

# Christian Prayer

## I. What is prayer?

**Prayer as God's gift** - "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.

**Prayer as covenant** - According to Scripture, it is the *heart* that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. The heart is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relationship: it is the place of covenant. Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.

**Prayer as communion** - In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father, with his Son and with the Holy Spirit. Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of God and in communion with Him. Christian Prayer is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.

To lift up or raise our heart is to raise our knowing from self-centeredness to the level of God-centeredness. To lift up our heart is to be joined with God – to be in communion with God.

## II – Basic Ways of Praying

As said above, prayer is communion with God. As our communications with others take many forms, our communication with God also takes a variety of forms. The Church identifies the following forms of prayer:

### 1. Blessing and adoration (2626-2628)

- **Blessing** an encounter between God and man. The prayer of blessing is our response to God, who out of unconditional love blesses us. The human heart in return blesses God, who is the source of all blessing.
- **Adoration** is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us, and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory." Adoration calls for a **humble heart**. A humble heart allows us to be open to God and enter His presence in our life.

### 2. Petition (2629-2633)

Supplication in the New Testament means: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out, even "struggle in prayer." Its most usual form is petition.

- **The first movement is asking forgiveness.** A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father, his Son, and one another. Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer.
- **The second movement is the desire and search for the Kingdom to come,** then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming. When we share in God's saving love, we understand that *every need* can become the object of petition. When we ask the Father in Christ's name, He will listen. Saint James and Saint Paul exhort us to pray *at all times*.

### 3. Intercession (2634-2636)

Intercession is asking on behalf of another. Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. Christian intercession recognizes no boundaries: for all men, all who are in high positions, persecutors, the salvation of those who reject the Gospel...

### 4. Thanksgiving (2637-2638)

Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church, especially in celebrating the Eucharist, because Christ has consecrated all creation to the Father. *Every event and need is an occasion for thanksgiving*, as Saint Paul reminds us: "Give thanks in all circumstances."

### 5. Praise (2639-2643)

Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes that God is God. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God, testifying to the only Son in whom we are adopted, and by whom we glorify the Father. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer, and carries them toward Him who is its source and goal.

### III. Sources of Prayer

In order to pray, one must have the will to pray and learn how to pray. Through a living transmission within the Church, the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray. He is the *living water* "welling up to eternal life" in our heart. It is He who teaches us to accept it at its source: Christ.

**The Word of God** - The Church "forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' by frequent reading of the Scriptures. When we pray we speak to God, and when we read the divine oracles" we listen to Him.

**The Liturgy of the Church** - In the sacramental liturgy of the Church, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present, and communicates the mystery of salvation, which is continued in the heart that prays. The heart assimilates the liturgy before and after the celebration.

**The theological virtues** - We enter into prayer by the narrow gate of *faith* for we seek the face of the Lord, and we want to hear and keep his Word. By *hope*, we celebrate the liturgy in expectation of Christ's return. The prayer of the Church and personal prayer nourish hope in us. Prayer, formed by the liturgical life, draws everything into the *love* by which we are loved in Christ and which enables us to respond to Him by loving as He has loved us. Love is the source of prayer; whoever draws from it reaches the summit of prayer.

**"Today"** - We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his Paschal mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times to make prayer spring up from us. Time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter Him. To pray amid daily events is a secret revealed to the children. We must pray that the kingdom influence every day events.

### IV. The Ways of Prayer

In the living tradition of prayer, each Church proposes to its faithful a language for prayer: words, melodies, gestures, and iconography.

**Prayer to the Father** - Whether our prayer is communal or personal, vocal or interior, it has access to the Father only if we pray "in the name" of Jesus. The sacred humanity of Jesus is the way by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to God our Father (2664).

**Prayer to Jesus** - The prayer of the Church, nourished by the Word of God and the celebration of the liturgy, teaches us to pray to the Lord Jesus. The name "Jesus," meaning Yahweh saves, contains everything. His name has been given to us. This name alone contains God's work of salvation. To invoke "Jesus" is to welcome God's Only Begotten Son.

**"Come, Holy Spirit"** - Every time we begin to pray to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who draws us on the way of prayer by his grace. He teaches us to pray by recalling Christ. That is why the Church invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit every day, especially at the beginning and the end of every important action. To be sure, there are as many paths of prayer as there are persons who pray, but it is the same Spirit acting in all and with all. It is in the communion of the Holy Spirit that Christian prayer is prayer in the Church.

**In communion with the holy Mother of God** - In prayer the Holy Spirit unites us to the person of the only Son, in his glorified humanity, through which and in which our filial prayer unites us in the Church with the Mother of Jesus. Her consent of faith given at the Annunciation continued to the cross of Jesus. Her motherhood has extended to the brothers and sisters of her Son "who still journey on earth." Jesus, the only mediator, is the way of our prayer. Mary shows us the way", and is herself "the Sign" of the way.

Mary is the perfect *Orans*, a figure of the Church. When we pray to Her, we are adhering with Her to the plan of the Father, who sends his Son to save all men. Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' Mother into our homes, for She has become the Mother of all the living. We can

pray with and to Her. The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary and united with it in hope (2673-2679).

### **Questions for discussion**

1. How do you pray at home?
2. How can you pray "always"?