Lord,
Teach Us To Pray

Foundations of Prayer

April 21, 2015
St. Dominic’s Catholic Church
What Is Prayer?
(CCC 2558-2565)

Prayer Is:

- A vital and personal relationship with the living and true God
- The encounter of God's thirst with ours
- It is the whole person who prays...from the heart
- The living relationship of the children of God with their Father

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy, so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father...in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.

The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well...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.

Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole person who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times)...If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.

In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity...with the whole human spirit." Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.
Time & Prayer
- Setting aside time
- Finding the right time
- Moments in the flow of life
- Praying at all times

Body & Prayer
- Breathing
- Senses (image, sound, smell)
- Posture & Gestures
- Motion

Expressions Of Prayer (CCC 2699-2724)

1. Vocal Prayer (alone or group)
   - Established Prayers
   - Free-form Prayers

2. Non-vocal Prayer

3. Mediation

4. Contemplation

The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer. However, Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal meditative, and contemplative. They have one basic trait in common: composure of heart. This vigilance in keeping the Word and dwelling in the presence of God makes these three expressions intense times in the life of prayer.

**Vocal** prayer, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ's example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples.

**Meditation** is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make our own in faith the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life.

**Contemplative** prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.
Prayer In A.C.T.I.O.N.S.

Adoration
Contrition
Thanksgiving
Intimacy
Offering
Need
Supplication

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
Exercise

- Take a 5 minute, slow walk through the church
  - Focus on being present to this time and place
  - Focus on your breathing
- Pick a place (at random) to stop
  - Stand, sit, or kneel
  - Spend 5 minutes praying the space
  - See the images, textures, colors
  - Let them resonate in your heart
- Spend 5 minutes praying the Lord’s Prayer
  - Slowly
  - Intentionally speaking each word and phrase
  - Connect it with what is happening in your life
- Spend 5 minutes meditating on a word, phrase, or image
  - Pick an aspect of the Lord’s prayer or the space around you that really resonates with you
  - Speak a phrase as a mantra - or -
  - Imagine a scene or interaction with Jesus
- Spend 5 minutes in silence
  - Rest in God’s presence
  - Rest in God’s love for you
  - Rest in God’s joy to be with you
- Spend a few minutes writing
  - What are the fruits of this prayer?
  - What response do you want to offer?
  - What words do you want to carry into this week?
Location, Location, Location

(CCC 2691)

Key Places:
- Our parish church
- A “prayer corner”
- Special places
- Pilgrimages

The church, the house of God, is the proper place for the liturgical prayer of the parish community. It is also the privileged place for adoration of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The choice of a favorable place is not a matter of indifference for true prayer.

- For personal prayer, this can be a "prayer corner" with the Sacred Scriptures and icons, in order to be there, in secret, before our Father. In a Christian family, this kind of little oratory fosters prayer in common.
- In regions where monasteries exist, the vocation of these communities is to further the participation of the faithful in the Liturgy of the Hours and to provide necessary solitude for more intense personal prayer.
- Pilgrimages evoke our earthly journey toward heaven and are traditionally very special occasions for renewal in prayer. For pilgrims seeking living water, shrines are special places for living the forms of Christian prayer "in Church."
Barriers To Prayer
(CCC 2726-2728)

Perceived:

- Separate from life (i.e., one more thing I don't have time for)
- Relying on our effort alone
- Uselessness (not scientific, productive, comfortable)
- Failures (dryness, flawed life, not getting what we want)

In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us erroneous notions of prayer. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: they "don't have the time." Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone.

We must also face the fact that certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of "this present world" can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant. For example, some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives. Others overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless. Still others exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful; whereas prayer, the "love of beauty" (philokalia), is caught up in the glory of the living and true God. Finally, some see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.

Finally, our battle has to confront what we experience as failure in prayer: discouragement during periods of dryness; sadness that, because we have "great possessions," we have not given all to the Lord; disappointment over not being heard according to our own will; wounded pride, stiffened by the indignity that is ours as sinners; our resistance to the idea that prayer is a free and unmerited gift; and so forth. The conclusion is always the same: what good does it do to pray? To overcome these obstacles, we must battle to gain humility, trust, and perseverance.
Saints & Prayer

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

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.

— St. John Damascene

Prayer is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself.

— Saint John Vianney

Vocal prayer...must be accompanied by reflection. A prayer in which a person is not aware of Whom he is speaking to, what he is asking, who it is who is asking and of Whom, I don't call prayer—however much the lips may move.

— St. Teresa of Avila

During mental prayer, it is well, at times, to imagine that many insults and injuries are being heaped upon us, that misfortunes have befallen us, and then strive to train our heart to bear and forgive these things patiently, in imitation of our Saviour. This is the way to acquire a strong spirit.

— St. Philip Neri

The difference between [meditation and contemplation] is like the difference between working, and enjoyment of the fruit of our work; between receiving a gift, and profiting by it; between the toil of traveling and the rest of our journey’s end.

— St. John of the Cross

My little children, your hearts, are small, but prayer stretches them and makes them capable of loving God. Through prayer we receive a foretaste of heaven and something of paradise comes down upon us. Prayer never leaves us without sweetness. It is honey that flows into the souls and makes all things sweet. When we pray properly, sorrows disappear like snow before the sun.

— Saint John Vianney