

INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER

"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Romans 10:13

"Pray without ceasing,"

St. Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17

"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."

St. Therese of Lisieux



The gift is free, but it needs to be asked for, as the disciples asked Christ, "Lord, teach us how to pray" (Luke 11:1). Christ promises that those who ask for this gift will be granted it, as is demonstrated by the story of the Samaritan woman at the well:

"If you knew the gift of God!" The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. "You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!" Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God (CCC 2560-61).

UNIVERSAL CALL TO PRAYER

- Though in prayer man calls out to God, it is in fact God Who calls man first, from the very first moment in Eden when God came walking and calling for Adam.
- Prayer is responsive, for God's loving initiative always comes first.
 - The desire to pray comes from God
 - the grace of humility necessary for prayer comes from God
 - the will to carry out our desire
 - the graces that come to us through prayer all have their source in God.

DEFINITION OF PRAYER

- Prayer is the cornerstone of the Christian life, the secret of every triumph of every saint and the one practice that can be universally advised at all times and in every occasion.
- *Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God (CCC 2559).*

- Prayer is the acting out of the virtue of religion which consists in asking proper gifts or graces from God.
- In a more general sense it is the application of the mind to Divine things, not merely to acquire knowledge of them but to make use of such knowledge as a means of union with God.
- Man desires not only to know God, but to communion with Him. Thus, prayer touches on the deepest aspect of man's being: his vocation to love.
- Prayer is a means of uniting man with the object of his love.

GIFT, COVENANT, COMMUNION

- First, prayer is a gift from God
 - Recognizing that this ability to call upon God is a gift, the proper attitude for prayer is **humility**.
 - As it is written, "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (Jas. 4:6).
- While the mind influences prayer, and it can be said that prayer is a spiritual communion, Scripture speaks of the *heart* as being the source of prayer.
 - By *heart*, Scripture denotes both the seat of man (the source of his being), and the whole man, body and soul.
- Prayer comes forth from the depths of man, and it is in these depths that mankind encounters God.
- Thus, prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.
 - It is both a divine action and a human action, reflecting man's spiritual nature and his earthly nature, coming both from ourselves and the Holy Spirit, and directed to the Father.
- Prayer is not only a covenant, but is also life-giving communion in that covenant.
 - Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.
 - This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ.
 - Prayer is *Christian* insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love" (CCC 2565).

THE PRAYERS OF JESUS

- As a man, Jesus learned to pray according to His human heart.
- Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his mission:
 - before his Father's witness to him during his baptism and Transfiguration
 - before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion.
 - Jesus often draws apart to pray *in solitude*, on a mountain, preferably at night.

Jesus teaches us how to pray

- From the *Sermon on the Mount* onwards, Jesus insists
 - on *conversion of heart*
 - reconciliation with one's brother before presenting an offering on the altar
 - love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors,
 - prayer to the Father in secret
 - not heaping up empty phrases
 - prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart
 - purity of heart
 - seeking the Kingdom before all else.
- *Filial boldness*: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will." Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt: "all things are possible to him who believes."
- The prayer of faith consists not only in saying "Lord, Lord," but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father.
 - Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan.
- In Jesus "*the Kingdom of God is at hand.*" He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to watchfulness.
 - In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory.
 - In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.

Jesus hears our prayer

- *Prayer to Jesus is answered by him already during his ministry, through signs that anticipate the power of his death and Resurrection*:
 - Jesus hears the prayer of faith, expressed in words (the leper, Jairus, the Canaanite woman, the good thief)
 - or in silence (the bearers of the paralytic, the woman with a hemorrhage who touches his clothes, the tears and ointment of the sinful woman).

- The urgent request of the blind men, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" or "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"
- *"St. Augustine wonderfully summarizes the three dimensions of Jesus' prayer: "He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us" (CCC 2616).*

THE PRAYER OF THE VIRGIN MARY

- *Her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness:*
 - at the Annunciation, for Christ's conception;
 - at Pentecost, for the formation of the Church, his Body.
- In the faith of his humble handmaid, the Gift of God found the acceptance he had awaited from the beginning of time.
- She whom the Almighty made "full of grace" responds by offering her whole being:
- "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word." *"Fiat"*: this is Christian prayer: to be wholly God's, because he is wholly ours.
- The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith.
- At Cana, the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; this is the sign of another feast - that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride.
- It is at the hour of the New Covenant, at the foot of the cross, that Mary is heard as the Woman, the new Eve, the true "Mother of all the living."

FOUR TYPES OF PRAYER

1. Blessing and Adoration

Blessing expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer: it is an encounter between God and man.

- In blessing, God's gift and man's acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other.

Adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator.

- It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil.

2. Prayer of Petition

By prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God.

- We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end.
- We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to him.

The first movement of the prayer of petition is asking forgiveness, like the tax collector in the parable: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"

- Christian petition is centered on the desire and search for the Kingdom to come, in keeping with the teaching of Christ.

There is a hierarchy in these petitions:

- we pray first for the Kingdom,
- then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming.

3. Prayer of Intercession

Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints.

In intercessory prayer, he who prays looks "not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm.

4. Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is.

As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving.

The letters of St. Paul often begin and end with thanksgiving, and the Lord Jesus is always present in it:

- "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"
- "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God.

- It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS.
- It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory

The Eucharist contains and expresses all forms of prayer: it is "the pure offering" of the whole Body of Christ to the glory of God's name and, according to the traditions of East and West, it is the "sacrifice of praise."

The Mass is the most perfect prayer because it is the offering of Christ to the Father.