

# **WHAT IS PRAYER?**

## **Texts from the**

### ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***



### **Prayer in the Christian Life**

#### *A personal relationship with the living God*

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (Part One) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (Part Three). This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer. (2558)

#### *A simple look toward heaven*

"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy." (St. Thérèse of Lisieux)

### **Prayer as God's Gift**

#### *Humility the foundation*

"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." (St. John Damascene) But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart? (Ps 130:10) He who humbles himself will be exalted; (Cf. Lk 18:9-14) humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought," (Rom 8:26) are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "Man is a beggar before God." (St. Augustine) (2559)

#### *God's thirst for us*

"If you knew the gift of God!" (Jn 4:10) The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him. (2560)

#### *A response of faith and love to the Son of God*

"You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (Jn 4:10). Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!" (Jer 2:13) Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God. (2561)

### **Prayer as Covenant**

#### *It is the heart that prays*

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. (2562)

### *A covenant relationship between God and man in Christ*

The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant. (2563)

Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man. (2564)

### **Prayer as Communion**

#### *The habit of being in communion with the thrice-holy God*

In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity... with the whole human spirit." (St. Gregory of Nazianzus) Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ. (Cf. Rom 6:5) Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love. (Cf. Eph 3:18-21.) (2565)

### **The Universal Call to Prayer**

#### *Man is in search of God*

In the act of creation, God calls every being from nothingness into existence. "Crowned with glory and honour," man is, after the angels, capable of acknowledging "how majestic is the name of the Lord in all the earth." (Ps 8:6; 8:1) Even after losing through his sin his likeness to God, man remains an image of his Creator, and retains the desire for the one who calls him into existence. All religions bear witness to men's essential search for God. (Cf. Acts 17:27) (2566)

#### *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. (2567)

### **IN BRIEF**

- **"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." (St. John Damascene) (2590)**

