

Prayer: Connecting to God

We came from God's hands, and our destiny is to live with our Triune God forever. While on earth, we yearn for God, as St. Augustine expressed in his famous prayer: "Our hearts are restless, O God, until they rest in you." Philosopher Blaise Pascal described this ache as having a hole in our hearts that can only be filled by God. Incredibly, God also longs to be with us. C.S. Lewis commented, "People seeking God is like a mouse seeking a cat." God, the almighty maker of the universe, loves us with a powerful, unconditional love. His love is so tremendous that in order for us to be with him eternally, he stooped to become a human being like us. Then, as the God-man Jesus Christ, God actually underwent death. His resurrection confirmed his promise that we too would rise someday.

In this life we can come in contact with this good God through prayer, traditionally defined as "the lifting of the mind and heart to God." Whenever we think of or speak with God, we are praying. It is said that most people pray more and better than they think they do.

4 THE CATHOLIC WAY TO PRAY

St. Teresa of Avila defined prayer as “a conversation with one whom you know loves you.” It involves both speaking *and* listening. Just as communication is key in the development of a human love relationship, prayer is essential if we wish to intensify our relationship with God. Prayer is as necessary for our spiritual life as breathing is for our physical life. God doesn’t need our prayer, but we do!

Here are some other good reasons to pray:

- Knowing that God exists makes sense out of the universe. Praying to God gives meaning to our lives.
- Prayer makes us better persons. Through prayer we receive graces to live the Gospel values and grow in virtues like faith, hope, and charity.
- Prayer removes temporal punishment due for sins, that is, the punishment that helps make up for our forgiven sins either on earth or in purgatory.
- Prayer is life’s most intoxicating high, the peak experience.
- In prayer we find satisfaction, fulfillment, and peace.
- God desires that we pray.

Growth in Prayer

The progression of prayer can be compared to the stages of communication between people involved in a love relationship. At first the two talk a lot: face-to-face, on the phone, by e-mail, or text messaging. They wish to learn as much as possible about each other and in turn to reveal information, even secrets, about themselves. As the relationship deepens, talking is not that necessary. The couple can read each other’s minds and communicate just by a glance. Over time, two people in love are content simply to be in each

other's presence wordlessly. Similarly, we begin speaking to God and eventually may enjoy contemplation (wordless prayer) and union with God. In the words of the thirteenth-century mystic Juliana of Norwich, "Prayer one-eth the soul to God."

Fortunately, communication with God can be instant. First of all, God is everywhere and on call 24/7. God knows our very thoughts and sees our every action. As St. Paul preached, "In him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). In addition, we enjoy the mystery of the divine indwelling: God dwells within our very being. God tugs at our hearts for attention. At any time we can sink down into the cave of our hearts for an encounter with God.

HOW GOD SPEAKS

God holds up his side of the conversation in several ways:

- All of God's creation—stars, mountains, trees, lakes, snow, flowers, dogs, our own marvelous bodies—shouts out God's love for us and declares God's power and glory. Rightly Simone Weil said, "The world is God's language to us."
- God speaks to us in Sacred Scripture, revealing himself as our lover and savior.
- God speaks to us through other people. Their words or actions can convey a divine message.
- God says things to us through our experiences, even our dreams.
- Most intimately, God speaks to us through our thoughts, either a progression of ideas or a sudden realization.

6 THE CATHOLIC WAY TO PRAY

As you advance in the spiritual life, your prayer preferences will change. You may be content to pray formula prayers or to speak to God simply and spontaneously, and then suddenly you find that you relish reflecting on Scripture instead, or even just sitting in silence, aware of God's presence. The basic rule for prayer is *pray as you can, not as you can't*. In the end, prayer is a gift from God!