

A Wing and a Prayer



Woman Praying at Sunset photo by Jude Beck.
Licensed under Creative Commons Zero (CC0) via Unsplash.com
<https://unsplash.com/photos/VgsCmHCNx8>



The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines prayer as: the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God (CCC2559). The Catechism goes on to identify three expressions of prayer, namely: vocal prayer, meditative prayer and contemplative prayer.

Vocal Prayer

Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life. Jesus taught a vocal prayer, the Our Father to his disciples. He not only prayed aloud the liturgical prayers of the synagogue but, as the Gospels show, he raised his voice to express his personal prayer, from exultant blessing of the Father to the agony of Gethsemane. Because it is external and so thoroughly human, vocal prayer is the form of prayer most readily accessible to groups (CCC 2701; 2703).

Meditative Prayer

Meditation is the stilling of the mind in order for the heart to be open to the presence of God. Christian meditation uses centred breathing and a mantra to rid the mind of distraction and to achieve stillness and silence of body and mind.

Silence in prayer, as between two people, is a sign of trust and acceptance. Without the capacity to be silent, we are unable to listen to another person. In its essence, silence is nothing less than worship in spirit and truth. So, it is not just the absence of noise. Silence is a whole attitude of being, of relating, and an openness to the mutual knowing and inter-being which is love.

In prayer we need to come to physical stillness. This is the first step of the inner journey to God at the centre of our being. Physical stillness has a direct effect upon the silence of our mind and so helps immensely to bring body, mind and spirit into harmony.

But the next dimension of stillness is interior. To come to a stillness of mind is the great challenge of prayer. Meditation is a universal spiritual practice which guides us into this state of prayer, into the prayer of Christ. It brings us to silence, stillness and simplicity by a means that is itself silent, still and simple.

Contemplative Prayer

Described by the church as the simplest and highest form of prayer, contemplative prayer involves resting in the silence of God: the work of meditation done, we are now open to fully behold Jesus who is our way to God. *It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love* (CCC2724). Contemplative prayer is the still point, the quiet centre of all communication with God. It is the simple act of being with God, a recognition, in stillness and silence, of God's being with us and our being with God.

Forms of Prayer

The purpose of the prayer can also determine its form, mode of delivery and the need for accompanying ritual elements, or rubrics. The Book of Psalms provides some examples of various purposes of prayer. In this book we find psalms expressing thanksgiving, petition, praise and sorrow. The Christian tradition has given particular emphasis in its prayer life to prayers of thanksgiving, petition, praise and sorrow. This is reflective of human living. A great deal of the day to day communication of human beings is for the purposes of making requests of one sort or another (petition), giving thanks for favours received (thanksgiving), expressing admiration or



appreciation of persons or things (praise) and saying sorry and asking forgiveness (sorrow). In liturgical events such as the Eucharist, all four of these purposes of prayer find expression. Many traditional Christian prayers serve the purpose of expressing one or more of the four sentiments of thanksgiving, petition, praise and sorrow. A central Christian prayer such as the Lord's Prayer expresses all four sentiments.

The primary purpose of prayer is to respond to God's initiation of dialogue with us. It is always an act of faith and hope. The purpose of prayers of praise and thanksgiving is to give more explicit and deliberate form to our sense of the greatness and wonder of God and of our own place within the total scheme of reality. The purpose of prayers of contrition or seeking forgiveness is for us to acknowledge our failure to respect this fundamental relationship with God and deliberately open ourselves anew to God's abiding presence within us to make us better than we are. Prayers of petition or intercession assist us to come to terms with our needs and those of other people. They assist us to make ourselves ever more sensitive to our obligations to do whatever is possible to fulfil those needs, whether for ourselves or for others.

The Sign of the Cross

The Sign of the Cross is probably the most often used prayer of Christians and for many, the first prayer they learned as children - "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen." Despite its simplicity, the Sign of the Cross is an ancient prayer rich in meaning. References to it appear in writings dating back to Tertullian (d. 230 C.E.) and it is believed that it was in use during the earliest days of Christianity.

Initially, the Sign of the Cross was made with the thumb, usually on the forehead but sometimes on the lips and chest. This small Sign of the Cross was in common use by the end of the fourth century and is still used today, preceding the proclamation of the Gospel at the celebration of the Eucharist. In doing this, we acknowledge our belief in the Word of God, our commitment to spread God's Word in our daily lives and our awareness of God's presence in our hearts. In other words, we pray that we should understand it with our minds, speak it with our lips and believe it in our hearts. Likewise, the Sign of the Cross made with the thumb occurs when receiving the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Anointing of the Sick. It also is used for marking the forehead with ashes on Ash Wednesday. By the end of the Middle Ages, the Western Church had adopted the practice of making the large Sign of the Cross with an open hand and touching the left shoulder before the right. This is the form we continue to use today.

Liturgy: The Prayer of the Church

'Liturgy' derives from the Greek word *leitourgia* which was used to refer to any public work, service or function exercised by the whole community. A common word that is close in meaning to 'liturgy' is 'worship'. But there are a number of descriptors that need to be added to make it equivalent to what we understand liturgy to be. Worship is prayer, praise and worship directed towards God. While worship can be an individual, private and spontaneous act, liturgy is always a communal, public and structured activity.



The people who do the work of liturgy, are the people of God, all the baptised - the Church. In the Catholic Church, we have inherited forms and patterns of worship that have developed during the Church's 2000-year history. A working definition of 'liturgy' is therefore, 'The official, public worship of the Church'. Celebrations that fall under this definition are all the sacraments, funerals, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Hours and Benediction. Prayer is not liturgy if it is spontaneous, unstructured, informal, private, or not addressed to God. In fact, in the latter case, it is not even prayer!

Liturgy is always an action, something we do. It is a public action, a ritual action, and a symbolic action. We participate in the action of the liturgy by responding, singing, listening and joining in the gestures. Not only does the Church's prayer of praise and petition rise to God in the liturgy but the rich blessing of the Spirit also descends upon the Church and its assembled members.

(Elizabeth Harrington <https://www.liturgybrisbane.net.au/Learn/Liturgy-Lines/what-is-liturgy/>)

The Liturgy of the Hours

From earliest times, the Church has prayed according to the rhythm of the day – morning and evening are the times that are 'ripe for prayer'; they are the hinges on which the rhythm of daily prayer hang. This prayer is a liturgy of time – it is 'time made holy' and is based on the Church's long tradition of praying at certain times of the day, morning, noon, evening and night. Those praying this prayer are praying as the Church, the Body of Christ and are praying on behalf of all peoples. Each 'office' which makes up the cycle of prayer follows a pattern of Psalms, Scripture Readings and Intercessions.

The Liturgy of the Hours originated in the practice of the monastic orders who prayed at various hours of the day. The traditional names for the hours are still used: Lauds (Morning Prayer), Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Compline (Night Prayer). Each of these hours features a canticle from the Gospel of Luke. The *Benedictus* (Song of Zechariah) is prayed at Lauds, the *Magnificat* (Song of Mary) at Vespers and the *Nunc Dimittis* (Song of Simeon) at Compline. These three great songs are known as the 'Gospel Canticles'.

Apart from the section by Elizabeth Harrington, the preceding paragraphs have been adapted from the resource, *Prayer in the Catholic Christian Tradition* (2017) prepared by Pat Lavercombe, Education Officer, Brisbane Catholic Education.

The Rosary

The Rosary is essentially a tool for meditation. The idea is to use the continual repetition of the Hail Mary as a mantra to promote the contemplation of the various events or 'mysteries' in the life of Christ. Many religions use beads as aids to meditation and it is possible that Christians returning from the Crusades copied the Moslem prayer beads they had seen. The traditional story, however, is that the rosary was given to St Dominic (1170-1221) by the Blessed Virgin Mary herself.

Because the rosary was popular among those people who could not read or afford books and because it allowed them to meditate on the crucial episodes of scripture, the Rosary has been called the 'poor man's gospel'.



Joyful Mysteries

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Visitation.
3. The Nativity.
4. The Presentation of Jesus at the Temple.
5. The Finding of Jesus in the Temple.

Sorrowful Mysteries

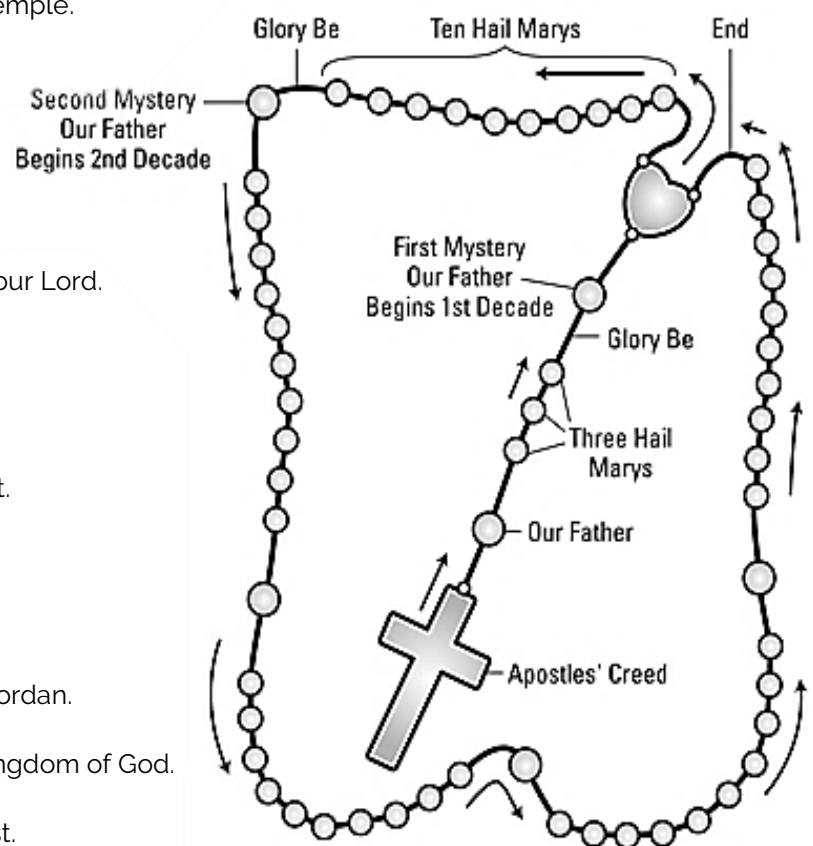
1. The Agony in the Garden
2. The Scourging at the Pillar.
3. The Crowning with Thorns.
4. The Carrying of the Cross.
5. The Crucifixion and Death of our Lord.

Glorious Mysteries

1. The Resurrection.
2. The Ascension.
3. The Descent of the Holy Spirit.
4. The Assumption of Mary.
5. The Coronation of the Virgin.

Luminous Mysteries

1. The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.
2. The Wedding at Cana.
3. Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God.
4. The Transfiguration.
5. The Institution of the Eucharist.



<https://www.dummies.com/religion/christianity/catholicism/how-to-pray-the-rosary/>

The rosary is like the echo of a wave breaking on the shore, God's shore: "Hail Mary. . . Hail Mary. . . Hail Mary. . ." It is like your mother's hand on your childhood cradle.

Carlo Carretto



Liturgy of The Word

Everything we do in liturgy has one major motivation: to help people pray and to worship God. In our Catholic tradition a Liturgy of the Word is a public prayer which allows people to meditate on scripture and to bring their needs before God. Such a liturgy has the following structure:

1. Gathering or Entrance Procession

This is the moment when the assembly show that they are ready to begin. They stand to welcome the ministers – the presider, the lectors etc. A suitable song is sung which usually emphasizes the idea that we are gathered together as one people.

2. Greeting and Welcome

Here the presider leads the people in making the Sign of the Cross. He/She welcomes everyone and briefly explains the theme of our prayer – why we are here. He/She then invites everyone to join in some moments of silence to focus and open their hearts to God's spirit.

3. The Opening Prayer

This prayer has the structure of a **collect**. Such prayers have four parts:

- (i) Name God **(You)**
- (ii) State something that God does **(Who)**
- (iii) Ask something **(Do)**
- (iv) Finish with a 'through' statement **(Through)**

For example:

*God of mercy, (i)
You bless us with the gift of friendship. (ii)
Help us never to take our friends for granted. (iii)
We ask this through Jesus, your Son. (iv) Amen.*

Or

*Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. (i)
Through your goodness you made the universe in all its wonder (ii)
Grant that we may respect and nurture your gift. (iii)
Through Jesus your Son. (iv) Amen.*

Or

*Creator God, (i)
Your will to make all men and women one family. (ii)
May we always work together in a spirit of unity and peace. (iii)
We ask this through Jesus, your Son, and trusting in the prayers of Mary his Mother. (iv) Amen.*



4. First Reading

This reading can come from the Old Testament or from those letters and books of the New Testament which are **not** gospels (i.e. **not** from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John).

5. Response

This is usually a psalm or song. The point of this part is to give the people a chance to respond to the reading they have just heard. It should promote meditation on the reading.

6. Gospel Reading

This will come from Matthew, Mark, Luke or John and will have a similar theme to the first reading or will be in some way related to it.

7. Homily

This is an opportunity for someone (usually the priest or presider) to explain the readings and relate them to what is happening in the life of the assembled community. This is sometimes called 'breaking open the Word' - trying to make it relevant and trying to understand what God is asking of the community; what he is calling them to do and become.

8. Intercessions

These prayers ask God for various needs. They usually begin with a little introduction by the presider who might say something like:

Having been strengthened by God's Word, let us bring our needs before him, confident in his compassion and care.

After all the intercessions (six is plenty!) the presider usually brings all the prayers together by inviting the people to join in the Our Father.

9. Final Blessing and Dismissal

This is a last prayer which sends the people out to bring the love of God to the world.

10. Recessional Song

This is a song which is sung as the ministers process out. It is usually an upbeat song of praise and thanksgiving.

Sometimes people like to add some creative movement or liturgical action or perhaps a PowerPoint with song or music. These things should only be done after careful thought and the questions liturgy planners should always ask themselves are: Does this activity/song etc. help people to pray? Is this activity/song etc. related to the readings so that it sheds light on them and helps people to reflect on them?

If the answer to these questions 'yes' then the activity/song etc. should happen **after the Gospel** either with the homily or instead of a homily. Remember, liturgy is not a holy variety concert. It is people praying. God and Jesus should be the focus. The following is a simple way to remember the structure of any formal group prayer:

1. We gather 2. We listen 3. We respond/reflect 4. We ask 5. We are sent forth.



I think a good number of Christians do not actually pray to the God of Jesus Christ, but to Zeus. Not that they are intending to pray to this pagan Greek god; it is just that their approach to prayer leads me to conclude that some people believe in a Zeus-like God.

Though he could be loving and kind, he was more famous for being moody and unpredictable. One of the lessons lesser gods and mortals learned quickly was that if you wanted a good deal out of life, then you had to stay on Zeus' good side. As with all the Greek gods, sacrifice and prayer were the usual offerings. I believe all the sacrifices and prayers in the world cannot change the God of Jesus because that is the way God wants it.

So, what does our petitionary prayer do? Why bother praying to a God who does not change? When we pray, we are asking our holy, and unchanging God to change us, and thereby change the world.

Richard Leonard

The word 'prayer' has often been trivialized by making it merely into a way of asking for what you want or making announcements to God, as if God did not know (see Matthew 6:7-8). But I use 'prayer' to mean any interior journey or practice that allows you to experience faith, hope, and love within yourself. It is not a technique for getting things, a pious exercise that somehow makes God happy, or a requirement for entry into heaven. Prayer is much more practising heaven now.

Richard Rohr

Prayer confronts us with ourselves and measures the distance between who and what we are and who and what Jesus is.... Being immersed in prayer, really immersed in prayer, sears our souls. It forces us to see how far from our own ideals we stand. It challenges the images of goodness and piety and integrity we project. It confronts us with what it really means to live a good life. It requires courage of us rather than simply piety. It says again and again, "Come, follow me."

Joan Chittister

Private or individualistic prayer is no prayer at all, in fact it is not possible, because prayer is precisely plugging into a shared field of knowing, feeling, and loving. St. John Cassian called any attempt at 'private prayer', pax pernicioosa – dangerous peace, because it keeps us feeling separate and superior instead of connected and compassionate.

Richard Rohr

It is not I who wanted prayer. It is he who wanted it. It is not I who have looked for him. It is he who has looked for me first. My seeking him would have been in vain if before all time he had not sought me. The hope on which my prayer rests is in the fact that it is he who wants it. And if I go to keep the appointment it is because he is already there waiting for me.

Carlo Carretto

If the only prayer you ever say in your life is "thank you", it will be enough.

Meister Eckhardt