

Prayer

Relationships

All things were created by God and for God, and God never ceases to draw all creation to Himself. The desire for God is written on the human heart. Just as we were created by God, our end, our purpose in life, also lies in our relationship with God. The basis and foundation of this relationship is love. God is love, and He loves us so much that He constantly holds us into existence. Since God is love, and we are made in the image and likeness of God, we were made to love, to love one another, and to love God. Everything that we do in our faith is call and response. God initiates this relationship by inviting us to enter into communion with Him, and our hearts, our bodies, every part of our being wants nothing more than to answer God's invitation, we desire this communion with God.

In His Encyclical letter "God is love" Pope Benedict XVI said, "Since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere command, it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us." The Ten Commandments are a perfect example of this. They are not simply commands that we are to carry out just because God said so. God does not want us to act out of fear or duty, he wants us to act out of love for Him in response to His love for us. This response is not possible without prayer, prayer that is rooted in love.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God." Prayer is recognizing that God is present to us at every moment of every day.

St. John Vianney:

- "prayer is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself."
- He constantly promoted meditative prayer before the Blessed Sacrament
- "We become like that which we gaze upon. Looking into a sunset, the face takes on a golden glow."
- "We do not have to talk very much in order to pray well. We know that God is there in His holy tabernacle; let us open our hearts to Him; let us rejoice in His Presence: This is the best prayer."

St. Theresa of Lesieux: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."

The light of Christ resides in each one of us, which is ignited at our Baptism. In this world we each face different trials and struggles, that can, over a period of time, dim that light. It is in a continued prayer life that this light is kept burning bright. Each time we turn to our Lord in prayer, we allow Him to add fuel to the fire, so to speak. The more we pray to our Lord, the brighter that light becomes; so that, as we go out to meet our Lord when He comes, that light might achieve its full potential.

How do I pray, and what do I say?

There are five conditions required in prayer. Confidence; Rectitude; Order; Devotion; and Humility. Jesus gives us a universal prayer that all can pray. Among all prayers, the Lord's Prayer, The Our Father, stands preeminent, for it excels in all five conditions.

Confidence

We should be confident when we pray, especially when we pray the Our Father. We have an advocate to the Father in Jesus Christ. It is Jesus who hears our prayer with the Father, therefore, praying in Jesus own words gives us security in knowing that our prayers are heard. Also, we must always remember that it is God who created us; and it is out of love that He created us. He loves us, He wants nothing more than to help us on our journey. Even though we may not always get what we want; we trust that He always gives us what we need, and no one knows what we need better than the one who created us.

Rectitude

Rectitude means that we pray for what we need, for what is good for us. Many times our prayers are not answered because we ask for things that are not good for us. The problem is that we do not always know what is good for us. Jesus knows what is good for us and helps us to pray for what is good for us by giving us the Our Father. First we call God "Our Father," then we praise His name; then we pray that His Kingdom may be the same on earth as it is in heaven. Then we pray for our daily bread, the Eucharist. Then we pray that He forgives us as we forgive others. And lastly to lead us out of this world of temptation, delivering us from the bonds of sin.

Order

There should always be some kind of order to our prayer. Not that it needs to be rigid, but there are some things that are more important than others, especially in prayer. Mathew's Gospel tells us, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." The right order is that our desires and prayers should prefer heavenly things to earthly things. We always strive to put God first, before our own meager needs. After all, He knows what we need, we should spend more time praising Him and thanking Him.

Devout

Prayer should be devout because it is devotion that makes the sacrifice of prayer acceptable. I think it is important to see prayer as a sacrifice, offering our trials, our struggles, and all that we do to the Lord. From the time that God called Abraham, he made sacrifices to the Lord in every place that he stopped. During the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, we offer to God, not only bread and wine, but our gifts as well as our crosses. Devotion arises from charity, which is the love of God and neighbor, and both are present in the Our Father. Our prayer should always be genuine, sincere, honest, and from the heart.

Humility

The greatest character of prayer will always be humility. Humility is necessary in prayer, because it is in humility that we recognize our dependence on God. Just as St. John the Baptist said, “I must decrease, so that He can increase.” If we demand control of our lives, then God can never come into our lives and make us whole. The Our Father teaches us humility; it teaches us to put God first. It teaches us to give up our lives for Him. Humility allows us to deny ourselves, pick up our cross and follow Him.

In what way do I pray?

Scripture gives us insights to Jesus own prayer life. When Jesus was with the disciples or with a crowd, He was usually teaching, but He always went away on His own to pray, either up a mountain, or into the desert or some secluded place. In Mark’s Gospel we hear, “In the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went away to a secluded place, and was praying there.” This is an example for us that we too not only need to pray, but in private. We need that quiet time with our Lord. We can pray anywhere at any time when we feel the need, but there should always be a time, each and every day to pray, where we get away from all the distractions of life, quiet our minds, and turn our hearts to God.

When I was at the seminary, I received many different letters of support. There is one in particular that I have held on to. It has a great message about prayer that I love to share with people. It reads: “Pray, Hope, and don’t worry. Worry is useless, God is merciful and will hear your prayer. When you pray to Jesus, pray not only with your lips, but with your heart. On certain occasions, pray only with your heart.” Prayer is the greatest weapon we have; it is the key to knowing God’s heart.

Devotions

Devotions are practices of piety that give concrete expression to the will to serve and worship God by directing it to some particular object, such as a divine mystery, person, attribute that is related to God. There are many different devotions that one can choose from to enhance their prayer life. Every devotion should have certain qualities. In order to prevent superstitious behavior and simplistic attitudes the Church as outlined three criteria of a true devotion.

1. True devotions are rooted in the teachings of Christ and of His Church.
2. True devotions appeal both to our imagination and our intellect.
3. True devotions will always guide us to a deeper spiritual life.

However, devotions should always be used in accordance with the normal liturgical celebrations. In other words, they should not only be derived from the sacred liturgy, but should always lead us back to this celebration of the Holy Eucharist, not away from it.

Some popular devotions:

- The miraculous Medal
- The Scapular
- Liturgy of the Hours
- Novena's

For more information on devotions, read *Our Catholic Devotions* by Therese Johnson Borchard

In my opinion, there are two devotions that stand above the rest.

The Stations of the Cross

The Stations are prayed mostly during Lent as we contemplate Christ's Passion, and Death. But they can be prayed year round. The Stations began as a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. People wanted to walk where Jesus walked; to walk with Him the Way of the Cross. Our life is a journey that we walk with Christ; praying the Stations of the Cross helps us to visualize His journey, which can only help us in ours.

The Holy Rosary

The best way to truly get to know the life of Jesus, is to contemplate His life; from His conception all the way to Calvary. And the best way to do this is in the daily praying of the Holy Rosary. The Rosary is pre-eminent in all Christian prayer. It is so because of the prayers that are prayed and because each mystery of the Rosary comes straight from the Scriptures that teach us of the life of Christ. So when we pray the Rosary, we are praying the life of Christ through Scripture. If we want to know about the life of Christ, there is no better way than to pray the Rosary. In fact, many different popes throughout the history of the Church have reiterated over and over the importance of the Rosary. Here are just a few:

Pope Leo XIII 1878 – 1903 “A powerful means of renewing our courage will undoubtedly be found in the Holy Rosary.”

Pope Pius XI 1922-1939 “If you desire peace in your hearts, your homes, and your country, assemble every evening to recite the Rosary.”

Pope Pius XII 1939 – 1958 “There is no surer means of calling down God's blessings upon the family than the daily recitation of the Rosary. We do not hesitate to affirm again publicly, that we put great confidence in the Holy Rosary for the healing of evils which afflict our times.”

St. Pope John Paul II 1978 – 2005 “The Rosary represents a most effective means of fostering among the faithful that commitment to the contemplation of the Christian mystery.”

Adoration

Adoration flows from the attitude, which acknowledges that we are a creature in the presence of our creator. Adoration exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us, and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to

God in respectful silence and humility. We humble ourselves in the presence of the Lord and silence our minds and heart in order to hear the Word of God. “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.” 1 Samuel 3:10

St. John Vianney – Holy Hour

I have found that it takes some time to catch fire in prayer. This has been one of the advantages of the Holy Hour. Sitting before the Presence is like a body exposing itself to the sun to absorb its rays. In those moments one does not so much pour out written prayers but listening takes place.

Holy Hour – An oxygen tank that revived the breath of the Holy Spirit in him

Thanksgiving

Just as God never ceases loving us, we should never cease to thank Him for the gift that is our life. We should always strive to have an attitude of gratitude in all we do. Prayer of Thanksgiving flows from the greatest form of prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist. The Word Eucharist means thanksgiving. We are called to thank God for all the gifts we have received, including our joys and our sorrows, all of which work toward our benefit. No one has a right to anything in this world, it is all a gift; everything we do is by the grace of God. Almost every one of St. Paul’s letters begins and ends by giving thanks. Thanksgiving is another sign of humility before our Lord.

Petition and Intercession

Prayer of Petition acknowledges how much we depend on God for our needs, including forgiveness and persistence in seeking Him. Christ calls us to “ask in order to receive;” “seek in order to find,” and to “knock in order that the door may be opened.” Prayer of petition is the most commonly used prayer, simply because both as individuals and as a faith community, our needs are many. One way prayer of petition is used is at the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, where we offer up intentions for the community, the Church, and the world. These usually include, for the Pope, for world leaders, for the sick, and for those who have died. We use this prayer for our families, friends, for those we care for. We pray for those who have asked us to pray for them, and we pray for those who have no one to pray for them.

Meditation

Just as we get to know people by meeting, listening, and speaking with them. It is in meditation that we get to know God by communicating with Him in quiet. I spoke earlier about finding a quiet place to pray, Meditation takes this to another level. The key aspect of meditation is silence. We need to silence our hearts and minds so that we can listen to God’s voice. Have you ever been in a conversation with someone where one person dominates the

conversation, not letting anyone else have a word? How can we ever come to know God's will for our life if we never let Him speak? It is important to let God have a say in our lives, we need to give Him the floor, so to speak, while we sit patiently, and quietly and listen. We accomplish so much more by listening to God and to others, than we ever do by our own words or opinions. Which means it is more important to listen to God, than to constantly bombard him with our needs, which, by the way, He already knows. Thomas Dubay put it this way, "meditation is a mental conversation between two friends coming closer, and as time goes on, becoming more and more intimate." We need silent time with God.

So, how does one go about meditating? The first step, as we have already discussed is to choose a quiet place and a suitable time. This is important so that we can give God our full attention without distractions. The next step is to put ourselves in the presence of God. The easiest way that I have found is to recite the Our Father, slowly, focusing on each word or phrase. Then we read something from Scripture or a quote from one of the saints. I have found that the readings for daily Mass are a good place to start.

We calmly read the passage, taking our time. We do this to let the words sink in, looking for anything that might stand out. Then we read the passage again in the same way, only this time we try to put ourselves in the passage, maybe as one of the characters, or simply as a bystander, witnessing firsthand what is happening. This helps us to get deeper into the passage. Every passage in Scripture can have many meanings. There is the meaning as it was in the culture of the time, there is the meaning now, in our time, and then there are other meanings as they apply to our life. This is why it is so important to meditate on Scripture. However, you can also meditate on a certain situation that you are dealing with.

Next we take some time and reflect on our meditation. How well were you able to picture yourself in the passage? What did you feel or experience, and what is the message that God is trying to convey to you? The more we meditate on Scripture, the deeper our understanding of it will become over time. It is also important to note, that we can meditate on the same Scripture passage more than once. Just as we are constantly changing, the meaning of Scripture will change as our spiritual life increases.

"He who does not meditate acts as one who never looks into the mirror and so does not bother to put himself in order, since he can be dirty without knowing it. The person who meditates and turns his thoughts to God who is the mirror of the soul, seeks to know his defects and tries to correct them, and moderates himself in his impulses and puts his conscience in order."

St. Padre Pio

"Silence is the root of our union with God and with one another. In silence we are filled with the energy of God Himself that makes us do all things in joy. The more we receive in silent prayer, the more we can give in our active life."

St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Contemplation

Remember that we are to seek heavenly things more than earthly things. This does not happen overnight, it is a process. As we grow in our union with God, we begin to be drawn more and more toward the good things of Heaven, and away from earthly things. It is in this stage of spiritual life where contemplation usually takes place, even though contemplation can happen at any time in one's spiritual life. Contemplation is an advanced development of communion with God. Contemplation, unlike meditation, is not something that we do. It is initiated by God. This is why it usually happens later in the spiritual life, but it is not unique to this stage, it can happen at any time.

In the first stages of contemplation, God gives us a gentle, delightful awareness of His presence. We cannot produce this and it cannot be had any time we want it. What the Lord infuses within us is at first, delicate, gentle and brief. At first the receiver of this gift may be distracted or may not realize what is happening. This type of deep absorption can consume us to the point that nothing can distract us from it. We should not try to understand or explain it. God graciously gives and we graciously accept. What is most important to know about contemplation, is that it is a movement of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that prepares a heart and soul for Christ; we simply need to be open to it.