

Meet Edward Hays

Author of *Prayers for the Domestic Church*

Q: Who do you write for?

A: My desire is to write so inclusively and ecumenically that any reader will be able to find spiritual nourishment in my books, regardless of their Christian denomination, and even if they are non-Christian. I believe the great challenge facing religious writers of this new millennium is to be able to speak to all people of good will, to all who love God regardless by what name they address the Divine Mystery. I know that the majority of my readers are Roman Catholic, but my fondest wish is that all believers – and even non-believers – could equally benefit from reading my books.

Q: Is this possible?

A: I know that religion is famous for making a sharp distinction between what is secular and what is sacred, but the spirituality of Jesus was secular. His way of holiness focused on living with a passionate, totally encompassing love for God and your neighbor that expressed itself not in religious rituals but in non-violence, hospitality to strangers, assistance to any in need and compassionate care of the poor. We, as disciples of Jesus, must learn to see with his eyes that ordinary life is the door to the kingdom, so to find the Divine Presence in the commonplace, and in those places, times and persons that seem the most secular. So you could say that I write for those who are inspired to be a true disciple of Jesus first, and only secondarily a member of a church.

Q: Almost all of your work incorporates art. What is important about images in our spiritual life?

A: Learning is 80% visual, since we are prehistorically oriented to images instead of linear words. Jesus spoke in pictures, parables and metaphors. So I strive to write my paintings (calling them parable-icons) and paint my novels and other books. Jesus as a storyteller painted motion pictures of the most intriguing kind since they required his listeners' imagination to create, color and put into motion the images he created. I consider my numerous books of parable-stories like children's coloring books where, regardless of age, the reader's imagination unconsciously shapes, colors and moves the images rising out of the text. Stories and parables never grow old or lose their magic magnetic power because they are soul-stories.

Q: As a spiritual director, what do you find people are seeking today, and how has that changed over the past thirty years?

A: Thirty-five years ago the primary request was to learn how to pray or how to meditate, and how to achieve inner peace. Today the quest is to find spiritual meaning in the often-harsh reality of their daily lives, their workplace and family struggles. This search for spiritual meaning is intimately connected to their hunger for some source for hope in a world and church that is devoid of it. Surprisingly, the religious needs of today's Catholics are much like those of the early catacomb Christians whom Paul in his apostolic letters encouraged to live in hope of God's faithful care.

Q: What needs of your readers are especially important to you?

A: I feel they have a need to connect their daily work-a-day lives with their religious beliefs, and hour in church on Sunday, they must spend the rest of the week in a desert. I also know that my readers include those who no longer attend church on a regular basis or feel alienated from the institutional church. So besides my books providing spiritual encouragement to those faithfully attending church, I feel a personal pastoral need to offer to those who don't some authentic, even apostolic ways to practice their Christian faith do so in a contemporary way. While they may feel a brief connection by their

Q: Do they have one critical need?

A: I believe that there is one critical that isn't easily addressed: The need to be challenged! It is an absolute and on-going necessity of every true disciple, since reforming your life, being a convert, is a life-long requirement of discipleship. Spiritual writers of previous ages dealt almost exclusively with personal sins, sexual and moral evils. In our time the need is to be challenged to admit our corporate sins: our involvement in the injustices and sins of our government and our church. For many good people this confrontation with the state and religion is just too offensively unsettling. Yet, disturbance is the mother of conversion! Good writers and speakers are bound by the Spirit of God to awaken themselves and then others to confront the dark presence of the Evil of the Anti-kingdom.

Q: What makes an Edward Hays book distinctive or unique?

A: Perhaps it's their playful, whimsical approach to the spiritual life, and even the Divine Mystery. Spirituality has a reputation of being a solemn, serious undertaking, and I personally – and in my writings – do not find the quest to be a joyless adventure. I believe that my writings may be distinctive because they weave together items from the newspapers, odd bits of trivia and daily chores like doing the laundry

into the fabric of finding holiness in daily life. Also, being an amateur artist, I've been able to illustrate some of my books with drawings and paintings.

Q: Your readers think of you as a distinctively American writer with deep roots in the mid-west. Are they correct?

A: It is said all writers reveal themselves in their writing, so I'm not surprised that mine reflects my American midwest heritage. Perhaps another reason for its American flavor is a profound belief in the necessity to create a uniquely American spirituality, liturgy and prayer. From our immigrant ancestors we inherited a beautiful European spirituality, prayer-life and pious devotions. But for our spirituality to be authentic it is necessary that our prayer and worship must flow out of and back into our American culture and heritage. Since we are still a very young country compared to other nations, I am convinced an American Catholic Liturgy and American spirituality will grow and develop with each new generation until it becomes a reality.

Q: After having published over thirty some books, do you now suffer from writer's block and have to sit staring for hours at a blank empty page?

A: No, since I like to say that I only take dictation: The Spirit is the scribe; I'm only the pen. I feel deeply grateful and blest that I'm gifted with more creative ideas for new novels and books than I have the time to write. Presently I have about four new books in various stages of process, and while I enjoy my work of spiritual direction, it requires discipline to limit your pastoral outreach so to have the solitude to write. Solitude is suspect in our over-interacting society. I am among the few Americans who intentionally does not use e-mail in order to have the creative space to write and pray. For me reflective prayer and writing require solitude. Out of this quiet space, I hope that my books will provide spiritual guidance to my many readers.

Q: Your first book *Prayers for the Domestic Church* was published 25 years ago and is still a best seller. Why do you suppose this is?

A: I began that book seven some years after the Second Vatican Council that declared the baptized to be the priestly people of God. It was written as a how-to manual for any home for the exercising of our baptismal priesthood by the use of recipe-formulas for countless domestic blessings, rituals and home sacraments. It celebrates that myriad of blessings and rituals possible without an ordained priest.

Q: You have said that your work has Jewish roots. How so?

A: Jesus was a Jew, and Christianity grew out of Judaism; which after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem conducted its primary celebrations of their holy days in their homes. This book is built on that tradition and the power of heads of households as leaders of worship. We have many rich gifts to glean from our Jewish religious heritage about the blessing powers of parents, or heads of households, and the living river of prayer that flows through all of daily life. The reality of the home as the core of religious life and today's small group gatherings in homes as nourishing basic spiritual communities may explain this book's longevity. As the numbers of those who no longer attend weekly worship increase, this book on home worship and prayer may find increasing popularity.

Q: And at the end of the day?

A: I know from experience that those who read my books are ordinary people. I believe my readers are those persons seeking a new, fresh and practical way to live out their faith today. My hope is that my books will open windows for them to begin to view what they see as secular, as actually being saturated with the sacred.