

A Guide to Prayer

We can pray alone or with others; we worship together as parish communities at Mass and pray as families. Prayer can be public or private. It can be formal or spontaneous. There are many types of prayer and many different styles of worship, but all centre on living and experiencing our relationship with the living God. Each person can develop his or her own style, routine, and rhythm of prayer. Prayer is an essential component of being a Catholic. Prayer helps us form a sense of security and a deeper awareness of our dependence on God.

There are four main types of prayer:

- Blessing and Adoration (praising God)
- Prayer of Petition (asking for what we need, including forgiveness)
- Prayer of Intercession (asking for what others need)
- Prayer of Thanksgiving (for what God has given and done)

Prayer of Blessing and Adoration

In this prayer we express praise and honour to God. We praise God for giving us life, for the wonder and beauty of our world, and for all the many blessings we enjoy. We open ourselves up to praise God for all the wonders of creation. This form of prayer encourages bodily expression, such as standing with arms raised or dancing.

Prayer of Petition

This is probably the most familiar prayer form of prayer. We are often taught to ask God for the things we need, but asking and praying for them are not necessarily the same. When we pray our petitions, we are asking God, who loves us very much, for something that we believe is good—for ourselves or for others. By using this form of prayer we are mindful of the needs of others as well as of our own needs. We are aware that God wants us to bring our problems and worries to prayer knowing that he will always hear and answer those prayers. God may answer our prayers in a different way and in a different timeframe than we are seeking but God will always give us what we need.

Prayers of petition serve to remind us that God expects us to care for one another and for all his creation. We can pray about the ordinary experiences of life—for people who are sick, for someone who needs a job, for help in our school work, for a safe trip. We pray for peace in our families and in our world. We can also express our sorrow and contrition to God in our prayer.

Prayer of Intercession

This form of prayer is prayer on behalf of others. This form of prayer can be a source of blessing upon others, the Church, and our world. Because we know that Our Lady and the saints intercede for us before God, the Church encourages us to pray to them for their intercession. Such prayer can bring us great strength and courage and also great peace of mind and heart.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

This form of prayer helps us to be grateful for God's many blessings, spiritual and temporal, and helps us to recognize and appreciate all the good things God gives to us. Reserving some time to praise and thank God for his gifts—the gift of life; the gift of our families and friends; the gift of food, clothing, and shelter; and the numerous other gifts we often take for granted—helps us to form a true spirit of gratitude.

Tips for praying:

1. Find a quiet place and time. Prayer can be done anywhere but it is good to have a place that is conducive to relaxing and focusing our attention on God. Finding a regular time to pray each day can also be helpful to making prayer an important daily routine.
2. Calm yourself and put away distractions. It is important to be relaxed when we pray by finding a comfortable posture.
3. Use formal prayers or speak what you feel to God, or a combination of each. It is important to note that there is no "right" way to pray. Experiment with styles and forms of prayer. Prayer is an ongoing, developing relationship with God.
4. Take time to listen. God does speak to us in prayer but we need to listen with our hearts. Be open to what God is telling you rather than just on what you want to or expect to hear.
5. Use the Bible in your prayer
6. Keep a journal of prayer
7. Have a proper attitude. Prayer requires openness to God and a desire to worship and get to know God better.

Meditative prayer

Meditation is one of the many styles of prayer. Meditation engages our head and heart in seeking a deeper union with God. It enables us to slow down and quiet our hearts so that we can hear God's voice and communicate with God in a deeper way. Meditation can last a few minutes or hours. It can strengthen our relationship with God and allow us to get in touch with ourselves.

The process of meditation can involve several steps:

- Find the time and place which is conducive to meditation. It is important to pick a time when one is alert and able to focus and a comfortable and quiet place.
- Prepare to pray by relaxing your body so that you can devote your attention to prayer. Some people use muscle relaxing exercises and breathing exercises.
- Choose a word or phrase to focus your attention on God. Some people use "Jesus" or "Abba" or "Jesus saves" or "Jesus loves me."
- Connect the word or phrase with your breathing. Silently repeat the word or phrase in tune with your breathing. Let the word resonate within you. The repetition helps to focus on and remain open to God's presence. If you become distracted, focus again on repeating the word or phrase.