

PRAYER IS FULLY REVEALED AND REALISED IN JESUS**FROM WHOM DID JESUS LEARN HOW TO PRAY ?**

Jesus, with His human heart, learned how to pray from His mother and from the Jewish tradition. But His prayer sprang from a more secret source because He is the eternal Son of God who in His Holy humanity offers His perfect filial prayer to His Father.

WHEN DID JESUS PRAY?

The Gospel often shows Jesus at prayer. We see Him draw apart to pray in solitude, even at night. He prays before the decisive moments of His mission or that of His apostles. In fact, all His life is a prayer because He is in a constant communion of love with the Father.

HOW DID JESUS PRAY DURING HIS PASSION ?

The prayer of Jesus during His agony in the garden of Gethsemane and His last words on the Cross reveal the depth of His filial prayer. Jesus brings to completion the loving plan of the Father and takes upon Himself all the anguish of humanity and all the petitions and intercessions of the history of salvation. He presents them to the Father who accepts them and answers them beyond all hope by raising His Son from the dead.

HOW DOES JESUS TEACH US TO PRAY ?

Jesus teaches us to pray not only with the Our Father but also when He prays. In this way He teaches us, in addition to the content, the dispositions necessary for every true prayer: purity of heart that seeks the Kingdom and forgives one's enemies, bold and filial faith that goes beyond what we feel and understand, and watchfulness that protects the disciple from temptation.

WHY IS OUR PRAYER EFFICACIOUS ?

Our prayer is efficacious because it is united in faith with the prayer of Jesus. In Him Christian prayer becomes a communion of love with the Father. In this way we can present our petitions to God and be heard: “Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

HOW DID THE VIRGIN MARY PRAY ?

Mary's prayer was characterised by faith and by the generous offering of the whole being to God. The Mother of Jesus is also the new Eve, the "Mother of all the living". She prays to Jesus for the needs of all people.

IS THERE A PRAYER OF MARY IN THE GOSPEL ?

Along with the prayer of Mary at Cana in Galilee, the Gospel gives us the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) which is the song both of the Mother of God and of the Church, the joyous thanksgiving that rises from the hearts of the poor because their hope is met by the fulfilment of the divine promises.

PRAYER IN THE AGE OF THE CHURCH

HOW DID THE FIRST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN JERUSALEM PRAY ?

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles it is written that in the first community of Jerusalem, educated in the life of prayer by the Holy Spirit, the faithful "devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERVENE IN THE CHURCH'S PRAYER ?

The Holy Spirit, the interior Master of Christian prayer, forms the Church in the life of prayer and allows her to enter ever more deeply into contemplation of and union with the unfathomable mystery of Christ. The forms of prayer expressed in the apostolic and canonical writings are still the normal types of prayer for Christians today.



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Coptic Icon of Pentecost

DIPPING INTO THE CATECHISM

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From the Compendium to the Catechism paragraphs: 550 – 558

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL FORMS OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER ?



They are blessing and adoration, the prayer of petition and intercession, thanksgiving and praise. The Eucharist contains and expresses all the forms of prayer.

WHAT IS “BLESSING” ?

The prayer of blessing is man’s response to God’s gifts: we bless the Almighty who first blesses us and fills us with His gifts.

HOW CAN ADORATION BE DEFINED ?

Adoration is the first attitude of each individual acknowledging that he (or she) is a creature before the Creator God. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Saviour who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the “King of Glory”, respectful silence in the presence of the “ever greater” God. Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications (from the Catechism of the Catholic Church no 2628).

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF THE PRAYER OF PETITION ?

The vocabulary of supplication in the New Testament is rich in shades of meaning: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out, even “struggle in prayer” (cf Romans 15:30). St Paul calls Christian petition “groaning”. The Holy Spirit “intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” when we do not know how to pray as we ought. The prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer is asking (petitioning) for forgiveness. A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father and His Son Jesus Christ and with one another. Asking for forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer (see CCC 2629, 2630, 2631, 2632, 2633).

IN WHAT DOES THE PRAYER OF INTERCESSION CONSIST ?

Intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. Since Abraham, it has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God’s Mercy. It conforms us and unites us to the prayer of Jesus who intercedes with the Father for all, especially sinners, even to the point of praying for those who do us harm (see Luke 23:34). The intercession of Christians recognises no boundaries: “for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions”, for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel. (see CCC 2634, 2635, 2636).

WHEN IS THANKSGIVING GIVEN TO GOD ?

The Church gives thanks to God unceasingly, above all in celebrating the Eucharist in which Christ allows her to participate in His own thanksgiving to the Father. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for His glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their Head. For the Christian every event becomes a reason for giving thanks. “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

WHAT IS THE PRAYER OF PRAISE ?

Praise is that form of prayer which recognises most immediately that God is God. It is a completely disinterested prayer: it sings God’s praise for His own sake and gives Him glory, quite beyond what He does, but simply because HE IS. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward Him who is its source and goal: the “one God”. 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”(see CCC 2639, 2640,2641,2642, 2643).

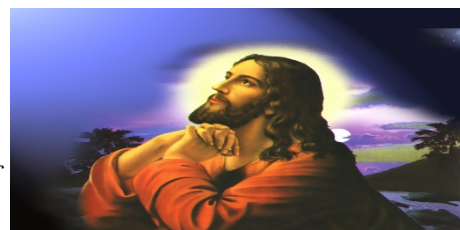
THE TRADITION OF PRAYER

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADITION IN REGARD TO PRAYER ?

In the Church it is through living Tradition that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God how to pray. In fact, prayer cannot be reduced to the spontaneous outpouring of an interior impulse; rather it implies contemplation, study and a grasp of the spiritual realities one experiences.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER ?

They are: The *Word of God* which gives us “the surpassing knowledge” of Christ (Philippians 3:8); the *Liturgy of the Church* that proclaims, makes present and communicates the mystery of salvation; the *theological virtues* (faith, hope and charity); and *everyday situations* because in them we can encounter God.



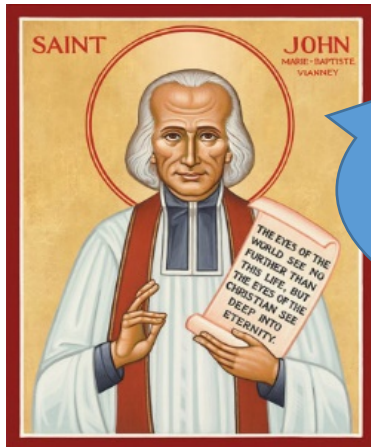
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DIPPING INTO THE CATECHISM

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From the Compendium to the Catechism paragraphs: 559-567



“I love you, Lord and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally....My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath.” St John Marie Vianney, the Curé of Ars.

IN THE CHURCH ARE THERE DIFFERENT WAYS OF PRAYING ?

In the Church there are various ways of praying that are tied to different historical, social and cultural contexts. The Magisterium of the Church has the task of discerning the fidelity of these ways of praying to the tradition of apostolic faith. It is for pastors and catechists to explain their meaning which is always related to Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS THE WAY OF OUR PRAYER ?

The way of our prayer is Christ because prayer is directed to God our Father but reaches Him only if we pray – at least implicitly – in the name of Jesus. His humanity is in effect the only way by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to our Father. Therefore liturgical prayers conclude with the formula: “through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PRAYER ?

Since the Holy Spirit is the interior Master of Christian prayer and “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26), the Church exhorts us to invoke Him and implore Him on every occasion: “Come, Holy Spirit!”

HOW IS CHRISTIAN PRAYER MARIAN ?

Because of her singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray to Mary and with Mary, the perfect “prayer” and to “magnify” and invoke the Lord with her. Mary in effect shows us the “Way” who is her Son, the one and only Mediator.

HOW DOES THE CHURCH PRAY TO MARY ?

Above all with the *Hail Mary*, the prayer with which the Church asks the intercession of the Virgin. Other Marian prayers are the *Rosary*, the *Akathistos hymn*, the *Paracletis*, and the hymns and canticles of diverse Christian traditions.

HOW ARE THE SAINTS GUIDES FOR PRAYER ?



The saints are our models of prayer. We also ask them to intercede before the Holy Trinity for us and for the whole world. Their intercession is their most exalted service to God's plan. In the communion of saints, throughout the history of the Church, there have developed different types of spiritualities that teach us how to live and to practice the way of prayer.

WHO CAN EDUCATED US IN PRAYER ?

The Christian family is the first place of education in prayer. Daily family prayer is particularly recommended because it is the first witness to the life of prayer in the Church. Catechesis, prayer groups, and "spiritual direction" constitute a school of and a help to prayer.

WHAT PLACES ARE CONDUCIVE TO PRAYER ?

One can pray anywhere but the choice of an appropriate place is not a matter of indifference when it comes to prayer. The church building is the proper place for liturgical prayer and Eucharistic adoration. Other places also help one to pray, such as a "prayer corner" at home, a monastery or a shrine.

WHAT TIMES ARE MORE SUITABLE FOR PRAYER ?

Any time is suitable for prayer but the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer: morning and evening prayer, prayer before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Eucharist, the Rosary and feasts of the liturgical year.



"We must remember God more often than we draw breath" St Gregory of Nazianzus

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DIPPING INTO THE CATECHISM

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From the Compendium to the Catechism paragraphs: 568-577

WHAT ARE THE EXPRESSIONS OF THE LIFE OF PRAYER ?

Christian tradition has preserved three forms for expressing and living prayer: vocal prayer, meditation and contemplative prayer. The feature common to all of them is the recollection of the heart.

HOW CAN VOCAL PRAYER BE DESCRIBED ?

Vocal prayer associates the body with the interior prayer of the body with the interior prayer of the heart. Even the most interior prayer, however, cannot dispense with vocal prayer. In any case it must always spring from a personal faith. With the *Our Father* Jesus has taught us a perfect form of vocal prayer.

WHAT IS MEDITATION ?

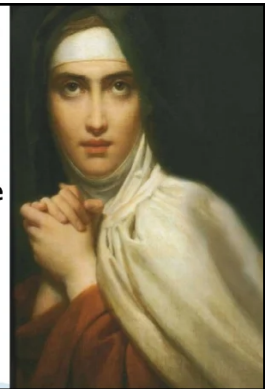
Meditation is a prayerful reflection that begins above all in the Word of God in the Bible. Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire in order to deepen our faith, convert our heart and fortify our will to follow Christ. It is a first step toward the union of love with our Lord.

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER ?

Contemplative prayer is a simple gaze upon God in silence and love. It is a gift of God, a moment of pure faith during which the one praying seeks Christ, surrenders himself to the loving will of the Father, and places his being under the action of the Holy Spirit. Saint Teresa of Avila defines contemplative prayer as the intimate sharing of friendship, “in which time is frequently taken to be alone with God who we know loves us.”

“Contemplative prayer in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him whom we know loves us...”

– St. Teresa of Jesus (of Avila)



WHY IS PRAYER A “BATTLE” ?

Prayer is a gift of grace but it always presupposes a determined response on our part because those who pray “battle” against themselves, their surroundings and especially the Tempter who does all he can to turn them away from prayer. The battle of prayer is inseparable from progress in the spiritual life. We pray as we live because we live as we pray.

ARE THERE OBJECTIONS TO PRAYER ?

Along with erroneous notions of prayer, many think they do not have the time to pray or that praying is useless. Those who pray can be discouraged in the face of difficulties and apparent lack of success. Humility, trust and perseverance are necessary to overcome these obstacles.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFICULTIES IN PRAYER ?

Distraction is a habitual difficulty in our prayer. It takes our attention away from God and can also reveal what we are attached to. Our heart therefore must humbly turn to the Lord. Prayer is often affected by *dryness*. Overcoming this difficulty allows us to cling to the Lord in faith, even without any feeling of consolation. *Acedia* is a form of spiritual laziness due to relaxed vigilance and lack of custody of the heart.

HOW MAY WE STRENGTHEN OUR FILIAL TRUST ?

Filial trust is tested when we think we are not heard. We must therefore ask ourselves if we think God is truly a Father whose will we seek to fulfil, or simply a means to obtain what we want. If our prayer is united to that of Jesus, we know that He gives us much more than this or that gift. We receive the Holy Spirit who transforms our heart.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO PRAY ALWAYS ?

Praying is always possible because the time of the Christian is the time of the risen Christ who remains “with us always” (Matthew 28:20). Prayer and Christian life are therefore inseparable.

“It is possible to offer frequent and fervent prayer even at the market place or strolling alone. It is possible also in your place of business, while buying or selling or even while cooking.” St John Chrysostom.



WHAT IS THE PRAYER OF THE *HOUR* OF JESUS ?

It is called the priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper. Jesus, the High Priest of the New Covenant, addresses it to His Father when the *hour* of His Sacrifice, the *hour* of His “passing over” to Him is approaching.

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