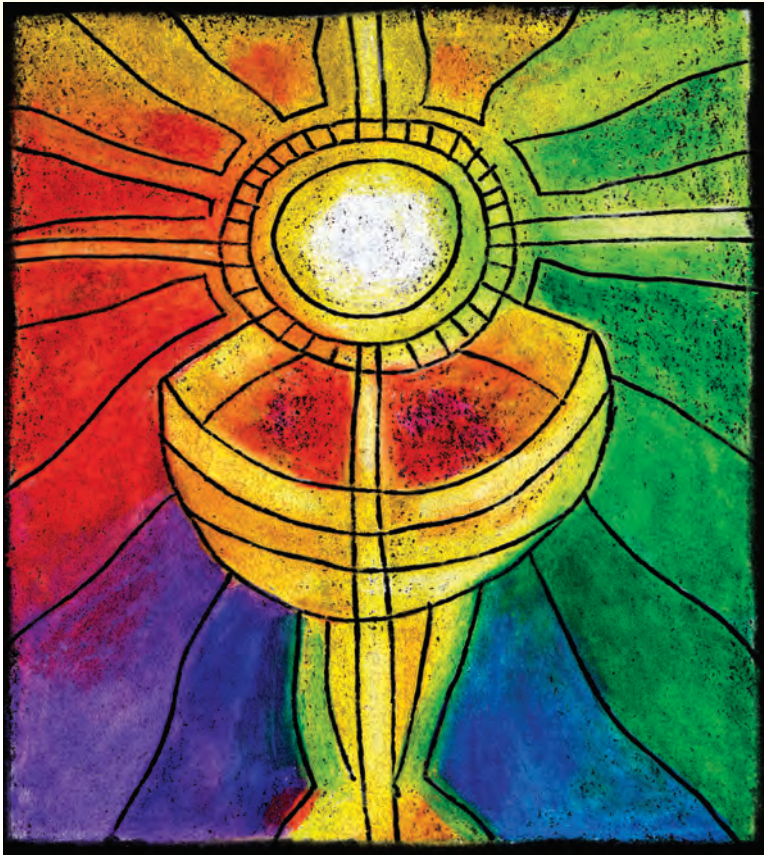


OUR CATHOLIC TRADITION

HANDBOOK

FOR

CATHOLICS



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Prayer and How We Pray

Our faith depends on a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is rooted in prayer.

What Is Prayer?

In prayer we raise our hearts and minds to God. We are able to speak and listen to God because through the Holy Spirit, God teaches us how to pray. Prayer is a gift from God. We can pray because God seeks us out first and calls us to meet him. Prayer arises from our heart, beyond the grasp of reason. Only the Spirit of God can understand the human heart and know it fully. Prayer is the habit of being with God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christian prayer is communion with Christ that branches out to all the members of his Body, the Church.

The Five Basic Forms of Christian Prayer

The Holy Spirit, who teaches us to pray, leads us to pray in a number of ways. This conversation with God can take the form of blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, or praise.

Blessing

To bless someone is to acknowledge the goodness of that person. The prayer of blessing or adoration is our response to God's goodness because of all the gifts he has given us. In the prayer of blessing, God's gifts and our acceptance of them come together. Because God blesses the human heart, the human heart can in return bless him, who is the source of every blessing.

Petition

Petition is much more than asking God for things we want or need. By prayers of petition we express our relationship with God as our Creator. We depend on him, and we ask him for something for ourselves. Sometimes we sin and turn away from God. The first step in the prayer of petition is turning back toward him and asking for forgiveness. We can then ask God for what we need, confident that he knows what we need before we ask.

Intercession

In prayers of intercession we ask something on behalf of another. As a prayer form, intercession is a prayer of petition that leads us to pray as Jesus did. Throughout his life on earth, Jesus interceded with the Father on behalf of all people. To pray in this way means that our hearts are turned outward, focused on the needs around us.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is characteristic of Christian prayer, especially in the Eucharist. The word *Eucharist* means “thanksgiving.” Through his death and Resurrection, Christ has reconciled us to God. His sacrifice is made present in every Eucharist. Every joy we experience, as well as our every need, can become an offering of thanksgiving in the Eucharist. In celebrating the Eucharist, the Church reveals itself as and becomes more fully a people of thanksgiving.

Praise

Praise is the form of prayer that recognizes that God is God and gives him glory. Praise goes beyond thanking God for what he has done for us. Praise gives him glory simply because he is. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them to God, who is the source of all that is.

Ways to Pray

Prayer can be vocal or mental, informal or formal, individual or communal, prepared or spontaneous, said or sung. Liturgy is the public worship of the Church. It includes the Mass, the sacraments, and the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office) through which the whole day is sanctified. Jesus, our model for prayer, was known to pray all night and before major events in his life. He taught us to pray with perseverance and trust in our good Father.

We Get Ready to Pray

We live in a busy, noisy, and fast-paced world. Because of this, we have difficulty concentrating. In order to meditate or reflect, we need to prepare ourselves. We can get ready for meditation by resting our bodies in a comfortable position, sitting with our backs straight and both feet on the floor. We can close our eyes,

fold our hands in front of us, take a deep breath, and then slowly let it out. We can establish a rhythm by slowly counting to three while breathing in and slowly counting to three while breathing out. Concentrating on our breathing helps us quiet our thoughts.

We Avoid Distractions

If we become distracted by thinking about something, such as the day at work or an upcoming event, we can go back to thinking about our breathing. We might also use a lighted candle or a sacred image to keep us focused. After a little practice, we will be able to avoid distractions, pray with our imagination, and spend time with God or Jesus in our hearts.

We Meditate and Contemplate

One way to pray is to meditate. To meditate is to think about God. We try to keep our attention and focus on God. In meditation we may use Scripture, prayer books, or icons to help us concentrate and spark our imagination. Another way to pray is to contemplate. This means that we rest quietly in God's presence.

We Pray with Scripture: Lectio Divina

God speaks to us personally through Sacred Scripture. This means that we don't read the Bible, we pray the Bible. A Catholic form of prayer that originated in the monasteries of early Christianity is *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading). These are its four steps:

- ◆ *lectio* (reading)—We slowly and prayerfully read a brief passage of Scripture several times.
- ◆ *meditatio* (reflecting)—We reflect upon the passage, a word, a phrase, or a verse that captures our attention.
- ◆ *oratio* (expressing)—We respond to God's Word in our own words, expressing joy, contrition, praise, thanks, or love.
- ◆ *contemplatio* (resting)—We rest silently in God's presence.

Learn, Live, & Love the Faith!

How do we pray the Rosary? What are the Works of Mercy? Who wrote the books of the Bible, and when? *Handbook for Catholics* is a conveniently organized collection of all the essential information needed for lay Catholics to understand and practice the faith they profess. From common Catholic prayers to Catholic Doctrine, from the Liturgical Year Calendar to the Order of the Mass, this easy-to-read, easy-to-use book will help Catholics grow in their knowledge and love of the faith.



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