

Personal Prayer: *Do we build God into our lives... or build our lives into God?*

*Virtues are formed by prayer.
Prayer preserves temperance.
Prayer suppresses anger.
Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy.
Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit,
and raises man to Heaven.*

~ St Ephraem

What is Prayer?

There are many different types of prayer.

In its simplest form, "*Prayer is conversation with God*" according to St. Clement of Alexandria, an early Father of the Church.

"Mental prayer ...is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends. It means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." St. Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains prayer in this way:

2559 "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought," are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "Man is a beggar before God."

2560 "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.

Because of our covenant relationship with God we pray both personally and liturgically. Prayer is communion with the God who loves us. It is always a response to God who has loved us first.

The Necessity of Prayer

We cannot say we have an active relationship with someone with whom we never communicate.

Jesus was in constant communion with his Father through frequently going aside to pray.

"It is simply impossible to lead a virtuous life, without the aid of prayer." Saint John Chrysostom

"Prayer brings our mind into the brightness of divine light, and exposes our will to the warmth of divine love. Nothing else can so purge our mind from its ignorance, and our will from its depraved affections. It is a blessed foundation which, as it flows, revives our good desires and causes them to bring forth fruit, washes away the stains of infirmity from our soul, and calms the passions of our hearts." p. 53*

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call him while he is near. ... turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving." Is 55: 6 & 7

"If He who was without sin prayed, how much more ought sinners to pray!" St. Cyprian of Carthage

“Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” 1 Thes. 5:17

“He (Jesus) told them a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart...” Lk 18:1

“Do nothing at all unless you begin with prayer.” St. Ephraem the Syrian

Pope John Paul II, in his international best seller, Crossing the Threshold of Hope, said *“...it is through prayer God reveals himself above all as mercy, that is, love that goes out to those who are suffering, love that sustains, uplifts and invites us to trust ... A person who prays ... makes God, who is merciful love, present in the world.”*

The Purposes and Forms of Prayer (CCC 2623-2649)

Think of the **ACTS** of the Apostles:

Adoration, Praise and Blessing – man acknowledging he is a creature before his Creator (see CCC 2628)

Contrition – “The first movement of the prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness...*” (CCC 2631)

Thanksgiving – (Eucharist) “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”¹

Supplication, Petition and Intercession – “Thy Kingdom come;” for our daily needs and others’ needs

But How can we find time to pray in this busy World?

We will never “find” time for prayer! We need to “make” time. And there are plenty of obstacles to overcome! A farmer does not just “find” grain in his bins. He cultivates it in the fields.

We need to recognize our need to spend time in communion with our Creator and then work to set aside specific time for prayer, as well as seek to live our entire lives in loving communion with God. As one priest succinctly puts it: *“No time for prayer, no faith in God!”*

Do you have a “prayer time”?

While the Bible reminds us of our need to “pray always,” the Catechism, reflecting on the Word of God as it has been lived out for 2,000 years, reminds us that “we cannot pray ‘at all times’ if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it...” CCC 2697

Although many feel they don’t have time to schedule a regular “prayer time,” it is precisely because of our busy lifestyle that we need to make time for prayer. We should begin and end our days with prayer. We need prayer for the spiritual strength to persevere in a hectic world! We make time for those things which we understand to be important to us. If we do not find time to pray, then we do not understand how vitally important it is to our spiritual survival. Prayer is our lifeline.

“The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer. Some are daily, such as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals, the Liturgy of the Hours.” CCC 2698

“The grace of God helps us to walk and supports us. He is as necessary to us as crutches are to a lame man.” St. Jean Vianney (the Cure of Ars)

“Every Christian needs a half hour of prayer each day, except when he is busy, then he needs an hour.” St. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

“Here is a rule for everyday life: Do not do anything which you cannot offer to God.” St. Jean Vianney (the Cure of Ars)

*“Imitate a little child which will walk along with one hand clinging to its father, and with the other gathering the wayside fruits. So while with one hand you collect and use the good things of this world, always with the other keep hold of your Heavenly Father, frequently turning to Him, in order to learn whether He approves your occupations and proceedings. Above all, beware of letting go your hold on His protection with the intention of gathering more abundantly, for if He is not with you, you cannot move one step without falling to the ground.” p. 147**

“Pray perseveringly, be attentive in prayer, and pray in a spirit of thanksgiving.” Col. 4:1

“Never forget that it is at the beginning of each day that God has the necessary grace for the day ready for us. He knows exactly what opportunities we shall have to sin ... and will give us everything we need if we ask him then. That is why the Devil does all he can to prevent us from saying our Morning Prayers or to make us say them badly.” St. Jean Vianney (the Cure of Ars)

“Often in the course of the day, ask for the light of the Holy Spirit.” St. Jean Vianney

Busy Moms may have to be creative, or seek the support of other family members to get even a needed 15-20 minutes of quiet time daily with the Lord.

How to Begin Your Prayer

*“Begin all prayer, whether mental or vocal, by placing yourself in the presence of God.” p. 57**

“If you want to “pray without ceasing” [1 Thes 5: 17], never cease to long for God. The continuation of your longing is the continuation of your prayer; and if you cease to long for Him, this prayer will also cease.” St. Augustine of Hippo

“But if you are to be speaking, as is right, with so great a Lord, it is good that you consider whom you are speaking with, as well as who you are, at least if you want to be polite.” St. Teresa of Avila, Doctor of the Church, encourages us to think of and be present to, the one to whom we are praying. She explains that even in everyday relationships it is considered impolite if we are always distracted with something or someone other than the person to whom we are speaking. Lest we become scrupulous however, she also tells us not to fret if on occasion we fall asleep during prayer. She explains that, just as any good parent, our Heavenly Father gazes lovingly on his children as they sleep.

Obstacles to prayer

Distractions (CCC2729), **a lack of vigilance** (CCC2730), **dryness** (CCC2731), **unrepentant sin** or a **lack of humility before God**, **resentments** or a **lack of charity** toward our neighbor can all be obstacles to prayer and part of our spiritual struggle.

There are Many Different Ways to Pray

There is individual private prayer, shared prayer and liturgical prayer (the prayer of the Church). The highest form of liturgical prayer is the mass.

There is vocal prayer, sung prayer, meditation, recited prayers or scriptures, gestures (kneeling, bowing, lifting of hands, standing...), spontaneous prayer, mental prayer (prayer without words which comes from the heart), contemplation...

What about Praying for (or with) Others?

Pope St. Gregory the Great tells us that: *“He causes his prayers to be of more avail to himself, who offers them also for others.”*

“When we are linked by the power of prayer, we, as it were, hold each other’s hand as we walk side by side along a slippery path; and thus by the bounteous disposition of charity, it comes about that the harder each one leans on the other, the more firmly we are riveted together in brotherly love.” ~ Pope St. Gregory the Great

“...[W]here two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” Matt. 18:20.

Family prayer, and prayer between spouses, is especially important. Parents have an obligation, not only to pray with their children, but to teach them by word and example to embrace their lives through the lens of prayer.

Here is a guide to remembering some of the basic components of personal prayer

P raise brings us into God’s presence.	... Hallowed be Thy Name
R ead and meditate on Sacred Scripture.	“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:63)
A sk God to speak to you and listen.	Thy Kingdom come...
Say Y es to His will.	Thy will be done...
E ntreat the Lord for your needs and others’.	Give us this day...
R epent and resolve to follow Jesus more closely.	Forgive us our trespasses...
Don’t forget to S ay Thank You for all God has done for you.	“Give thanks to the Lord in prayer.” (Sirach 39:6)

Prayer on Sunday and Holydays

Let us just briefly mention that daily personal prayer would be severely impoverished if it does not find its source and summit in the Eucharistic celebration of the Lord’s Day.

“Sundays, centered on the Eucharist, are kept holy primarily by prayer. The cycle of the liturgical year and its great feasts are also basic rhythms of the Christian’s life of prayer.” CCC 2698

After you Pray

“On leaving this fervent prayer, you must beware of giving your heart any sudden jar, which might spill the precious balm with which devotion has filled it. I mean that if possible you should remain some brief season in quietness, and gradually pass from prayer to your needful occupations, seeking to retain as long as possible the holy thoughts and inclinations you have been exercising. A man who has received a costly vessel full of some precious cordial would carry it most carefully. He would walk slowly, and not look idly about him, but keep his eyes now on the road before him for fear some stone or false step should endanger him, now at his vase for fear he should spill its contents. Do the like when you cease your meditation; do not at once plunge into distractions, but merely look straight before you; if you must of necessity enter into worldly conversation, you cannot help yourself,

*but you can be on the watch, and mount guard over your heart, so that you may lose as little as possible of the precious cordial you have obtained in prayer.” p.p. 67, 68**

*“When we walk in a beautiful garden we usually gather some few choice flowers, inhale their fragrance, and carry them away with us retaining and enjoying them through the day. So when our mind has fed upon some mystery by meditation, we should select some few points which especially strike us, and are most calculated to benefit us, and dwell upon them, inhaling their spiritual fragrance (throughout the day).” p. 66**

*“Above all, ... you must be careful to retain the resolutions to which you have come through meditation, on your return to active duties.” p.67**

“Man is not nourished by what he swallows, but by what he digests and uses.” - Hippocrates

* An Introduction to the Devout Life, St. Francis de Sales, bishop, confessor and doctor of the Church.

Prayer Is an Expression of Love, Saint John Paul II, DEC. 12, 2001 (from Zenit.org).

- John Paul II says that prayer cannot be understood without first appreciating the language of love.

“Prayer is not adverse to repetition, as someone who is in love does not hesitate to repeatedly express his affection for the beloved,” the Pope told thousands of pilgrims attending the midweek general audience in the Vatican...

The Book of Daniel recounts how God saved the Maccabean youths from the torment ordered by King Nebuchadnezzar in the second century B.C. Their words of blessing and thanksgiving still inspire prayer today.

“This hymn is similar to a litany, repetitive but at the same time new: Its invocations rise to God like billowing incense, which fills the atmosphere in similar but unique ways,” the Pontiff explained. In his prayer, the believer also repeats his praise to God, because to *“emphasize the same things is a sign of intensity and of the multiple nuances of interior feelings and affections,”* John Paul II added.

The Christian is conscious of the fact that, with his death and resurrection, Jesus opened the *“new heavens and a new earth,”* and *“a different, renewed man comes into being in the image of his creator through the birth from on high,”* the Pope continued.

“Thus, in singing this canticle the Christian believer is invited to contemplate the world of the first creation, intuiting the outline of the second, inaugurated with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus,” the Holy Father concluded.

ⁱ 1 Thess 5:18; Col 4:2