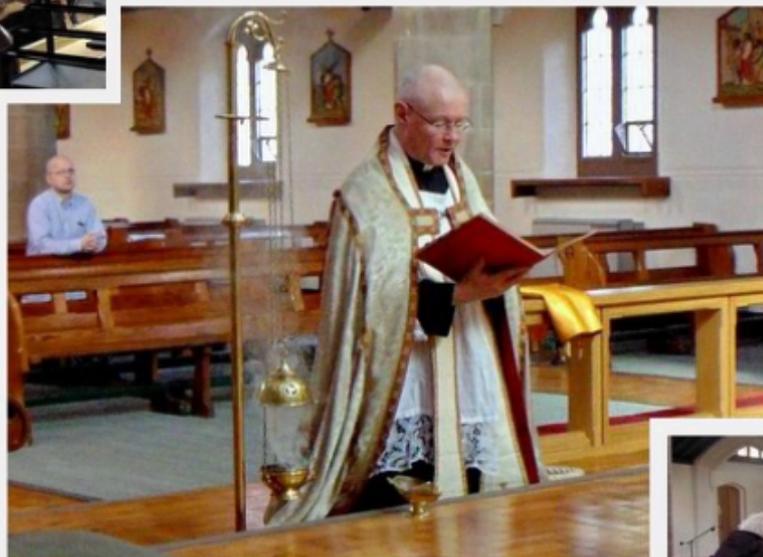


Year of Faith Sermons



PART FOUR

Christian Prayer

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The Call to Prayer

Scripture

1 Kings 18:41-46, 19:9-18; John 4:5-42;

Catechism

Paragraphs

2558-2565 What is prayer?

2566-2597 Prayer in the Old Testament: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)



Discussion

What is prayer?

Prayer is “a surge of the heart” towards heaven, in the words of St Thérèse of Lisieux. It is “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (St John Damascene). Prayer is a *gift* from God. Jesus “thirsts” for our prayer (c.f. John 4:1-54). We need to be humble when we pray, since we are “beggars” before our Creator. Through prayer, we respond in faith to the living God’s plea for us to acknowledge our relationship with him. Prayer is a *covenant* relationship with God, springing forth from his action in the world. Prayer is rooted in the *heart*; indeed if our hearts are far from God, prayer is in vain. Prayer is also communion with the life of the entire Trinity. We are searching for God, and he for us.

Prayer in the Old Testament

As God gradually reveals himself to the human race, prayer “appears as a covenant drama ... which engages the heart”. The life of prayer has unfolded throughout the history of salvation. We know from the creation stories that mankind has always been seeking a relationship with God. Abel and Noah

offered sacrifices. Abraham, our “father in faith”, “who had received the promises” (c.f. Hebrews 11:17) was entirely obedient to the Word. His faith was put to the test when he was asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Moses prayed as mediator of the people. From the burning bush, God calls Moses. This is one of the primordial images of prayer. God reveals himself in order to save us, but he wants our co-operation. Moses, who “was very humble” (Num 22:3) was able, through prayer, to “climb the mountain” and listen to (contemplate) God’s will for him. Among other characters in the Old Testament, David is *par excellence* the shepherd-king who prays for his people. His prayer is a model for his people to show their own commitment to the Lord. Elijah, the “father” of the prophets, prays for the conversion of the people’s hearts, reminding them that external worship is not enough for their salvation. Finally, the Psalms express the ever-deepening prayer of the People of God. There are psalms of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication. The Psalm, as St Ambrose said, is “a confession of faith in song” (CCC 2589).

Questions for reflection

Why is prayer necessary?

What can the witnesses of the Old Testament teach us about prayer?

Christian Prayer

Scripture

Luke 1:46-56; Matthew 6:5-15; Mark 1:35-39

Catechism

Paragraphs

2598-2622	Prayer in the New Testament
2626-2628	Blessing and Adoration
2629-2633	Petition
2634-2636	Intercession
2637-2638	Thanksgiving
2639-2643	Praise

Discussion

Prayer of Jesus

Jesus himself prayed, having been taught by his mother, who kept in her heart the “great things” done to her by the Almighty (CCC 2599). He prayed according to the traditions of those amongst whom he lived, but his prayer “springs from an otherwise secret source”, the Father (CCC 2599). The Holy Spirit always acts in Jesus’ prayer. Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his ministry, and those of his apostles. He often prays in solitude, praying for all people. He teaches his disciples to pray, so that they may “become one” with him and the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit (c.f. John 17:6-26). The whole of Jesus’ prayer is orientated towards and includes a total and **loving submission to the Father’s will**. He constantly makes petitions to the Father, he thanks the Father, he asks forgiveness of his Father for the sins of mankind. His last words on the Cross allow a glimpse of the depths of his prayer. The Father always hears Jesus’ prayer.

Jesus’ teaching on prayer

Jesus teaches us to pray, insisting on the conversion of heart that is so necessary for salvation. We can learn to pray in *faith* and with *filial boldness*, knowing that “all things are possible to him who believes” (Mk 9,23). Prayer of faith consists not just

in saying, “Lord, Lord” but in *disposing the heart to the will of the Father* (CCC 2611).

The importance of prayer

Prayer stops us falling into temptation. There are various parables that illustrate the importance of prayer. If we ask the Father in the name of Jesus for our needs, we will be given “the Spirit of truth”. This is the new dimension brought about by Christian prayer. Jesus hears our prayers, for he is “one with the Father”.

Our Lady’s prayer

The Virgin Mary is our great model in how to pray. Her *Fiat* illustrates her openness to the will of God, and the *Magnificat* is a hymn of praise to the wonders of God. All members of the Church are called to pray.

Forms of prayer

There are different forms of prayer: Adoration (where we acknowledge God as our Creator), Petition and Intercession (where we ask for our needs with the humility that Christ showed) and Thanksgiving (where we recognise what God has done for us) and Praise.

Questions for reflection

How can the events of the Gospels help us to pray?
Is it possible to ask God for too many things?

Tradition of Prayer

Scripture

Romans 9:26-27; Psalm 138; Acts 3:1-10

Catechism

Paragraphs

2650-2662 The sources of prayer: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)

2663-2682 How to pray

Discussion



The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit, the “living water welling up to eternal life” (c.f. John 4:14), teaches us to pray; **prayer cannot be reduced to a spontaneous outpouring.** The Holy Spirit teaches us to accept that Christ is the source of prayer. Christ awaits in various “wellsprings”, enabling us to “drink of the Holy Spirit” (c.f. CCC 2653) in prayer. We encounter the Holy Spirit in Sacred Scripture, which teaches us to know Christ (c.f. Phil 3:8), the Church’s liturgy, where the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present and communicates the mystery of salvation, and the practice of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity.

Theological virtues

Faith helps us recognise the Face of the Lord in prayer. Hope in God’s promises gives us joy, and helps us to love the Person to whom we pray. Each moment is the “today” in which we can pray.

The Holy Spirit is present in all prayer; He is the “interior Master” (cf CCC 2672) of Christian prayer.

How to pray?

Prayer can be made to the Father, to Jesus, through whom we reach the Father, and the Holy Spirit. A simple and humble prayer is to attentively invoke the name of Jesus, which can bring forth much fruit (CCC 2668). Prayer to the Heart of Jesus helps us to follow the way of the Cross, the true path of salvation. We should also call upon the Holy Spirit every day, by saying, for example, “Come, Holy Spirit”. Of supreme importance in prayer is the presence of Mary, the Mother of God. Her own co-operation with grace teaches us to pursue two basic movements in prayer: first, we “magnify” the Lord for the great things he has done, as Mary did; secondly we entrust ourselves to her, as she did herself to God. This twofold dynamic is expressed in the two parts of the “Hail Mary”.

Questions for reflection

How can the Holy Spirit be more present in my prayer?

Why is it important that we learn to pray with the Scriptures?

The Life of Prayer

Scripture

Matthew 6:5-6; Mark 11:20-25;

Catechism

Paragraphs

- 2683-2696 Guides for prayer
- 2697-2699 Different expressions of prayer
- 2700-2704 Vocal prayer
- 2705-2708 Meditation
- 2709-2719 Contemplation

Discussion

Spiritualities

We are not alone when we pray, but surrounded by the saints, the “cloud of witnesses” who have preceded us into the Kingdom (CCC 2683). Their writings and good example help us to pray. Different charisms and schools of spirituality, as “refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2684), have sprung up in the Church and are essential guides for the faithful.

What supports prayer?

There are different supports for prayer: the Christian family, ordained ministers, religious who have consecrated their lives to prayer, catechesis, and prayer groups are all “driving forces” for the renewal of prayer today. The church, as the house of God, is the proper place for prayer, although there are other places can help us to pray which can – and should – be found. **Praying at specific times helps us to become people of prayer.**

Expressions of prayer

Vocal, meditative and contemplative prayer are the three major expressions of prayer. They have one

basic trait in common: **composure of heart.**

Vigilance of the heart in prayer makes our prayer intense. *Vocal prayer* – as expressed, for example, by the “Our Father” – is an essential element of the Christian life, for as sentient beings we need to express ourselves vocally. God also requires it, for “it renders him that perfect homage which is his due”. *Meditation* is an attentive search for the meaning of what we read in prayer. It helps us pass from our thoughts to our real situations. It compels the person who prays to ask, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”. Meditation, engaging all the faculties of the soul (thought, imagination, emotion and desire), strengthens our

will to follow Christ more closely. *Contemplative prayer*, a silent and loving “close sharing” (CCC 2709) with God, is prayer that is fixed on the Lord himself. In it, we speak to and listen to the Lord, contemplating in an attitude of docility how good he is. Our hearts must be “gathered” for the gift that is contemplation. As the simple peasant once said of his experience of contemplation: “I look at him and he looks at me” (CCC 2715).



Questions for reflection

- How might joining a scripture-study group or prayer group help me to pray?
- How can the “Our Father” be a springboard for better prayer?

The Battle of Prayer

Scripture

Mark 14:32-42, 66-72; John 17

Catechism

Paragraphs

- 2725-2728 What we need to pray well: [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#)
2729-2733 Humble vigilance of heart
2734-2741 Filial Trust
2742-2744 Perseverance in Love
2745-2758 The prayer of the Hour of Jesus

Discussion

The spiritual battle

Prayer presupposes effort. It is a battle against ourselves and against Satan, who tries to stop us praying. The “spiritual battle” of the Christian life is inseparable from the battle of prayer. Some people deride prayer and see it as merely psychological activity, or as something irrational, and a flight from reality. Our own failure in prayer can also be a discouragement.

Common difficulties

To combat such obstacles, we must be aware of the difficulties brought on in prayer. First there is *distraction*, which reveals what we are attached to. Choosing the Lord awakens our preferential love for him, come what may. We are also sometimes beset with *dryness*, which makes prayer unattractive. We must face up to our lack of faith in prayer, realising that apart from Christ, we can do *nothing* (CCC 2732). *Acedia*, or spiritual laziness, reminds us that “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

Importance of reflection

If we are humble, we recognise our situation without distress and have an opportunity to grow in trust

Questions for reflection

Can I always expect God to answer my prayer?

If my prayer is always about what I want, how can it be changed to become more authentic?

and constancy. Sometimes we think our prayer is not heard. This should encourage us to ask ourselves how we see God: as someone simply to be used for our advantage or the loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? We might ask wrongly, or with a divided heart. But if our motives for prayer are mixed, then we cannot be sure that what we hear for an answer is what God is actually saying.

Effective prayer

For our prayer to be more effective, we must learn to pray more resolutely with Jesus.

Our Lord sought only the **will of his Father**, which he expresses most eloquently during the “hour” of his passion and death. We too should strive to do the Father’s will, and express that desire in prayer, even if it does bring difficulty.

Indeed our prayer thus becomes more authentic. Difficulties encourage us to persevere in loving attentiveness to the Lord. **It is always possible to pray**; moreover it is vital to pray, for prayer and the Christian life are inseparable.

Our Father

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.



The Our Father – part 1

Scripture

Romans 8:14-17; Luke 23:44-48

Catechism

Paragraphs

2761-2776 'The Summary of the Whole Gospel': [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) & [Part 4](#)

2777-2785 ['We Dare to Say'](#), ['Father'](#)

2786-2796 ['Our' Father](#), ['Who Art in Heaven'](#)

Discussion

Prayer of Petition

The simplest and oldest form of prayer is to ask for things. Asking things of God is quite natural as God is understood by all people in terms of an exaltation of the human qualities of strength and power. It can be like the covenant; if I *do this* then God will *do that*. Jesus takes this simple and old way of praying and changes it completely. He still teaches us to ask for things, but now the petitions are made neither as the covenants were of old by way of a business deal, nor according to Law by a subservient nation clinging to the Land, but as little children to their loving Father. **Prayer has become a response to the love which God has first shown us.**

God – our Father

This most familiar prayer is a *gift* to us, and not something that we can say through any right, merit or deduction of our own. All human beings are made in *image* of God, and naturally yearn for union with the Him, and so naturally we have always called God by the powerful titles of 'Creator', 'King' and 'Lord' of all things. Jesus restores the *likeness* of God within us, and reveals to us the living God as He is in Himself. Not only does Jesus perfectly reveal God to us, but allows us to join in his own prayer; the prayer which God the Son has offered to God the principle of Being through all eternity. Jesus invites us through grace to have the same relationship with God that he has; that of Son.

Questions for reflection

How do Christians differ from all other human beings who are the children of God?

How is the Church's teaching about the Trinity, the Person of Christ, Grace found in this prayer?

The title 'Father' is better translated as the intimate title given by little children 'Daddy' (in Aramaic 'Abba'), which is one of complete **trust and dependence** of one who loves without condition.

'Our Father'

When we say the 'Our Father' together at Mass we do so at the beginning of the Communion Rite, the Sacrifice of Calvary is accomplished, and through, in and with Him who died we make our common prayer to God before receiving Holy Communion. We take up the words of Jesus at the completion of the Sacrifice. Jesus spoke to God as his Father at the beginning and at end of the Passion. In the Garden of Gethsemane when his human and Divine wills are battling he finally collapses and says, "Father, not my will but yours be done," and the soldiers arrive. On Cross when he cried out that all the concepts of God have failed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" his final words are, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." With this declaration of "Father" the Temple veil is ripped in two, and now heaven is thrown open to creation. God's life of eternal love is now possible for human beings through the revelation of the living God and our relationship with Him in Jesus His Son. Our voices are now caught up in the eternal voice of the eternal Son in the word "Father".

The Our Father – part II

Scripture

Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 12:25-35

Catechism

Paragraphs

- 2807-2815 Seven Petitions
2807-2815 'Hallowed be Thy Name'
2816-2821 'Thy Kingdom Come'
2822-2827 'Thy Will be Done on Earth, As it is in Heaven'

Discussion

The greatness of God

The intimacy which the Christian is taught by Jesus to have with God is the beginning of the journey into the mystery of the Divine love of the three Persons. This Son/Father relationship establishes the ground for everything else that happens, and it is what makes us holy as he is holy. The Name of God was given to Moses in the burning bush which is full of life, "I am who I am", as the name of God with us 'Jesus', is given to a virgin who is a mother. These ideas are more than our minds can carry, and these are the times when God's holiness is revealed to us. We cannot grasp the depth of God, we cannot ascend to His heights, but when He speaks his name and performs His mighty deeds our minds are caught up into and perfected by love.

The Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God, his reign which Jesus carries out, does not end in worldly success. It is a Kingdom where the poor and the little ones are the mighty, and where love and self-giving are the only law. For the Christian to live according to the Kingdom of God

involves martyrdom, a bearing witness to the new Law of love in the face of greed, ambition, pride and power, which are the routes to worldly success. **It means living for Easter, knowing that the world will crucify you as it did the Lord**, but that the Father will recognise the loving life we lead and raise us up to eternal life.

Life in the world

In the world it is for the Christian to live and bear witness to the Kingdom of God. He is part of culture, and engages in the whole host of different aspects of social living. The world is a good place and there are 'footprints' of God here, echoes which show that all creation is saturated with the creative Word of God, even though these points of Truth, Goodness and Beauty are often used to serve our selfish ends. The new light in which we live gives us discernment to see things as they truly are, and to speak to the world of how it can be truly happy in God. This prophetic voice is affirming of all that is good in the world, and a call to perfection through love and self-giving in obedience to God.

Questions for reflection

What images of God do I have, and how do they square with His revelation of Himself in Jesus?
What comprises do I make with the Kingdom, and how do I accommodate God's reign into worldly success?

The Our Father – part III

Scripture

Matthew 6:25-34; 1 Kings 19:3-8; Mark 8:1-10, 14-21;

Catechism

Paragraphs

2828-2837 'Give us This Day our Daily Bread'

Discussion

Living by Faith in the world

The work of the Christian in the world is daunting; knowing that living according to the Kingdom will involve living and dying with Jesus. In ourselves we have no power to continue for long on this road, and we will quickly compromise with what we have declared thus far in the Lord's Prayer. We may become ashamed of our Christian faith, especially when it conflicts with what many people in the world take for right conduct, and we feel that we should just go along with the crowd, and prefer a quiet life in the world rather than the road to heaven.

God's help

This self-knowledge of our weakness and half-heartedness is itself a great strength if we will declare it before God. We remain humble and lowly, and rely totally on God our Father to sustain us with His strength and power to do great things in His name. This petition is one of hunger and need, and helps us to keep a smile on our face when we get things wrong.

'Daily bread'

The bread that God gives is the Bread of the Kingdom; it is the wedding banquet of the Lamb. When we receive Holy Communion and eat the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus we are changed into Him, witnessed by calling God "our Father". Jesus is in heaven, and in sharing in that banquet we too belong to heaven. The angels and saints assist us in the journey by their prayers, and Church here on earth is sustained by the Bread of Angels. Jesus asks us to take up our cross every day and follow Him, and the sustenance that He gives is daily. We go to Mass and Holy Communion not because we have got it 'right' or because we are 'strong', but for quite the opposite reason. We go to Mass and Holy Communion because we are weak and hungry.

Questions for reflection

Am I reliant on my own powers, strength and insight, or do I accept my weakness as the necessary condition for God to act?

What value do I place on daily Mass, and what preparation do I make for Holy Communion?

The Our Father – part IV

Scripture

Luke 18:9-14, Matthew 19:21-35

Catechism

Paragraphs

2838-2845 ‘And Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against’

Discussion

We need God’s forgiveness...

We have seen that the battle is hard, and the road long and the call of the Gospel is often fitted into the normal operations of the world. To live as Jesus lived according to God’s Kingdom is a struggle. This petition asks for **forgiveness for the compromises that we have made with the spirit of the world against God our Father**. When we no longer trust Him, and forget (or outright reject) the opening words of the Lord’s Prayer and act accordingly, this is sin. But God’s Providence uses even sin to bring us closer to Him, as we rely less and less on our weak and divided wills and more and more throw ourselves on Him.

We need to forgive each other...

What we learn from God, we pass on to others. Knowing ourselves to be sinners and seeing God’s response to us, we then show this way to those to sin against us. God has cancelled the debt that we owe Him, broken the chain that binds us to the sin, and we do the same. In forgiving someone who has

sinned against me I am breaking the chain that binds us together in a cycle of recrimination. We are both free. If I am not willing to show this to my neighbour, then it is difficult to see if I have really received it from God. Probably I see His forgiveness of my sins as simply being put back on the tightrope to wobble along for a while until I fall off, rather than to be free to be joyful as a supremely loved child of the Father.

Forgive “seventy seven times”

Jesus has told us that we must keep on forgiving time and time again, not just once or twice or three times, but “seventy times seven”. That is what God does to us, so that we can grow more and more into His likeness. Sin then becomes the way in which we can know ourselves for what we are, and know God for what He is. We are raised ‘higher’ than we could ever imagine if we open ourselves as we are to God for forgiveness, and then we see even our sins in His providential light – “O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam” as the Church sings in the light of the new Paschal light shining in the darkness.

Questions for reflection

How many times will I forgive a sin against me?

How do I examine my conscience, and how often?

The Our Father – part V

Scripture

Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 10:17-20; John 16:33

Catechism

Paragraphs

2846-2854 'And lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil'

2855-2865 The Final Doxology

Discussion

Temptations

Everywhere we go on our journey into God, through this divided world, Jesus has been before us. This is of particular importance when we are engaged in battle with our passions, and we find that we would much rather go along with them and make the world serve us, rather than we the world. At the root of every temptation is something good, and something which brings happiness. If this is seen in the light of God's Kingdom, food, money, sex, reputation, ambition etc, can be of great service to us and our neighbour.

If the temptation is nurtured and kept hidden from prayer and the light of God, then it will corrupt the very thing it was designed to enliven.

We become slaves to the world through selfish passions, rather than enjoy the freedom of God's children to enjoy the world.

The Evil One

Satan hates human beings, and hates the world God loves. He will twist good things we have been given round, so that what should free us will bring us

chaos, eventually consuming us in self-hatred. He is a liar, and says that by holding fast to things, reputation, desires, etc we will be happy.

Christ's victory

Jesus has conquered Satan by giving up every human security; bread and political and spiritual power in His forty day fast in the desert, as well as religious expectation and Divine favour of the expected Jewish Messiah. By calling God "Father" to the end, and holding fast to His Will which is love when that Gospel was rejected, and even His friends left Him, Jesus destroyed the power of Satan. To call God "Our Father" is our only hope. The battle is long and intense, and there are deep wounds we have to suffer. These wounds will be our battle scars of honour in the Kingdom. God and Satan are not two equal opposing forces, with God in the blue corner and Satan in the red corner. God is Lord, the Creator of all, and all things are permitted by His Providence.

Questions for reflection

What weapons do I use in the Spiritual Combat?

What image do I have of the devil, and how does the 'Our Father' effect that?