

THE TRADITION OF PRAYER

The Church Teaches us to Pray Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The Holy Spirit and the Tradition of the Church

We are taught to pray by the Holy Spirit through Tradition

Prayer cannot be reduced to the spontaneous outpouring of interior impulse: in order to pray, one must have the will to pray. Nor is it enough to know what the Scriptures reveal about prayer: one must also learn how to pray. Through a living transmission (Sacred Tradition) within “the believing and praying Church”, the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God how to pray. (2650)

The tradition of Christian prayer is one of the ways in which the tradition of faith takes shape and grows, especially through the contemplation and study of believers who treasure in their hearts the events and words of the economy of salvation, and through their profound grasp of the spiritual realities they experience. (2651)

Special times for prayer are needed

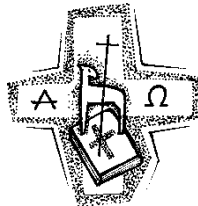
Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget Him who is our life and our all. This is why the Fathers of the spiritual life in the Deuteronomic and prophetic traditions insist that prayer is a remembrance of God often awakened by the memory of the heart: “We must remember God more often than we draw breath” (St. Gregory of Nazianzus). But we cannot pray “at all times” if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it. These are the special times of Christian prayer, both in intensity and duration. (2697)

The Church’s rhythms of prayer

The Tradition of the Church proposes to the faithful certain rhythms of praying intended to nourish continual prayer. Some are *daily*, such as:

- morning and evening Prayer,
- grace before and after meals,
- the Liturgy of the Hours.
- *Sundays*, centred on the Eucharist, are kept holy primarily by prayer.
- The cycle of *the liturgical year* and its *great feasts* are also basic rhythms of the Christian’s life of prayer. (2698)

Scripture and the Sacred Liturgy



The Word of God

The Holy Spirit is the *living water* “welling up to eternal life” (Jn 4:14) in the heart that prays. It is he who teaches us to accept it at its source: Christ. Indeed in the Christian life there are several wellsprings where Christ awaits us to enable us to drink of the Holy Spirit. (2652)

The Church “forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful... to learn ‘the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures... Let them remember, however, that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For ‘we speak to him when we pray; we listen to him when we read the divine oracles’” (2653)

The spiritual writers, paraphrasing Matthew 7:7, summarize in this way the dispositions of the heart nourished by the word of God in prayer: “Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation.” (Guigo the Carthusian) (2654)

The Liturgy of the Church

In the sacramental liturgy of the Church, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present and communicates the mystery of salvation, which is continued in the heart that prays. The spiritual writers sometimes compare the heart to an altar. Prayer internalises and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration. Even when it is lived out “in secret”, prayer is always *prayer of the Church*; it is a communion with the Holy Trinity. (2655)

The Theological Virtues



Faith

One enters into prayer as one enters into liturgy: by the narrow gate of *faith*. Through the signs of his presence, it is the Face of the Lord that we seek and desire; it is his Word that we want to hear and keep. (2656)

Hope

The Holy Spirit, who instructs us to celebrate the liturgy in expectation of Christ's return, teaches us to pray in *hope*. Conversely, the prayer of the Church and personal prayer nourish hope in us. The psalms especially, with their concrete and varied language, teach us to fix our hope in God: "I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry" (Ps 40:2). As St. Paul prayed: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Rom 15:13) (2657)

Love

"Hope does not disappoint us, because God's *love* has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). Prayer, formed by the liturgical life, draws everything into the love by which we are loved in Christ and which enables us to respond to him by loving as he has loved us. Love is the source of prayer; whoever draws from it reaches the summit of prayer. In the words of the Curé of Ars, St. John Vianney:

"I love you, O my God, and my only desire is to love you until the last breath of my life. I love you, O my infinitely loveable God, and I would rather die loving you, than live without loving you. I love you, Lord, and the only grace I ask is to love you eternally... My God, if my tongue cannot say in every moment that I love you, I want my heart to repeat it to you as often as I draw breath." (2658)

Praying at All Times

Praying in the events of each day

We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his Paschal mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times, in the events of *each day*, to make prayer spring up from us. Jesus' teaching about praying to our Father is in the same vein as his teaching about providence: time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter him, not yesterday nor tomorrow, but today: "O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts" (Ps 95:7-8) (2659)

...and each moment

Prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the kingdom revealed to "little children", to the servants of Christ, to the poor of the Beatitudes. It is right and good to pray so that the coming of the kingdom of justice and peace may influence the march of history, but it is just as important to bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations; all forms of prayer can be the leaven to which the Lord compares the kingdom. (Cf. Lk 13:20-21) (2660)

IN BRIEF

- **By a living transmission – Tradition - the Holy Spirit in the Church teaches the children of God to pray. (2661)**
- **The Word of God, the liturgy of the Church, and the virtues of faith, hope and charity are sources of prayer. (2662)**

