

LIGHTING A CANDLE AS A FORM OF PRAYER

Fr. Edward Looney

JAMES 2:17 FAITH (ALONE) WITHOUT (GOOD) WORKS IS DEAD!!!

Do you have an intention that lies heavy on your heart? Consider lighting a votive candle this weekend, asking God to grant you his comfort and peace.

A while back I was showing one of my parish churches to an unchurched individual and a person unfamiliar with Catholicism. We stopped by the votive candle area and the person was unsettled by the sight: candles unattended and left burning. This individual thought we should blow out all the candles and could not grasp why this practice would be so popular in Catholicism.

For me, every time I am opening or locking up my parish church in the early morning or late evening hours, I am struck by the



incandescent glow of the votive area. I love it when nearly all the candles are burning and the flames can be seen at all different levels, conveying to the onlooker that people throughout the week have lit those candles.

Each candle lit in a votive area is a reminder of the person who lit the candle. All the candles collectively symbolize the prayers contained within the hearts of so many believers. There are some people who light a candle every Sunday, and you wonder what their intention might be. Some people light three or four candles; perhaps one for each of their children. Other people will go to a church or shrine after receiving a

bad medical diagnosis or hearing that someone else has received bad news. There is something cathartic about this prayerful and ritualistic action.

It isn't just the lighting of the candle that provides comfort. It is above all the prayer that accompanies it. After a person lights a candle, they might in that place, look at the religious statue or image nearby, and offer a prayer from the heart, asking Jesus, Mary, or the saints for their heavenly assistance. After the prayer is said, depending on the type of candle, it will remain lit for a few hours, several days, or even an entire week, symbolic that even if the person cannot pray for the petition at every minute, the saints in Heaven will carry on with their intention. The flickering flame becomes a reminder to the petitioner and all who see it that in the darkest moment of a person's life, Christ's light shines, illuminating the darkness.

When's the last time you lit a candle? Does your parish church have a votive candle area? Do you have an intention that lies heavy on your heart? Consider lighting a votive candle this weekend, asking God to grant you his comfort and peace as you make your act of prayer and surrender to His will. And if you don't have the words for a prayer yourself, consider using this one:

I stand here, in this place, where many before me have come to pray and entrust their petitions to the [maternal] intercession of Mary [or saints]. I stand here, knowing that many people will come to this sacred place after me, and if God wills it, may I return here to pray again and to give thanks to God for answered prayers.

As I go forth from this [place] I light this candle and ask Mary to join her prayers to mine, especially for (state your intention). This candle is a reminder, that my prayer continues after I leave this place.

Thank you, Mary, for praying with me and for my intention, and thank you God, for the way in which you will answer my prayer according to your providence. Open my heart to accept your will and give me confidence in heaven's prayers, through Christ our Lord. Amen.