

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword .....	9
Preface .....	11
Introduction .....	13
The Way of Prayer .....	13
Children's Relationship with God .....	14
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
The Different Forms of Prayer .....	17
Personal or Silent Prayer .....	18
Community Prayer .....	19
Prayer from Memory or Memory in Prayers? .....	23
Psalms and Children .....	27
The Lord's Prayer: Jesus' Favorite Prayer .....	32
Praying the Rosary .....	33
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
Praying with the Senses .....	39
Praying with the Eyes: Knowing How to LOOK .....	40
Praying with the Ears: Knowing How to LISTEN .....	41
Praying with the Hands: Knowing How to TOUCH .....	41
Praying with the Mouth: Knowing How to TASTE and SPEAK .....	42
Praying with the Nose: Knowing How to SMELL .....	43
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
Praying Through Gestures, Singing, and Drawing .....	45
Gestures .....	46
Singing .....	50
Drawing .....	52

## *Chapter 4*

Introduction to Silence .....	55
The World Without Silence .....	55
Silence and the Mystery of God .....	56
Biblical Silence .....	56
Types of Silence .....	59

## *Chapter 5*

Introducing Children to Silence .....	61
Practical Considerations .....	62
Helpful Techniques ??? .....	64

## *Chapter 6*

A Place for Prayer .....	71
The Prayer Corner .....	72
Characteristics of the "Prayer Corner" .....	73

## *Chapter 7*

Prayer in the Family .....	77
From Conception to the Baby's Arrival Home .....	78
Before the Child Can Walk .....	79
After the Child Can Walk .....	81
Different Occasions to Pray .....	82
Conclusion .....	87
Bibliography .....	89

## Chapter 3

# Praying Through Gestures, Singing, and Drawing

*The catechesis of children, young people, and adults aims at teaching them to meditate on the Word of God in personal prayer, practicing it in liturgical prayer, and internalizing it at all times in order to bear fruit in a new life.*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2688*

Gestures, singing, and drawing are some of the ways in which children pray. It is through these activities that we will recognize and assist them to achieve true moments of prayer.

Children not only enjoy but express themselves in a complete and total way through song, gesture, and drawing. Their whole personality resonates with and is expressed through the senses, even more so when they sing and make gestures.

## Gestures

*Contrary to what happens with the adult, the gesture is not the child's projection of an idea or a feeling that tends to externalization. Rather, it is the means by which the idea or feeling enters his consciousness.*

*(Translated from the Spanish) Lubienska de Lenval*

For children, gestures are much more meaningful than words. Gestures allow children to express what words cannot say. For example, a child will express praise to God much more profoundly by waving at God with her arms to accompany the words "I praise God" than if she just says the words alone.

Most kids need gestures much more than words to express themselves. For them, if the whole body or parts of it are not involved, communication seems incomplete. This is all the more true in prayer.

It is one thing to say we're happy because Jesus loves us; it's another to dance around a statue of Jesus, singing with our whole being, "I have a friend who loves me."

Obviously kids not only enjoy it more when their whole body expresses what they feel, but this expression makes them feel more deeply what they say. We must ensure that children live the religious gestures they make. Unfortunately, routine or a lack of knowledge can eventually nullify the meaning of gestures that were once very valuable.

Here I propose a list and a brief explanation of the sacred gestures commonly used in our personal prayers or community celebrations to help us better communicate with God.

- **Sign of the Cross:** This is the sign of salvation, since Jesus redeemed us on the cross. It is the sign of Christ. It should be

made slowly, broadly, and carefully. When we make it, we put ourselves in God's presence for any and all life situations.

- **Sign of the Cross (long):** We make three crosses, slowly and ceremoniously, first on the forehead, then on the lips, and finally on the chest. At the same time, we say,

+ O Lord, open my mind;

+ O Lord, open my lips;

+ Open my heart to listen and proclaim your Word.

This Sign of the Cross is used before the proclamation of the Gospel, replacing the previous (short) version. Therefore, only this one should be made.

- **Standing:** When something or someone important is coming, standing means being willing and ready to respond.
- **Kneeling:** Before the greatness and holiness of God, we kneel to express our smallness, our humility, our praise for the God who loves us and gave us life. Kneeling indicates that the heart is bowing with deep respect for God.
- **Sitting:** This is the attitude of openness to listen carefully to another or to the Word of God.
- **Inclining the head:** Indicates reverence or a greeting to God. We use this gesture when we pass in front of the altar.
- **Bowing:** Like the previous gesture, bowing shows adoration and respect in the presence of God.
- **Genuflection:** The right knee touches the ground, the left knee is bent, and the head is bowed. It indicates greeting and worship, especially in front of the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.
- **Striking the chest:** A sign of penance. Repentance is manifested through a soft blow to the chest with a closed fist. It symbolizes

hitting the doors of our interior world to call us to see God and return to him.

- **Standing with open arms:** The soul opens fully to God as a sign of joy, praise, jubilation, and thanksgiving.

- **The sign of peace:** The sign of peace not only means we are reconciled to others but expresses the hope that God will flood us with his peace.

- **Hands:** In a particular way, the face and hands are the soul's mirror and instruments. After the face, hands are the most expressive part of the body. With them we can make different gestures that have different meanings:

—**Hands together:** expresses the union of the whole person who is oriented toward God on high.

—**Interlaced fingers:** faced with a stressful situation or deep grief, interlaced fingers express the need for unity and inner strength as the person asks God for help.

—**Open hands extended upward:** expresses the attitude of receiving something, of receiving God; in some cases it can mean imploring help from above.

—**Holding hands:** a sign of unity and of an affectionate bond uniting those making the gesture.

—**Laying on of hands:** hands extended down over another's head signifies the transmission of the force and the power of the Spirit who is poured out in us.

—**Clapping for God:** expresses approval and joy over everything we have received.

- **Blessing:** Only God can bless and does so through his ministers. His almighty love is aimed at the hearts of his creatures. From God's hand flows the holy and good strength that makes

us grow. God gives himself. Only the Lord can bless people. When objects are blessed, God is blessing the people who will use them.

- **Processional entrance:** Expresses the march of the people of God, a journey they make together as a people to the Father.
- **Taking grace:** This happens when we approach an image, touch it, and make the Sign of the Cross. We ask saints to intercede with God so that the Lord will shed his grace on the one who implores it.
- **Kissing or blowing kisses to an image:** These are ways of expressing affection and reverence. It is important to help children understand the relative value of images.
- **Bringing flowers or gifts:** Expresses affection, remembrance, and thoughts about the other. This is especially true when it comes to the Virgin Mary.
- **Candles:** The lighted candle represents the presence of the risen Christ, especially the paschal candle. Light, which gives form, color, and meaning to things, is a sign of life, a sign of God.
- **Holy water:** Water is full of mystery. It is clear, simple, purifying, comforting, and powerful all at the same time. Life flows forth from it. When we make the Sign of the Cross, dipping our fingers in holy water with proper interior disposition, our venial(or small) sins are forgiven.

It is very important to seek out and explain the meaning of the gestures we make. We should always take a moment to reflect on the sacred gestures we use so that we internalize them and make them intentionally.

We must demand great authenticity and sincerity from ourselves and from children so that we do not perform empty gestures without the right internal attitudes. And we should always make the ges-

tures with the children. That's how we pass on the "bug" of enthusiasm that helps kids grow in their faith. Sometimes we can create gestures with the kids; the important thing is to help them express their love for God.

Any religious gesture used in prayer and lived with intensity will help us establish greater communication with God, our Lord.

## Singing

*Singing is characteristic of one who loves;*

*singing is praying twice.*

(From the Spanish) Attributed to Saint Augustine

Singing is an intense form of expression that is verbal, poetic, and musical at the same time. It is one of the most complete forms of human expression and perhaps one of the best ways to worship and communicate with God.

Song has a very important place in a child's prayer. Along with gestures, it is one of the forms of expression that children enjoy and get into most. Songs reach so deeply into the hearts of children that they often remember them for a lifetime.

Religious songs are an important educational, recreational, and pastoral resource. Singing should be a daily and permanent part of children's catechesis. I believe that the inclusion of song in the catechesis of children is an excellent methodological choice since, in practice, it is a "sung catechesis."

Especially when we add songs with gestures. This "magical" fusion of singing and gestures generates a response in children that we cannot even imagine and whose educational power is difficult to fully grasp. Those who have had the experience know that children enjoy few things more than "singing with the whole body," or combining gesture, song, and prayer.



A creative catechist can make up songs with the children and choose the gestures that go best with the songs. Of course, as always, the catechist will not only have to do these gestures but must live and sing with full intensity.

### *Some notes on singing with children*

- We need to take special care with the content of the songs because of how they make such a mark on a child's heart. We should avoid teaching corny, silly simplifications that lack any poetry or indulge theological nonsense.
- The content must be simple, deep, and accessible to the child's understanding. I recommend explaining the words first.
- A song addressed to the Lord must be differentiated from other common songs by its form and by the way we sing it.
- The melody should be suited to a child's age. It should be cheerful, fast, short, rhythmic, simple, repetitive, and easy to remember.
- If possible, a good portion of the songs should be accompanied with gestures that reinforce the content without being silly or ridiculous.
- The lyrics and melody should fit the context of the catechetical topic.
- We must use creativity, ingenuity, and incentive to get kids to "live" the songs dedicated to God.
- The kids are more aware of the song itself than of the way it is sung by the catechist (they are not demanding judges but rather an audience eager to sing and learn a new song). So we can move and sing with a certain calm, even if we make mistakes.
- If you do not feel capable of singing, you could use a music player, although that is not the best option.

Many parents would like to have copies of songs to sing with their children at home. Catechists and teachers need to know which ones to recommend.

We can use tapes or CDs, but we should not rely on them too much. Many beautiful songs end up “stale” because we repeat them on every occasion.

Prayer through singing and singing in prayer are two sides of the same coin. The deepest experiences of prayer for the psalmists, saints, and Christians are inextricably joined to songs of praise and thanksgiving. Throughout the life of the Church, song has been a privileged expression of prayer.

In children, the need to combine singing with prayer is much deeper and responds much better to their condition as children. From there, we must not by any means miss the enormous richness of song in the believer’s prayer, catechesis, and faith life.

Thanks to God and to the work of many catechists, musicians, and poets, the repertoire of religious songs for kids is increasing day by day. We need to keep up with them and spread them around so that others can use them.

These directions are only a guide to the use of religious song in catechesis and prayer.

Of course, the only way to learn to sing songs with the kids is to sing along with them, and only those who have been through this beautiful experience can realize its immense value for catechesis.

## Drawing

*We need to contemplate the beauty of the Father and impregnate our soul with it.*

(Translated from the Spanish) Attributed to Saint Gregory of Nyssa

Drawing, or artistic expression in general, is one form of expression that kids get most excited about. Children like to draw and fre-

quently apply and share much of themselves when they set out to make a piece of art.

Plastic expression mobilizes a child so that his or her whole being is absorbed by the activity, producing as much pleasure and dedication as playing games.

Such enthusiasm could be used to channel a moment of prayer so that pleasure, devotion, and prayer are closely linked. This resource should be used regularly in catechesis, though without tiring or exhausting the kids as this will restrict their creative capacity.

Moreover, anything that helps kids develop their creative capacity helps them participate indirectly in God's creation. Every creative act is a participation in creation. The pursuit of beauty is, in essence, the seeking of God.

In children, the experience of faith and the expression of faith are inextricably linked. For them, activities of religious expression are a way of reliving what they just experienced in catechesis. That is, if the child has a faith experience, he relives it and internalizes it when he can express it through his own creation. Also, when he is expressing faith, he is having an experience of faith. It is a process that constantly reinforces itself.

Making a drawing for God to the rhythm of tranquil music can become a moment of quiet prayer. Using these drawings to express our needs, our gratitude, or simply what we want to say or tell God is another way for all of us to express ourselves.

Whenever we draw, we should add specific catechetical content to the drawing. Insofar as it is possible, children should include themselves, their friends, family, Jesus, and so on in the drawing. We should not create any stereotyped image of God, much less correct the kids on this point. However, we can encourage their drawing and creativity through suggestions.

For example, we can stimulate their creativity through the reading of a biblical text. With paper in front of them and their materials

ready, have youngsters close their eyes after hearing the story and imagine the scene: how the characters are dressed, what the weather is like, what sounds and noises they imagine in the scene, what the characters are saying to one another, what Jesus is saying, and what their attitude is. "I imagine my friends, my family, and so on within the scene. What colors best express what I imagined?" With suggestions and questions like these, we can guide children to make their drawing a prayer. Then we open our eyes and, with the joy of knowing that we are drawing for God, we get down to business.

Clearly we are not evaluating the quality or technique of the drawing but trying to make it a means of approaching God.

After the experience, the children can take the pictures home or to a Liturgy of the Word and offer them to God.