

## Session 7: Prayer

HYMN: We Kneel and Adore You



We kneel and adore You, O God, our  
 Creator;  
 O grant us for ever Your greatness  
 to sing!  
 We worship You only; with no one  
 beside You,  
 one Deity, three Persons, our Lord  
 and our King.

We beg Your forgiveness, entreating  
 Your mercy;  
 our sin is before us, our guilt is  
 laid bare.  
 Our sorrow o'erwhelms us; we promise  
 amendment,  
 but reach perfection only by Your  
 love and care.

We praise You, O God, our Sustainer,  
 Redeemer,  
 in beauty transcendent, in goodness  
 profound.  
 Your plans have no limit, Your being  
 is eternal,  
 Your pow'r is universal, Your love  
 has no bound.

We thank You, O God, for the gifts  
 You have given:  
 the morning, the evening, the dark,  
 and the light;  
 for eating and drinking, for  
 ev'rything that's growing,  
 for knowledge and for conscience,  
 for hearing and sight.

We ask You, O God, to look after us  
 daily:  
 we ask you for peace and for freedom  
 from pain.  
 We ask You for comfort in trial and  
 tribulation;  
 we ask that You ensure we do not  
 live in vain.

PRAYER: See Eph 1:17-19.  
 Let us pray: O God,

grant us a spirit  
 of wisdom and insight  
 to know You clearly.  
 Enlighten our innermost vision,  
 that we may know the great hope  
 to which You have called us,  
 the wealth of Your glorious heritage  
 to be distributed  
 among the members of the Church,  
 and the immeasurable scope  
 of Your power  
 in us who believe.  
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 Your Son,  
 Who lives and reigns with You  
 in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
 God, for ever and ever.  
 — Amen

READING: Mt 7:7-11

The Lord be with you.  
 — *And with your spirit*  
 A Reading from the holy Gospel  
 according to Matthew  
 — *Glory to You, O Lord*  
 Jesus said,  
 "Ask, and it will be given to you;  
 seek, and you will find;  
 knock, and the door will be opened  
 to you.

"For everyone who asks, receives;  
 and the one who seeks, finds;  
 and to the one who knocks,  
 the door will be opened.

"Which one of you  
 would hand his son a stone  
 when he asks for a loaf of bread,  
 or a snake  
 when he asks for a fish?

"If you, then, who are wicked,  
 know how to give good gifts  
 to your children,  
 how much more  
 will your heavenly Father  
 give good things  
 to those who ask Him."  
 The Gospel of the Lord  
 — *Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ*

IN BRIEF: WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES

Prayer is the raising up  
 of the mind and heart to God, —

Session 7

by thinking of Him;  
by adoring, praising,  
and thanking Him;  
and by begging of Him  
all blessings for soul and body.

(Notice: "mind and heart.")

Those who think  
neither of God  
nor of what they say  
do not pray well;  
in fact,  
if their distractions are willful,  
they offend God.)

The best of all prayers  
is the "Our Father,"  
or the Lord's Prayer,  
taught us by Jesus Christ Himself.

In the Lord's Prayer,  
we call God "Our Father," because  
He is the Father of all Christians,  
whom He has made His children  
by Baptism.

We say  
"our" Father,  
and not "my" Father,  
meaning "Christ's and mine."  
Also, being all brothers,  
we are to pray  
not for ourselves only,  
but also for everyone else.  
(God can also be called  
the Father of all mankind  
because He made them all,  
and loves and preserves them all.)

We say,  
"hallowed be Thy Name,"  
praying that God may be known,  
loved, and served  
by all His creatures.

We say,  
"Thy kingdom come,"  
praying that God may come  
and reign in the hearts of all  
in this world,  
and bring us all hereafter  
to His heavenly kingdom.

We say,  
"Thy will be done  
on earth as it is in Heaven,"  
praying that God may enable us  
to do His will in all things,  
as the blessed do in Heaven.

We say,  
"Give us this day  
our daily bread,"  
praying that God may give us  
every day

all that we need for soul and body.

We say,  
"Forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those  
who trespass against us,"  
praying that  
God may forgive us our sins  
as we forgive others  
the injuries they do to us.

We say,  
"Lead us not into temptation,"  
praying that God may give us grace  
not to yield to temptation.

We say,  
"Deliver us from evil,"  
praying that God may free us  
from all evil  
of soul and body.

BIBLE READING

1 Sm 1-15

In your Bible reading this week,  
you will see how completely  
the Israelites' well-being  
depends upon their rejection  
of idols and false gods  
and their fidelity  
to the worship of the one true God  
as He had commanded.

Next week we will talk about  
"Liturgy: Public Worship,"  
in which we worship God alone  
as He has commanded.

At the beginning of the session,  
we will recite  
*Liturgy of the Hours One*  
and at the end,  
*Liturgy of the Hours Two.*

To pray them with us,  
you should have a print copy  
of the prayers.

According to the time of day,  
you have three options:

Option I:

1. Morning Prayer
2. Midday Prayer

Option II:

1. Midafternoon Prayer
2. Evening Prayer

Option III:

1. Evening Prayer
2. Night Prayer

## Prayer

### Introduction

"Our knowledge of Jesus needs above all a first-hand experience. Someone else's knowledge is of course important, for normally the whole of our Christian life begins with the proclamation handed down to us by one or more witnesses. However, we ourselves must then be personally involved in a close and deep relationship with Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

Prayer is an important part of it. "Our prayer cannot be reduced to an hour on Sundays. It is important to have a daily relationship with the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

### In the name of Jesus

Prayer is "a conversation" between two people, one of Whom is God.<sup>3</sup>

How *dare* we converse with God? He inspired such awe in the Jews that they did not even speak His name, "Yahweh,"<sup>4</sup> but used His title, "Lord."

However, Jesus, God the Son made Man for us, conversed with His Father familiarly.<sup>5</sup> And He handed His name over to us<sup>6</sup> and told us to use it in prayer. "Until now you have not asked for anything in My name," He told His apostles. "Ask and you shall receive."<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, we converse with God "in the name" of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Now to speak or act *in the name* of another person is to somehow identify ourselves with him. For example, if the president is not available, the vice president acts *in his name*.<sup>9</sup>

*Dare* we identify ourselves with Jesus in prayer? Yes! For Jesus, Who has "in some way"<sup>10</sup> united Himself to every human being and become our "Mediator" with His Father,<sup>11</sup> told His apostles, "When you pray, say 'Our Father.'"<sup>12</sup>

As the priest introduces the Lord's Prayer at Mass, then, he says, "At the Saviour's command, and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say," and we continue, "Our Father." Thus we identify ourselves, along with Jesus, as God's sons and daughters.<sup>13</sup>

Jesus spoke to us as such when He told His apostles, "You will ask in My name and I do not say that I will petition the Father for you. The Father already loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God."<sup>14</sup>

### Pray always

"Never cease praying," St. Paul said.<sup>15</sup>

The only way to do this is to unite our work and our prayer<sup>16</sup> all day long. As the Benedictines<sup>17</sup> say, "*Laborare est orare*"<sup>18</sup> ("to work is to pray") — but only if

1 Pope Benedict XVI: *The Apostles*, Chapter Thirteen

2 Pope Francis: *Twitter*, @Pontifex, October 17 2013

3 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "How Does the Pope Pray?"

4 Ex 3:13-14

5 See Mt 11:25, 14:23, 26:36-44, 53; Mk 1:35, 6:46, 14:32-39; Lk 5:16, 6:12, 9:28, 10:21, 11:1, 22:32, 41-45, 23:34; Jn 11:41-42, 12:27-28, 14:16, 17.

6 CCC 2666

7 Jn 16:24. Also see Jn 15:16. That is why we end prayers with "through Christ our Lord."

8 CCC 2664

9 The police arrest criminals *in the name* of the law. In the Old Testament, God threatened with death anyone who spoke lies *in His name* (see Dt 18:19-20; Jer 14:14-15, 23:25, 27:15, 29:9, 29:21, 21). Jesus said that His disciples would perform miracles *in His name* (see Mk 9:39).

10 CCC 618. As we shall see, it is through belief, Baptism, and the Holy Eucharist.

11 See 1 Tim 2:5.

12 See Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4. Also see Appendix 1.

13 The words "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," with which we begin and end our prayers, recall our Baptism, the Sacrament that first identifies us with Jesus and allows us to say "Our Father" to God. Before He ascended into Heaven, Jesus told His disciples to baptize all nations "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).

14 Jn 16:26-27

15 1 Thes 5:17

16 See CCC 2742.

17 The religious order founded by St. Benedict.

18 This motto is often attributed to St. Benedict, founder of the monastic order, but its real origin may be

we stay in touch with God in prayer.<sup>19</sup> We can talk to Him at any time: walking, sitting, buying, selling, cooking, eating, driving, *etc.*<sup>20</sup>

For example, in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye "chats" to God all day long. When his horse goes lame, he asks, "Dear God, was that necessary?"<sup>21</sup> When his daughter leaves for Siberia, he begs, "Take care of her. See that she dresses warm."<sup>22</sup>

In my family, every day began with Mass and finished with family prayer. If we got hurt, Mother said, "Offer it up."<sup>23</sup> If we wanted anything, she said, "Say a Hail Mary."<sup>24</sup> As she put bread in the oven, she said, "Please, our Lady, make it a success." If we heard a siren, she called out, "Say a prayer for whoever it is." If a plane flew overhead, she murmured, "Please see them safely to their destination." From December 6 on, we asked St. Nicholas "to help Mummy and Daddy get ready for Christmas."<sup>25</sup> We asked God to protect us when we drove out in the car and we thanked Him when we got back home. Prayer was woven into everything we did.

### What constitutes prayer?

Prayer can be wordless. For example, when a *pogrom*<sup>26</sup> breaks up his daughter's wedding, Tevye raises his eyes and arms to God in mute question and appeal.<sup>27</sup> St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that for her, prayer was "a surge of the heart," "a simple look turned toward Heaven," "a cry of recognition and of love."<sup>28</sup>

We pray with our whole being: body, mind, and soul.<sup>29</sup> We pray with our bodies by speaking, singing, kneeling, standing, bowing our heads, closing or raising our eyes, lifting or joining our hands, perhaps lying on the floor.<sup>30</sup> We pray with our minds by thinking of what we are saying and Whom we are talking to.<sup>31</sup>

However, in speaking of prayer, the Bible usually (more than a thousand times) mentions our "heart."<sup>32</sup> It means not the muscular pump that circulates my blood, but my "hidden centre"; the "dwelling-place where I am, where I live"; the place "to which I withdraw"; the "place of decision," deeper than my "psychic drives"; the "place of truth," where I "choose life or death"; the "place of encounter" with God.<sup>33</sup>

Accordingly, the priest says at Mass, "Lift up your hearts," and we answer, "We lift them up to the Lord."<sup>34</sup>

This is prayer: "the raising up of one's mind and heart to God."<sup>35</sup>

### Forms of prayer

A "surge of the heart"<sup>36</sup> may be a prayer, but prayer "cannot be reduced to the spontaneous outpouring of interior impulse": "one must also learn how to pray."<sup>37</sup>

One day, as Jesus finished praying, His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."<sup>38</sup>

a nineteenth-century popular book on Benedictine life written by a German abbot called Maurus Wolter.

19 See CCC 2565.

20 See CCC 2743.

21 Joseph Stein and Sheldon Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof*, Act 1, Scene 2

22 Joseph Stein and Sheldon Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof*, Act 2, Scene 3

23 In other words, "Accept it, and tell God you accept it, for love of Him, because He knows best."

24 See Appendix 1.

25 St. Nicholas is the original Santa Claus. His feastday is December 6.

26 First recorded in 1882, the Russian word *pogrom* comes from the prefix *po-* and the verb *gromit*: "to destroy, wreak havoc, demolish violently." It was adopted into English to describe the mass violence of 1881-1883 directed against the Jews in Russia, but it has been extended to include all such attacks against Jews throughout history, especially those approved or condoned by local authorities. It can also be used for similar persecution of any other ethnic or religious group.

27 Joseph Stein and Sheldon Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof*, Finale, Act 1

28 CCC 2558

29 "We are body and spirit, and we experience the need to translate our feelings externally" (CCC 2702).

30 King David danced "with abandon" before the Lord (2 Sm 6:14). Pope John Paul II was once found prostrate on the floor in his chapel (Timothy Dolan: *Priests for the Third Millennium*, 4). See Appendix 3.

31 "I want to pray with my spirit, and also to pray with my mind" 1 Cor 14:15).

32 See CCC 2562.

33 CCC 2563

34 Introduction to the Preface of the Eucharistic Prayer.

35 CCC 2559

36 Thérèse of Lisieux: *Manuscripts Autobiographiques*, C 25r

He said, "When you pray, say, "Our Father...."<sup>3 9</sup>

We can identify five *forms* of prayer: 1) adoration, 2) asking forgiveness, 3) praise, 4) thanksgiving, and 5) petition.

### 1) Adoration

To start praying, we must place ourselves "in the presence of God."<sup>4 0</sup> As we thus become aware of Him, our first response is to adore Him.

We are created beings talking to our Creator. He is "utterly holy,<sup>4 1</sup> totally other, incomprehensible, absolute, almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing, and absolutely majestic."<sup>4 2</sup> In humility, we exalt His greatness and power.<sup>4 3</sup> In the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Hallowed be Thy name" — "May Your name be kept holy."

Adoration can be impulsive as well as formal. For example, we can make every small pleasure "a channel of adoration" by simply acknowledging that "we are being touched by a finger of that right hand at which there are pleasures forevermore."<sup>4 4</sup>

### 2) Asking forgiveness

As we recognize God, we become conscious of our sinfulness and of how offensive it is to God's holiness, justice, love, and care for us.<sup>4 5</sup>

This is how Isaiah felt before God's glory when he cried out, "Woe is me! I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips.... yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"<sup>4 6</sup> This is how Peter felt after the miraculous catch of fish when he "fell at the knees of Jesus, saying, 'Leave me, Lord. I am a sinful man.'"<sup>4 7</sup>

If we want to stay in God's presence, conversing with Him in the name of His Son, we must beg forgiveness, like the tax collector: "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"<sup>4 8</sup>

In the Mass, in the "Penitential Rite," which follows the Greeting, we pray, "Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy!" In the Lord's Prayer, we say "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."<sup>4 9</sup>

"When you stand to pray," Jesus said, "forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your faults."<sup>5 0</sup>

Asking and offering forgiveness are prerequisites for "righteous and pure prayer," whether public or private.<sup>5 1</sup>

### 3) Praise

As we adore God, we praise, or "glorify," Him; not only for what He has done for us, but also for Who He is.<sup>5 2</sup>

In the *Gloria* of the Mass, right after the Penitential Rite, we exclaim, "Glory to God in the highest!" "We give You thanks for Your great glory!" Later, we join the "company of all the angels and saints" in the unending hymn of God's praise.<sup>5 3</sup>

*Why* do we praise God? Even more puzzling — why are we *told* to praise Him?<sup>5 4</sup> Surely, God has "no need of our praise.... since our praises add nothing to

37 CCC 2650

38 Lk 11:1-4

39 See Mt 6:9-13. Also see Appendix 1.

40 Francis de Sales: *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Chapter XIII: Fifth Meditation

41 See the talk on "God: Unity and Trinity."

42 Our Sunday Visitor's *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "Fear of the Lord"

43 See CCC 2628.

44 See Ps 16:11. See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, XVII.

45 Our Sunday Visitor's *Catholic Encyclopedia*: "Fear of the Lord"

46 Is 6:5

47 Lk 5:8

48 Lk 18:13

49 At the end of the Lord's Prayer (see Mt 6:9-13), Jesus emphasized this point: "If you forgive the faults of others, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours. If you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive you" (Mt 6:14). See the talk on "Sin and Forgiveness."

50 Mk 11:25. See also Mt 5:23-24.

51 CCC 2631

52 See CCC 2639. God's name, Yahweh, can be translated "He Who Is."

53 See the ancient hymn of praise *Te Deum* in Appendix 1.

[His] greatness." Nevertheless, they "profit us for salvation."<sup>55</sup>

To understand, notice that "all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise."<sup>56</sup> The worthier the object of our praise, the more intense our enjoyment, and the more enthusiastic our praise. Our praise does not merely *express* our enjoyment, but actually *consummates* it: our enjoyment is *incomplete* until we can express it in praise.<sup>57</sup>

*We will have reached the maximum happiness possible to us when we can enjoy God, the worthiest Object of all, as fully as we are able, and, at the same time, at every moment, give this enjoyment perfect expression.*

And that is what we will do forever in Heaven, where "everything in the universe" cries aloud in an unending hymn, "To the One seated on the throne, and to the Lamb,<sup>58</sup> be praise and honour, glory and might, forever and ever!"<sup>59</sup>

To see what this really means, we must suppose ourselves "to be in perfect love with God — drunk with, drowned in, dissolved by" a delight which does not remain pent up within ourselves as a bliss that is incommunicable and therefore almost intolerable, but which "flows out from us again incessantly in effortless and perfect expression."<sup>60</sup>

Man's purpose is "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."<sup>61</sup> In Heaven, we shall realize "that these are the same thing": to enjoy fully *is* to glorify. "In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him."<sup>62</sup>

#### 4) Thanksgiving

We are told to "give thanks to God the Father always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>63</sup>

"Everything" means all things and all events,<sup>64</sup> for God does not just give us our existence, but also, at every moment, *provides*<sup>65</sup> for it.<sup>66</sup> For example, Jesus assured His disciples that "not a single sparrow" alights on the ground "without your Father's consent," while "as for you, every hair of your head has been counted."<sup>67</sup>

"It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give You thanks, Lord," the priest says at Mass.<sup>68</sup>

God does not need our thanks any more than our praise, "yet our thanksgiving it itself [His] gift."<sup>69</sup>

#### 5) Petition

"Petitionary" prayer means "requesting good things from God."<sup>70</sup> It is what we usually mean by "praying" or "prayer."<sup>71</sup>

54 God Himself said, "Offer to God praise as your sacrifice and fulfill your vows to the Most High; then call upon Me in time of distress; I will rescue you, and you shall glorify Me" (Ps 50:23).

55 See Common Preface 4.

56 "The world rings with praise — lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles" (C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, IX).

57 See C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, IX.

58 Christians have always compared Jesus' sacrifice, which saved us, to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, which saved the Jews from slavery in Egypt (Ex 12:1-13).

59 Rv 5:13

60 C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, IX

61 *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 1

62 C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, IX

63 Eph 5:20. See also 1 Thes 5:18; Col 4:2.

64 CCC 2638. We should thank God not just when He gives us what we wanted, but when He gives us anything.

"It seems to me that we often, almost sulkily, reject the good that God offers us because, at that moment, we expected some other good.... God shows us a new facet of the glory, and we refuse to look at it because we're still looking for the old one" (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, V).

65 We speak of God's "providence" (see CCC 37, 303, 305, 307, 312, 314, 321-323, 373, 395, 842, 1040, 1884, 1951, 2115, 2119, 2404, 2547, 2554, 2659, 2738, 2830).

66 See CCC 301, 269.

67 Mt 10:29-30

68 At the beginning of most Prefaces to the Eucharistic Prayer.

69 See Common Preface 4.

70 CCC 2559

Jesus told us to ask for what we need: in the Lord's Prayer, we say, "Give us this day our daily<sup>72</sup> bread."<sup>73</sup> We are told to "present" our needs to God.<sup>74</sup> Of course, "God knows what we need before we ask Him,"<sup>75</sup> but He waits for us to ask because our dignity as His children lies in our freedom.<sup>76</sup>

When we ask God for things, we admit our total dependence on Him.<sup>77</sup> We can petition Him, therefore, about every need:<sup>78</sup> not just those which "influence the march of history," but also our basic, everyday needs.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, how can we tell which are more important? The fate of a nation seems more momentous; yet nations will vanish, while individual humans will live forever.

Nevertheless, "there is a hierarchy" — an order of importance — in our petitions: we should pray first for the coming of God's Kingdom, and second for what we need in order to "welcome it and co-operate with its coming."<sup>80</sup>

"Do not worry about your livelihood: what you are to eat or drink or use for clothing," Jesus said. "Is not life more than food? Is not the body more valuable than clothes?"<sup>81</sup> "Your heavenly Father knows all that you need. Seek first His kingship over you, His way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides."<sup>82</sup> Accordingly, in the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God's Kingdom will come and His will be done before we ask for our daily bread.

#### a) Asking with an undivided heart

To pray "in the name of Jesus,"<sup>83</sup> we must have the mind of Jesus,<sup>84</sup> Who "seeks only what pleases the Father."<sup>85</sup> Accordingly, in the Lord's Prayer, "we ask our Father to unite our will to His Son's, in order to fulfil [our Father's] will: [namely] His plan of salvation for the life of the world."<sup>86</sup>

If our will is totally united to the will of Jesus, we can pray with "filial<sup>87</sup> boldness:"<sup>88</sup> the boldness of a son talking to a father who never denies him anything.

This is the kind of prayer Jesus spoke of when He said, "I assure you, if you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you would be able to say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible for you."<sup>89</sup>

To people who pray like this, Jesus said, "I give you My word: if you are ready to believe that you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer, it shall be done for you."<sup>90</sup> This point is often misunderstood: the prayer which can move mountains is

71 "Pray" used to mean "ask," as in "Gentlemen, I pray you tell me..." (W.S. Gilbert: *The Mikado*). "Let us pray" in the Mass and the heading "Prayer" in the missal always preface a request. The "Prayers of the Faithful" are meant to be requests. The whole of the Lord's Prayer is petitionary.

72 Notice that the manna with which God fed the Israelites became wormy and rotten if they collected more than they needed for one day, except on Friday, the day before the Sabbath (see Ex 16:16-30). In *Perelandra*, Ransom feels bound by a similar command (see C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 3-4) and the Lady says that distrust of God is like "gathering fruits today for tomorrow's eating instead of taking what [comes]" (see C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 17).

73 Lk 11:3

74 Phil 4:6. See also Eph 6:18.

75 Mt 6:8

76 See CCC 2736.

77 See CCC 2629.

78 See CCC 2633.

79 See CCC 2660. The rightness of "prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the Kingdom" revealed to little ones (see Mt 11:25).

80 CCC 2632

81 Mt 6:25

82 Mt 6:33

83 CCC 2664

84 Phil 2:5

85 CCC 2740

86 CCC 2825

87 From the Latin *filii* ("son") and *filia* ("daughter").

88 CCC 2610

89 Mt 17:20. See also Lk 17:6 and 1 Jn 5:14-15. "The fellow-worker, the companion, or (dare we say) the colleague of God is so united with Him at certain moments that something of the divine foreknowledge enters his mind" (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, XI).

90 Mk 11:24. Father Frank West SJ, who used to be in charge of Mother Teresa's lay associates in Canada, said that once, when he asked her over the phone to pray for a man with cancer, she was silent for a

prayer made with the *filial boldness* that comes when our will is totally united to the will of Jesus, so that *of course* we seek only what pleases God the Father.<sup>91</sup> It can be called praying "in faith," where "faith" means "a filial adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand."<sup>92</sup>

This is the kind of faith Jesus was speaking of when He said, "Your faith has saved you."<sup>93</sup> He was *not* referring to so-called "faith-healing,"<sup>94</sup> which seems to be psychosomatic, not spiritual.<sup>95</sup>

We can hear the filial boldness of Jesus in the prayer He offered just before He raised Lazarus. "Father, I thank You for having heard Me. I know that You always hear Me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd." Then He called loudly, "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead man arose and came out of the tomb.<sup>96</sup>

This prayer shows *us* how to ask: "*before* the gift is given," Jesus "commits Himself to the One Who, in giving, gives Himself," for "the Giver is more precious than the gift."<sup>97</sup>

#### b) Asking with a divided heart

If we do not pray with the mind of Christ<sup>98</sup> — if our wills are not totally united to His — we can expect that through selfishness or ignorance we will ask for things which are not good, for others or for us.

God *cannot* grant these requests (any more than a parent can grant a small child's demand for a razor blade), "for He desires our well-being, our life."<sup>99</sup> We "do not receive" what we are asking for because we are asking "wrongly," with a view to "squandering" what we receive on our pleasures,<sup>100</sup> St. James says.

When we pray to God with our will imperfectly united to Christ's, we must always add, "If it be Your will."

Jesus prayed like this the night before He died. Down on His knees, in anguish so great that His sweat fell to the ground like drops of blood, He prayed three times: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass Me by. Still, let it be as You would have it, not as I"; "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours, be done"; "My Father, if this cannot pass Me by without My drinking it, Your will be done!"<sup>101</sup>

This is not "filial boldness." Jesus seems unsure of His Father's will: He says, "if it is Your will." He seems to be *submitting* to it rather than *doing* it.<sup>102</sup>

Jesus was praying like a sinner. Because He had just given the apostles His Body to eat and His Blood to drink, He had become infected with "the sin of the world."<sup>103</sup> The words He cried from the cross — "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" — are followed, in the Psalm He was praying, by the words "far from My prayer, from the words of My cry."<sup>104</sup>

Jesus told us to keep on praying like this with urgency and patience, without

moment, and then she said, "He'll be all right."

91 Similarly, St. Augustine said, "Love, and then what you will, do," meaning that if we love God to the point where we make His will our own, of course we may do whatever we want (Augustine, *In Epistolam Ioannis ad Parthos, Tractatus VII*, 8).

92 CCC 2609. It is "a question of simply saying 'Yes!' to God" (Raniero Cantalamessa, *Life in Christ*, 3). See also CCC 429.

93 Mt 8:13, 9:22, 29, 15:28; Mk 5:34, 10:52; Lk 7:50, 17:19, 18:42

94 See Our Sunday Visitor *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "Faith healing."

95 He was *not* praising the state of mind produced by "desperate desire working on a strong imagination," which is not "faith in the Christian sense" (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, XI).

96 Jn 11:41-44

97 CCC 2604

98 Phil 2:5

99 CCC 2737

100 Jas 4:3

101 See Mt 26:39, 42; Lk 22:42-44.

102 See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, V.

103 Jn 1:29; see also 2 Cor 5:21.

104 Ps 22:2. "In this last prayer of Jesus, as in the scene on the Mount of Olives, what appears as the innermost heart of His Passion is not any physical pain, but radical loneliness, complete abandonment" (Joseph Ratzinger: *Introduction to Christianity*, II, 3). It was Jesus' separation from His Father, and not merely the fear of a death He had faced bravely up to now, that caused His agony.



losing heart.<sup>105</sup> It is more important to ask than to get what we ask for,<sup>106</sup> because by asking, "we express awareness of our relationship with God,"<sup>107</sup> the Giver, Who, in giving, gives the far more precious Gift of Himself.<sup>108</sup>

God wants us to exercise<sup>109</sup> our desire in prayer, so "that we may be able to receive what He is prepared to give." In fact, He wants to do "something even greater" than what we ask.<sup>110</sup> "But you cannot give to people what they are incapable of receiving."<sup>111</sup> Therefore, while we "cling to Him in prayer,"<sup>112</sup> He transforms our "praying heart,"<sup>113</sup> making us capable of "simply saying 'Yes!'" to Him<sup>114</sup> with an undivided heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

### c) God does what is best

We said that God wants to do "something even greater"<sup>115</sup> than what we ask for; in fact, He always wants to do *the best*.<sup>116</sup> But "best" for whom? What if two runners each pray that they will win the race? How can God's "plan of salvation for the life of the world"<sup>117</sup> be "best" for everyone?

In human affairs, we can usually distinguish between the plan (or the main plan) and its accidental but unavoidable by-products. For example, we stop killing seals and accidentally put fishermen out of work; we change Mass times to make it easier for school children and accidentally make it impossible for working adults.

But the better a plan is made, "the fewer unconsidered by-products it will have, the more birds it will kill with one stone, the more diverse needs and interests it will meet, and the nearer it will come to being a plan for each individual."

For example, in a room furnished by a genius, there is nothing accidental. Every object, as you look at it, seems to be the focus of the whole room, the key to its design. Every object could say with perfect truth that the room had been designed as the perfect setting for it.<sup>118</sup>

Now for God, Who can do everything and Who creates, knows, and loves everything, there can be no such thing as an accidental by-product.<sup>119</sup> "Everything is providential"<sup>120</sup> and every providence is a special providence.<sup>121</sup> The great work

105 "So I say to you, 'Ask and you shall receive'" (Lk 11:5-13). "Will not God, then, do justice to those who call out to Him day and night?" (Lk 18:1-8).

106 Even with a divided heart, we know that it is more important for God to consider our prayers — take them into account — than for Him to grant them. "Religious people do not talk about the 'results' of prayer; they talk of its being 'answered' or 'heard'" (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, X).

107 CCC 2629

108 CCC 2604

109 One form of physical exercise is to lie flat-out on a large ball and try to balance. To attempt balance is more important than to achieve it, for it is in the attempt that we use our muscles.

110 See CCC 2737.

111 Agatha Christie: *Funerals are Fatal*, Chapter XXII, IV

112 See CCC 2737.

113 See CCC 2739.

114 Raniero Cantalamessa, *Life in Christ*, 3

115 CCC 2737

116 As St. Thomas More said, consoling his daughter shortly before he was beheaded, "Nothing can come but that that God wills. And I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best" (CCC 313). What God does for us is limited only by our ability "to receive what He is prepared to give" (CCC 2737).

117 CCC 2825

118 Ransom "thought he saw the Great Dance. It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light, leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity — only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated" (C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*, 17).

119 See CCC 303.

120 That is, the result of God's care for us.

121 "The doctrine of 'special providence' means that God is able and willing not only to promote general well-being, but also to secure to everyone who trusts and obeys Him that all things shall work together for his true personal welfare. [See Rom 8:28.] God does not generalize without particularizing" (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Part 19, 4).

of God's creation was made for the sake of all it does and is, down to the curve of every wave and the flight of every insect."<sup>122</sup>

#### d) God lets us co-operate

Now much of God's creation has no say in its design, like stars, rocks, or atoms. However, He has given humans the power to change both things and events.<sup>123</sup>

We see how our *actions* can change things, but how can our *prayers* change things?<sup>124</sup> If God decides to grant my prayer for good weather or an increase in pay, what does He *do*?

This question is hard for us to answer because we live in time, with a past, a present, and a future, while God does not.<sup>125</sup> We talk of His "eternal present,"<sup>126</sup> for anything He does or is, He does or is eternally, without beginning or end.

In particular, He sees the *whole* of creation — not just what we call the present, but also what we call the past and what we call the future. Everything is "open and laid bare to His eyes."<sup>127</sup>

To help us think outside time, consider the characters and the events in a 400-page novel. At page 150, the characters behave as though the events on pages 1-149 are in the past, while those on pages 151-400 are still in the future. That is, the characters experience the events in the story *page by page*.

Now imagine that one of these characters asks the author to change something in the story. (That is what we do when we petition God for something.)

The character thinks that since he makes his request on page 150, the author will have to change the story *from that page on*.

But the author sees the whole story as a single creative act<sup>128</sup> encompassing *all* the events and *all* the characters on *every page*.<sup>129</sup> If he grants the request, he does so not by changing the latter part of the story, but by allowing the request to affect the *whole novel*<sup>130</sup> *from the beginning*.

God knows our prayers (and our actions) and takes them into account "from the foundation of the world. Our prayers are heard not just before we make them,"<sup>131</sup> but even before we are made ourselves.<sup>132</sup>

For example, a priest's vocation today might result from the prayers of a nun in Africa being prayed (from our point of view) 1,000 years from now. The extraordinary number of converts to Catholicism among graduates of the Protestant Gordon-Conwell Seminary in Massachusetts<sup>133</sup> might be due to the prayers of the Carmelites who had run it earlier (from our point of view) as a Catholic boys'

122 C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, X. Also see C.S. Lewis: *Peregrina*, 17 for Ransom's vision of the Great Dance, which makes it clear that all things were made for each thing.

123 See the talk on "God's Will."

124 "God instituted prayer in order to lend to His creatures the dignity of causality" (Blaise Pascal: *Pensées*, 513). It is just as amazing that God allows our *actions* to cause change. God could, "if He chose, repair our bodies miraculously without food, or give us food without the aid of farmers, bakers, and butchers." (He could even bring us into being without parents.) "Instead, He allows soils and weather and animals and the muscles, minds, and wills of men to cooperate in the execution of His will," the fruition of His "plan." God seems to delegate to us everything He can. He lets us do "slowly and blunderingly what He could do perfectly and in the twinkling of an eye"; He even allows us to neglect what He would have us do (C.S. Lewis: *The World's Last Night*, The Efficacy of Prayer).

125 Our past is the part of our lives we have already lost; the future is the part we do not yet have. But there cannot be anything that God has lost or does not yet have.

126 Analogously, an author, in describing his work, describes it in the present tense: e.g., "And then Frodo agrees to take the ring; and he and Sam prepare to leave Rivendell."

127 CCC 302

128 Of course, every human creation takes time, and the author might change his mind during the creation.

129 Similarly, the director of a movie knows the whole of the movie. That is why he can tell the story either chronologically or by flashbacks.

130 That is, different in proportion to the magnitude of the request. The idea that a character could ask the author to change the story is not as far-fetched as it might seem. Authors do talk about their characters refusing to behave: "And then there's Monica. The nicer I try to make her, the more irritating she gets" (Agatha Christie: *The Pale Horse*, I, 2). However, the author takes this into account, as we said, by rewriting the whole story.

131 It is difficult for us to avoid time-words like "before."

132 C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, IX

133 Including Scott Hahn and Steve Wood.

school, before being forced to sell because of declining numbers.<sup>134</sup>

Why have we spent so long on petitionary prayer, compared to the other forms?<sup>135</sup> The answer (to our shame) is that "when we praise God or give Him thanks for His benefits in general, we are not particularly concerned whether or not our prayer is acceptable to Him. On the other hand, we demand to see the results of our petitions."<sup>136</sup>

Now let us get back to prayer in general.

### Times for prayer

We are told to pray at all times,<sup>137</sup> but this will not happen unless we pray at specific times, consciously setting aside time for it.<sup>138</sup>

In the Church's Tradition, there are certain "rhythms"<sup>139</sup> of prayer:

- the daily rhythm of morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals,<sup>140</sup> and the Liturgy of the Hours.
- the weekly rhythm of Sunday, the Lord's day.<sup>141</sup>
- the annual rhythm of the Church's "liturgical year,"<sup>142</sup> reflected in the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours.<sup>143</sup>

### Places for prayer

The church is the proper place for public prayer, especially the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. It is also the place where we can adore Christ in the tabernacle. Some churches are open during the daytime.<sup>144</sup> Many have small "adoration chapels."<sup>145</sup> Many adoration chapels are open 24/7.<sup>146</sup>

For private prayer, you can set up a "little oratory,"<sup>147</sup> a "prayer corner," in your home, with icons,<sup>148</sup> statues, a crucifix, a Bible, *etc.*

For very special prayers, you can make a pilgrimage to a Church-recognized shrine.<sup>149</sup>

Jesus often prayed on a mountain, at night.<sup>150</sup> However, you may find that silence and solitude leave you open to internal distractions; you may need a moderate amount of external distraction.<sup>151</sup> If so, you can pray while you are walking, running, swimming, or driving.

Your bedroom can be a good place to pray — but remember that while it is good to pray while falling asleep, it is not good to fall asleep while praying!

### The Liturgy of the Hours

"Liturgy"<sup>152</sup> means the Church's official public worship: namely the *Mass* and the

134 See Patrick Madrid: *Surprised By Truth*, "A Prodigal's Journey."

135 The intellectual difficulties are the same for any form of prayer.

136 CCC 2735

137 See 1 Thes 5:17.

138 CCC 2697. Speaking about people who claim they "pray all the time" but never set aside time for prayer, Father Peter Nygren OSB said that they want to talk to God, but are afraid of what they might hear if they listen (see Peter Nygren OSB: *Prayer*).

139 See the talk on "The First Three Commandments."

140 See Appendix 1.

141 See the talk on "The First Three Commandments."

142 See the talk on "The Liturgical Year."

143 CCC 2698

144 e.g., Holy Rosary Cathedral

145 e.g., St. Patrick's in Vancouver

146 e.g., St. Helen's. If you live near a monastery (the home of men or women who live in seclusion, living a life of contemplation and reciting the Liturgy of the Hours together), you may be able to use their chapel. It is part of their vocation "to further the participation of the faithful in the Liturgy of the Hours and to provide [the] necessary solitude for more intense personal prayer" (CCC 2691).

147 From the Latin *ora* ("pray").

148 Flat pictures, usually painted in egg tempera on wood, but also wrought in mosaic, ivory, and other materials, to represent Christ, Mary, or another saint, which are used and venerated in the Orthodox churches and the Eastern Catholic rites.

149 For example, St. Jude's Shrine in Vancouver; the Grotto in Mission BC; St. Joseph's Oratory in Montréal; the Grotto in Portland OR; and the shrines in Lourdes (France) and Fatima (Portugal).

150 See Mt 14:23-24; Mk 6:46; Lk 6:12, 9:28.

151 See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, III.

*Liturgy of the Hours.*

Priests and all consecrated persons promise solemnly to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, but anyone can pray it.<sup>153</sup> It includes:

- Morning Prayer (early morning).
- Daytime Prayer (midmorning, midday, or midafternoon).
- Evening Prayer (early evening).
- Night Prayer (just before bedtime).
- the Office of Readings (any time).

Each includes prayers, readings, and excerpts from the Book of Psalms or the Canticles.<sup>154</sup> Next week, we will say two of them to show you what they are like.

**Psalms**

The Bible's Book of Psalms is also called the *Psalter*.<sup>155</sup> Psalms are songs — hymns, royal chants, pilgrim songs, wisdom-meditations, and prayers of lamentation or thanksgiving, both individual and communal.

However, the note underlying all of them is praise. In fact, they are also known as the "Praises";<sup>156</sup> praying the Psalms used to be called "singing the praises."<sup>157</sup>

Consider the Psalm that begins the day in the Liturgy of the Hours: "Come, let us sing to the Lord and shout with joy to the Rock Who saves us. Let us approach Him with praise and thanksgiving and sing joyful songs to the Lord."

"The Lord is God, the mighty God, the great King over all the gods. He holds in His hands the depths of the earth and the highest mountains as well. He made the sea; it belongs to Him — the dry land, too, for it was formed by His hands."<sup>158</sup>

This Psalm "both sounds the call to prayer and sings the response to that call: *Hallelu-Yah!*<sup>159</sup> — "Praise God!"<sup>160</sup>

Written thousands of years ago in a distant country,<sup>161</sup> the Psalms can nonetheless be prayed today, by everyone.<sup>162</sup> Repeatedly, we find that they say just what we want to say in our present joy or sadness, success or difficulty. Everyone who prays them notices it.<sup>163</sup>

The Psalms are poems,<sup>164</sup> so they stick in your memory and come back to you

152 From the Latin *liturgia*, from the Greek *leitourgia* ("public duty," "public worship") from the Greek *leitōs* ("of the people") plus *ergon* ("work").

153 See CCC 1175.

154 Ex 15:1-18; Dt 32:1-12; 1 Sm 2:1-10; 2 Sm 22:1-7, 17-37, 47-51; 1 Chr 29; Tb 13:1b-8, 8-11, 13-15; Jdt 16:1, 13-15; Wis 3:1-8, 9:1-6, 9-11; Sir 14:20, 15:3-6, 36:1-5, 10-13; Is 12:3-6, 26:1b-4, 7-9, 12, 33:13-16, 35:1, 2b-4a, 4c-6, 10, 38:10-14, 17-20, 40:10-17, 42:10-16, 45:15-25, 55:6-11, 60:1-3, 11a, 14c, 18-19, 61:10-62:5, 66:10-14a; Jer 14:17-21, 31:10-14; Lam 1:12, 16; 3:19, 22-24, 26; Ez 36:24-28; Hos 6:1-3; Jon 2:2-7, 9; Hb 3:1-19; Dn 3:26, 27, 34-41; Mt 5:1-12; Lk 1:46-55, 1:67-69, 2:29-32; Eph 1:3-10; Col 1:12-20; 1 Pt 1:3-4, 18-21, 2:21b-25; 1 Jn 1:5-9; Rv 4:11, 5:9-10, 13, 7:9-10, 12, 15-17; 11:17-18; 12:10b-12a; 21:1-5; 21:22-26; 22:1-4.

155 From the Greek *psalterion*, an instrument played by twanging (the Greek for "twang" is *psallo*). A "psaltery" was an ancient and medieval instrument like a dulcimer, but played by plucking the strings rather than striking them. The Psalter is divided into five smaller books: the first includes Psalms 1-41; the second, 42-72; the third, 73-89; the fourth, 90-106; and the fifth, 107-150.

156 CCC 2589

157 A phrase that has passed into English unchanged.

158 Ps 95:1-5

159 Latinized to "Alleluia."

160 CCC 2589

161 About half of them are supposed to have been written by King David (d. c 970 BC), the first king of the Judean dynasty, whose praise, repentance, and submission to God's will make him a model of prayer (see CCC 2579). However, one is attributed to Moses (c 14th century BC), while others seem to have been composed as late as the fourth century BC.

162 See CCC 2588.

163 "The psalms seem to me to be like a mirror, in which the person using them can see himself and the stirrings of his own heart; he can recite them against the background of his own emotions" (Athanasius (c 296-373): *Letter to Marcellinus*.) See Appendix 2.

164 "The psalms must be read as lyrics, with all the licences and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry" (see C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, I). "Lyric" means "of or for the lyre, meant to be sung; having the nature of song." A lyre is an obsolete harp-type instrument small enough to be held up in one hand. A hyperbole is an exaggerated statement not meant to be taken literally. One of the most notable "formalities" in the psalms is parallelism (saying the same thing twice in different words); e.g. "He will make justice dawn for you like the light; bright as noonday shall be your vindication" (Ps 37:6). Our Lord, soaked in this

when you need them. You see the rising sun on a snow-covered mountain, and you exclaim, "Lord God, how great You are! wrapped in light as in a robe."<sup>165</sup> You feel a surge of love for Him, and you whisper, "O God, You are My God, for You I long."<sup>166</sup> Or you want to apologize, and you murmur, "Have mercy on me, O God, in Your kindness; in Your compassion blot out my offence."<sup>167</sup>

Jesus Himself prayed the Psalms. His cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" comes from Psalm 22, which describes just what He was undergoing. He must have been praying it silently, until those words burst forth.

"The Book of Psalms is irreplaceable."<sup>168</sup> "Prayed by Christ and fulfilled in Him,"<sup>169</sup> they "remain essential to the prayer of the Church."<sup>170</sup>

### Ready-made prayers

Basic, memorized prayers give "essential support to the life of prayer."<sup>171</sup> However, we should be careful to say them as if we mean them, and not with the artificial intonation that can result from frequent repetition.

Some people prefer to talk to God in their own words;<sup>172</sup> they find it hard to use someone else's words.<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless, the standard, Church-sanctioned prayers<sup>174</sup> have advantages:

- They give us the words we need.<sup>175</sup>
- They keep us in touch with sound doctrine.<sup>176</sup>
- They remind us of what we ought to ask for.<sup>177</sup>
- They help us focus on God instead of our own words.<sup>178</sup>

Perhaps these four points explain why priests are forbidden "to add, subtract, or change anything in the Liturgy."<sup>179</sup>

poetic tradition, used parallelism; e.g. "Your verdict on others will be the verdict passed on you. The measure with which you measure will be used to measure you" (Mt 7:2).

165 Ps 104:1-2

166 Ps 63:2

167 Ps 51:3

168 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "Praying: How and Why"

169 See C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*, X-XII.

170 CCC 2586. Also see Appendix 2.

171 CCC 2688

172 "Our praying can and should arise above all from our heart, from our needs, our hopes, our joys, our sufferings, from our shame over sin, and from our gratitude for the good. It can and should be a wholly personal prayer" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One Five*).

173 See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, II.

174 See Appendix 1.

175 For the same reason, we send printed greeting cards, we sing ready-made songs like "Happy Birthday" and "For Auld Lang Syne," and we use standard greetings and good-byes such as "Hello; how are you?" and "Have a nice day."

176 See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, II. I know of a well educated priest who, at the end of an extemporaneous prayer by someone else, said under his breath, "That one contained three heresies."

We "constantly need to make use of those prayers that express in words the encounter with God experienced both by the Church as a whole and by [other] individual members of the Church." Otherwise "our own praying and our image of God become subjective and end up reflecting ourselves" more than God. "In the formulaic prayers that arose first from the faith of Israel and then from the faith of praying members of the Church, we get to know God and ourselves as well. They are 'a school of prayer' that transforms and opens up our life.

"In his Rule (19, 7), St. Benedict coined the formula *Mens nostra concordet voci nostrae* ('Our mind must be in accord with our voice'). Normally, thought precedes word; it seeks and formulates the word. But praying the Psalms and liturgical prayer in general is exactly the other way round: the word, the voice, goes ahead of us, and our minds must adapt to it. For on our own we human beings do not 'know how to pray as we ought' (Rom 8:26) — we are too far removed from God; He is too mysterious and too great for us. And so God has come to our aid: He Himself provides the words of our prayer and teaches us to pray. Through the prayers that come from Him, He enables us to set out toward Him; by praying together with the brothers and sisters He has given us, we gradually come to know Him and draw closer to Him" (Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One, Five*).

177 Contemporary problems, being closer, can make us forget our "great, permanent, objective necessities," which are often more important (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, II).

178 "As long as you notice, and have to count, the steps, you are not yet dancing, but only learning to dance. The perfect prayer would be one we were almost unaware of because our attention would be on God (C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, I).

179 Pope Paul VI: *Sacram Liturgiam*, 2, 11

**Modes of prayer**

So far, we have described mainly *vocal* prayer, in which we actually say words, mentally or out loud.<sup>180</sup>

Vocal prayer is essential. Jesus Himself prayed with words.<sup>181</sup> Because it is external and so "thoroughly human," vocal prayer is appropriate for groups, but even individuals praying interiorly must not neglect it.<sup>182</sup>

However, there are two other modes of prayer: *meditation*<sup>183</sup> and *contemplation*. In meditation, we *search* for truth, while in contemplation, we *delight* in it.<sup>184</sup>

In meditation, our minds seek "to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking."<sup>185</sup> Meditation engages "thought, imagination, emotion, and desire."<sup>186</sup>

Books can help: the Bible (especially the Gospels), readings and prayers from the Liturgy of the Hours or the Mass, and approved spiritual works.<sup>187</sup> The Church "forcefully and specially" exhorts us to read the Bible frequently, but it reminds us that prayer "should accompany" our reading, "so that a dialogue takes place" between God and us.<sup>188</sup> The Rosary,<sup>189</sup> in which we meditate on events in the life of our Lord and His mother, is also a prayer of meditation.<sup>190</sup>

However, Christian prayer should go even further: to "union" with Jesus.<sup>191</sup> "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation."<sup>192</sup> In contemplation, we also meditate, but our attention is fixed on the Lord Himself. Contemplation is "intense";<sup>193</sup> it is the mode of prayer in which God comes closest.

Various saints have described contemplation: "a loving look at God,"<sup>194</sup> "a free, penetrating, and still gaze,"<sup>195</sup> being "alone with Him Who we know loves us,"<sup>196</sup> "a close sharing between friends," "I look at Him and He looks at me."<sup>197</sup>

It is a silent love, like that of lovers simply looking at each other, delighting in being together. If words are used, they are not speeches,<sup>198</sup> but more like the words and broken phrases used by lovers when they make love.

We cannot always meditate, but we can always contemplate. We should not wait until we have time, but make time for it.<sup>199</sup>

**"Prayer is a battle"**

Prayer gives us intimate access to God. It is a privilege we have by God's graciousness.

However, it "always presupposes effort."<sup>200</sup> It can be "irksome." We welcome excuses to omit it. We are reluctant to begin and delighted to finish.<sup>201</sup> "Prayer is

180 Of course, words are not enough. "My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to Heaven go" (William Shakespeare: *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene III). "Whether or not our prayer is heard depends not on the number of words, but on the fervour of our souls" (CCC 2700).

181 E.g., the Lord's Prayer (Lk 11:1-4) and those before the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:41-44), in the Garden of Gethsamane (Mt 26:39,42; Lk 22:42-44), and on the cross (Mk 15:34; Lk 23:34,43,46; Jn 19:26-28,30).

182 See CCC 2704.

183 See Appendix 3.

184 Raniero Cantalamessa: *The Eucharist, Our Sanctification*, Chapter 5

185 CCC 2705. See Appendix 3.

186 CCC 2708. See Appendix 3.

187 CCC 2705. See Appendix 3.

188 CCC 2653

189 See Appendix 1.

190 CCC 2708. See Joseph Ratzinger: *God and the World*, Part II, 13, "The Rosary."

191 CCC 2708

192 CCC 2654. "Ask, and you will receive. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For the one who asks, receives. The one who seeks, finds. The one who knocks, enters" (Mt 7:7-8).

193 CCC 2714

194 Bonaventure; see CCC 2709.

195 Hugh of St. Victor; see CCC 2709.

196 Teresa of Avila; see CCC 2709.

197 A French peasant to John Vianney; see CCC 2715.

198 See CCC 2717.

199 See CCC 2710.

200 CCC 2725

201 See C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*, XXI.

a battle."<sup>202</sup>

To some extent, we are battling wrong ideas. Prayer is not an escape from reality, a merely psychological activity, an effort to reach a mental void, or simply a ritual of words and postures. It is not verified by reason or science, validated by what it produces, or authenticated by sensuality or comfort.<sup>203</sup>

Chiefly, however, prayer is a battle against our fallen human nature and against the devil, who does all he can to stop us praying.<sup>204</sup>

Our habitual difficulty is distraction: in vocal prayer, from what we are talking about; in meditation, from what we are thinking about; and in contemplation, from the Person Whose company we are enjoying. Distractions offend God, for they show that we are more attached to His creation than to Him. "Therein lies the battle: the choice of which master to serve." However, "to set about hunting down distractions would be to fall into their trap; all that is necessary is to turn back to our heart" as soon as we recognize that it has strayed.<sup>205</sup>

Another difficulty is laziness due to our lax way of life. This was the apostles' problem when they fell asleep instead of watching and praying with Jesus the night before He died. "The spirit is willing, but nature is weak," Jesus said.<sup>206</sup>

The most common difficulty is lack of faith; not so much lack of belief as the "thousand labours or cares" that "surge into our minds as soon as we begin to pray." "Once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love?"<sup>207</sup>

Finally, we have to "battle" against what looks like the "failure" of our prayer — whether adoration, apology, praise, thanksgiving, or petition — especially during periods of so-called dryness.<sup>208</sup>

### The Spirit helps us

Prayer is a battle, but we do not fight it alone: "the Holy Spirit is present in our prayer and gives it a divine dimension."<sup>209</sup> Alone, "we do not know how to pray as we ought," but God's Spirit "helps us in our weakness," interceding for us "as God Himself wills" with "groanings that cannot be expressed in speech."<sup>210</sup>

Therefore, it is good to begin with the prayer "Come, Holy Spirit,"<sup>211</sup> for "only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully."<sup>212</sup>

If we try to pray without God's help, we soon become discouraged.<sup>213</sup> For example, C.S. Lewis, in his early teens, resolved to repeat every clause of every prayer until it produced what he called a "realization," by which he meant "a certain vividness of the imagination and the affections" achieved by his own efforts. "Night after night, dizzy with desire for sleep and often in a kind of despair, I endeavoured to pump up my 'realizations,'" he said. Prayer became "a burden" from which he "longed to escape," making it easier for him to apostasize.<sup>214</sup>

When my goddaughter asked me to teach her to pray, I asked the late Father Augustine Kalberer OSB for help. "You've been praying all your life, haven't you?" he asked. I said, yes. "But you don't think you're doing it right?" I said, no. "That's good," he said. "If you thought you were, that would be a good indication that you weren't."

Asked "How does the Pope pray?" Pope John Paul II replied, "You would have to ask the Holy Spirit! The Pope prays *as the Holy Spirit permits him to pray.*"<sup>215</sup>

202 CCC 2573, 2577, 2612, 2725-2726, 2728-2831

203 See CCC 2726-2727.

204 See CCC 2725.

205 See CCC 2729.

206 See Mt 26:40-45; Mk 14:37-41; Lk 22:45-46.

207 CCC 2732

208 See CCC 2728.

209 Pope John Paul II: *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 65

210 See Rom 8:26-27.

211 See Appendix 1.

212 CCC 2563

213 CCC 2726

214 C.S. Lewis: *Surprised By Joy*, IV

215 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "How Does the Pope Pray?"

**Conclusion**

God established the newly created Adam and Eve in friendship<sup>216</sup> and familiarity<sup>217</sup> with Himself. When they fell, human beings lost this familiarity. Ever since, we have had to search for God<sup>218</sup> — "though indeed He is not far from each one of us."<sup>219</sup>

Accordingly, "we begin to pray, believing that it is our own initiative that compels us to do so. Instead, we learn that it is always God's initiative within us."<sup>220</sup> "Our own first step is always a response."<sup>221</sup> God's initiative "restores in us our true humanity"; we are brought into the "dignity of the children of God."<sup>222</sup>

Prayer, then, "ought to animate us at every moment"; "we must remember God more often than we draw breath."<sup>223</sup> It must be formal, with time set aside for it, but it should also be informal and spontaneous: "Thank you, God"; "I'm sorry, God"; "Please, God!"; "Help, God!"; "All right, God"; "I love You, God"; "Wow, God!" and, in temptation, "Jesus, I trust in You."

But the simplest prayer is always the name of Jesus.<sup>224</sup>

**Postscript**

To finish, let us pray the final chorus of Handel's *Messiah* — the "new hymn"<sup>225</sup> sung by "everything in the universe"<sup>226</sup> after the renewal of all things.<sup>227</sup>

"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His Blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

"Blessing and honour, glory and pow'r be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."<sup>228</sup>

**Bibliography**

- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *On Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*  
 Pope Benedict XVI: *Jesus of Nazareth, Part One*  
 Raniero Cantalamessa: *Life in Christ*  
 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*  
 C.S. Lewis: *Prayer: Letters to Malcolm*  
 C.S. Lewis: *Perelandra*  
 C.S. Lewis: *Reflections on the Psalms*  
*Fiddler on the Roof*  
 Rev. Peter Nygren OSB: *Prayer*  
 Paul Williams: *Buddhism From a Catholic Perspective*  
 Paul Williams: *Unexpected Way: On Converting From Buddhism to Catholicism*

---

216 CCC 374

217 CCC 378

218 See CCC 2566.

219 CCC 28

220 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "Praying: How and Why"

221 CCC 2567

222 Pope John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, "Praying: How and Why"

223 CCC 2697

224 See CCC 2666.

225 Rv 5:9

226 Rv 5:13

227 See Rv 21:5.

228 Rv 5:9,12-13.



## Appendix 1 - Prayers

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father, Who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be Thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done  
on earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver  
us from evil. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

**Hail, Mary**

Hail, Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee.  
Blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
Holy Mary, mother of God,  
pray for us sinners,  
now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

**Glory Be**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and  
to the Holy Spirit,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever  
shall be, world without end. Amen.

**Morning Offering**

O Jesus, through the most pure and  
immaculate heart of Mary,  
I offer You all my prayers, thoughts, works,  
and sufferings of this day,  
for all the intentions of Your divine Heart,  
in union with the holy sacrifice of the Mass  
throughout the world,  
in reparation for my sins,  
and for the good of the whole Church.  
Amen.

**Act of Contrition**

O my God, I am heartily sorry for having  
offended Thee,  
and I detest all my sins  
because I dread the loss of Heaven and the  
pains of Hell,  
but most of all because they offend Thee,  
my God,  
Who art all-good and deserving of all my  
love.  
I firmly resolve, with Thy grace,  
to sin no more and to avoid the occasions of  
sin. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Acclamation of assent, confirmation of the speaker's thoughts; from the Latin *amen*; from the Greek *amen* ("verily"); from the Hebrew *amen* ("so be it"); from *aman* ("to confirm").

**Te Deum**

You are God: we praise You;  
You are the Lord: we acclaim You;  
You are the eternal Father: all creation  
worships you.

To you all Angels, all the Powers of Heaven,  
Cherubim and Seraphim, sing in endless  
praise:  
Holy, holy, holy, Lord, God of power and  
might,  
heaven and earth are full of Your glory.

The glorious company of apostles praise  
You.  
The noble fellowship of prophets praise You.  
The white-robed army of martyrs praise  
You.

Throughout the world, the holy Church  
acclaims You:  
Father, of majesty unbounded,  
Your true and only Son, worthy of all  
worship,  
and the Holy Spirit, Advocate and Guide.

You, Christ, are the King of glory,  
the eternal Son of the Father.  
When You became Man to set us free,  
You did not spurn the Virgin's womb.

You overcame the sting of death,  
and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all  
believers.  
You are seated at God's right hand in glory.  
We believe that You will come, and be our  
judge.

Come then, Lord, and help Your people,  
bought with the price of Your own Blood,  
and bring us with Your saints to glory  
everlasting.

Save your people, Lord, and bless Your  
inheritance.  
Govern and uphold them now and always.  
Day by day we bless You.  
We praise Your name for ever.  
Keep us today, Lord, from all sin.  
Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.  
Lord, show us Your love and mercy;  
for we put our trust in You.  
In You, Lord, is our hope,  
and we shall never hope in vain.

**Prayer for the Dead**

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
May they rest in peace. Amen.

**Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
 Creator of Heaven and earth,  
 and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
 Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
 born of the Virgin Mary,  
 suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
 was crucified, died, and was buried.  
 He descended into hell; on the third day  
 He rose again from the dead;  
 He ascended into Heaven,  
 and is seated at the right hand of God the  
 Father almighty;  
 from there He will come to judge the living  
 and the dead.  
 I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy  
 catholic Church, the communion of  
 saints, the forgiveness of sins, the  
 resurrection of the body, and life  
 everlasting. Amen.

**Grace Before Meals**

Bless us, O Lord, and these Your gifts,  
 which we are about to receive from Your  
 bounty.  
 Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Grace After Meals**

We give You thanks, almighty God, for all  
 Your benefits,  
 Who live and reign, world without end.  
 Amen.

**Come, Holy Spirit**

Come, Holy Spirit,  
 fill the hearts of Thy faithful,  
 and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love.  
 Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be  
 created,  
 and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.  
 O God, Who hast taught the hearts of the  
 faithful  
 by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
 grant that by the same Spirit we may be  
 always truly wise,  
 and ever rejoice in His consolation.  
 Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer to St. Michael**

Saint Michael the Archangel,  
 defend us in battle;  
 be our safeguard against the wickedness and  
 snares of the devil;  
 may God rebuke him, we humbly pray,  
 and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host,  
 by the power of God, cast into Hell Satan  
 and all the evil spirits  
 who prowl through the world seeking the  
 ruin of souls. Amen.

**The Rosary**

*The Rosary comprises five decades, each  
 consisting of*

- the Lord's Prayer
- ten Hail Mary's
- the Glory Be

*However, it is usually preceded by*

- the Creed
- the Lord's Prayer
- three Hail Mary's
- the Glory Be

*and followed by*

- the Hail, Holy Queen

*while each decade is followed by a brief  
 concluding prayer such as*

- "O my Jesus, forgive us our sins; save us  
 from the fires of Hell. Lead all souls to  
 Heaven, especially those in most need of  
 Thy mercy."

*During each decade, we meditate on one of  
 the events in the life of Jesus and His  
 mother, as follows:*

**The Five Joyful Mysteries**

*(Mondays and Saturdays except in Lent and  
 Sundays from Advent to Lent)*

- 1 the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38)
- 2 the Visitation (Lk 1:39-56)
- 3 the Nativity (Lk 2:1-20)
- 4 the Presentation (Lk 2:22-39)
- 5 the Finding in the Temple (Lk 3:41-51)

**The Five Luminous Mysteries**

*(Thursdays except in Lent)*

- 1 the Baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17)
- 2 the Wedding at Cana (Jn 2:1-11)
- 3 the Proclamation of the Kingdom  
 (Mt 13, 19:16-30, 20:1-16)
- 4 the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9)
- 5 the Institution of the Eucharist  
 (Mt 26:26-29)

**The Five Sorrowful Mysteries**

*(Tuesdays and Fridays and every day in  
 Lent)*

- 1 the Agony in the Garden (Mk 14:32-42)
- 2 the Scourging at the Pillar (Mt 27:26)
- 3 the Crowning with Thorns (Mt 27:27-31)
- 4 the Carrying of the Cross (Lk 23:26-31)
- 5 the Crucifixion (Lk 23:32-49)

**The Five Glorious Mysteries**

*(Wednesdays except in Lent and Sundays  
 from Easter to Advent)*

- 1 the Resurrection (Jn 20:1-18)
- 2 the Ascension (Acts 1:1-14)
- 3 the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-12)
- 4 the Assumption (see the talk on "Mary and  
 Joseph")
- 5 the Coronation (see the talk on "Mary and  
 Joseph")

**Hail, Holy Queen**

*(Replaced with "Queen of Heaven" in Eastertide; see below.)*

Hail, holy Queen, mother of mercy:  
our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To thee do we cry,  
poor banished children of Eve;  
to thee do we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.  
Turn then, most gracious advocate,  
thine eyes of mercy toward us,  
and after this exile, show unto us  
the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary!  
Pray for us, O holy mother of God,  
that we may be made worthy  
of the promises of Christ.

**The Angelus**

*(Traditionally said at 6:00 am, 12:00 pm,  
and 6:00 pm; replaced with "Queen of  
Heaven" in Eastertide; see below.)*

The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,  
And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.  
Hail, Mary,...  
Behold the handmaid of the Lord:  
Be it done unto me according to Thy word.  
Hail, Mary,...  
And the Word was made flesh,  
And dwelled among us.  
Hail, Mary,...  
Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,  
That we may be made worthy of the  
promises of Christ.

Let us pray: Pour forth, we beseech  
Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts,  
that we to whom the Incarnation of Christ,  
Thy Son, was made known by the message  
of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross  
be brought to the glory of His Resurrection.

Through the same Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

**Queen of Heaven**

*(in Eastertide)*

Queen of Heaven, rejoice! *Alleluia!*  
For He Whom Thou didst merit to bear  
*Alleluia!*  
has risen as He said! *Alleluia!*  
Pray for us to God! *Alleluia!*  
Rejoice and be glad, O virgin Mary!  
*Alleluia!*

For the Lord has truly risen! *Alleluia!*  
Let us pray: O God, Who, by the Resur-  
rection of Your Son, have given joy to the  
whole world, grant that through the inter-  
cession of the Virgin Mary, His mother, we  
may attain the joys of eternal life. Through  
the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Stations of the Cross**

Essentially, the Stations (or Way) of the  
Cross is a meditation on fourteen of the  
events in Christ's passion and death:—

- 1 Jesus is condemned to death (Mt 27:24-26)
- 2 Jesus bears His cross (Jn 19:17)
- 3 Jesus falls the first time
- 4 Jesus meets His mother (Jn 19:25-27)
- 5 Jesus is helped by Simon (Lk 23:26)
- 6 Jesus meets Veronica
- 7 Jesus falls the second time
- 8 Jesus speaks to the women of Jerusalem  
(Lk 23:27-31)
- 9 Jesus falls the third time
- 10 Jesus is stripped of His garments  
(Mt 27:35)
- 11 Jesus is nailed to the cross (Lk 23:32-43)
- 12 Jesus dies on the cross (Lk 23:44-49)
- 13 Jesus is taken down from the cross  
(Mk 15:42-47)
- 14 Jesus is laid in the tomb (Mt 27:57-66)

**Prayer for Vocations  
to the Consecrated Life**

O God, You have chosen the apostles  
to make disciples of all nations,  
and by Baptism and Confirmation  
have called all of us to build up Your holy  
Church.

We earnestly implore You to choose from  
among us, Your children,  
many priests, deacons, brothers, and sisters,  
who will love You with their whole heart  
and will gladly spend their entire lives  
to make You known and loved by all.  
Amen.

**Prayer for Priests**

God our Father, look with mercy and  
love upon those Your Son has chosen to be  
ministers of your Word and Sacraments, and  
ardent but gentle shepherds of Your flock.

As spiritual fathers of those entrusted to  
their care, keep them faithful in obedient  
service to You.

Enkindle in our priests the fire of Your  
love, so that they will seek nothing but  
Your greater glory and the salvation of  
souls.

We pray that Mary, Queen of the Holy  
Rosary, will wrap her mantle around our  
priests, draw them closer to Your Heart day  
by day, and inspire many young men to  
answer Your call.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*St. John Vianney, pray for us.*

**Prayer for Reverence for Life**

Almighty God, Giver of all that is good, we thank you for the precious gift of human life: for life in the womb, coming from Your creative power; for the life of children, making us glad with their freshness and promise; for the life of young people, hoping for a better world; for the life of people who are disabled, teaching us that every life has value; for the life of the elderly, witnessing to the ageless values of patience and wisdom.

Like blessed Mary, may we always say yes to Your gift. May we defend it and promote it, from conception to its natural end. And bring us at last, O Father, to the fullness of eternal life in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer To Be Guarded from the Capital Sins**

O meek Saviour and Prince of Peace, implant in me the virtues of gentleness and patience. Let me curb the fury of *anger* and restrain all resentment and impatience so as to overcome evil with good, attain Your peace, and rejoice in Your love.

O Model of humility, divest me of all *pride* and arrogance. Let me acknowledge my weakness and sinfulness, so that I may bear mockery and contempt for Your sake and esteem myself as lowly in Your sight.

O Teacher of abstinence, help me to serve You rather than my appetites. Keep me from *gluttony* — the inordinate love of food and drink — and let me hunger and thirst for Your justice.

O Lover of purity, remove all *lust* from my heart, so that I may serve You with a pure mind and a chaste body.

O Father of the poor, help me to avoid all *covetousness* for earthly goods and give me a love for heavenly things. Inspire me to give to the needy, just as You gave Your life that I might inherit eternal treasures.

O Exemplar of love, keep me from all *envy* and ill-will. Let the grace of Your love dwell in me that I may rejoice in the happiness of others and bewail their adversities.

O zealous Lover of souls, keep me from all *sloth* of mind or body. Inspire me with zeal for Your glory, so that I may do all things for You and in You.

Amen.

**Prayer Before the Crucifix**

Behold, O kind and most sweet Jesus, I cast myself upon my knees in Thy sight, and with the most fervent desire of my soul, I pray and beseech Thee to impress upon my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity.

With true contrition for my sins and a firm purpose of amendment, with deep affection and grief of soul, I ponder within myself and mentally contemplate Thy five wounds, having before my eyes the words that long ago David the Prophet spoke concerning Thee: "They have pierced my hands and my feet; they have numbered all my bones."

**Memorare**

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided.

Inspired with this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother! To thee I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful.

O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but, in thy mercy, hear and answer them. Amen.

**Act of Faith**

O my God, I believe in You and all Your Church teaches, because You have said it, and Your word is true.

**Act of Hope**

O my God, I hope in You for grace and glory, because of Your promises, Your mercy, and Your power.

**Act of Love**

O my God, I love You with all my heart because You are so good, and for Your sake I love my neighbour as myself.

## Appendix 2

## The Song of the Church

From Pope St. Pius X:<sup>1</sup> *Divino Afflatu* ("By God's Inspiration")

The collection of Psalms found in Scripture, composed as it was under divine inspiration, has, from the very beginnings of the Church, shown a wonderful power of fostering devotion among Christians as they offer to God "a continuous sacrifice of praise, the harvest of lips blessing His name."<sup>2</sup>

Following a custom already established in the Old Law, the Psalms have played a conspicuous part in the Sacred Liturgy itself and in the Divine Office. Thus was born what St. Basil calls "the voice of the Church,"<sup>3</sup> that singing of Psalms, "which is the daughter of that hymn of praise" (to use the words of our predecessor, Urban VIII) "which goes up unceasingly before the throne of God and of the Lamb,"<sup>4</sup> and which teaches those especially charged with the duty of divine worship, as St. Athanasius says, "the way to praise God, and the fitting words in which to bless Him."<sup>5</sup>

St. Augustine expresses this well when he says "God praised Himself so that man might give Him fitting praise; because God chose to praise Himself, man found the way in which to bless God."<sup>6</sup>

The Psalms have also a wonderful power to awaken in our hearts the desire for every virtue. St. Athanasius says, "Though all Scripture, both old and new, is divinely inspired and has its use in teaching, as we read in Scripture itself, yet the Book of Psalms, like a garden enclosing the fruits of all the other books, produces its fruits in song, and in the process of singing brings forth its own special fruits to take their place beside them."<sup>7</sup>

In the same place St. Athanasius rightly adds, "The Psalms seem to me to be like a mirror, in which the person using them can see himself and the stirrings of his own heart; he can recite them against the background of his own emotions."<sup>8</sup>

Augustine says in his *Confessions*, "How I wept when I heard Your hymns and canticles, being deeply moved by the sweet singing of Your Church. Those voices flowed into my ears, truth filtered into my heart, and from my heart surged waves of devotion. Tears ran down, and I was happy in my tears."<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, who could fail to be moved by those many passages in the Psalms which set forth so profoundly the infinite majesty of God, His omnipotence, His justice and goodness and clemency, too deep for words, and all the other infinite qualities of His that deserve our praise?

Who could fail to be roused to the same emotions by the prayers of thanksgiving to God for blessings received; by the petitions, so humble and confident, for blessings still awaited; and by the cries of a soul in sorrow for sin committed?

Who would not be fired with love as he looks on the likeness of Christ, the Redeemer, here so lovingly foretold? His was the voice St. Augustine "heard in every Psalm: the voice of praise, of suffering, of joyful expectation, of present distress."<sup>10</sup>

1 Pope 1903-1914

2 Heb 13:15

3 Basil the Great: *On Psalm 1*, 2

4 Pope Urban VIII (Pope 1623-1644): *In Divinam Psalmodyam*, 2

5 Athanasius (c 296-373): *Letter to Marcellinus*

6 Augustine: *Enarrationis in Psalmum 144*, 1

7 Athanasius: *Letter to Marcellinus*

8 Athanasius: *Letter to Marcellinus*

9 Augustine: *Confessions*, Book IX, 6, 14, quoted in CCC 1157

10 Augustine: *Enarration in Psalmum 42*, 1

## Appendix 3

## On Meditation

From *Buddhism From a Catholic Perspective*, by Paul Williams\*

Edited for brevity and ease of reading

**Introduction**

Many people think that Buddhists are experts in meditation, and that Christians can benefit from their meditation practices. Broadly speaking, there are two types — "calming" and "insight."

Calming meditation results in relaxation and improved concentration, which are valuable. However calm, relaxation, and concentration are no more valuable on *religious* grounds than a good walk.

**First danger**

The first danger for Christians who take up Buddhist meditation is that its techniques ("life-strategies") will come to replace prayer.

Christian prayer is directed to the living God, Who meets us not so much when we are cross-legged as when we are on our knees, praying, and not so much when we are seated as when we are on our feet, working to help usher in His Kingdom.

There is nothing wrong with relaxing. I use a relaxation CD program myself, with gentle muscle-relaxing advice set to classical music.

But I do not confuse relaxing with my religious duty — prayer and the Sacraments. Relaxation from stress bears as much relation to prayer as a glass of wine after a hard day's work bears to a sip of Christ's Blood from the chalice at Mass.

Why should a Christian even consider Buddhist meditation? There is a long tradition of advice for *Christian* meditation, such as Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* and St. Francis de Sales's *Introduction to the Devout Life* — two of my favourites. There are the Rosary,<sup>1</sup> the Stations of the Cross, the Divine Office, daily Mass, and the Jesus Prayer, which comes from Eastern Catholicism and the Eastern Church Fathers.

There is also a Christian tradition of deep, silent, wordless meditation, but it is an advanced form of prayer, infused by God's graciousness, which we can learn only within a specifically Christian context: liturgical, doctrinal, and pedagogical.<sup>2</sup>

**Second danger**

That, then, is the first danger for Christians who take up Buddhist meditation.

The second is this: that as a Christian begins to appreciate Buddhist calming meditation, he may gradually move to "insight meditation," abandoning the truth of Christianity in favour of the tenets and presuppositions of Buddhism as they are assumed and expressed in "meditation circles."

One of these false presuppositions is that all religions lead to the same ineffable goal, that their differences are simply verbal, and that mystical meditation leads us to an Absolute that is beyond words. *Wrong.*

In turn, this leads to the false belief that all expressed truth, including the teaching of the Catholic Church, can be abandoned in favour of a transcendent truth reached by personal experience through meditation. *Wrong.*

It also leads to the false conclusion that if the Absolute is beyond all words, Jesus Christ cannot be God as Christians understand it, but only in the sense that we are all "God" — "God" being just another name for the truth we discover in our own inner experience. *Wrong.*

1 See Pope John Paul II: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 28 (see the talk on "Mary and Joseph," Appendix 2).

2 See CCC 2709-2719.

Finally, it can convince us that Jesus does not reveal God in any definitive or unique way, for He was just a good man, one of many — past, present, and future — who realize the "Christ nature" within us all (like the "Buddha nature" in some Buddhist traditions). *Wrong.*

### Body, mind, and soul

Whether we like it or not, our choice of method in our prayer already determines the result. If we devote ourselves to practices and methods that are not home-grown in the soil of our Christian faith, we will imperceptibly be led toward the "faith" of which these practices are, indeed, a genuine expression.

For example, posture is important in prayer. A Buddhist monk need not face in any particular direction when he is meditating, for he is not directed outwards, to Someone else. However, when the early Christians prayed, they faced East, toward the Lord. Churches were designed so that everyone — priest and people — faced East at Mass.

Body and mind are intimately connected. We *embody* prayer in our posture. Prayer is different if the posture is different. If we really and seriously met God in prayer — not just some deep bit of ourselves, but the one, true, and *living God* — we would not remain comfortably cross-legged on a meditation cushion, but would throw ourselves down on our faces in trembling adoration.

Certainly, sitting quietly in the presence of the Lord is part of Christian contemplative prayer, but we must be careful not to substitute a passive awareness of ourselves for a real meeting with God. God is not our own subjective depths, but an absolutely objective Other.

### Summary

Buddhist meditation is either nothing more than a technique for relaxing, concentrating, and calming (like "mindfulness of breathing") or it is "insight meditation."

Even if it is merely relaxation, there is a danger that it will take over our spiritual life, replacing the hard work of prayer with the pleasures of relaxation. We may even begin to *prefer* Buddhist meditation to prayer, for it is more enjoyable. Instead of nurturing our relationship with God and our neighbours, it simply nurtures our relationship with ourself.

And insofar as it is "insight meditation," it has religious content that is Buddhist and therefore non-Christian, and there is a danger that we will adopt it.

My own experience shows that Christians who practise forms of meditation derived from Buddhism are flirting with heresy (a word that comes from the Greek *hairesis*: "choice," "opinion") and that all too often, preferring their own opinion to orthodoxy, they leave the Christian faith.

As for the idea that we can, by our own efforts, through meditation or any other technique, attain the spiritual heights — that is the old heresy of Pelagianism.

### Christian prayer

"Christian prayer is always determined by the structure of the Christian faith, in which the very truth of God and creatures shines forth," says the Vatican's document on Christian Meditation.<sup>3</sup>

Christian prayer is defined "as a personal, intimate, and profound dialogue between man and God," expressing the communion of redeemed humans "with the Persons of the Trinity." This communion, "based on Baptism and the Eucharist — source and summit of the life of the Church — implies an attitude of conversion, a flight from 'self' to the 'You' of God."<sup>4</sup>

Christian prayer is always both personal and communal. It shuns impersonal

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 3

<sup>4</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 3

techniques and concentration on self, which can imprison us in a spiritual privacy that is "incapable of a free openness to the transcendental God."<sup>5</sup>

Genuine prayer, "as the great spiritual masters teach," stirs up in us "an ardent charity" that moves us "to collaborate in the mission of the Church" and to serve our brothers and sisters "for the greater glory of God."<sup>6</sup>

Jesus did not practise Buddhist meditation. He said, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father, Who art in Heaven...'"<sup>7</sup> and He entrusted this prayer to His Church. Accordingly, when a Christian prays, whether in the liturgy or alone, he prays within the framework of the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Christians should meditate regularly, lest God's message find in them the well-trodden footpath, the rocky ground, or the thorns of Christ's parable.<sup>9</sup> There are as many methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters. However, a method is only a guide: what is important is to advance, with the Holy Spirit, along the one Way of prayer<sup>10</sup> — Jesus, Who called Himself the Way, the Truth, and the Life.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Christians should recognize, as St. Francis de Sales notes, that private meditation is not nearly as important as the Church's liturgy: her public, communal, meeting with God.

"There is always more benefit and comfort to be derived from the public offices of the Church than from private devotions," he says. "God has ordained that communion of prayers should always have preference over every kind of private prayer."<sup>12</sup>

In His great graciousness, God comes to us freely. If we want to see Him, we should look at Jesus Christ, in Whom "we see our God made visible."<sup>13</sup>

By making Him "the subject of your meditation, your whole soul will be filled with Him," said St. Francis de Sales. "You will learn His ways and frame your actions according to His model. He is the light of the world. It is, therefore, in Him and by Him and for Him that we must be instructed and enlightened.... By keeping close to our Saviour, by meditation and observation of His words, actions, and affections, by His grace, we shall learn to speak, act, and will like Him."<sup>14</sup>

Christian meditation brings us closer to Christ — not in strange mental states or "mystical" experiences, but in our behaviour, which is increasingly Christ-like, so that we may be made worthy of His promises.

\*After twenty years spent practising and teaching Tibetan Buddhism in Britain, scholar and broadcaster Paul Williams became a Catholic in 2000.

5 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 3

6 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 28

7 See Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4.

8 See the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Aspects of Christian Meditation*, 7. Also see the talk on "The Communion Among the Saints in the Body of Christ."

9 See Mt 13:4-23; Mk 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15.

10 See CCC 2707.

11 See Jn 14:6.

12 Francis de Sales: *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part II, Chapter XV, "Of the Other Public Offices of the Church"

13 Preface I for Christmas

14 Francis de Sales: *Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part II, Chapter I, "Of the Necessity of Prayer"