



## Office of the Vice President for Mission

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TO: The Gonzaga Community  
FROM: Frank Case, S.J.  
SUBJ: Moment for Mission  
DATE: March 3, 2015

### **Lessons from the House of Charity, I**

For the three Moments for Mission during the Season of Lent, I would like to share some insights I received from working at the House of Charity here in Spokane some 35 years ago, when it was still on Main Street just off Division. This first lesson has to do with prayer.

Some of my time there I spent just hanging out in the large sitting room out front where men would gather in small groups or simply sit alone. Every now and then one of the men would share rather deeply with me his life story. Most of the men, of course, had led lives bedeviled by addictions and other related problems. As they shared their stories, I would ask them if they ever prayed. The first three men I asked said immediately and quite emphatically, “Yeah, Father, I pray all the time. God’s all I have.”

One day I was having such a conversation with a couple of blood brothers who had been raised Catholic but for whatever reasons were no longer “practicing” their religion. When I asked them if they ever prayed, they both went stiff and their body language told me they were about to withdraw from the conversation. I quickly said, “Wait a minute. I’m not asking if you go to church on Sunday, say the rosary, or say your evening and morning prayers. I’m only asking if you even talk with God.” They both relaxed immediately and replied quite simply as the other men had, “Yeah, Father, we pray all the time. God’s all we have.”

Not to belittle the importance of going to mass, saying the rosary, or saying our regular prayers, I still found these men’s answers conveyed a certain wisdom born of pain. These men’s lives had stripped them of the normal accoutrements of what we would call the good life or even a decent life. All the external expressions of their individual dignity had been peeled back and they were in many ways simply naked to the world. But through these rather agonizing experiences they had received a wonderful grace, the ultimate realization and conviction that God knew them completely in all their humanity, yet utterly loved them. All they had was God. They talked with God all the time. And what a great gift they were to me! Lesson number one.

I couldn't help but think of Christ telling his disciples, "When you pray, do not prattle like the pagans.... Pray in this way: Our Father."