

What is the Loving Heart of Jesus in Companioned Prayer™ ?

In Companioned Prayer we take our prayer – our prayer subject and our self – into the compassion of Jesus' quiet, loving presence. But how do we do this? And just what is the loving heart of Jesus?

The Loving Heart of Jesus

Essentially Companioned Prayer is our surrender into the personal loving presence of our Lord, exemplified by his loving heart. This is the simple key to everything. Letting go *into our prayer subject within our experience of the love of Jesus* is the heart of our prayer.

In *GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE* we are encouraged to take our prayer subject to the loving heart of Jesus. But what is the loving heart of Jesus? Some people may have a specific concept in mind, such as the Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart and related illustrations. These devotions may venerate an illustration of Jesus' physical heart and the outpouring of his love as the representation of his divine love for us. For other people the concept of Jesus' loving heart may be unfamiliar and perhaps even disconcerting. Unfortunately both reactions (veneration or confoundment) may take us away from our Companioned Prayer inner felt prayer experience, and move us out to some thought, intellectual concept or adoration. Therefore, it may be helpful to further understand how the loving heart of Jesus is surrendered into in Companioned Prayer.

Through our faith we know that Jesus is the embodiment of God's love for us as we are, and that love is expressed not only through Jesus but also through all of God's creation, including us. When we experience love from another person, or when we experience the love we give another person, this love is a sharing of God's love felt here and now, concretely. This love is a portion of the blessing and gift of God's love, the same love that he provided in fullness and transparent purity through Jesus. We experience this divine love in our relationships of compassion, hope, charity, love, tenderness and affection. Therefore we know from our own experience how tender love and acceptance feels, and we can naturally appreciate how Jesus' tender love for all humanity feels, and how his personal love for us, with our personal burdens and wounds that we carry, feels. Perhaps we have had some experiences in Companioned Prayer or in other worship or prayer times of a more direct appreciation or experience of Jesus' loving heart, of his pure love or tender compassion. If so, we can also place our self and our prayer subject within how this gentle and deep tender love feels inside, not as a concept, but in a physical letting go and surrendering within. This is a felt mystery that will deepen with time. So be patient, and in faith be okay with not trying to define exactly what it is.

Through our faith we let ourselves experience this tender divine compassion by taking our fragile and wounded selves into the mystery of this abiding love, and letting go into this very real and very present gift of Jesus' loving heart. In this way we simply are open to experiencing his tenderness and loving acceptance, felt inside us, not as a concept but only as an abiding and familiar experience. An experience that we allow and encourage by giving ourselves into and

participating in his gift of tenderness and loving acceptance, felt inside us, in our wounds, in our prayer issue, as we take it to him in faith and abide in that love. In the reality of Jesus' presence we are open to the flowing presence of his love felt in the tenderness of our prayer issue, allowing us to be closer to and accepting of our prayer issue and its special gift to us, instead of handing it off or distancing ourselves from it. For it is within this very brokenness that, with tenderness and acceptance, we experience God's mercy and grace.

The fourth step of Companioned Prayer

GOD'S LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

Notice how all this {your prayer subject} feels inside, and how you carry it. [pause] With tenderness and faith, notice how it feels to take all this to the loving heart of Jesus, and to feel his gentle love and acceptance in all of this.

Once we have an idea of what to pray about, that is, what it feels like God is calling us to notice, we take a moment to notice how it feels in our body, how we carry it. And then we notice how it feels to take it to the loving heart of Jesus, and to experience his tender love and acceptance. Our prayer subject may feel positive, negative or neutral. It may be an issue of thankfulness or joy, or it may be an issue of concern or challenge, or it may be some other aspect of our life. In all cases we pause here to abide in God's tenderness and acceptance within our involvement with our prayer issue. Sometimes our prayer subject might feel too sensitive or hurting for us to want to get close to it. But in faith we can. By allowing God to bring love, acceptance and tenderness to an issue, we will notice that we can then be more accepting and patient with the prayer issue ourselves.

In faith we silently take our prayer subject to Jesus' sacred and loving heart. We do this with simple and devoted intention. And then we quietly wait, in faith, and abide in his flowing and very tender love. So silent and pure is his love that we may or may not notice it most of the time. But in faith we experience our prayer subject even deeper, more pronounced, within our Lord's love, because he is with us.

Taking our prayer subject to Jesus' loving heart is not a theological or intellectual action. Nor do we picture an image of his loving heart and focus or act within the image. This step of the prayer is not a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the sense of a traditional devotion in which one meditates and adores Jesus and his loving grace. Instead, in this step we humbly bring our prayer subject and our self to Christ, to his sacred and divine heart, in simple intent, surrendering our self to him, allowing our self, our soul, to be open to him as our Lord. It is from God that love flows, and in this reality of his extraordinary love and mercy, we humbly surrender to him, placing ourselves in his good hands and loving heart. That is all we need to do in this step of the prayer. In faith we open our self to receive God's love – into who we are in our fragility, in our brokenness, in our needs, and in how we own and hold our prayer issue, knowing he is with us in our prayer. Knowing that Christ is our Companion in our prayer, that he journeys with us as we hold our tender or sensitive issues in his loving heart, helps us to also be his instrument of love here on earth in our relationships, and even to those issues inside us that need his healing love.

It is very important to note that the purpose of taking our prayer issue to Jesus and experiencing his gentle love and acceptance is not to nullify or neutralize the feeling of our prayer subject or issue. It is not a matter of making it or ourselves “feel better” or “feel good.” Nor should we replace or substitute our prayer issue with feelings, thoughts or images of faith, such as Jesus’ love or Mary’s compassion. We are not handing our prayer issue off to God, giving it to Jesus for him to take from us. The purpose of intentionally taking the time to abide in Jesus’ love at this point in the prayer is to more closely experience our prayer subject within his presence. We have received or identified our prayer subject with God’s help, and we want to acknowledge, accept and know it, and carry it forward into our prayer with him, and not abandon it.

In Companioned Prayer we will find God’s presence and grace gifted to us *from within the very prayer issue we are carrying*. In fact, often the grace or gift that we experience in our prayer is in proportion to the degree that we honestly acknowledge, with humility and faith, our actual prayer issue, and not avoid or replace it with a “good feeling”, “religious or devotional feeling”, or “good intention”. At the time of our prayer, our real prayer issue is our cross that we are called to carry, and that we willingly take up. It is essential to us and to our prayer. Being with it in God’s love and acceptance allows us to be more accepting and patient with our issue; allows us to be closer to it within our faith relationship with God, rather than more distant from it. This is true for prayer issues that feel positive as well as those that feel negative. Perhaps we do not have the strength or patience to forgive or be accepting of an issue of pain or hurt in a way that will allow us to be closer to it and to carry it forward in our prayer. But in faith we know that with Christ as our loving Companion, we can.

Sometimes when we pray it is easy to feel Jesus’ compassion, love or tenderness with a prayer issue. Sometimes it is not so easy. So spend some time with it, and if it is not easy and you are practicing Companioned Prayer, let your companion know so that he or she may help you. Your companion can suggest different ways for you to be with your issue. Your companion may even suggest just taking a portion or piece of your issue and bringing that to Jesus’ gentle loving heart, and seeing if you can hold just that piece. In any case, if you would like help with this, just ask. And in doing so it is not necessary to share what your issue is if you do not wish to.

When we are with our prayer issue within God’s love and acceptance, it is important to notice how our prayer issue feels in our body. Often it is reflected physically in some way. Typically as a result of allowing it to feel some patience or gentleness, we might notice that the issue physically feels lighter or less heavy in our body. Or we may feel less tense, more relaxed. Sometimes when an issue seems to start off with a physically noticeable correlation, such as a tightness or pressure in some area of our body, we might even notice a specific change in that area. In any case, noticing how it feels in our body to be with our prayer issue in this gentle faith-filled way helps us to remain receptive to God and not caught up in the emotion or analysis of an issue. It also greatly helps us remain close to our prayer issue.