

Tactile Prayer

*“My heart has heard you say, Come and talk with me. And my heart responds,
“Lord, I am coming.” (Psalm 27:8)*

Tactile prayer is any discipline that helps us in our focus, our memory and in our connection with God. They have been a part of spiritual life in the Christian Church from the very beginning. Often we don't realize or recognize them as forms of prayer but even in the Old Testament we find examples of tactile prayer that are intended to help us to connect with God as altars were built to remember times and places where different individuals encountered God. Sacraments are forms of tactile prayer, taking communion and being baptized are physical expressions of and participations with God who continues to be at work in time and in our lives.

Tactile prayer has long been a part of church life as a means to help us focus in our prayer life. There's nothing distinctly sacred in the tools used in tactile prayer. The sacred and holy comes in our connection with God.

- ❖ Candles – Candles have long been used in prayer. The flame has been used to represent the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The flickering of a candle speaks to the dynamic nature of God's Holy Spirit and the dynamic nature of our relationship with God. Reflecting on the flame of a burning candle as we pray can serve to keep us focused on the living, purifying, dynamic nature of our relationship with God
- ❖ Votive Candles - The flame as a purifying symbol has ties back to the sacrifices in the Temple. Votive candles have the unique quality of being self-consuming in much the way sacrifices upon the altar were consumed and their essence was lifted to God.
- ❖ Prayer beads – perhaps the most commonly thought of prayer beads are the rosary used in the Catholic Church. But those are by no means the only prayer beads. There isn't anything specifically holy about any type of prayer beads. They serve as tools to help us keep focus and to recall our prayers.
 - Beads can be loose or on a string. Consider holding loose beads in your hand and with each prayer, listen as you drop each bead into a bowl. Recognize that as you have released the bead you have released your prayer to God and left it in his care.
 - Make a string of beads that can be carried with you. This can help us to focus as we pray especially if we find ourselves in busy or distracting places. For those of us who are by nature easily distracted they can be helpful even as we seek to settle in to a time with God in a quiet place. Moving our fingers from one bead to the next can help us to lift and quiet

our hearts as we move from the busyness of life into the quietness of God's presence.

- ❖ Journaling – There are various ways to journal. Whether you keep an actual prayer list of people or issues you want to pray for or if your journal is a recollection of answered prayers, all of these are forms of tactile prayer. Writing as prayer is an incredible tool as words help crystallize into recognizable forms that which is unformed and unrecognizable.
 - Some people keep an ongoing list of people and situations that they lift up to God in prayer. One of the wonderful qualities of this type of journaling is it gives us a context through which we can keep track of answered prayers as well as those which we continue to lift up to God. Both of these qualities speak to aspects of God's character – his faithfulness, his provision, his timelessness and his sovereignty.
 - Another means of journaling is chronicling what we have heard in our times of silence and solitude which we can reflect upon at later times. Recalling what we have heard God prompt in the past often is a wonderful tool to use in future times of silence and solitude. It's also a wonderful encouragement when we experience times of spiritual dryness. Looking back on these journals reminds us that God has touched and spoken to us before which can serve as a cup of cold water in what may feel like a spiritual desert.
 - Writing letters to God is also a form of journaling. This can be especially helpful for those of us who are easily distracted. If a mind wanders during prayer you know precisely where to pick up your train of thought. It is also an opportunity to look back and hear where your heart was coming from in the past and see how God has transformed it.