be in His presence, to watch and hear what He is doing in our lives and in the lives of others. Obviously, St. John Vianney found peace in his life by praying this way. He once said that, during the difficult times, he has only one resource, "to throw [himself] at the foot of the tabernacle like a little dog at the foot of his master."

The next time we sit down to pray, let us think about Buck and pray like a dog, eager and alert. We will look up into God's face and dwell upon it, study it, follow it with keenest interest. Let our love for our Master be expressed in simple adoration!