

The Revelation of Prayer: Our Yearning for God

Goal

The goal of this chapter is to help students reflect upon the Sacred Tradition we inherit from the Israelites, God's chosen people of the Old Testament. Through their stories and their examples, we learn the meaning of God's blessing and God's initial invitation to enter a covenant relationship with him. Through conversation and prayers the door is opened for the students to respond to God's call.

Objectives

Your students will:

1. Define the terms *covenant of Sinai*, *Diaspora*, *Hebrews*, *hesed*, *People of God*, *prophet*, *revelation*, and *Sacred Tradition*.
2. Explain how knowing our Sacred Tradition can help us learn the art of prayer.
3. Explain, in light of God's blessing of Abraham, the phrase "In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response." (CCC, 2567)
4. List ways in which, like Moses, encountering God moves us from slavery to freedom.
5. Name three body postures that help us open ourselves to prayer.

Catechism Focus



The material in this chapter, "The Revelation of Prayer: Our Yearning for God," is taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The teacher and students can reference the following:

- "The Universal Call to Prayer" (2566–2567)
- "In the Old Testament" (2568)
- "Creation—Source of Prayer" (2569)

- "God's Promise and the Prayer of Faith" (2570-2573)
- "Moses and the Prayer of the Mediator" (2574-2577)
- "David and the Prayer of the King" (2578-2580)
- "Elijah, the Prophets and Conversion of Heart" (2581-2584)
- "The Psalms, the Prayer of the Assembly" (2585-2589)

Overview

Just as aspiring artists and writers should study the great works of the past, so we as aspiring pray-ers should study the legacy of our ancestors. Not only do we learn how to pray, but we are also inspired by the real purpose of prayer: the transformation that is possible when we encounter the living God. Through the inspiration of Abraham we learn to recognize the meaning of "blessing" in our lives. Because of the blessing that we have already received, we are free to bless others and receive their blessing.

Through the story of Moses we learn the freedom that is ours through entering into a covenant with God. This special relationship gives us the strength and courage to overcome that which enslaves us and others.

Young people are often moved and surprised by David's ecstatic dance as he honors God. Inspired by this story, students will experiment with various body postures that can help us enter into prayer with our whole selves.

Finally we come to understand that the psalms can help us to get behind the roles that we sometimes need to play with others and to express the deep emotions that come from our true selves.

Presentation Procedures

Lesson One: The Universal Call to Prayer (pages 17–19)

Catechism Focus



This lesson will explore paragraphs 2566 and 2567 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Paragraph 2591 summarizes God's call to us through the whole history of salvation.

Opening Prayer Reflection

Together pray Psalm 111 with the class.

Activity "What Do You Think?" (page 17)

Respond to the statement in this section. Name some people throughout history who were changed through prayer. (Examples might include: Saint Paul, Saint Augustine, Moses, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr. and so on.) Ask students to volunteer to share their responses with the class.

Opening Story (page 17)

After reading the story of Manuel, discuss the question on page 17 of the student workbook concerning our relationship with God.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:
Praying is communicating with God.

Discuss

At first glance, this may not be a startling revelation to students, but broadening their ways of thinking about communication may help them see that there are many ways of praying.

Brainstorm all of the ways that we communicate with others. Write the students' ideas on the board. Get as many as you can. (Be sure to include words, body language, art, music, facial expressions, dance, letters to a friend, and poetry.)

Encourage discussion: What are your favorite ways of communicating? At what times in your life? For what purpose?

Activity "For Reflection" (page 18)

Allow time for the students to complete the questions in the section "For Reflection" on page 18 of the workbook. Discuss the responses with the class.

Present

Just as there are as many ways of communicating as there are people, so there are as many ways of praying as there are individuals. Yet if you

were an aspiring writer, you would be foolish to never read the works of great writers from the past. (Pass around copies of great works of literature, for example *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, or other works that you have available.) You may learn how to paint well from studying Rembrandt or Picasso. (Again pass around various prints from great artists. Here you may also use other media to get the point across; for example, a video tape of great Olympic athletes, an architectural blue print, pictures of great cathedrals, a short excerpt from a great film, and so on.)

Discuss

Elicit specific examples of ways studying these various art forms will help a person become a better writer, artist, athlete, architect, and so on. Ask your students to give examples of ways they have been inspired and learned from moments of inspiration.

Present

We can also learn the art of prayer from the Sacred Tradition of the Catholic Church, from our ancestors in faith who have gone before us. (Pass around a copy of the Bible and other classic works from our Tradition.) Help the students see that just as all artists learn from the past, so we ought to study the ways our ancestors prayed. Then through experiment, success and failure, trial and error we can develop our own unique style of praying and make these various prayer forms our own.

Journal "What the Documents Say" (page 19)

Have the students read the quote from the *Catechism* on page 19 of the student workbook. Allow time for students to respond to the questions. Ask students to volunteer to share their responses with the class.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

Revelation

Our faith teaches us that Sacred Scripture is God's revelation. Something unique and powerful is revealed about God through the Bible. God has revealed himself to us by gradually communicating his own mystery in deeds and words. "In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to [us] in a human way" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 109).

Journal (page 20)

Have students complete the journal writing exercise on page 20 of the student workbook: "In creation, I have experienced the presence of God . . ."

Closing Prayer Reflection

Light a candle if school policy permits this. Have reflective music playing in the background. Ask the students to quietly call to mind saints, prophets, patriarchs, and other people of history who have been role models and inspiration for them. In the form of a litany, have the students, one by one, invoke the name of one person. After each name have the group respond, "Be with us," or "Help us to pray." Then read together the prayer on page 26 of the student workbook.

Lesson Two: The Blessing of Abraham; Moses and the Prayer of Intercession (pages 20–22)

Catechism Focus

This lesson is taken from paragraphs 2570–2577 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Paragraphs 2592–2593 summarize the prayers of Abraham and Moses.

Opening Prayer Reflection

Integrate this prayer or a prayer of your own at the beginning of the lesson:

God of Life and Source of All,
So often I feel that I am not worth much.
I compare myself to others who seem to be better than I am.
Help me to recognize the many ways that you have blessed me,
in the past, and especially now.
We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

Blessing

Discuss

Have students name thoughts, feelings, associations, or questions that they have with this word. Invite their discussion.

Present

Have a student read Genesis 12:1–3. Abraham received God's blessing. Think about the ways that you have been blessed in your life—affirmed for who you are perhaps by your parents, teachers, coaches.

Blessing is what we all long for.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

God's blessing is not a paycheck.

Present

Many people believe that they have to earn a blessing through achievements. But the good news of our faith is that we do good works because we have been blessed by God first. God's blessing is a gift, freely offered. Because we have already been blessed by God, we also have the gift to bless others.

Activity "What Do You Think?" (page 21)

Allow time for the students to respond to the questions in the section "What Do You Think?" on page 21 of the student workbook. Discuss the responses with the class.

Optional

Note: This activity is a potentially powerful experience for many young people. Careful thought and preparation are very important.

Form a circle. Have the students quiet their bodies, their thoughts, and their hearts. Light a candle (if school policy permits). Pray for the Spirit's presence. Invite the students to affirm each other by naming ways they see God's blessing in them. Have the students point out the gifts and talents they recognize. Make sure that everyone is affirmed for at least one or two "blessings."

Alternative: Have each student write their name on a sheet of paper. Have them pass the sheets of paper around, making sure that each paper gets to every student. Invite the students to write on each sheet one or two ways that they recognize God's blessing in each person. Give the students time to read their "blessing sheet."

Journal

Have the students respond to "Exploring Our Catholic Faith," question 2, on page 27 of the student workbook.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

Through the power of prayer we are called and strengthened to become free people.

Present

Read aloud Exodus 3:1–12. Summarize and discuss the reading by making two columns on the board, *Slavery* and *Freedom*. Ask your students to name the benefits of both. In other words, Why would a person choose to be "enslaved" rather than free? (It's more comfortable; it's easier; you don't have to think for yourself.) Why would a person rather be free? (Live life more fully; be able to love one's self and others.)

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

What "enslaves" us?

What or who are our "pharaohs"?

Present

Moses is called to bring the people from slavery to freedom. Using the word "slavery" in a symbolic way, that is, those internal and external forces that enslave us, what "pharaohs" have you encountered in your life? In the lives of others? In society? (Responses might include: addiction, social injustice, domestic violence, peer pressure, and so on.)

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

How might we free ourselves from our "pharaohs"?

Present

Through his communication with God, Moses receives his call, his vocation, and the strength to carry it out. Only through prayer can we be aware of and gain the courage to do battle with and be victorious over our own "pharaohs" and work courageously against social injustice.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

hesed

Present

The word *hesed* means "God's unending love." During their wanderings in the desert, the Hebrews became more aware they were God's special people and committed themselves to living this relationship.

Activity "What Do You Think?" (page 22)

Allow time for the students to respond to the questions in this section. Ask volunteers to share their responses with the class.

Assign

Have the students look through newspapers and magazines and find an article about people who are oppressed. Write a paragraph explaining how prayer might play a role in liberating those caught in oppression.

Closing Prayer Reflection

I love the LORD, who listened
to my voice in supplication,
Who turned an ear to me
on the day I called.

I was caught by the cords of death;
the snares of Sheol had seized me;
I felt agony and dread.
Then I called on the name of the LORD,
"O LORD, save my life!"

Gracious is the LORD and just;
yes, our God is merciful.
The LORD protects the simple;
I was helpless, but God saved me.
Return, my soul, to your rest;
the LORD has been good to you.
For my soul has been freed from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet from
stumbling.

I shall walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

Psalm 116:1-9

Lesson Three: David, Elijah, and the Psalmist (pages 23–26)

Catechism Focus



This lesson is inspired by paragraphs 2578–2580 and 2585–2589 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Paragraph 2596 summarizes the importance of the Psalms in the life of the Church.

Opening Prayer Reflection

Open this lesson by reading Psalm 100.

Present

Briefly tell the story of David's procession into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:1–20) as he brings the Ark of the Covenant into the Holy City.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

Then David, girt with a linen apron, came dancing before the LORD with abandon. (2 Samuel 6:14)

Discuss

Discuss how our bodies can be a great help to us in our prayer. Say, David is so filled with his love for God that he uses his body to pray. We, too, are invited to use our bodies when we pray.

Activity "What Do You Think?" (page 23)

Allow time for the students to respond to these questions. Ask for volunteers to discuss their responses with the group.

Prayer Exercise

Have the students try out these prayer postures together. Pause between each one. Ask them to be aware of what attitudes and feelings each prayer posture brings about in them.

- Closing your eyes versus opening them
- Folding your hands
- Palms up versus palms down
- Standing together
- Kneeling
- Sitting
- Genuflecting
- Walking

Journal

Have the students practice one or two of the above prayer postures. Have them write a one or two paragraph reflection about the experience.

Present

Summarize the importance of praying the psalms in the life of the Church. Point out that the moods and emotions of the psalmist are clearly conveyed in the psalms. We can feel elation as well as lamentation.

Video



Understanding the Catechism: Prayer, Video segment 2: "Praying Not So Well." Watch this segment of the video with your students. Distribute copies of the video discussion guide, which is found on page 25 of this guide, and lead the group in a discussion of this segment.

Board

Write on the board or newsprint:

Roles we play vs. our true self.

Present

It is not possible to share all of our emotions with others all the time. Yet, our relationship with God is unique because in prayer we do not need to "play roles." God already knows what is in our hearts. We can let out all of our emotions to God as the psalmist did, and know that God hears us. Sadness, grief, joy, hope, and many other emotions are important to bring to God in prayer. The psalms can help us let our true selves and the emotions that we feel down deep come out.

Activity

Ask your students to look at "Listening to God's Word" on page 27 of the student workbook. Divide the students into small groups. Give each group a copy of their own psalm from the list. Have each group read their psalms out loud to each other and list all of the emotions that are present.

Discuss

Lead a discussion on how reading a psalm might be helpful in your private prayer. Ask what is the value of saying or singing the psalms as an assembly?

Activity "What Do You Think?" (page 24)

Have the students complete the questions on page 24 of the student workbook. Ask for volunteers to share their answers with the class.

Journal

Invite your students to reflect on their own emotions and needs in their lives now. Then have them compose their own psalm in their journals.

Closing Prayer Reflection

Read and pray aloud Psalm 63:2-4 together with your students.

O God, you are my God—
for you I long!
For you my body yearns;
for you my soul thirsts,
Like a land parched, lifeless,
and without water.
So I look to you in the sanctuary
to see your power and glory.
For your love is better than life;
my lips offer you worship!

Recall and Review

Important Terms to Know

As a final review of this chapter, invite the students to use the terms in "Important Terms to Know" on page 26 of the student workbook to illustrate their understanding of their identity as Catholics.

Chapter Summary

Use the "Chapter Summary" on page 27 of the student workbook to reinforce the major points of the chapter and to elicit and respond to any unanswered questions the students might have.

Exploring Our Catholic Faith

Use these exercises throughout the presentation of the chapter. They are designed to help the students reinforce, apply, and extend the concepts developed in the chapter.

Quiz

The quiz for chapter 2 is found on page 26 of this guide.

Answers:

1. F, 2. T, 3. T, 4. F, 5. F, 6. T, 7. T, 8. F, 9. F, 10. F

Name _____

Discussion Guide

1. Write about a time when you prayed for something that you later realized you should not have prayed for.

Goal

Objectives

2. Write about a time when you feel you should have prayed but you did not. Discuss your answers with two or three other people.

Catechism Focus

The material in this chapter, "Be the Fullness of Time," is created from the teachings of the Catholic Church found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The teacher and students can reference the following:

- "Jesus Prays" (2594-2595)
- "Jesus Teaches Us How to Pray" (2607-2616)
- "The Prayers of the Virgin Mary" (2617-2619)

Name _____

I. True/False

In the space provided, write "T" if the statement is true and "F" if the statement is false.

- _____ 1. Hesed refers to God's love that comes to us after we fulfill certain requirements.
- _____ 2. God's message, or revelation, is shown to us in many ways including creation and Scripture.
- _____ 3. Knowing our Sacred Tradition can help us enrich our prayer lives.
- _____ 4. We should not pay attention to our bodies when we pray.
- _____ 5. We should always try to be happy when we pray.
- _____ 6. Entering into God's covenant gives us freedom and courage.
- _____ 7. The psalms teach us to bring our real selves into prayer.
- _____ 8. Psalms are mostly used for private prayer only.
- _____ 9. Living a holy life and dancing are almost total opposites.
- _____ 10. God is waiting for us to make the first move.

II. Essay

Explain the meaning of the saying "God's love is not a paycheck. It's a gift." What impact does this message have on a Christian's approach to prayer?