

Introduction to Prayer

*O Lord, look down from thy holy habitation, and consider us.
Incline thy ear, O Lord, and hear. ~ Baruch 2:16*



OUR PERSONAL relationship with God is more important than anything else. The heart of this relationship is prayer, which is also the primary way that we foster and maintain it. Prayer, as the *Catechism* explains, “is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God”¹ (CCC 2559). Whether spoken or unspoken, prayer is that privileged communication which each person shares with his or her Creator.



Praying Hands, c. 1508, by Albrecht Dürer

Why Pray?

God created us to know, love, and serve him in this life, and to be happy forever with him in the next (see Is 43:7; Mk 8:36; Mk 12:30; Jn 14:2). The deepest desire of the human heart is for God. Having experienced the signs of his presence in the world around us and in our own lives, in faith we seek and desire God above all else. St. Augustine, a bishop of the early Church and himself a convert, put it beautifully when he said, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

We all long to rest in God. The Father sent his Son into the world to draw us back into communion with him and to be that source of his compassion and mercy for all who are troubled and weighed down by the trials of life. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28-30). The most important way of knowing this “rest” is through prayer.

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¹ St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 3, 24 from J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 1089C (Paris, 1857-1866)

The Art and Gift of Prayer

Prayer is something that we learn and it is also a gift from God. It is a combination of our own personal effort and the work of God within us. It establishes a real communion with God that forms into the relationship intended by him for each one of us. If we begin by doing what we can and ask him for help, he will help us although sometimes in ways that we may not at first understand. Developing a prayer life can only happen if one makes time for the Lord each day. Also, the Scriptures are useful in teach-

ing us how to pray.

Prayer from the Heart

Whether we recite formal written prayers or pray spontaneously, prayer should come from the heart. Love is the source of prayer, our response in love to the God who created us out of love. Praying from the heart also means that we are honest with ourselves and with God. Scripture says, “before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare” (Heb 4:13), so there is no way to hide even our deepest wounds and sins from him. However, he promises that, to those who come to him in prayer with a contrite heart, he will listen and offer forgiveness. Letting God into our hearts will deepen our ability to pray and make us ever mindful of his mercy and love.

Helpful Scriptures for Prayer

Ps 27:8-9 Mt 6:6 Jn 16:23-24 1 Jn 1:9
Ps 46:10 Mt 26:40-41 Phil 4:6-71 Jn 5:14
Ps 62:1 Jn 15:7 1 Thes 5:16-18
(CCC 2558-2619, 2598-2619, 2656, 2658)