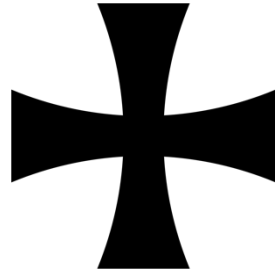


Christian Prayer and Spirituality: The Interior Life



Christian Prayer and Spirituality

Living the “**interior life**” is the way to establish an intimate relationship with God. It is where we encounter God and are transformed into the image and likeness of God.

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. It is a way of quieting the mind and heart so that we can listen to the God’s voice.

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*)

The interior life is where a person will find meaning, purpose, joy and peace. To enter the interior life, a prayer life is essential to the Christian way. Prayer is not only how we communicate with God, but commune with Him. It is meant to be a conversation, meaning both parties talk and both listen.

THE 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.
- Rest assured, 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 and giving us what we need.

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.

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.

Mt 6:6 “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.”

- 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.

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.

IMPROVING OUR PRAYER LIFE

Often, the hardest part of a good prayer life is establishing the habit of praying. When we create prayer routines, we establish habits that bring us closer to God.

- Set particular times of the day to pray, at minimum in the morning and before bedtime.
- Choose a location that is quiet and conducive to prayer.
- Use items such as candles, a crucifix, holy images, etc. to assist you in praying.

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 the peaks and valleys, thereby, 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 nothing happens, absolutely nothing.” When this attitude happens, the soul is not aware of God’s secret and mysterious operations. He is working, even in our spiritual dryness. But when the period of trial passes, we are different and better if we trusted in God’s care to work in us.

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

THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER

- Christian **prayer** should have as its goal, building a life of perfection in accordance with the two-fold love towards God and neighbor. “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (*Mt 5:48*)
- Authentic Christian Spirituality is based upon the revelation of truth and how it is communicated to us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit by the Church.
- 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 union 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. Charismatic, Missionary, Lay, etc.)

3 STEPS TO DEVELOPING THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OF PERFECTION

1. **Detachment** of the material world (Purgation – St. Francis De Sales – Introduction to the Devout Life)

- This means that we are not to have inordinate attachments to anything that is of this world, material or immaterial. This includes our health and loved ones.

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 in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

- 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, almsgiving . . .)

The Second Purgation – The conviction of the great evil sin brings upon us. We must have a deep and intense contrition (sorrow) 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 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.

2. **Enlightenment**

- Through the purging of our attachment to worldly things, we make room to receive the things of the spirit.

Eph. 1:16-19 do not cease giving thanks for you . . . that 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

3. Union with God

- Once we are enlightened by the grace of God, we enter into a specialized relationship in which we experience God in a most intimate manner. This is what is called the practice of *contemplation*.

Rom 6:3-5 We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that . . . 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.

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 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, meaning and peace. The greatest things are accomplished in silence and in deep clarity of inner vision. 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.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always!

Appendix of Common Catholic Prayers

Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our Father

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. Amen.

Hail Mary

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou amongst 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.

Glory Be

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to
the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is
now, and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.

Saint Michael Prayer

Saint Michael the Archangel,
defend us in battle.
Be our protection against
the wickedness and snares of the devil.
May God rebuke him, we humbly pray,
and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly host,
by the power of God, cast into hell Satan and
all the evil spirits who prowl throughout the
world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.

The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and earth;
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended into Hell,
on the third day He arose again from the dead.
He ascended into Heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of
God the Father Almighty;
from thence He shall come to judge
the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to thy protection,
implored thy help,
or sought thy intercession,
was left unaided.
Inspired by this confidence,
We fly unto thee,
O Virgin of virgins my Mother;
to thee do we come, before thee we stand,
sinful and sorrowful,
O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not our petitions,
but in thy mercy hear and answer them.
Amen.

Morning Offering

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, for the salvation of souls, the reparation of sins, the reunion of all Christians, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father this month.

Amen.

(Written in 1844 by Fr. François-Xavier Gautrelet)

Hail Holy Queen

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears. Turn then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile, show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary! Pray for us, O holy Mother of God, that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ. Amen.

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water from the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy Wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.
From the malignant enemy, defend me.
In the hour of my death, call me,
And bid me to come to Thee.
That with Thy saints, I may praise Thee,
Forever and ever.
Amen.

The Angelus

The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.
And she conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Behold the handmaid of the Lord.

Be it done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

And the Word was made Flesh.

And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, full of grace...

Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray. 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.

Guardian Angel Prayer

Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day be at my side, to light and guard, to rule and guide. Amen.

Grace Before Meals

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Grace After Meals

We give thee thanks for all thy benefits, O Almighty God, who lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.

May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.

<p>Prayer of Surrender Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my understanding, and my will. All that I have and cherish you have given to me. I surrender it all to be guided by your will. Your love and your grace are wealth enough for me. Give me these, Lord Jesus, and I ask for nothing more. Amen.</p>	<p>Act of Contrition O my God, I am heartfully sorry for having offended thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishment, but most of all because I have offended thee my God, who is all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to sin no more, and to avoid the near occasion of sin. Amen.</p>
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