

NO FRILLS

by
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Having gone through I don't know how many batteries by turning my radio on when I went to bed and then falling asleep without turning it off, I decided to buy myself an electric radio. Just a simple AM/FM plug-into-the-wall type. So I went to a well-known store that specializes in such things. In fact, "radio" is actually part of its name.

Having been unable to find anything I wanted on the shelves, I went to the counter and asked for an electric radio. The salesperson pointed out a nice electric radio cum CD player. No, thanks. Just an electric radio. There was this nice one with an alarm clock built in. Cute, but no. Just an electric radio.

Finally, he found one – the only model they had in stock, high up on a shelf that obviously wasn't visited too often. The dust was rather thick on its box. But it was what I wanted. Just a radio. No CD player, no alarm clock, no waffle iron. Just a radio. You wouldn't have thought I was asking for anything so rare. But radios aren't just radios anymore. They got frills!

Our prayer life can get that way. Instead of just talking to God AND listening, we rattle beads at Him, we light candles in front of Him, we bombard Him with novenas and vigils. Not that these things don't have their place. But you can get too much of a good thing.

When you say the Rosary during Mass, 'something gonna suffer': the Rosary or the Mass. If you've ever tried to talk on the phone and watch TV at the same time, you know this. True, our minds can work on several levels at once; but one level or the other is going to take priority. The Mass and the Rosary both deserve one's undivided attention. Hence, combining the two ain't gonna cut it.

Some people "prescribe" certain prayers for themselves. This is fine as we should all have a regular prayer routine (NOTE: I said *routine*, not *rut*). But to panic if you "miss" this or that prayer, to feel that you must say all the prayers or it doesn't count and so you rush through them – well, it can get almost superstitious. Like it's "bad luck" not to knock on all those heavenly doors everyday.

God's not counting the words. He's looking into the heart they come from. If, indeed, they come from the heart and not just from habit.

Part of the problem, I guess, is the fact that we learned prayer as a set of formulas. I know when I was a kid (back in the Dark Ages), prayer wasn't just rapping with God, it was the recitation of these formulas.

As a result, I more or less grew up with the idea that that was the only way to pray. Once I realized you can pray in your own words, some of the strict routine fell away. Don't get me wrong. Formula prayers are good. Like, who can knock the Our Father? But people should realize that they can pour their hearts out to God in their own words and it will still "count." It's still prayer. Just a little less frilly is all.

Of course, just as we must be careful not to let routine become rut, we must also guard against getting sloppy.

Formula prayers (if we don't just rattle them off) can help focus our attention on what we're doing, what we're saying.

It's good, every so often, to read over the Our Father or the Hail Mary. To see what we're actually saying. And then try to put it into your own words. These simple exercises can give us a renewed appreciation of the words and their meanings.

The important thing is not to get so caught up in style and formula that we neglect the communication aspect of prayer. Sometimes, a simple, no-frills, straight-from-the-heart prayer is the best kind. Just like sometimes all you want is a basic electric radio.

Now, if you'll excuse me,
I'm off to buy a watch that does nothing
but tell time.

