

Class #5

Life of Prayer

Overview

Prayer, personal and communal, is a relationship with the divine Other, who is also the foundation of the Christian life. There are many forms of prayer, such as prayers of piety – rosary, novenas, lectio divina, etc. Other prayers are without words and thoughts, but use a mantra-like formula or “sacred word,” like contemplative meditation. Ministry without prayer creates empty activism. The purpose of a parish, more than catechesis or social programs, is to create an environment in which people can pray and establish an intimate relationship with the living Spirit of Christ.

Goals:

- Realize that prayer is the way of experiencing and growing in our intimacy with God through Christ, in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us (Rom. 5.5)
- Reflect on the meaning and modes of prayer
- Develop an awareness of existing resources (catechism, writings of the mystics, etc.)
- Become aware of various prayer forms
- Affirm current practices of prayer
- Consider starting or joining a prayer group

Resources.

Gratefulness.org.

Handbook for Today's Catholic, Sections 2 and 3.

SC 6-13.

Index of Catechism, 806-807.

R. Ellsberg. *All Saints. Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. NY: Crossroad, 1997.

“Prayer” in NDCS, 764-775 and in NDT, 787-791.

“Silence” in NDCS, 883-885.

DVD “Coming Home”.

CCC, #2558-2652, 2691-2696. 2697-2724. 2761-2762.

www.wccm.org (mantra-type meditation in the tradition of John Main, OSB)

www.gratefulness.org (Site organized by Bro. David Steindl-Rast)

<http://sacredspace.ie/> (daily prayer online; Irish Jesuits; all languages)

<http://www.torreys.org/bible/> (Bible study)

<http://www.archdiocese.la/archbishop/letters/liturgy/> (Preparation for Sunday Mass)

Contemplativeoutreach.org (Information on practice of contemplative prayer and centering prayer—a means to contemplative prayer)

Mercaba.org (Un poco de todo. Español)

Glossary (Words to know)

Prayer

Contemplation and action

Meditation

Silence

Lectio divina, sacred scripture

Liturgical seasons of the year

Rosary

Key Factors Concerning Prayer

1. Personal and communal dimensions of prayer.
2. Prayer is a consciousness awareness of God's loving presence
3. Silence, stillness, attentiveness are all essential factors, and great challenges for deepening any relationship, human and divine.
4. Reading and meditation on the sacred scriptures nourishes our prayer life. Knowledge of the bible is essential in Christian prayer.
5. The liturgy is the vertical and horizontal expression of the whole community at prayer. How does one "prepare" for the Sunday Eucharist?
6. The liturgical cycle is a school of prayer.
7. The discipline of setting time aside for prayer is essential as a disciple. Learn to deal with distractions and interruptions. Places for prayer.
8. Prayer practices are aids, not absolutes. Rosary, labyrinth, icons.
9. (If time allows, show the DVD from Nooma.com series "Noise" and "Sunday.")

HOW TO MEDITATE:

Find a quiet place. Sit down with your back upright. Sit still.

This instruction is best in a handout

(In English, see www.wccm.org. Explanation and video.)

(In Spanish, see <http://www.meditacioncristiana.com/>)

Scriptural References

- "Pray always." "Pray unceasingly." (1Thes. 5.17). "Our Father," Gethsemane, Romans 7-8
- Baptism in Jordan. Religious (mystical) experience. Desert. Spirit.
- "Cry, Abba" (Rom. 8.15). "Go to room in secret" (Mt 6.6).
- "We do not know how to pray but the Spirit himself prays WITHIN us" (Rom. 8.26).
- "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5.44).
- "Where two or three..." (Mt. 18.20); Christian community (Acts 2.41-47).
- Jesus' promise of "abundant life" (Jn 10.10).
- Reason why parishes exist: to create environments in which people may encounter the living Christ.

Key Factors on Prayer

"Prayer is a conversation with God" Gregory of Nyssa (4th century).

- Allow God to be God, and human to be human (its OK to have doubts, questions).
- We can express our emotions to God, even anger.
- "Pray as you can, not as you can't."

The deepest desire of every human heart is to experience union with God.

- "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430).
- Prayer is the way that we consciously open ourselves to God's presence. We become "aware."

The initiative to pray is always God's initiative

- The experience of a desire to pray is always in response to the urgings of the Holy Spirit within us
- . God initiates the great "Dialogue" - through cosmos, creation, the Word - Jesus.

The first and final rule of prayer is to listen

- Listen to and for God in the events of your everyday life, in your work and relationships.
- Listen to and for God in your emotions.
- Listen to and for God in the Scriptures.
- Listen to and for God in the silence of your heart, in stillness and in quiet.
- We want to find ways to be quiet and discover healthy aloneness. We learn to be alone with the Alone.
- A communal dimension exists: We, TOGETHER, can listen and seek God.

Prayer with words and without words are the two main *kinds* of prayer

- Prayer with words- out loud or mentally, reading
- Prayer without words- in this prayer we are not so much doing as simply being in the presence of God. (Note: two people deeply in love do not need words to express their love to each other.)

Communal and personal prayer are the two main *ways* of praying:

- Communal prayer means praying with and as the church: Eucharist, Sacraments, Liturgy of the Hours.
- The liturgical cycle -- Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost -- is a school of prayer and spirituality.
 - Advent: First and second coming of Jesus. End of the world.
 - Christmas: the crib is more important than the decorated tree.
 - Lent: fast from anger, envy, gossip. Read more. Make a retreat. Slow down.
 - Eucharist: eat as a family, at least once a week.
 - Cross: recognize suffering humanity. Pray with the newspaper. "Carry one another's burdens."
 - Resurrection: our reason for hope (Eph. 1.18). No room for anxiety, fear, and despair. Being together, reconciled. From death to life, from darkness to light. Fire.
 - Enthroned the bible in a corner of the house. Crucifix.
- Personal prayer means any prayer practices that we do privately: rosary, devotions, novenas
- Devotions are cultural expressions of our faith. (Posadas, Guadalupe, novenas, Sacred Heart)

The five traditional *forms* of prayer are:

- Adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, petition, and union, or contemplative prayer- the prayer of silence
- (Note: Eucharistic Adoration MUST include prayer for social justice, and not just meditation on the host. The body of Christ extends to all humanity, especially those who suffer, including creation, on the planet and in the cosmos.)

Reading and praying scripture are keys for our prayer life.

- Reading and meditation on the sacred scriptures nourishes our prayer life. Use of the bible is essential in Christian prayer.

The heart of prayer is thanksgiving- the meaning of the word "Eucharist"

- The fruit end of all prayer is love, wonder, and gratitude.

God always hears our prayers. Always.

- God inspires us to pray. God listens, no matter how unworthy we might feel.

- Simple prayers in our own words are a very good way to express what is in our mind and heart.
- Honesty is essential to any fruitful, growing relationship, and also in prayer.
- Our prayers do not need to have special or fancy words or formulas to be heard.

The Eucharist is the great prayer of our common lives as Catholic Christians.

- Our lives as Christians are prayer.
- The Eucharist is a summing up of our larger, less-consciously, prayerful acts that make up the business of living.
- The gifts we offer at the Offering are symbols of offering our lives – our labor, fruits of the harvest, and all living and non-living beings, all matter in whichever form -- consciously to the Father, in the Son through the Holy Spirit. Through Eucharist, we collaborate in the ongoing drama of creation. The “Our Father” is our “yes” to the invitation to be co-creator.
- The Eucharist is the great prayer for our unity (with one another, with animals, plants, water and air) as the extension of the body of Christ.
- In the Eucharist we are joined to each other and to all members of the City of God, past, present and to come, through Christ, in the Spirit to the Father.

Prayer is an exercise of the whole person, mind, heart, body, and soul

We can pray with and through activities such as walking, running, other forms of activities.

- Praying while doing other activities helps us to integrate our ordinary pastimes with a life of prayer
- Some bodily gestures in our tradition: sign of the cross, kneeling, standing, hands raised, fold hands, hold hands, embrace, kiss of peace, dance.
- We pray and experience God “in the ordinary” things of life. We don’t seek special experiences, like visions, certain feelings. Distractions in prayer are normal.

A practice of prayer should have a structure

- To love someone requires spending time with that person, and this includes God.
- Find a regular time; acknowledge God’s presence; listen. Begin with 10 minutes, once in the morning and again in the evening. Be conscious of your breathing; God is closer to you than your very breath.
- Prayer practices, such as the rosary, labyrinth, icons, are aids, and can be changed as the Spirit leads. (Never compare your spiritual practices to those of someone else.)
- Our life of prayer will change as our relationship with God grows. Allow yourself to be led by the Spirit in the kind, way and form of your prayer.

Discussion questions:

- How do I pray?
- There is a shift between communal and personal prayer, but we are still always praying with the Body of Christ—Why? How are we joined?
- Where in the Mass do we find the different kinds, forms, and ways of prayer?
- What does it mean, and how do we pray always?
- When and how do I pray during the day?
- Why is the appreciation of anything a form of prayer?
- Practice the meditation of quiet for 10 minutes in your group. What did you experience? What questions might you have?
- Is it possible to form a group that will meditate together for 25 minutes once a week?

Bibliography

Handbook for Today's Catholic, Sections 2 and 3.

Index of Catechism, 806-807.

Documents of Vatican II, SC 6-13. (on the liturgy)

R. Ellsberg. *All Saints. Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time*. NY: Crossroad, 1997.