

What Prayer Is

Q. 262. What is prayer?

Prayer is the lifting of our minds and hearts to God.

We lift our minds and hearts to God to praise His goodness, to thank Him for His kindness, to acknowledge our sins, to plead for pardon, to ask His aid for our salvation, and to give glory to Him.

When we pray, both our minds and our hearts are active: our minds occupy themselves with thinking of God and our relationship with Him, and our hearts perform acts of worship.

Prayer is conversation with God. Being aware of God and looking at Him with the eyes of our souls, we reach toward Him to converse with Him, to give Him what we have, and to make our wills one with His. We adore, praise, and thank Him. We ask for His help and His pardon. We trust God in the simplest way, confiding to Him all that we have most at heart—our sorrows and joys, our hopes and fears, and our desires and plans. In return, we receive help, consolation, and advice from Him. We speak quite plainly with God of important matters, often without any feeling or emotion. All that matters is that we speak honestly and earnestly. We pray well when we tell God what is in our hearts. Thus, prayer is communication of spirit with Spirit, of man with God.

Prayer is the simplest and most natural expression of worship. All intelligent creatures are obligated to think about God and to converse with Him—in other words, to pray to Him. In order to pray, you need only understand who God is and who you are, how great God's fatherly goodness is, and how deep is your own misery. Sacred Scripture and the Liturgy of the Church are invaluable means for understanding who God is and drawing closer to Him through prayer. Faith will teach you all that is necessary. Your prayer, in order to be true prayer, must be from the heart.

You can pray to God at any time and in any place, for you are always in His presence. His love for you is always the same. Even when you are swamped with worldly cares and selfish interests, He is close to you; you will always find Him waiting to listen and ready to answer.

Prayer is the means by which we communicate with God. It is an indescribable grace and honor to have God listen to you and allow you to seek His presence. Nowhere else are you received so sincerely and so lovingly. Try to appreciate the great privilege of being able to talk with God.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Without prayer, you dare not face life. If you are out of touch with God, Our Lady, and the saints, you cannot properly do your work or carry your burdens or hope to reach eternal life.

Prayer is not necessarily a matter of words. It is, fundamentally, an active attitude of the soul. It is an attitude of eager longing for grace. It is a humble and trustful unfolding of your real needs before God, a pleading with Him to satisfy those needs, and a disposition to welcome gifts of God. Above all, it is a readiness to abandon yourself to God's will in all things.

Sacred Scripture

Pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. *James 5:16*

Let him turn away from evil and do right; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil. *1 Peter 3:11-12*



Catechism of the Catholic Church

2562 Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the *heart* that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

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.

Vatican Council II

The spiritual life, however, is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with others, but he must also enter into his bedroom to pray to his Father

in secret; (cf. Mt. 6:6) furthermore, according to the teaching of the apostle [i.e., St. Paul], he must pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Th. 5:17). We also learn from the same apostle that we must always carry around in our bodies the dying of Jesus, so that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-11). *Sacred Liturgy, 12*



Summary Prayer

Eternal Father, from the rising of the sun to its setting, Your Name is worthy of all praise. With joy and gladness we cry out to You and ask You to open our hearts, that we may sing Your praises and announce Your goodness and truth.

Be near to all who call upon You in truth and increase the dedication of those who revere You. Hear our prayers and save us, that we may always love You and praise Your holy Name.

Lord God, You fill the hungry with good things and break sinners' chains. Hear Your people who call to You in their need and lead Your Church from the shadows of death. Gather us, from sunrise to sunset, that we may grow together in faith and love, and so give lasting thanks for Your kindness through our prayers.

Jesus, help us to understand the power there is in unity of prayer. You said, "If two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:19-20).

Unite us all as children of the family of God, in which God is our common Father, and You, our Elder Brother. Look down upon our family when we are gathered in Your Name, and graciously pour out Your blessings upon us.

Lord our God, Whose power is beyond all words to describe, Whose glory is measureless, Whose mercy is without limits, and Whose love for mankind is beyond all telling, look down upon us, and in Your kindness, grant to us and to all those praying with us the riches of Your compassion and mercy.

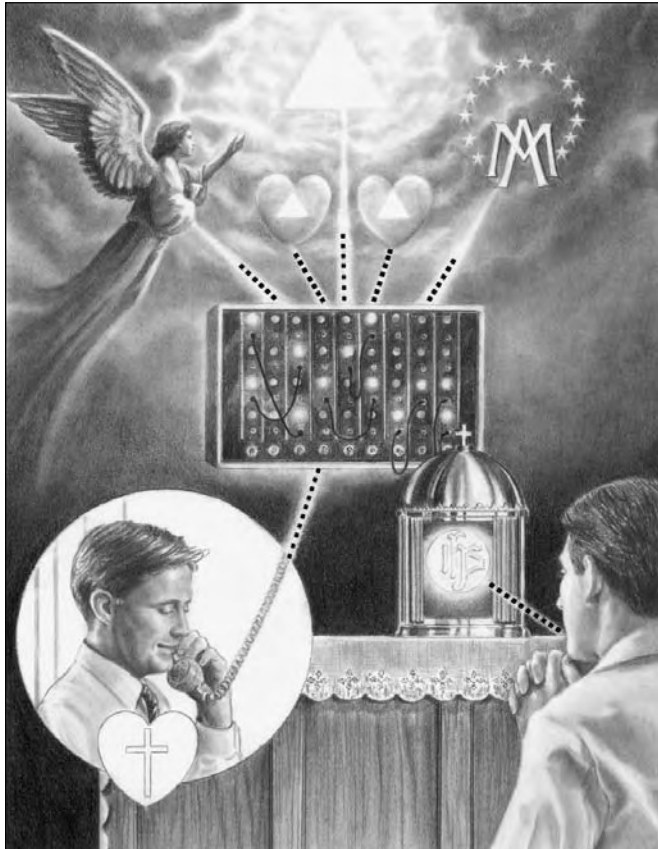
Almighty and everlasting God, may our prayers rise like incense before You, our hands like the evening sacrifice. Hear our prayers and protect us both by night and day, that whatever the changes and chances of this mortal life, we may always find strength in Your unchanging love. We ask this through Jesus our Lord, to Whom with You and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. What is prayer?
2. How often do you pray to God? What attitudes do you strive for in order to pray more genuinely?
3. In silence, give thanks for the great privilege of being able to communicate with God through prayer.

Catechism by Diagram

#E4-74



Communicating with God. Prayer is conversation with God Whom we love (heart with cross). As we talk with friends on the telephone, so we can talk with God (triangle) at any time of the day or night—He is always on the line (dotted lines toward God). We can also talk to Our Blessed Mother (“A M” with twelve stars), the angels, and the saints (two hearts near God). We can talk with Jesus in the tabernacle. Prayer is like a switchboard that puts us in touch with God and the saints, just as the saints and angels communicate with God and can pray for us.

#P26-73



Q. 263. What is mental or interior prayer?

Mental or interior prayer (as distinct from vocal prayer, which normally is expressed by set formulas) begins with a serious consideration of the truths of the Faith, with a view to their practical application to our daily lives. During mental prayer, you grow in the knowledge of your faith and acquire principles of right living by applying yourself to prolonged reflection on some doctrine of the Church or teaching of our Savior.

This reflection, however, is only a point of departure for spontaneous prayer. Such prayer is the principal part of every meditation. The subject of meditation provides incentives and matter for prayer. Prayer really begins at the moment when your will, set on fire with love, enters into direct communication with God and yields lovingly to Him in order to please Him and to fulfill His commands and desires. Therefore, the essential element in mental prayer is contact with God, the source of all holiness.

It is in the heart that prayer essentially dwells. The Blessed Virgin Mary kept the words of Jesus “in her heart” (cf. Luke 2:51). When our Lord taught His Apostles to pray, He did not bid them to apply themselves to an intellectual exercise, but to express the love of their hearts as simply as do little children. If meditation does not lead to conversation with God, then it is no longer an interior prayer, but a kind of study or examination of conscience, or a period of spiritual reading for information and enjoyment. The important point is not to think much, but to love much.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr: John Vianney and Fr: Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Sacred Scripture

Q. 263. Ps 63:1-8, 77:11-12; 1 Jn 5:14-15.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Q. 263. Paragraphs **2705-2719**.

Successful meditation depends above all on prayer and a longing for perfection. Use a book only as a means of uniting your heart with God, keeping in mind that Sacred Scripture is the best source. If you can commune with God only through vocal prayer, then continue vocal prayer. The Holy Spirit has many ways of leading a soul nearer to God. If you are able to speak habitually and simply with God, and can gain much spiritual food from this communication, do not tie yourself down to any particular method. Once the best way is found, keep faithfully to it until the Holy Spirit draws you to another way. Be generously docile to His grace. Try to make at least a short meditation every day. You will find this practice an important means of growing in the love of God. You will gradually acquire the spirit of prayer, which, in other words, means the habit of having recourse to God more and more frequently.

#P26-72



The difference between vocal prayer and interior prayer is this: in vocal prayer we use a prepared form of words, either a standard prayer from a prayer book, or a prayer we have made up by ourselves, and we recite this prayer, aloud or silently, from the book or from memory. In interior prayer, we do not use a prepared form of words at all, but merely raise our minds and hearts to God spontaneously, addressing Him with words of love or in no words at all.

Vocal prayer also forms an essential prayer of the external worship of God. Vocal prayer, expressed in public worship, has special power with God and is very pleasing to Him, for Our Lord said, “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20).

“Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:9-10).

There comes a point in the spiritual life when, after faithful practice of Christian virtue and prayer, the Holy Spirit acts and prays within us. As Scripture says,

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

#P26-68



Morning Offering: “Lord, how much You love me and suffered for me!
Please help me today to love until it hurts.”

Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we come to experience what is called infused prayer. Infused prayer means “poured into.” “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

The grace of infused prayer does not require any extraordinary mystical graces or experiences. It is the development of the ordinary graces of Baptism.

Sacred Scripture

To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. *Psalm 25:1*

On the glorious splendor of thy majesty, and on thy wondrous works, I will meditate. *Psalm 145:5*

I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. *1 Corinthians 14:15*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2684 In the communion of saints, many and varied *spiritualities* have been developed throughout the history of the churches. The personal charism of some witnesses to God’s love for men has been handed on, like “the spirit” of Elijah to Elisha and John the Baptist, so that their followers may have a share in this spirit.¹ A distinct spirituality can also arise at the point of convergence of liturgical and theological currents, bearing witness to the integration of the faith into a particular human environment and its history. The different schools of Christian spirituality share in the living tradition of prayer and are essential guides for the faithful. In their rich diversity they are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit: “The Spirit is truly the dwelling of the saints and the saints are for the Spirit a place where he dwells as in his own home, since they offer themselves as a dwelling place for God and are called his temple.”²

2699 The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart’s resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer. However,

Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. They have one basic trait in common: composure of heart. This vigilance in keeping the Word and dwelling in the presence of God makes these three expressions intense times in the life of prayer.

2708 Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.

#P26-65



Vatican Council II

In the various seasons of the year and in keeping with her traditional discipline, the Church completes the formation of the faithful by means of pious practices for soul and body, by instruction, prayer, and works of penance and mercy. *Sacred Liturgy, 105*

Summary Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, as we contemplate Your presence in word and sacrament and in the lives of our brothers and sisters, rekindle in us the fire of that love which Jesus Your Son brought on earth by His Passion, and which burns in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Author of undying light, quench our mortal thirst with the grace of the Spirit, that our lips may praise You, our lives may honor You, and our meditations may glorify You, as we seek to find You in prayer and to reflect upon Your truth and commandments.

Jesus, You pointed out Martha as an example of external activity, and Mary, as an example of union with God in prayer. I want to combine both: to be active, without thereby losing the spirit of prayer amid the pressure of the occupations of my calling, and on the other hand, to devote myself to prayer, without allowing it to interfere with the duties of my state in life.

Like Mary, I am resolved to learn at Your feet the lessons of holiness and salvation, not only by meditation but also by my frequent Holy Communion and prayers before the tabernacle. Thus, my union with You in loving friendship will make my active life more fruitful, because my activity will be penetrated by Your Spirit and sanctified by Your blessing. May I praise You forever and ever. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. What is the difference between vocal prayer and mental (interior) prayer?
2. Do you try to develop the habit of mental prayer? Each day, choose a passage from Scripture, especially from the New Testament, and strive to meditate on it for fifteen minutes. Make specific resolutions which will help you carry out the inspirations you receive during your meditation.
3. Thank God for being able to know and love Him more through the grace of mental prayer.

Q. 264. Why is prayer necessary?

Prayer is necessary because (1) God has commanded us to pray, and (2) it is an unconditional means of obtaining grace. The need for prayer is rooted in man's very nature as a creature of God who receives gifts from His generosity.

1. Prayer is necessary because God has commanded us to pray.

The First Commandment of God binds man to religion and to the worship of God: "I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3; Deuteronomy 5:6-7). The First Commandment obliges us to offer to God alone the supreme worship that is due Him. Man must recognize and honor God as His Creator. Religion consists in giving God the recognition and honor He deserves.

Prayer to God is an act of the virtue of religion, the highest of all the moral virtues which leads us to fulfill our duty to our Creator by showing Him respect and submission. Created by God and totally dependent upon Him at every instant, we must always be in a state of reverence toward Him. When we pray, our mind, our noblest faculty, recognizes God as Creator and Lord, and expresses our need for Him.

Other virtues are involved in prayer, especially the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Through faith we know God and His merciful power to which we appeal. Charity governs our desires, and in so doing, brings order to our petitions. Hope gives us the confident expectation that these desires will be granted.

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

The virtues of humility and penitence then cooperate with the virtue of religion to deepen our sentiments of reverence toward God.

God requires prayer, not because of any need of His (for He has need of nothing) but because of His justice and holiness. He is our Lord, our Father, and the source of all our good. Hence, honor is due to Him, and He cannot deny Himself by allowing this honor to be given to another.

Prayer is the means ordained by God for His creatures to reach Him and remain with Him. We were created by God to know, love, praise, adore, and serve Him. Through prayer we attain these ends, as far as we can do so on earth. In heaven, there will be eternal prayer.

Our Lord often taught the necessity of prayer. He said, “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name” (John 16:23). Our Lord tells us that we should pray “always” (Luke 18:1). St. Paul says: “Pray constantly” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), which means that we should always be ready to pray at the proper times and that our prayers should constantly influence our other actions.



#P26-55

2. Prayer is necessary because it is an unconditional means of obtaining grace.

The sacraments and prayer, together with good works, are the divinely instituted means of obtaining grace. Whatever fruits our good works produce in us must derive nourishment and strength from God, the source of all grace. We all need this important means of grace called prayer. Without it, it is impossible to lead a Christian life and to die a happy death.

Without God's grace, there is no salvation; without prayer, no grace can be expected in those who have reached the age of reason. Prayer, therefore, is a grace itself. Without the grace of God, we can do nothing in the supernatural order. We cannot overcome temptation or gain spiritual merit for any good deed performed.

God knows all our wants and needs even before we express them to Him, and He is ever ready to help us; but He has established prayer as the condition for obtaining His grace and favors.

Moreover, since our minds have been darkened and our wills have been weakened by original sin, it is difficult to resist temptation or stay out of grave sin without the help of God's grace, which is given in answer to our prayers. Prayer, therefore, is the remedy for our human weakness. When we pray, God gives us the strength to do that which we cannot do by ourselves.



Sacred Scripture

But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of man. *Luke 21:36*

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. *Hebrews 4:16*

And the smoke of the incense rose with the prayers of the saints from the hand of the angel before God. *Revelation 8:4*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2725 Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name. The 'spiritual battle' of the Christian's new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer.

Splendor of Truth

For God does not command the impossible, but in commanding he admonishes you to do what you can and to pray for what you cannot, and he gives his aid to enable you. (*section 102*)

Vatican Council II

All the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Romans 12:1). They should everywhere on earth bear witness to Christ and give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope of an eternal life which is theirs (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). *The Church, 10*

Summary Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we believe that prayer is as necessary as grace, without which there is no salvation, simply because, in the ordinary course of things, no grace is obtained without prayer. Without prayer, our souls must lose what grace and union they possess. Neglect of prayer spells doom to our souls.

We also believe that prayer is more than a duty. It is a great and holy privilege, second only to the surpassing privilege of receiving the sacraments. When we pray, we engage in the same great work in which You are now engaged eternally in heaven, where You are always making intercession for us. We share in the great work of Mary and the saints; to their prayers we join our own, that they may offer them to God for us. Help us to appreciate the privilege of prayer by praying as often as we possibly can.

Jesus, help us to understand that nothing is more important or necessary for us than to be in close union with You, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, for all holiness consists in this union. Give us the grace to imitate Your example of living with God through prayer.

Our lives are fruitless unless You bless our efforts with Your grace, for without You, Jesus, we can do nothing. Help us always to remain in You by divine love and prayer, but especially through frequent Holy Communion. If we are united with You, then as often as we perform actions with good intentions and out of love for You, we shall be successful. All our actions, however unimportant they may seem, will be pleasing to You and will merit a reward. To You be all honor, glory, and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. Why is prayer essential if we are to achieve salvation?
2. Is private prayer a part of your daily routine? Be faithful to your prayer time and think of situations in which you can encourage others to pray.
3. List some instances in your life when prayer has helped you and your family. Thank God for them.

Catechism by Diagram

#P26-59



Why We Pray. Prayer is the lifting (arrow) of our minds and hearts to God (triangle). The need for prayer is rooted in man's very nature as a creature who receives God's blessings. Every good thing has its source in God. Therefore, prayer (folded hands) is a debt which we owe God. God has made Himself known in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, in the creation of the world, in the many blessings He gives us (cornucopia), and in His protection of us from danger (boat on the sea). In prayer we adore God, thank and praise Him, and ask for His help.

Q. 265. What are the four purposes of prayer?

The four purposes of prayer are: (1) adoration, (2) thanksgiving, (3) repentance, and (4) petition.

1. Adoration.

Our first and foremost duty is to acknowledge God's supreme dominion over us, as our Creator and Father; our absolute dependence on Him, as His creatures and children; and His supreme excellence. The worship of God, Father, Son, and

For commentaries on each question with Cardinal Arinze, Sr. John Vianney and Fr. Straub (in Spanish), see Appendix E.

Sacred Scripture

Q. 265. Ps 51:1-3, 105:1-4; Mk 14:32-38; Jas 5:16.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Q. 265. Paragraphs **2626-2643**.

Holy Spirit, is called the worship of adoration. The honor we give to the angels and saints is called veneration.

Adoration is due to God alone, because God alone is supreme. All other beings are creatures, being made by God and ruled by Him.

Adoration is the essential act of prayer, because it expresses the creature's awareness of the Creator. Consecration of ourselves to God is an ideal prayer of adoration.

"I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will tell of all thy wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in thee, I will sing praise to thy name, O Most High" (Psalm 9:1-2).

"Seven times a day I praise thee for thy righteous ordinances" (Psalm 119:164).

2. Thanksgiving.

We pray to thank God for His favors. God's purpose in creating the world was not only to give us material goods and security, but also to inspire in us grateful thoughts about Him, so that we might reach our sublime destiny. Our entire beings are God's free gifts of love. He has given us immortality so that we can know, love, and possess Him for all eternity. Through the Redemption, He has raised us to a supernatural plane; that is, He has made us His children, brothers and sisters of Jesus, and heirs of heaven. By His providence, He watches over us day and night with unflinching care and bestows on us many blessings. When we wander away from God through sin, He forgives us through the saving grace of the sacrament of Penance. When we become hungry and tired in soul, He nourishes us with His own Body and Blood. In our prayers, we can put our gratitude into words for these marvelous gifts.

"But be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father" (Ephesians 5:18-20).

For all this generosity, we can make only one fitting return—the offering of Jesus Christ to God the Father in the Mass. We should unite ourselves to Jesus and offer ourselves, too, with all that we are and do, in thanksgiving for the limitless graces and blessings that have been bestowed upon us. Frequently during the day, as we go about our work, we should turn our thoughts and affections to God by offering Him prayers of gratitude.

3. Repentance.

We pray to obtain from God the pardon of our sins and the remission of their punishment. When we break God's law, we offend God. Sorrow for sin makes for fruitful conversation with God. The terrifying fact that you have actually offended the all-good and all-holy God should ever keep you in the attitude of the penitent sinner.



4. *Petition.*

We pray to ask for graces and blessings for ourselves and others. We need God every moment of our lives in the natural order. We depend upon God for everything, and for that reason, we pray to Him for help. We may ask for temporal as well as spiritual favors.

Our need for God in the supernatural order is even greater. God is the limitless source of all good, and He longs to share this good with others. He has even assured us that our goal is to reign with Him in Heaven and to share His own happiness there forever. We should appeal to God in prayer frequently. Our Lord has urged us to make such appeals: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7).

Sacred Scripture

For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, that they might be delivered from their sin. *2 Maccabees 12:44-45*

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. *1 Timothy 2:1-2*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2626 *Blessing* expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer: it is an encounter between God and man. In blessing, God’s gift and man’s acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other. The prayer of blessing is man’s response to God’s gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing.

2631 The first movement of the prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness*, like the tax collector in the parable: “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”²¹ It is a prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer. A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and with one another, so that “we receive from him whatever we ask.”²² Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer.



Vatican Council II

“The practice of religion of its very nature consists primarily of those voluntary and free internal acts by which a man directs himself to God. Acts of this kind cannot be commanded or forbidden by any merely human authority. But his own social nature requires that man give external expression to these internal acts of religion, that he communicate with others on religious matters, and profess his religion in community. *Liberty*, 3

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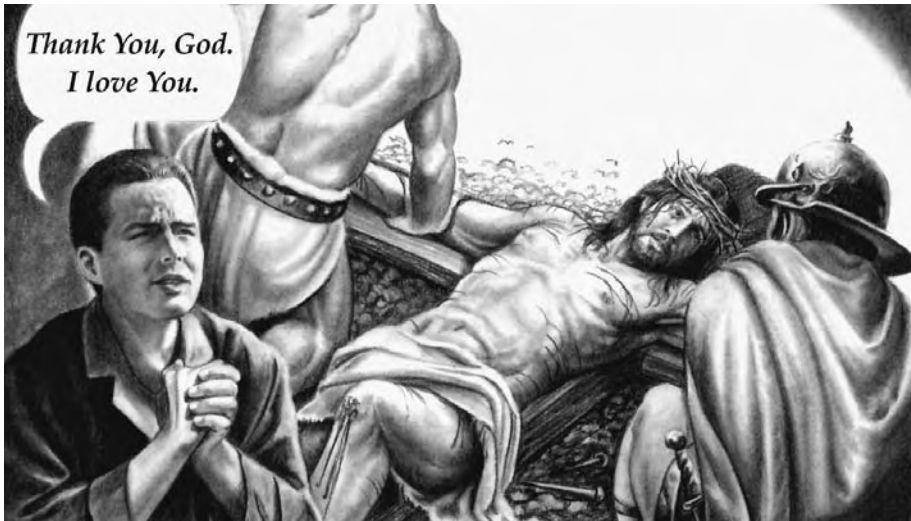
The discovery of intimacy with God, the necessity for adoration, the need for intercession—the experience of Christian holiness shows us the fruitfulness of prayer, in which God reveals himself to the spirit and heart of his servants. The Lord gives us this knowledge of himself in the fervor of love. *Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life*, 43

Summary Prayer

Heavenly Father, We believe that we are bound in conscience to pray—not simply in order to ask You for favors, but to adore You, thank You, and ask Your pardon for our sins. If we are careless with our prayers, we deprive our souls of many graces and blessings which You would give us in answer to our prayers. May Your Holy Spirit always help us to pray as we ought, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Doctrine • Moral • Worship Exercise (see Appendix B for answer key)

1. What are the four purposes of prayer?
2. Look through the Psalms and mark those which you can use for adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, and petition.
3. Schedule nightly prayer within your family. You can vary your prayer format by including songs of adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, and petition, and by combining formal and spontaneous prayers. Try to say the family Rosary every day, since it will form and protect your family in a special way.



Chapter Summary Prayer

Hear our prayers, Lord Jesus, and cover us with the wings of Your Cross, that whatever the changes and chances of this mortal life, we may always find strength in Your unchanging love, for You are the Savior of the world and the joy of mankind. You promised to be with those who pray in Your Name; help us to always pray with You to the Father, in the Holy Spirit.

Lord Jesus, Whose pierced hands were lifted toward Your holy Father and Whose life was rescued out of death, be the Shepherd of Your Chosen People; lead us through the trials and tribulations of this present life and help us to sing hymns of praise to the Blessed Trinity.

Lord Jesus Christ, by Your death and Resurrection, You reconciled everything in heaven and on earth; by the power of Your blessed Passion, set us apart so that we may sing the praise of God in union with the angels and saints in heaven.

Watch over Your people who come to You in prayer, and strengthen the hearts of those who hope in You, that they may proclaim Your saving acts of kindness in the Heavenly City.

God of all compassion, Father of all goodness, to heal the wounds that our sins and selfishness bring upon us, You bid us turn to prayer and to sharing with our brothers. We acknowledge our sinfulness. Our guilt is ever before us. When our weakness causes discouragement, let Your compassion fill us with hope and lead us, through repentance, to the beauty of eternal joy.

May Your love never abandon us. Continue Your saving work among us as we endeavor to serve You well. May the saving Sacrifice of the Mass bring us Your forgiveness so that, freed from sin, we may always please You. May our sharing in the Bread of Life bring us Your protection, forgiveness, and life. Amen.

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See Appendix A for more references.

Q. 262. What is prayer?

Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), Vatican II, sect. 12, 13, 83-101; On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, John Paul II, sect. 65; The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, John Paul II, sect. 59-62.

Q. 264. Why is prayer necessary?

The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, John Paul II, sect. 59-62; Splendor of Truth, John Paul II, sect. 9, 52, 102-103.



Thought Provokers

Please see Appendix C for the answers.

- Q. 262: Why do we need to pray since God knows our needs and thoughts at all times whether we pray or not?
- Q. 263: How often should we pray?
- Q. 264: St Paul says that we should pray always (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:17). How can we do this?
- Q. 265: What posture or bodily position should a person assume when praying alone outside of church?

