

PRAYER IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

Sunday, March 28, 2021

Opening Prayer: Angelus, Gregorian Chant

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)



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.

The peacefulness of the fields and the birds above in the sky show a harmony between the couple and nature. The couple fits perfectly with their natural setting. The natural world is good because it was created by God as a gift to mankind. The couple are tilling and managing God's gifts rather than abusing these gifts.

The dress of the couple indicates they are peasant farmers. The wheelbarrow behind the woman, the basket and pitchfork in the foreground show that these peasants have been working the fields. The piles of hay on the fields in the background show the result of their work. The work of the day is completed; the man and woman are tired. Their work of creation in the fields ties the couple to the Creator in heaven and all His creation. They pause at the end of the day to pray just as God rested after creating the world.

The posture of the man and woman is that of prayer. Their heads are bowed, and hands are folded. Their bodies are praying and certainly their minds are also praying. They are standing, not kneeling, not pleading. This shows an upright nature to their work and lifestyle.

This couple is in the habit of praying. The Angelus is prayed daily at the same times. Prayer is as much a part of their lives as working the land during the day and resting in the evening. Their habit of praying often leads to a deeper and more fruitful prayer life and calmness in their lives.

With their heads bowed, we imagine that they are saying the Angelus in a low voice, rather than lifting their heads and projecting their words. Or perhaps they remain silently listening after the completion of the Angelus. In their low voices or in silence, the couple is listening. This scene does not show the tension and anxiety associated with pleading or the loud voice and exuberance associated with glorifying.

The setting sun, birds seen high in the sky, distant church bells, beauty of the countryside and the couple praying all give a sense of peace and calm. Through prayer, the couple is resting in God and in His creation. Trust in God creates a peace and calm in the souls of this couple.

The light of day is slowly fading, but not suddenly or turbulently. The sun is still bright in the left horizon, and gradually fades to dusk at the right. The couple in

the foreground and the birds in the sky are unconcerned with the coming night. The end of the day is not a defeat to be mourned or a goal to be celebrated. For the couple, the fading of the day is not defeat but rather a part of our pilgrimage toward God.

- What are your experiences with prayer?

BREAK

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)

GOD TEACHES US TO PRAY

- Genesis 15: Abram asks for a son.
- Genesis 18:16-33: Abraham intercedes for the city of Sodom.
- 1 Samuel 3: God calls the prophet Samuel.
- 1 Kings 18: The prophet Elijah challenges the people.
- Psalm 65: Thanksgiving for God’s blessings.
- Psalm 95: A call to praise and obedience.
- Luke 4:1-13: The devil tempts Jesus during His prayers.
- Romans 8:26-37: St. Paul writes of the Holy Spirit helping us to pray.

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER

- 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.
- Meditation is a quest to understand what God wants 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.
- 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

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, our 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)

REMAINING SCHEDULE

Saturday, April 3, 2021: Easter Vigil rehearsal @ 8:00 pm, mass @ 9:00 pm

Sunday, April 4, 2021: Easter Sunday, no class

Sunday, April 11, 2021: Participation in Parish Life and Renewal, no readings

Sunday, April 18, 2021: Charitable Activities and Social Justice, no readings