

# **Christian Prayer and Spirituality**



# Christian Prayer and Spirituality

Prayer is how we communicate with God. It is meant to be a conversation, meaning both parties talk and both listen.

- There are 5 **categories** of prayer. Our prayer life should include a good blend of ALL of these.
  - Petition- Asking God for something
  - Thanksgiving- Giving thanks for the ways you have been blessed
  - Intercession- Asking God for something for someone else
  - Praise- Giving glory to God for all he has done
  - Adoration- Simply loving God for who he is.

The tendency for many of us can be to live exclusively in petition with only a little thanks and intercession to break it up. We must find ways to include all five.

- One common mistake we make is treating God as a cosmic butler, simply waiting around to serve us, if we would only pray. Or as a vending machine . . . I put in a prayer and out comes the results I wanted.
- God is our king; we are the ones who serve him. He is also a loving Father and as a loving Father, he knows what is best for us. Thus, our prayers are not always answered in the way we desire them to be.
- God does answer all prayers. Sometimes that answer is “No” or “Not yet.”
- The saints have told us that prayer is ultimately NOT about changing God's mind, but rather changing our hearts. When we pray, what we really do is ask that God help us to understand His plan and trust in his will. For example, if I pray for a sick person, I'm not just asking that God "change his mind about that person being sick." I am also asking God to help me and those affected to trust in His plan for that individual, and of course, if that plan includes physical healing, that is great, but either way, let me find comfort in that God is watching over us.

This does not mean that our prayers are pointless? God does listen and sometimes all He needed to bring something about was to hear us ask for it and demonstrate our faith in Him. Either way, prayer should always lead to our greater trust and reliance on God.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Different Prayer Methods

Christ tells us that we should all take time to go alone and in a quiet place to be with God in prayer. But that doesn't mean this is the only type of prayer.

- Silent prayer (in your heart)
- Vocal prayer (out loud)
- Memorized prayer
- Reading the Bible
- Litanies
- Rosaries
- Novenas (9 days of prayer based on the time the apostles spent in the upper room praying between the Ascension and Pentecost)
- Praise and Worship
- Using the skills God has given you with a sense of attributing success to His glory for giving you those abilities

- Doing everyday things with great love and purposefulness. St. Therese of Lisieux (The Little Flower) said, “Do little things with great love”. It is how much we have loved on this earth that will determine our place in heaven.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### Three Different Kinds of Prayer

- **Verbal**- this is the use of **words**, silent or vocal in order to communicate with God.
- **Meditative**- this is when we use our **imagination** to think upon and bring forth and emotional experience with God.
- **Contemplative**- this is placing ourselves in the midst of **God's presence**. It is not so much a verbal communication, nor an imagination but just a being present in God. This higher form is something that we should all strive to one day be able to achieve in our prayer life, but don't feel bad if you can't do it now. Ask God to help you pray better.

Often the hardest part of prayer is building up the habit. When we create prayer routines, we establish habits that bring us closer to God

It is common for our faith lives to go up and down in hills and valleys. Sometimes we feel God's presence and power, and sometimes we feel dry and distant. Prayer is the means by which we can traverse both, ensuring that our faith is more than just feelings and warm emotions.

“All their time is spent looking for satisfaction and spiritual consolation; they can never read enough spiritual books, and one minute they are meditating on one subject and the next on another, always hunting for some gratification in the things of God. God very rightly and discreetly and lovingly denies this satisfaction to these beginners. If he did not, they would fall into innumerable evils because of their spiritual gluttony and craving for sweetness. This is why it is important for these beginners to enter the dark night and be purged of this childishness. – St. John of the Cross; Dark Night of the Soul - 6.6.(2)

If you are struggling to pray, find a mentor to help guide you! Find someone who prays well and ask him or her for help in your own prayer life.

Start small. Prayer is not about quantity, but **quality**. Don't feel like you have to pray for hours and hours. Often a few minutes of genuine commune with God is far greater than hours of disconnected drone. Prayer is a relationship, not a task.

“Much more is accomplished by a single word of the Our Father said, now and then, from our heart, than by the whole prayer repeated many times in haste and without attention.” --Saint Teresa of Avila

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### The Goal of Christian Prayer

- Christian **prayer** should have as its goal or object, building a life of perfection in accordance with the two-fold charity, or divine love, towards God and neighbor. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mat. 5:48)

- Authentic Christian Spirituality is based upon the truth of the Trinity and how it is revealed and communicated to us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit by the Church. It is important to realize that spirituality presupposes morality, which in turn presupposes doctrine.
- There can be no division between doctrine and authentic spirituality, because spirituality is about truth and union with the thrice-Holy God.
- Authentic Christian Spirituality is not just something that we think is correct, but that which is in line with traditional Catholic spirituality (e.g. some incorrect prayer methods are Centering prayer, Transcendental meditation, etc.).
- It is not about emptying ourselves, but filling our being with God’s spirit and life (grace).

### The Goal of Christian Spirituality

- Christian **spirituality** must have as its ultimate goal the union of man with God.
- This union can be manifested in this world, but points to the ultimate union, which is eternal life with God in heaven.
- Union with God can best be attained in this world by uniting ourselves with Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- The Eucharist is the ultimate way of uniting ourselves with God while on this earth. The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life”. (*Lumen Gentium 11*)

### Types of Spiritualities

Within the Catholic Church, though, there are several authentic or true spiritualities that we can speak of, such as the following:

- Corporate followers of saintly Christians (i.e. Franciscan, Salesian, Dominican, etc.)
- National dispositions / Cultures (i.e. Mexican, Irish, etc.)
- Historical periods (i.e. Pre-reformation, Vatican II, Tridentine, etc.)
- Doctrinal / Content (i.e. Eucharistic, Marian, etc.)
- Specialized / Vocational (i.e. Missionary, Lay, etc.)

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

### 3 Steps to Developing the Spiritual Life of Perfection

- **Detachment** of the material world (Purgation – St. Francis De Sales – Introduction to the Devout Life)
  - **Rom. 8:5-8 ff** For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is **death**, but the concern of the spirit is **life and peace**. For the concern of the flesh is **hostility** toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh **cannot please God . . .**

#### The First Purgation - *Confess* your mortal sins

- Purge the affection of sin - shun the sin and don’t “look back” at it. Some hate having to give up the sin. Include mortifications (e.g. fasting, alms giving . . .)

**The Second Purgation** – The conviction of the great evil sin brings upon us. We must have a deep and intense contrition through *meditations* like the following:

- Put yourself in the *presence* of God and ask him to inspire you.
- *Humble* yourself before God
- Focus on our ‘teleology’ our end for which we were created – *eternal life*.
- Consider how *good* God has been to you blessed physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Recall to mind the *sins* you have committed throughout your life, especially the ingratitude to God.
- Consider your *death*; how for you the world will cease to exist and you will enter into *judgment*.
- Meditate on *hell*. Imagine yourself there, suffering for all eternity.
- Meditate on *Heaven*. See yourself in the beauty and happiness with God and your loved ones. See yourself with your guardian angel and that you have *chosen* eternal life over death.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- **Enlightenment**

- Through the purging of our attachment to worldly things, we are able to receive the things of the spirit.
  - **Eph. 1:16-19** do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might

- **Union with God**

- **Rom. 6:3-5** Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into **union** with him through a death like his, we shall also be **united** with him in the resurrection.
- **Eph. 4:2-5** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the **unity** of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- **John 6:56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

# Christian Prayer and Spirituality – The Interior Life

Henry Avila, July 2021

The Interior Life means finding God in all things since he made all things that exist. It is a life of contemplation in action; meaning that we must take the time to be with God in that most inner chamber of our heart where he awaits us.

And he said [to Elijah], “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (*1 Kings 19:11-12*)

A prayer life is essential to the Christian life. Prayer is how we communicate with God. It is meant to be a conversation, meaning both parties talk and both listen.

- There are **5 categories** of prayer. Our prayer life should include a good blend of ALL of these.
  - **Petition** – Asking God for something
  - **Thanksgiving** – Giving thanks for the ways you have been blessed and what you have been given
  - **Intercession** – Asking God for something for someone else
  - **Praise** – Giving glory to God for all he has done
  - **Adoration** – Simply loving God for who he is.

The tendency for many of us can be to live exclusively in petition with only a little thanks and intercession to break it up. We must find ways to include all five.

- One common mistake we make is treating God as a cosmic butler, simply waiting around to serve us, if we would only pray. Or as a vending machine . . . I put in a prayer and out comes the results I wanted.
- God is our king; we are the ones who serve him. He is also a loving Father and as a loving Father, he knows what is best for us. Thus, our prayers are not always answered in the way we desire them to be.
- God does answer all prayers. Sometimes that answer is “No” or “Not yet.”
- The saints have told us that prayer is ultimately NOT about changing God's mind, but rather changing our hearts. When we pray, what we really do is ask that God help us to understand His plan and trust in his will. For example, if I pray for a sick person, I'm not just asking that God "change his mind about that person being sick." I am also asking God to help me and those affected to trust in His plan for that individual, and of course, if that plan includes physical healing, that is great. Either way we must find comfort in that God is watching over us.

Does this mean that our prayers are pointless? No, God does listen and sometimes all He needed to bring something about was to hear us ask for it and demonstrate our faith in Him. Either way, prayer should always lead to our greater trust and reliance on God.

NOTES \_\_\_\_\_

---

**Different Prayer Methods**

Christ tells us that we should all take time to go alone and in a quiet place to be with God in prayer. But that doesn't mean this is the only type of prayer.

- Silent prayer (in your heart)
- Vocal prayer (out loud)
- Memorized prayer
- Reading and Meditating on the Bible (e.g. Lectio Divina)
- Litanies
- Rosaries
- Novenas (9 days of prayer based on the time the apostles spent in the upper room praying between the Ascension and Pentecost)
- Praise and Worship
- Using the skills God has given you with a sense of attributing success to His glory for giving you those abilities
- Doing everyday things with great love and purposefulness. St. Therese of Lisieux (The Little Flower) said, "Do little things with great love". It is how much we have loved on this earth that will determine our place in heaven.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Three Different Kinds of Prayer

- **Verbal-** this is the use of words, silent or vocal in order to communicate with God.
- **Meditative-** this is when we use our imagination to think upon and bring forth an emotional experience with God.
- **Contemplative-** this is placing ourselves in the midst of God's presence. It is not so much a verbal communication, nor an imagination but just a being present in God. This higher form is something that we should all strive to one day be able to achieve in our prayer life, but don't feel bad if you can't do it now. Ask God to help you pray better.

Often the hardest part of prayer is building up the habit. When we create prayer routines, we establish habits that bring us closer to God

It is common for our faith lives to go up and down in hills and valleys. Sometimes we feel God's presence and power, and sometimes we feel dry and distant. Prayer is the means by which we can traverse both, ensuring that our faith is more than just feelings and warm emotions.

"All their time is spent looking for satisfaction and spiritual consolation; they can never read enough spiritual books, and one minute they are meditating on one subject and the next on another, always hunting for some gratification in the things of God. God very rightly and discreetly and lovingly denies this satisfaction to these beginners. If he did not, they would fall into innumerable evils because of their spiritual gluttony and craving for sweetness. This is why it is important for these beginners to enter the dark night and be purged of this childishness.  
– St. John of the Cross; Dark Night of the Soul - 6.6.(2)

In time of spiritual dryness, souls often think as follows: "I go to prayer, and I do nothing, absolutely nothing." The soul does nothing and is not aware of His secret and mysterious operations. But when the period of trial passes, we find that we are different.

Desolation is the indispensable means whereby the soul attains its transformation in Jesus, the supreme goal and the perfection of holiness.

If you are struggling to pray, find a mentor to help guide you! Find someone who prays well and ask him or her for help in your own prayer life.

Start small. Prayer is not about quantity, but **quality**. Don't feel like you have to pray for hours and hours. Often a few minutes of genuine commune with God is far greater than hours of disconnected drone. Prayer is a relationship, not a task.

“Much more is accomplished by a single word of the Our Father said, now and then, from our heart, than by the whole prayer repeated many times in haste and without attention.” --Saint Teresa of Avila

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **The Goal of Christian Prayer**

- Christian **prayer** should have as its goal or object, building a life of perfection in accordance with the two-fold charity, or divine love, towards God and neighbor. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Mat. 5:48)
- Authentic Christian Spirituality is based upon the truth of the Trinity and how it is revealed and communicated to us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit by the Church. It is important to realize that spirituality presupposes morality, which in turn presupposes doctrine.
- There can be no division between doctrine and authentic spirituality, because spirituality is about truth and union with the thrice-Holy God.
- Authentic Christian Spirituality is not just something that we think is correct, but that which is in line with traditional Catholic spirituality (e.g. some incorrect prayer methods are Centering prayer, Transcendental meditation, etc.).
- It is not about emptying ourselves, but filling our being with God’s spirit and life (grace).

### **The Goal of Christian Spirituality**

- Christian **spirituality** must have as its ultimate goal the union of man with God.
- This union can be manifested in this world, but points to the ultimate union, which is eternal life with God in heaven.
- Union with God can best be attained in this world by uniting ourselves with Christ through the Holy Spirit.
- The Eucharist is the ultimate way of uniting ourselves with God while on this earth. The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life”. (*Lumen Gentium 11*)

### **Types of Spiritualities**

Within the Catholic Church, though, there are several authentic or true spiritualities that we can speak of, such as the following:

- Corporate followers of saintly Christians (i.e. Franciscan, Salesian, Dominican, etc.)
- National dispositions / Cultures (i.e. Mexican, Irish, etc.)
- Historical periods (i.e. Pre-reformation, Vatican II, Tridentine, etc.)
- Doctrinal / Content (i.e. Eucharistic, Marian, etc.)
- Specialized / Vocational (i.e. Missionary, Lay, etc.)

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



### 3 Steps to Developing the Spiritual Life of Perfection

- **Detachment** of the material world (Purgation – St. Francis De Sales – Introduction to the Devout Life)
  - **Rom. 8:5-8 ff** For those who live according to the flesh are concerned with the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the spirit with the things of the spirit. The concern of the flesh is **death**, but the concern of the spirit is **life** and **peace**. For the concern of the flesh is **hostility** toward God; it does not submit to the law of God, nor can it; and those who are in the flesh **cannot please God** . . .

The first purgation - **Confess** your mortal sins

- Purge the affection of sin - shun the sin and don't "look back" at it. Some hate having to give up the sin. Include mortifications (e.g. fasting, alms giving . . .)
- Second Purgation – The conviction of the great evil sin brings upon us. We must have a deep and intense contrition through **meditations** like the following:
  - Put yourself in the **presence** of God and ask him to inspire you.
  - **Humble** yourself before God
  - Focus on our 'teleology' our end for which we were created – **eternal life**.
  - Consider how **good** God has been to you blessed physically, mentally and spiritually.
  - Recall to mind the **sins** you have committed throughout your life, especially the ingratitude to God.
  - Consider your **death**; how for you the world will cease to exist and you will enter into **judgment**.
  - Meditate on **hell**. Imagine yourself there, suffering for all eternity.
  - Meditate on **Heaven**. See yourself in the beauty and happiness with God and your loved ones. See yourself with your guardian angel and that you have **chosen** eternal life over death.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

---

- **Enlightenment**
  - Through the purging of our attachment to worldly things, we are able to receive the things of the spirit.
  - **Eph. 1:16-19** do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him. May the eyes of [your] hearts be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope that belongs to his call, what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones, and what is the surpassing greatness of his power for us who believe, in accord with the exercise of his great might

- **Union with God**

- **Rom. 6:3-5** Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into **union** with him through a death like his, we shall also be **united** with him in the resurrection.
- **Eph. 4:2-5** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the **unity** of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism;
- **John 6:56** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

## **Conclusion**

In an age of technology giving us instant access to endless pleasures one would think that we had “arrived.” But our limitless connectivity has left us curiously empty. Why are we not fulfilled when we have everything? It is because we are living the “Exterior Life.”

The Exterior Life is a life lived outside of oneself. It is the unfocused life of distraction and activity hunting for good feelings and affirmation. It longs to be happy and desires peace, but remains restless. Why do we live the Exterior Life? Because we don’t know any other way. The Exterior Life doesn’t want you to feel sad, it just wants nothing but pleasure. But this is unnatural. To be human is to endure the full range of emotions in life’s experiences. We are destined to experience sadness as well as joy, anger as well as love, restlessness as well as contentment. To live the Exterior Life is to bury honest and necessary emotions while stunting our growth in character and virtue.

Blaise Pascal once said, “all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact: that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber.” That is why we need the Interior Life. It requires silence and humility, slowing down and simply being. It means grappling with difficult truths and taking an inventory of who we are and who we are to become, all of this with God’s grace working in us.

When we turn inwardly, we may not like what we see. While we hunger for the blessings of the Interior Life, we shrink away from its responsibilities. Wanting the best return for the least investment. The exterior of life promises cheap ego fixes that vanish too quickly and leave nothing but emptiness demanding to be filled once again.

The Interior Life is difficult, but it is worth it. It opens us to wisdom and grace, purpose and peace. The greatest things are accomplished in silence and in deep clarity of inner vision. (1 Kgs 19:11-12) Let’s put the phone down, turn off our computers and televisions and turn to God. Let us pray, think and leave a little room for reflection in our lives and for silence. Let us hear the Word of God in stillness and perhaps we will learn to understand it.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always!

