

A Life of Prayer

Objective:

Developing a life of prayer is a transformative journey that nurtures the soul and deepens our connection with the divine. It starts with cultivating a habit of daily communication with God, expressing gratitude, seeking guidance, and finding solace. Diversifying prayer forms enriches this journey, allowing us to grow spiritually and align our desires with God's will. Through persistent prayer, we develop a profound relationship with God, empowering us to face life's challenges with grace and resilience. It becomes an evolving journey of communion with the divine, illuminating our path with God's presence.

We pray not only to discover what we think and feel, but also to learn what God thinks and feels. Prayer is a two-way street. When we pray, we give our all-knowing God a chance to communicate with us. That means we have to LISTEN. This is risky business. By inviting God to speak to us, we risk being changed; that is, we risk having our attitudes altered, our perspectives broadened, our plans modified.

So, Prayer is really just about developing a relationship with God. And, as Thomas Keating said, "The only way you can fail at prayer is to not show up."

Song Suggestion: Prayer of St. Francis (Blue 368, Red 721)

Bible and Catechism Readings:

1 John 5:14

And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for all is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.

Romans 12:12

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer

Catechism 2567

God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.

Catechism 2558

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" ... This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.

Catechism 2560

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."

Saint:

The Catholic patron saint of prayer is Saint Teresa of Avila, also known as Saint Teresa of Jesus. She was a Carmelite nun and a prominent mystic, theologian, and writer in the 16th century. Saint Teresa is highly revered for her deep devotion to prayer and her spiritual writings, which have had a significant impact on Christian contemplative traditions.

She emphasized the importance of developing a close personal relationship with God through prayer, describing prayer as an intimate conversation with the divine. Saint Teresa's most famous work, "The Interior Castle," delves into the different stages of the soul's journey towards union with God, highlighting the significance of prayer in this spiritual growth.

Vignette: As the golden rays of the setting sun gently bathed the room in warm hues, Maria sat by the window, holding her rosary beads in her hands. The smooth feel of each bead between her fingers brought a sense of comfort and familiarity. It was a cherished heirloom passed down through generations in her family, each bead carrying the weight of countless prayers offered by her ancestors.

With closed eyes, Maria began her quiet ritual, the beads slipping through her fingers like whispered secrets. As she recited each prayer, she could feel the weight of her worries slowly lift, replaced by a sense of tranquility. The sound of soft footsteps echoed from the hallway, and her young daughter, Isabella, tiptoed into the room. Curiosity sparkled in her eyes as she watched her mother, mesmerized by the sight of the rosary.

Maria smiled, gently inviting Isabella to sit beside her. She explained the significance of the rosary, how each bead represented a prayer and how it helped her connect with her faith and find peace. Intrigued, Isabella reached out and touched the beads, her small hand mingling with her mother's.

In that intimate moment, the rosary became more than just a string of beads. It became a symbol of love, faith, and the bond between generations. Maria knew that one day, the rosary would be passed down to her daughter, continuing the tradition of prayer and devotion. As they sat there together, basking in the warm glow of the sunset, Maria couldn't help but feel grateful for this timeless connection that the rosary had brought to her family, binding them together across the ages.

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

Is daily prayer as vital as breathing? Explain how and why? Describe your relationship with God through daily prayer.

How often do you pray? What benefits can you share from your prayer life that others might learn from?

Do you ever read the Bible? How can the Bible drive your prayer life?

What's the hardest thing for you in establishing a prayer life? Time? Priority?

Do we incorporate gratitude and thankfulness in our prayers to God?

Are our prayers answered? How would we know? Do we recognize that it is God's will be done and not ours?

Resources:

Types of Prayer

1. Prayers of Adoration: These prayers express deep love and reverence for God. They focus on praising and worshipping God for His greatness and majesty.
2. Prayers of Thanksgiving: These prayers are expressions of gratitude to God for His blessings, gifts, and providence in one's life.
3. Prayers of Contrition: Also known as prayers of repentance or penance, these prayers seek God's forgiveness for sins and express a sincere desire to turn away from wrongdoing.
4. Prayers of Petition: Prayers of petition ask God for specific needs, both for oneself and for others. They involve asking for guidance, healing, protection, or assistance in various situations.
5. Intercessory Prayers: Similar to prayers of petition, intercessory prayers involve asking for God's help on behalf of others, such as family, friends, or those in need.
6. Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office): This is a structured set of prayers and readings used by priests, religious, and some lay Catholics throughout the day. It includes psalms, hymns, and biblical readings.
7. Rosary: A popular Catholic prayer that involves meditating on the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary while reciting specific prayers.
8. Novena Prayers: Novenas are nine-day prayer periods dedicated to a particular intention, saint, or devotion. They often involve praying specific prayers or meditations each day for nine consecutive days.
9. Prayers to Saints: Catholics often pray to saints, asking for their intercession and guidance in various matters.
10. Act of Faith, Hope, and Charity: These prayers express one's beliefs in God, hope in His promises, and love for God and others.
11. The Mass: The central liturgical celebration of the Catholic Church, where various prayers and rituals are performed, including the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
12. Personal Conversational Prayers: These are informal, spontaneous prayers spoken directly to God, often done in one's own words.

Action Plan:

Set a Regular Schedule: Choose specific times during the day when you can comfortably engage in prayer, such as morning, afternoon, and evening.

Create a Sacred Space: Designate a quiet and peaceful area in your home or outdoors where you can focus on prayer without distractions.

Start with Short Prayers: Begin with brief and simple prayers to build consistency and gradually increase the duration and complexity of your prayers over time.

Choose a Prayer Style: Explore various prayer styles, such as silent meditation, reciting scripted prayers, or conversational prayer, to find the approach that resonates with you the most.

Stay Committed and Patient: Like any habit, starting prayer requires patience and commitment, so be kind to yourself during this process and keep trying even if it takes time to establish a routine.

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