

St. Francis of Assisi Parish
RCIA - Deacon P. Iacono

Wakefield, Rhode Island 02879

Christian Prayer

I. Introduction

1) *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* has an excellent section on prayer – it is absolutely required reading. **Some highlights:**

a) Prayer is talking to God with mind and heart, and often with the voice. It is a response to God's invitation to seek him. (CCC #2559) Come to me, all you grown weary and are burdened, and I will refresh you (*Matthew* 11:28).

b) Through Baptism we are “made one with Christ and his Church”; our prayers are offered with Christ to the Father in the Holy Spirit. (CCC #2565) “In Christ we have free and confident access to God through our faith in Him” (*Ephesians* 3:12).

c) As I have said since the beginning of our journey together, God wants to have a relationship with us! Thus, that relationship is established and fostered through prayer. Everyone, in all religions, needs to experience prayer; without this people become self-centered and as dry as autumn's leaves.

d) God calls every person to prayer. He wants to engage us in a personal relationship, a conversation. God continually invites us to engage with Him. It is not a one time affair; yet, be careful, if we ignore Him, we will loose track of our way and find ourselves derailed. (CCC #2566-2567) “By probing about after Him we might search for and find God, for He is not far from any of us” (*Acts* 17:27).

e) **A very important question:** How can I learn how to pray? We learn to pray best by praying, *by talking to God from our own heart*. Many examples of prayer can be found throughout the pages of Scripture, especially in the *Psalms*. (CCC #2568-2619, 2653-2654) “Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my groaning. Hearken to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you do I pray. O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you, and watch” (*Psalms* 5:1-3).

1) Let us not forget that **the four Gospels** are excellent sources of *examples* of prayer: **conversion of heart** (*Matthew* 5:23-24); **faith** (*Matthew* 7:7-11); **filial boldness** (*Mark* 9:23); **desire to do God's will** (*Matthew* 9:38); **watchfulness** (*Mark* 1:15); **perseverance** (*Luke* 11:5-13); **patience** (*Luke* 18:1-8); **humility** (*Luke* 18:9-14), (CCC #2607-2613). **The perfect prayer** is the *Our Father*. It was given to us by Jesus Himself, what more do we need? It provides us with an outline of prayer. Learn it and live it as best as you can.

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2) The mystery of our faith requires that we not only believe in the *Apostles and Nicene Creed*, but also celebrate it. We must transform our lives according to its dictates. This transformation demands that we develop “a personal and vital relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is called prayer.” (CCC # 2558)

3) Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is *the whole person* who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes **of the soul or the spirit**, *but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times it speaks of this)*. **According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays.**

4) If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. (CCC #2563). **Prayer is conversation with God** – avoid distractions! But, be patient! Distractions are inevitable! When they occur just ignore them and move on with your conversation.

5) “Christian prayer is **a covenant relationship** between God and man in Christ.” Prayer’s dimensions are those of Christ’s love extending throughout the Body of the Church.” [for all time] (CCC # 2564-5)

II. Types of Prayer – with Scriptural applications (Adapted from the Daughters of Saint Paul). There are seven specific types of prayer: **adoration** (*Psalms* 95:6); **asking forgiveness** (*Luke* 18:13); **blessing** (*Ephesians* 1:3); **intercession** (*1 Timothy* 2:1); **petition** (*Colossians* 4:12); **praise** (*Ephesians* 3:20); **thanksgiving** (*1 Thessalonians* 5:18) (CCC # 2626-2643).

III. Sources of Prayer

1) As Catholics we have **three sources** of prayer are: **Holy Scripture**, the **Church's liturgy** (the seven Sacraments, the *Divine Office*, and common prayers), and **the virtues of faith, hope and love** which dispose us to be prayerful in our daily life (CCC #2653-2658) Prayer should be daily – it should become part of our life – as St. Paul tells us: “Pray at all times in the Spirit with every manner of prayer and supplication” (*Ephesians* 6:18). We should pray for ourselves, our nuclear and extended family living and dead, the clergy (bishops, priests, deacons) members of religious orders, the sick and the dying, all sinners, our enemies, unbelievers, and the suffering souls in Purgatory, and for all those in positions of authority (secular and religious). “First of all, I urge that supplications, prayers of intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men- for kings and for all those in positions of authority...” (*1 Timothy* 2:1-2).

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IV. What are the common forms of prayer?

1) Three common forms of prayer are **vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer.** (CCC #2721)

a) **Vocal prayer** is prayer of mind, heart and lips. It is prayer spoken audibly (this is usually done in community at the greatest prayer – the Holy Mass, in the public recitation of the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, or in the recitation of the Divine Office by bishops, priests, deacons, and religious when they are assembled in community) (CCC #2700-2704); “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise” (*Psalms* 51:15).

b) **Meditation** is a mental (unspoken) prayer in which a person, after quiet reflection, arrives at or strengthens the resolution to live a better Christian life. Meditation can lead us to know Jesus better and follow Him more closely. (CCC #2705-2708) Two techniques that are used to assist us in this are known as the *Jesus Prayer* (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me as sinner) and *Lectio et Divina* (Holy Reading, thus, “seeing”) in which you read a passage in Scripture or some other sacred material and reflect on its meaning for you (I have a structure of that attached to this document); from this reading comes conversation with Christ. “*Reflect on the statutes of the Lord, and meditate at all times on His commandments. It is He who will give insight to your mind, and your desire for wisdom will be granted*” (Sirach 6:37).

c) **Contemplative (mystical) prayer** Contemplative (mental) prayer is unspoken prayer of the highest order in which a *person is **united** to God and ponders His truths.* (CCC #2709-2719) “Then there are those sown on the good earth, who are the ones who hear the word and welcome it and bear fruit, one thirty fold, one sixty, and one a hundredfold” (*Mark* 4:20).

V. How life affects our prayer

1) Distractions can and do occur in all aspects of our daily life. Our emotional, physical, and spiritual state will affect our prayer. It will make us uncomfortable and, at times, unfruitful when we try to pray. A good attempt to overcome these things – these distractions – is a form of prayer; our efforts, our “groanings,” are pleasing to God. “*If the grain of wheat that falls to the ground does not die, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit*” (*John* 12:24).

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V. How life affects our prayer - continued

2) Other difficulties that can affect our prayer are:

False expectations, lack of emotional and spiritual interest, laziness, lack of or weak faith. (CCC # 2726-2728, 2730-2733) We don't always get what we pray for because God ultimately knows what is best for us, and can see that a particular request may not be for our ultimate good. Every sincere prayer is answered in some way. (CCC # 2735-2737) *"This is the confidence we have in [God], that if we ask for something **which is in accordance with His will He hears us.**"* (1 John 5:14)

3) The need to pray united with the Holy Spirit: *"Pray at all times in the Spirit with every manner of prayer and supplication"* (Ephesians 6:18). *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them"* (Matt. 18:20).

VI. The Saints Discuss Prayer

- 1) **St. Therese of Lisieux** was asked "What is prayer?" Her response: *"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy."*
- 2) **St. John Damascene** said: *"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. But, when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart?"*
- 3) **St. Luke' Gospel:** *"He who humbles himself will be exalted."* (Luke 18: 9-14). Luke tells us that humility should be the foundation for prayer.
- 4) **St. Paul** says: Only when we humbly acknowledge that *"we do not know how to pray as we ought,"* (Romans 8: 26) are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer.
- 5) **St. Augustine** tells us that *"Man is a beggar before God."* (CCC #2559) Christ comes to every human being and knocks on the door of our heart. He comes seeking us. He comes to us and asks us for a drink. Like the Samaritan women at the well we learn that Jesus thirsts for our friendship — **for a relationship with us** — His creation. *"God thirsts that we may thirst for Him."* (St. Augustine) (CCC# 2560)
- 6) **St. Teresa of Avila** explains *"Do not be astonished at the difficulties one meets in the way of mental prayer, and the many things to be considered in undertaking this heavenly journey. The road upon which we enter is a royal highway which leads to heaven. Is it strange that the attainment of such a treasure should cost us something? The time will come when we shall realize that the whole world could not purchase it."*

