

“It is about praying beyond the labels we stick onto people (liberal, conservative, bigot, naive) and seeing them as a beloved child of God. Just like you.”

What Is ‘Praying Facebook’?

Depending on whom you ask, and maybe what time of day, Facebook is either a great tool for connection or a major time suck. Either way, most of us spend moments of each day on some form of social media. Why not turn this routine and sometimes mindless action into an intentional, sustaining prayer practice?

Praying Facebook is something I do most nights, as I check in on the lives of the people on my news feed. As I scroll through, I read intentionally each name. I pause on their profile picture, I read their post, and then offer a prayer to God for them. Sally is out of work? “God, bring meaningful and joy-filled employment to Sally.” Frank had a frustrating day with the kids? “God, I thank you for Frank and his dedication to his family. Please give Frank a restful night as he prepares for another day as a stay-at-home dad.” I even pray for sponsored ads and political memes!

“God, continue to guide (business) to equal and fair employment practices.” “God, please guide (political person) to love of neighbor. May they remember the countless times you say in scripture to not be afraid.”

The Power of Prayer

I could tell you that this is a great way to pray when life is crazy busy. And certainly, as a mother of 2 young children, as a wife, a full-time priest, and friends with many, even I want to buy into the myth that praying Facebook is a way to be prayerful when you can't take more meaningful, more intentional, or more spiritual actions.

But that is the myth. Because praying Facebook is meaningful. And it is intentional. And it is spiritual. It also just happens to be something you can do in your pj's.

Praying Facebook is a way to shift our focus to the needs of others - making the cares and concerns not about us, but rather about the people who share theirs. Rather than be irritated with the fancy dinner photo your coworker shares, offer up prayers of gratitude that she has had such a wonderful experience. We can connect with people and their

emotions on an entirely different level when we engage with the people on Facebook with a prayerful attitude. Imagine rather than being annoyed at your college roommate's political affiliations, you are able to put aside your own opinion and pray for her this way, "God, I pray that the hopes and fears that drive Jessica's political beliefs might be tenderly held by you. I pray that you would comfort her in times of fear and hopelessness, and support her in her dreams."

Praying Facebook is also a way to make sacred something that is both meaningless and meaningful. You know this to be true if you have ever unfriended, blocked, or angrily commented on a post that you didn't agree with. In real life - face-to-face - would you ever say to someone, "I don't want to be your friend," stamp your foot and huff off? When you invite the God who longs for wholeness into the global dialog that occurs through social media, perhaps you find more understanding and less to unfriend.

Through my practice, I have started to think less about what people are posting and more about the feelings and emotions that drive what they post. Anger and judgment are rarely because people are jerks. Rather, they are the products of people who are entrenched in fear, feeling powerless and helpless, and often enough, we are too. Meeting those people on social media platforms, and inviting God to be present as well, starts to change fear into compassion.

How to Pray Facebook

This is the great part! Praying Facebook can be done by anyone, any place, at any time. I started by simply saying a prayer for each person I scrolled past, "God, be with Mark. God, send your love to Jim."

My practice then grew to praying for the person and what they were posting about. This does take a bit more reading and thinking about the lives of others, but the results are great. For example, your sister posts about having a hard day at work, or her kids are driving her crazy. My prayer would look something like this: "God, thank you for Sara and the work she does at her job/with her kids. Be with her, God, as she continues her work."

It's not particularly challenging to pray for those you love or with whom you share sympathetic ideas. The next level involves praying for those who make you really angry - the ones you have little connection with, the ones that if they were to disappear from your feed, you wouldn't even care. Before you block or unfriend, pray. It requires a level of wondering about what drives them, pondering where they are in life and how they got there. It is about praying beyond the labels we stick onto people (liberal, conservative, bigot, naive) and

seeing them as a beloved child of God. Just like you.

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