

PRAYER IN CHRISTIAN LIFE



Jean-Francois Millet: The Angelus

The title of this work is *The Angelus*. The Angelus is a prayer which is repeated three times daily; at 6 am, noon and 6 pm. Often church bells are often rung at these times to announce the Angelus. A church tower can be seen in the distance and we can imagine hearing the bells pealing over the open fields. The couple would not be in the fields at 6 am and low sunlight in the sky shows that it must be the end of the day, the evening Angelus.

Opening Prayer: Angelus

Leader: The Angel of the Lord declared to Mary:

Response: And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.

All: Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Leader: Behold the handmaid of the Lord:

Response: Be it done unto me according to Thy word.

All: Hail Mary...

Leader: And the Word was made Flesh:

Response: And dwelt among us.

All: Hail Mary...

Leader: Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God,

Response: that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Leader: Let us pray:

All: Pour forth, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy grace into our hearts; that we, to whom the incarnation of Christ, Thy Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by His Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of His Resurrection, through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

WHY DO WE PRAY?

- Are we asking God to change things for us, or to change us for the better? If we ask God to change us; then we arrive at the deepest meaning of prayer.
- In prayer we are not making a sacrifice to change God's will. Rather, we are trying to understand and accept God's will.
- We need to relate to God, our Father, who brought us into existence. Pray is a way of seeking that relationship.
- Life is a journey from God who is our beginning. We journey toward God who is our destiny. We travel on this journey with God in our prayers.
- We travel toward God, with God and in God. Prayer is not a human initiative, but a divine one.
- We are always in a close relationship with God. We are in God. Though distinct from God, we are never separated from God.

WHAT IS PRAYER

- "The Holy Spirit, whose anointing permeates our whole being, is the interior master of Christian prayer." (CCC 2672)

- Prayer is a conversation with God based on mutual love.
- Prayer can be done individually or in a group. In silence or vocally. Spontaneously or use common prayers.
- Even Saints often felt that their prayers were inadequate. Prayer must come from the heart and requires effort.

THE CALL TO PRAY

- The Old Testament recounts how God taught the ancient Jewish patriarchs and prophet to pray.
- Christ taught his disciples to pray. We will talk about the Our Father after the break.
- The Gospels tell us about Christ's intense prayers: "And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him. And when he came to the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not enter into temptation.' And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.' And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (Luke 22:39-45)
- The Holy Spirit inspires us to pray. We pray to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and Son to lead us in the ways of prayer: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the very Spirit intercedes with signs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-37)

TYPES OF PRAYER

- Prayers of petition ask God for good things. It is centered on the desire for God's kingdom to come. We acknowledge that we are created and totally depend on God.
- Prayers of intercession ask God to help others, especially sinners. We express our communion with all God's people. It makes us realize that we are a communion of saints; our lives are intertwined together toward God. "The saints do not cease to intercede with the Father for us...their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped." (956, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
- Prayers of thanksgiving acknowledge the good things God has done.

- Prayers of praise laud God for His own sake and give Him glory. We praise God for who He is, not what he has done.
- The mass contains all these types of prayers.

BATTLE OF PRAYER

- Prayer is not just something we do on occasion. It is not a fragment of our lives. Prayer is our life lived with a renewed heart.
- We should grow in prayer as we age. To do this we must improve our prayer life.
- Discipline and knowledge are important to overcome distractions. Distractions are inevitable; do not be overly anxious about them.
- Persevere in prayer. We come to prayer from busy, noisy, and hectic lives. You should keep particular times and places for your daily prayer, otherwise you won't pray every day. Sunday mass should be one of these times.
- Listen to God, don't do all the talking. A life of prayer is to be conscious that we are in the presence of God. Eucharistic adoration is quite and contemplative; this helps us hear God's voice in us.
- We must pray always, not in the sense of always saying prayers, but letting our lives be animated by prayer.
 - "He 'prays without ceasing' who unites prayer to works and good works to prayer. Only in this way can we consider as realizable the principle of praying without ceasing." (Origen, De Oratione 12)
 - "We pray as we live, because we live as we pray" (CCC 2725)

JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY: THE OUR FATHER

"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: 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. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6: 5-15)

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER

- Meditation is a quest to understand God and what our response should be.
 - Meditation involves thinking and reasoning.
 - We can meditate on events, spiritual readings, or in front of an icon.
 - Works of charity are a good subject for meditation.
- Vocal prayers are the easiest means to start a prayer life.
 - The mass is filled with many prayers.
 - The rosary is often used as a group prayer (One Our Father, ten Hail Mary's times 5)
 - Vocal prayer is our spiritual thoughts put into words. This is a necessary element of the life of prayer because we are body and spirit.
 - The vocal prayers of others add to our prayers in the liturgy.
- Contemplative prayer is an attempt to be alone with God.
 - We say nothing and allow God to talk to us. It is simply resting in God's presence.
 - Quiet! This is the most difficult form of prayer because we are easily distracted. Contemplation is gazing upon Christ: a gazing that has no need for words, thoughts, or ideas.
 - It is only by love, not by thought that we come to know God.
 - Eucharist adoration, Pilgrimages

REMAINING SCHEDULE

Sunday, April 14, 2024: Participation in Parish Life and Renewal, no readings
Charitable Activities, no readings

Sunday, May 26, 2024: 11:00 am (arrive by 10:30): Adult confirmations, St. Matthew Cathedral

PRE-EASTER RETREAT

I will offer excerpts from three works, the first on holiness, a second on the Easter Vigil and the third on Easter's effect on our lives. Each reading will be followed by a short period silent prayer and contemplation. The first reading is from *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and be Glad), which is an Apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis on the call to holiness in today's world

19. A Christian cannot think of his or her mission on earth without seeing it as a path of holiness, for "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (*1 Thessalonians* 4:3). Each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.

20. That mission has its fullest meaning in Christ, and can only be understood through him. At its core, holiness is experiencing, in union with Christ, the mysteries of his life. It consists in uniting ourselves to the Lord's death and resurrection in a unique and personal way, constantly dying and rising anew with him.

23. You too need to see the entirety of your life as a mission. Try to do so by listening to God in prayer and recognizing the signs that he gives you. Always ask the spirit what Jesus expects from you at every moment of your life and in every decision you must make, so as to discern its place in the mission you have received. Allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today's world.

24. May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life. Let yourself be transformed. Let yourself be renewed by the Spirit, so that this can happen, lest you fail in your precious mission. The Lord will bring it to fulfilment despite your mistakes and missteps, provided that you do not abandon the path of love but remain ever open to his supernatural grace, which purifies and enlightens.

(Period of silence and prayer)

The second reading speaks of the Easter Vigil, particularly of the pascal candle and fire. It is from *Meeting Christ in the Sacraments* by Fr. Colman O'Neill, O.P.

The Easter Vigil liturgy is all the more remarkable in that it throws off this cloistered restraint and breaks out in a display of enthusiasm which is almost disconcertingly out of character with the rest of the Roman rite. For this one ceremony the Church reverts to the astonishment and the hardly controlled joy of the early Christians who had seen the risen Lord. Centered on the paschal candle, the Easter liturgy is a triumphant celebration of the body of Christ.

Planted with the five grains of incense, the candle represents the wounded body of Christ; lit with the paschal fire, it stands for the risen, glorified body. From this symbolic flame the candles of the congregation are lighted...

The simple, dramatic ceremonies of Easter, almost primitive in their intensity of feeling when compared with other rites of the Church, go to the heart of Christianity. The Church contemplates the mystery of herself; in the multitude of lighted candles she sees the glory of the risen Christ communicated to Christians by baptism. In celebrating the resurrection of Christ, she celebrates the fact that all her members have risen with him. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall enlighten you" (Ep 5:14); this is the Easter hymn of the Church. Now that Christ has passed from death to everlasting life before the face of the Father, mankind has passed with him... All sin, even what still lies in the future, has been overcome...

(Period of silence and prayer)

The third reading speaks of the "joy" of this feast and how it fills "time". It is from *For the Life of the World* by Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox priest.

And thus Easter is not a commemoration of an event, but-every year-the fulfillment of time itself, of our real time. For we still live in the same three dimension of time: in the world of nature, in the world of history, in the world of expectation. And in each one of them man is in a secret search for joy, that is, for an ultimate meaning and perfection, for an ultimate fulfillment which he does not find. Time always points to a feast, to a joy, which by itself it cannot give or realize. So needful of meaning, time becomes the very form and image of meaninglessness.

But on Easter night the meaning is given. And it is not given by means of "explanation" or even "commemoration," but as a gift of joy itself, the joy of participation in the new time of the Kingdom... What is this night of which St. Gregory of Nyssa says that it becomes brighter than the day and which the

Orthodox call the “bright night”... The only reality is joy and this joy is given. “Enter ye all into the joy of your Lord, You who are rich and you the poor, come to the feast, Receive all the riches of loving-kindness... And let no one bewail his poverty. *For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.*” And the whole service is nothing but a response to this joy, its acceptance, its celebration, the affirmation of its reality...

After the Easter night comes the morning, and then another night and another new day. Time begins again, but it is now filled from “inside” with that unique and truly “eschatological” experience of joy.

(Period of silence and prayer)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.