

20250727. 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Lord, teach us to pray.

Jesus prayed constantly. Saint Luke tells us that when Jesus was baptized, the heavens opened while he was praying. Jesus prayed before choosing the twelve apostles and before asking the apostles who they said he was. He prayed regularly in the synagogues and the Temple. He prayed before the prediction of his Passion and during the Transfiguration. Jesus prayed at the Last Supper, in Gethsemane, and on the cross.

Jesus prayed for extended periods, sometimes spending the entire night in prayer. The Gospels rarely describe what his prayer consisted of, telling us simply that he prayed very often. One thing is clear: the apostles were so moved by the consistency and depth of his prayer that they asked him: "Lord, teach us to pray."

Jesus responded with what is now called the Lord's Prayer. It's called "the Lord's Prayer" because Jesus, our Lord and example of prayer, is its author. It is so perfect that Saint Augustine states that if someone were to examine all the prayers in Scripture, they would not find anything that isn't included in the Lord's Prayer.

What is prayer? Let's consider that prayer is not an activity, but a way of being and existing—a way of giving oneself in the form of love. Love is intimacy, intimacy is communication, and communication with God is prayer. Lovers, for example, express their words, gestures, and feelings to one another; in fact, one of the leading causes of breakdown in a love relationship is a lack of communication.

Prayer involves our entire being, body, soul, and emotions. That's one reason we, Catholics, are sometimes criticized; for an outsider, it looks like we stand, sit, bow, recline, and make signs. But in reality, what we are doing is worshipping and praying with our entire being, that is, with our whole body and soul. God reveals himself to us; through prayer, we reveal ourselves to God. Prayer is, in a way, our preparation for heaven.

Prayer requires faith, hope, and charity; we all understand that in some way, but what prayer requires most is humbleness; it also requires some sacrifice. The way to measure love for someone or something is by assessing the amount of time we are willing to dedicate to that person.

We often ask ourselves, "How much time a day should we dedicate to prayer?" There's no correct answer, but Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians tells us: Pray always. We might say that praying all the time is practically impossible, especially if we think that praying requires sitting in a pew at the chapel. However, as we mentioned earlier, we must make prayer an integral part of our being.

We can, for example, pray while we work; while we do our daily tasks, we can, of course, offer our sufferings as a gift of prayer. Besides Mass and Adoration, these are some of the best times to pray: 1) when we wake up in the morning, 2) before our meals, 3) when we receive the sacraments or a blessing, and 4) before going to bed. We must not forget the importance of praying before making a difficult decision; that is what Jesus himself did.

The Church teaches us that there are two types of prayer: individual and public; we need both. The Church instructs us to pray individually or privately; vocal or spoken prayer is a good way to begin. Spoken prayers are what we learn at home, such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, and the Gloria.

The second form of private prayer is meditation. Not yoga meditation; that's something else and not what I'm referring to. In yoga, you mostly place yourself at the center. Christian meditation places Jesus at the center. The most common form of Christian meditation is our devotions, such as the rosary and the chaplet of Divine Mercy.

And the third and highest form of private prayer is contemplation. There are several traditions regarding contemplation, but it essentially involves focusing on God and refraining from speaking a single word. God whispers in our ears, but if we don't stop talking, we can't hear him.

Now, let's talk about public Prayer. The perfect form of public prayer is the Holy Mass. It is the sacrifice of God the Son, offered to God the Father, through the power of God the Holy Spirit. Yes, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ offers Himself entirely to the Father, but the interesting part is that He invites us and takes us with Him; redeemed, rather than broken. Some describe the Mass as "God offering God to God," and that is why the Mass, unlike private prayer, is the perfect prayer. That is why we all need to come and participate in the Mass.

Sometimes we get distracted during private prayer, as well as during liturgical prayer or Mass. Some people may argue that attending Mass and being distracted is a waste of time and a lack of respect, and they prefer not to participate. Coming to Mass, even if you get distracted, will never be a waste of time. Simply making the effort to attend Mass is considered an act of prayer. It's the same for adoration; simply being here means you've made an effort, and that counts. And remember, your part of the job is to get here; once you're here, it's the Lord who does all the work on you.

Sometimes we don't want to attend Mass, and some might say, 'If I don't feel like going to Mass, I'd rather not go. Again, prayer is an act of love, and love is an intentional act. Sometimes we have to do things out of love, even if we don't want to. So, even if we don't want to come to Mass, and we do, we can offer that sacrifice of love to God, and He will take it into account.

Sometimes we get frustrated because we think God doesn't answer our prayers. God is always aware of our needs and always answers our prayers. Sometimes He says yes, and sometimes He says "no, not yet." But God will never give us a snake when we think we're asking for a fish. God always answers our prayers in accordance with His divine plan; He usually has something better in store for us, and sometimes we don't even imagine it. It is a good idea to pray to God that our plans align with His.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't pray to God because God knows everything I need?" No, God awaits our requests, and it's up to us to make them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that "the dignity of God's children lies in their free will" (CCC 2736). God wants us to seek him on our own, to do our part. If God gave us everything we need without us doing anything, then what would be the point?

In summary, prayer is not an activity; it is a way of life. God is here to help us, but we must do our part and ask for his help. So, in the words of our Lord:

"...ask and you will receive;
seek and you will find;
knock and the door will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks, receives;
and the one who seeks, finds;
and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened."

Gen 18:20-32, Psalm 138:1-2, 2-3, 6-7, 7-8, Col 2:12-14, Rom 8:15bc, Luke 11:1-13