

PRAYER



One of the important practices of Lent is prayer. But what exactly is prayer? And how should we pray? We need only look to the saints to gain some powerful insights into the meaning of prayer.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website (usccb.org) has some very insightful quotes from the saints on the subject. Allow me to share some of them here.

"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." — CCC (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*) - #2558, St. Therese of Lisieux.

Descriptions of prayer are abundant throughout Christian history. "True prayer," wrote St. Augustine, "is nothing but love." Prayer should arise from the heart. "Prayer," said St. John Vianney, "is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself." "Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer each day," remarked St. Francis de Sales, "except when we are busy—then we need an hour." Definitions of prayer are important, but insufficient. There is a huge difference between knowing about prayer and praying. On this issue, the Rule of St. Benedict is clear, "If a man wants to pray, let him go and pray."

St. John Damascene gave a classic definition of prayer: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (CCC - #2559).

The *Catechism* clearly defines prayer as a "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (CCC, #2558). Prayer is Christian "insofar as it is communion with Christ" (CCC, #2565), and a "covenant relationship between God and man in Christ" (CCC - #2564).

It is important to remember that we understand prayer through our celebration of the Sacraments and in the Liturgy of the Hours. The word *liturgy* comes from a Greek term meaning "public work or work done on behalf of the people."

All the worshipers are expected to participate actively in each liturgy, for this is holy "work," not entertainment or a spectator event. Every liturgical celebration is an action of Christ the High Priest and of his Mystical Body, which is the Church. It therefore requires the participation of the People of God in the work of God.

Liturgy is centered on the Holy Trinity. At every liturgy the action of worship is directed to the Father, from whom all blessings come, through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We praise the Father who first called us to be his people by sending us his Son as our Redeemer and giving us the Holy Spirit so that we can continue to gather, to remember what God has done for us, and to share in the blessings of salvation.

And here are a few more teachings taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.— (CCC - #2591)

The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. - (CCC - #2644)

Because God blesses the human heart, it can in return bless him who is the source of every blessing. - (CCC - #2645)

Forgiveness, the quest for the Kingdom, and every true need are objects of the prayer of petition. - (CCC - #2646)

Prayer of intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. It knows no boundaries and extends to one's enemies. - (CCC - #2647)

Every joy and suffering, every event and need can become the matter for thanksgiving which, sharing in that of Christ, should fill one's whole life: "Give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess 5:18). - (CCC - #2648)

Prayer of praise is entirely disinterested and rises to God, lauds him, and gives him glory for his own sake, quite beyond what he has done, but simply because he - (CCC - #2649)

We can find all five of the expressions of prayer listed in above #2644 throughout the Mass. Do you know where? Think about it. Reflect on it. Is your participation in Mass truly a prayer? It could be! It should be! Why not use this Lent to pray on that?

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