

## **Three Objectives today:**

**To present the Church's teaching on the ways we can grow in our relationship with God through prayer.**

- Why do we Pray?
- What are the different forms of Prayer?
- Why do we ask God for things when he already knows what we need?

**To provide traditional method of how to develop and strengthen the life of prayer.**

- Periods of Prayer
- What is the proper way to Pray to God?
- Five Answers that God gives to us when we Pray

**To present the spiritual significance of praying the Our Father as a summary of the whole Gospel. Life which reflects this quality of living brings about the kingdom of God.**

What is the breakdown of the Lord's Prayer?

A little boy was kneeling beside his bed with his mother and grandmother and softly saying his prayers, "Dear God, please bless Mummy and Daddy and all the family and please give me a good night's sleep."

Suddenly he looked up and shouted, "And don't forget to give me a bicycle for my birthday!!"

"There is no need to shout like that," said his mother. "God isn't deaf."

"No," said the little boy, "but Grandma is."

*Chapter 4 of the Catechism is about Prayer*

# Prayer in the Christian Life

*Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. (Matthew 7:7)*

*And when you pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Truly I say to you, They have their reward. (Matthew 6:5)*

"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." We believe that prayer is necessary for salvation. Prayer may be practiced alone or in a group; silently or aloud.

The Catholic Church teaches that no man can perform great deeds within the mystical body of Christ except by prayer, and unless the forces exercised rely on the power of prayer. Cardinal John Henry Newman stated that: "If there is anything which distinguishes religion at all, which is meant by the very word, it is the power of prayer."

A little girl once confided to her teacher, "Sometimes I think of God even when I'm not praying" The child didn't know that she was praying according to the time-honored definition of prayer. "The raising of the mind and heart to God." Any time we reflect on God, respond to God with mind or heart, or are in communion with God, we are at prayer. It's been said that most people pray more and better than they think they do.

There are about 650 different prayers in the Bible

# Why we Pray

Every one of us has been created by God and is destined to live with him forever. We were made for union with our Triune God. Jane Ubertino sums up why we pray by saying. "*We pray because God is God and we are we, and therefore that meeting is the most important thing in our life.*"

God loves us first and desires to be with us. He haunts us. As C.S. Lewis notes, "*People seeking God is like a mouse seeking a cat.*" On the other hand, *we have a strong desire to be with God, our good and loving Creator.* We hunger for what is true, good, and beautiful; and God is absolute truth, goodness and beauty.

God invites us to enter into a relationship of love with him. *In human love relationships communication is key. The same is true in fostering a personal relationship with God.* Communication with God, both listening and speaking to him, is prayer. God doesn't need our prayer, but we do. Knowing that God exists makes sense out of the universe. Praying to him gives meaning to our lives.

Fortunately communication with God can be instant. First of all, God is everywhere and on call 24/7. Put mathematically, God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.

Story:

One day a little fish swam up to an older fish and asked, "Where is the thing called the ocean?" The older fish answered, "It's what your swimming in." "But this is just water," countered the little fish, and he swam away, continuing to search for the ocean. In the same way, we are surrounded by God but don't always realize it or accept it.

*Another reason to pray is that prayer makes us a better persons.* Through prayer we receive graces that help us to live the Gospel values and grow in virtues like faith, hope, and charity. In addition, prayer is a means for removing temporal punishment due to sins, that is, the punishment that helps make up for our forgiven sins either on earth or in purgatory.

How important Prayer is to certain people

Abraham Lincoln once explained, "I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My wisdom and that of all around me seemed insufficient for the day."

Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago, was a very busy man. His fellow priests were concerned about him and advised that he take time to pray. The cardinal acted on their advice and began rising an hour earlier in order to pray. With prayer as a

prelude, his days went much smoother. In fact, Cardinal Bernardin had to face two crises: he was falsely accused of sexual impropriety, and he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. His strong prayer life gave Cardinal Bernardin the stamina to meet these crises with grace.

In his book "An Invitation to Prayer" Pope John Paul II emphasized prayer as the cornerstone of Catholic life. Similarly, in her book "Everything Starts from Prayer" Mother Teresa of Calcutta stressed the importance of prayer in every aspect of life to Catholics, from multiple perspectives.

*The best way to learn to pray is by praying. (Ask God for Help!)*

## **Ways to Pray**

Prayer comes in many varieties.

- Vocal (said aloud) prayer or mental (thought) prayer
- Personal (private) prayer or group (communal) prayer
- Traditional formulas, such as the Our Father and Hail Mary
- Prayers composed by saints and other people. Sometimes these express for us the exact thoughts and feeling we have in our hearts.
- Our original written compositions
- Spontaneous (informal) prayer
- Singing or listening to a hymn.
- Meditation, that is, thinking about God. We can meditate on Scripture passages, prayer books, pictures, or our own experiences.
- Affective prayer, which is responding to God with various sentiments, such as love and adoration.
- Contemplation, the highest form of prayer, a wordless prayer in which we simply rest quietly in God's presence. We bask in God's love. Intuition more than reasoning is involved here.

# The Five Types of Prayers

2559 "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer, only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought," are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "Man is a beggar before God."

2562 Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

## **PRAYER OF ADORATION - *We admire God***

God blesses us, that is gives us good gifts. In return we bless, or adore, God, which means we acknowledge and celebrate God's greatness and goodness. Adoration is the primary stance of human beings before God, who is our creator, our savior, and the master of the universe. Who can gaze at the ocean, a sunset, or a newborn baby and not respond with awe and adoration for God?

In prayers of adoration or worship, we praise the greatness of God, and we acknowledge our dependence on him in all things. The Mass and the other liturgies of the Church are full of prayers of this sort, such as the Gloria (or Glory to God). Among private prayers, the Act of Faith is a prayer of adoration.

## **PRAYER OF PETITION - *Asking for something***

Someone quipped, "As long as there are tests, there will be prayers in public schools." We depend on God for everything, not just for help in tests. Jesus always answered when people asked him for help. What's more, he advised us to ask the Father in his name for what we need. The main thing we stand in need of is forgiveness. Therefore, we express our contrition and petition the Father to forgive us. We also ask God that his kingdom of peace and justice come. We can request God to give us anything else for ourselves, even things we might consider trivial, confident that he will hear us. A prayer of petition is an act of faith.

Example: The "Lord, have mercy" as Mass

## **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

All the members of the Church are interdependent. when others are in need, we turn trustingly to our good God with prayers of supplication for them. In this way we imitate Jesus, who is constantly interceding for us. Scripture assures us that we can help one another by our prayers: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

We Catholics believe in praying for the deceased. If they are in purgatory, our prayers will hasten their purification process. We have the custom of sending the grieving family a Mass card informing them that we have had a Mass said for the repose of the soul of their loved one.

Example: The Prayers of the Faithful at Mass and the Liturgy of the hours

## **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

When we receive gifts, graces, and favors, it's only common courtesy to express our gratitude to God with prayers of thanksgiving. Jesus shows that he values this form of prayer when he expresses disappointment that out of ten cured lepers only one is thoughtful enough to thank him.

Example: The Eucharist is our greatest expression of thanks.

## **PRAYER OF PRAISE**

When someone exhibits an admirable quality or achieves something remarkable, our response is to acknowledge this with a compliment. Likewise, moved by God's power, goodness, or love, we praise him. Glorifying God because he is God is the chief occupation of the angels and saints in heaven. Incidentally, the word alleluia means "praise God."

Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God

Example: Psalm 150 "Praise the Lord"

## **Why do we ask God for things when he already knows what we need?**

Apparently God wants us to articulate our needs. Before healing the blind man, for example, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus encouraged us to ask, to seek, and to knock (See Matthew 7:7-11)

A young boy saw a large rock in his backyard, and asked his mother if he could move it.

"Of course you can," she replied. "You just have to use all your strength."

So, the boy put both hands under the rock and strained to lift the rock to no avail. He furrowed his brow, and reset his hands, and again the effort led to no movement.

Undaunted, the boy took a step back, surveyed the rock, picked the best place to lift it, slide his hands under the rock and with a mighty grunt moved the rock not a single inch. "Mom, I thought you said I could lift the rock," the boy lamented.

"Sometimes," his mother said, "Using all your strength means saying 'I need help.'" Sometimes we need to Pray for a little help.

# Periods of Prayer

An **octave** is eight days of prayer. Prayer for Christian Unity is an octave from January 18 to January 25 during which we pray that all Christians may be one. Christmas and the seven days after it are the Octave of Christmas.

A **novena** is praying a certain prayer nine consecutive days or nine hours. Novenas began in imitation of the nine days that Mary and the disciples prayed while awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. People pray novenas to obtain a favor or to honor Jesus or a saint.

A **triduum** is three days of prayer that usually occurs before a special day. The three days from Holy Thursday evening to Easter Sunday evening are known as the Holy Triduum.

A **retreat** is a period of prayer away from the busyness of ordinary life in which people concentrate on developing their relationship with God in silence and solitude.

A **day of recollection** is a retreat usually centered on a theme. It can last a day or part of a day.

## Short Prayers

A centuries-old custom is the praying of one-line prayers called aspirations. These short prayers, or arrows shot to heaven, can be prayed throughout the day, lifting our minds and hearts to God in the midst of work. They are said to be like jewels added to our actions.

## Long Prayers

A litany is a rather long prayer invoking God or a saint under many titles. Each group of invocations is followed by the same response, such as "have mercy on us," or pray for us." Example: Litany of Saints.

## Specific Prayer Times

In the Morning - This is usually our first and perhaps our best time to Pray

Before and after meals - We depend on God for our food that keeps us alive. Then it's only courteous to be mindful of him at mealtime.

In the evening before retiring - At night we thank God for the blessing of the day.

According to the Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

- Prayer is the great gift and activity of communication with our loving God.
  - In Baptism, we enter into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ.
  - Prayer is communion with the One who loves us.
- God is the initiator of the covenant relationship, always proclaiming steadfast love and absolute fidelity
- Liturgical and personal prayer are two dimensions of prayer entered into by God's people.
- Life of a prayer is expressed in three main ways
  - Vocal Prayer

- Meditation
  - Contemplative prayer is the ultimate gift and highest form of prayer.
  - The struggle of prayer arises from our condition of being people wounded by sin.
1. When a person prays, they are never the same. Explain.
    - 1.1. Prayer provides the faith to believe, the fidelity to sacramental celebration, and the courage to live the commandments. Prayer is the driving force for living faith, lively liturgy, and fortitude in moral living.
  2. Why is the environment important for prayer?
    - 2.1. Focus on the Prayer
  3. Three of the greatest obstacles to prayer in our time.
    - 3.1. The habitual difficulty in prayer is **distraction**. It can affect words and their meaning in vocal prayer; it can concern, more profoundly, him to whom we are praying, in vocal prayer (liturgical or personal), meditation, and contemplative prayer. To set about hunting down distractions would be to fall into their trap, when all that is necessary is to turn back to our heart: for a distraction reveals to us what we are attached to, and this humble awareness before the Lord should awaken our preferential love for him and lead us resolutely to offer him our heart to be purified. Therein lies the battle, the choice of which master to serve.
    - 3.1. In positive terms, the battle against the possessive and dominating self requires **vigilance**, sobriety of heart. When Jesus insists on vigilance, he always relates it to himself, to his coming on the last day and every day: today. The bridegroom comes in the middle of the night; the light that must not be extinguished is that of faith: "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!"
    - 3.1. Another difficulty, especially for those who sincerely want to pray, is **dryness**. Dryness belongs to contemplative prayer when the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones. This is the moment of sheer faith clinging faithfully to Jesus in his agony and in his tomb. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." If dryness is due to the lack of roots, because the word has fallen on rocky soil, the battle requires conversion.



## **Five Answers that God gives to us when we Pray**

### **"No, I love you too much."**

The Lord of the universe isn't under obligation to say "yes" to every prayer. That's a good thing, considering some of the things we request!

But sometimes God says "no" to our most heartfelt requests. Have you discovered this to be true in your own life? I certainly have. When my friend Diane started losing her hearing. When my mother-in-law came down with polio. When my nephew contracted aids.

I would be known as Luis Palau Jr. if it weren't for the fact that God said "no" to my most earnest childhood prayers. Shortly after my tenth birthday, my father, Luis Palau Sr., contracted bronchial pneumonia and died ten days later.

Death became, to me, the most undeniable reality under heaven. Everything else can be rationalized and wondered about and discussed, but death is there, staring you in the face. It happens. Even to the most godly people. No matter how hard we pray. Why? Because we still live in a fallen world.

I've been reminded of this repeatedly since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on America. Tens of thousands of lives were spared. But God said "no" to the prayers of thousands of others. Will good come of their deaths? I believe so.

Without a doubt, the death of my father has had more impact on my ministry than anything else in my entire life, besides my own conversion to Jesus Christ. My wish and desire is that people get right with God, settle the big question, and die knowing—like my father—that they will be with Jesus, "which is better by far" (Phil. 1:23).

Does that mean we shouldn't bother to pray? Just the opposite. Over the years, traveling throughout the world, I've discovered four other ways God frequently answers prayer. Believe me, he loves to say "yes!"

### **"Yes, but you'll have to wait."**

Immediate answers to prayer: You want them. I want them. But God simply does not always work that way. And to get his best, we must be patient. In some cases, we must wait until the stroke of midnight for his answer to come.

Phil Callaway didn't know what to say when his young children asked if Mommy was going to die. His wife, Ramona, suffered horrible seizures.

Hundreds of friends and relatives prayed, but Ramona's weight eventually slipped to 90 pounds. Medical specialists tried everything, but by the fall of 1996, the seizures were occurring daily, sometimes hourly.

Phil rarely left Ramona's side. He wondered if she would even make it to her 30th birthday. One evening, when things looked utterly hopeless, Phil paced their dark back yard, then fell to his knees. "God!" he cried out. "I can't take it anymore. Please do something!"

Suddenly a doctor's name came to mind. Phil called the doctor, who saw Ramona the next morning and diagnosed a rare chemical deficiency.

Within a week, Ramona's seizures ended. Her eyes sparkled again. The miracle was so incredible Phil says, "God gave me back my wife."

**"Yes, but not what you expected."**

Have you ever asked God to use you? If so, expect the unexpected!

National Football League running back Sherman Smith, the "Sherman Tank," stood six feet four inches tall and packed 225 pounds of the most solid muscle you'd ever want to tackle. His reputation for bowling over defensive linemen raised his celebrity to near-cult status in the Pacific Northwest, where he played for the Seattle Seahawks.

Then, without warning, the Seahawks traded their most popular player to the San Diego Chargers. Everything changed overnight for this running back, whose Christian faith was as rock solid as his abs. He wasn't with the Chargers for more than a few weeks when he seriously injured his knee. While in rehabilitation, he wondered, Lord, why did you ship me to San Diego?

But while his knee mended, Sherman had the opportunity to lead one of his teammates to the Lord. That converted party-guy, Miles McPherson, has since become an outstanding youth evangelist who reaches tens of thousands of people each year.

Why was Sherman traded to San Diego? God wanted to use him, all right!

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5-6).*

**"Yes, and here's more!"**

Ever wonder if the Lord really knows what you want and need?

Australian David Smallbone felt God leading him to promote Christian concerts in his homeland where only 5 percent of the people believed in Christ. When too few fans filled seats during one major tour, however, David took a \$250,000 bath in red ink.

Creditors repossessed his home, and the father of six looked for work elsewhere. A top artist offered him a job in Nashville, so the Smallbones sold their furniture and other possessions and purchased tickets to the United States.

A few weeks after they arrived, however, David was informed that his position was "no longer available." He literally could not get out of bed for several days. When he and his wife explained to their children what happened, they all got on their knees and asked God to help them.

Interesting things began to happen. God provided bags of groceries, a minivan, and odd jobs. Then the biggest surprise of all—a recording contract for David's oldest daughter, Rebecca, age 15. She recorded her first album using an old family name, St. James.

Flash forward to today. David promotes his own daughter's sold-out concerts. Rebecca St. James has become one of the hottest Christian artists in America. Christianity Today magazine has named her one of the top 50 up-and-coming evangelical leaders under age 40. We love asking her to sing at our evangelistic festivals around the country.

All along—no surprise—God knew what he was doing!

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future"* (Jer. 29:11).

**"Yes, I thought you'd never ask."**

Many people think prayer is complicated. Actually, the simplest prayer can bring you the miracle you need, when you need it.

After a serious fall, an older gentleman named Luke Mulder prayed to receive Jesus Christ. He then prayed for his wife, Clara, who was visiting her sister in California. That very same day Clara heard a gospel presentation and trusted Christ.

Christian cartoonist Ron Wheeler dreamed of creating evangelistic tracts, but he needed a new computer. He found out what he needed and started to pray. Two weeks later, a friend called Ron out of the blue and offered him a new computer—the exact model Ron had been praying about. Shortly after setting up the computer, Ron received a phone call from American Tract Society asking him to design a whole series of evangelistic cartoon tracts.

My friends Esteban and Carmela Tosoni were driving one of the highest mountain passes in the world when their car broke down. They were 20 miles from the nearest town. The Tosoni family prayed for God to send help. When they opened their eyes, a mechanic appeared out of nowhere, asked if he could help, fixed their gas filter, then departed.

Coincidences? Hardly!

## Why do Catholics believe you should pray to saints?

As a matter of fact, Catholics do not teach that Christians should pray to saints. What they do teach is that we should ask for saints' intercession.

In the case of Catholic prayer "to saints," Catholics ask saints or a particular saint to pray on their behalf. They might say "Please pray for my roommate whose lung has collapsed. I know that you are in heaven with Jesus, and so I ask that you pray to him for me." The common response to this is, why not pray to Jesus Himself? Why not go directly to the source? Why are intermediaries needed, when the Bible says there is no mediator between God and man?

To answer these questions, let's consider the process of intercession. In most evangelical churches, there are prayer chains, prayer partners, and intercessory prayer teams. These people are responsible for listening to the prayer needs and concerns of the congregation, telling these concerns to others if necessary, and praying for these concerns. To give an example of this in action, when my roommate's lung collapsed, I asked my mom to pray for her. My mom, in turn, asked her Bible study to pray. This is an example of intercession. When I asked my mom to pray, I was not praying to her; rather, I was asking her to pray on my behalf. Why not go straight to God? Because I wanted more people praying for my roommate. Because I wanted the support of my faith community, the Church. Because I coveted the prayers of godly people. I was not asking for a mediator between myself and God; rather, I wanted someone to walk alongside me in prayer. The only difference between this familiar process and Catholics who pray to saints is that those saints are dead.

The next problem is precisely that: if the saints are dead, how can they hear us?

First, consider the resurrection. Those saints are not dead, but risen. We believe that Christ rose from the grave, killing death for all the saints. The promise of resurrection is the promise of life.

However, one may believe in the resurrection and believe that those in heaven must be happy, otherwise what use is heaven? Hearing our prayer requests would burden them, making Heaven an unhappy place. Doesn't this contradict the teaching that the saints are glorified?

# Our Father: The Spirituality of Gospel Living

## THE MAKEUP OF THE PERFECT PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer is comprised of seven petitions, which are divided up very much like the Ten Commandments. The first three petitions are God-ward—vertical—and the last four petitions deal with the horizontal relationships we have with others. Likewise, the first great commandment is to love the Lord, and the second great commandment is to love your neighbor. God should come first in our prayers; His counsel and will should be the great priority in our lives. But we must also not neglect our relationships on earth, which is why Jesus' model includes those around us.

Right now, we'll concentrate on those first three petitions, and later, we'll look at our prayers concerning our friends, family, and neighbors. Then we will find some biblical and practical answers to common questions about prayer.

First, let's consider that these first three petitions to God have a unique relationship to the Godhead. The first petition deals with the Father, "Our Father ... Hallowed be thy name." The second petition deals with the "kingdom;" that's the Son. Jesus spoke many parables about the Son going to receive a kingdom, and coming back as the King of kings. Without Him, we couldn't even come to the Father. And concerning "your will," who is it that leads us into the will of God? The Spirit, the one who impresses on us the will of God and the love for Christ. It is the Spirit who gives the power to do the will of God. And so you have the Father, the Son, and the Spirit represented in the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

## ADDRESSING OUR GOD AS A FAMILY

God as a father is a theme that runs through the entire Bible. He is the creator of all life, and the protector of His children. In the Old Testament, His list of names includes: "Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6). He is powerful and omnipotent, yet He is also the all-sufficient provider. Taken together, He surely is the God of the universe ruling from heaven, but we can still approach Him personally as our Father.

Even better, "Our Father" tells us that we are received as children of God. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). God is willing to adopt us into His family. What a beautiful truth! "Our Father" says we can share in the inheritance He gave through Christ—that we are a part of the heavenly family. The Bible says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father ... give good things to them that ask Him" (Matthew 7:11)? We can go to our Father knowing that He has the very best gifts in store for us. The very phrase "Our Father" is clothed with love. He's someone who we can safely approach with love, even when He disciplines us. Proverbs 3:12 records, "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights" (NKJV). Psalm 103:13 adds, "Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him" (NASV). This also means that we are a family of brothers and sisters, praying to "our Father." He's not just my Father; He's your Father too.

This brings to mind another reason why this prayer is such a great pattern for us. Notice the word "I" doesn't appear in the entire prayer! We all typically pray frequently using "I" or "me," but in this prayer, it's a collective. In our culture, we get the equation upside down; it's you, then your friends, and then God. In the Bible, the priority is reversed. Love the Lord, then your neighbor, and then you. (If you need an easy way to remember, just think of J-O-Y. That's Jesus, Others, and You!)

## “WHICH ART IN HEAVEN”

Our pattern of prayer also tells us how near and how far our Lord really is from us. “Our Father” is a very intimate, up-close idea, but “in heaven” gives us a sense of His distance from us. We are separated from God, and we’re acknowledging that by saying, “There’s a problem: We’re here; You’re there.” What’s caused this separation? Isaiah says, “Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God” (59:2 NKJV).

In the garden, God asked Adam, “Where are you?” In our prayer, we’re confessing to God that we’re far away from Him—much in the same way that Adam ran from God. We’ve been separated from paradise. But we have hope. Did you know that the first three chapters in the Bible tell how sin came in through the serpent and that we’ve been separated from heaven and paradise; however, the last three chapters of the Bible tell how the serpent is destroyed, paradise is restored, and we’re once again together with God?

Another reason the Bible says, “which art in heaven,” is because we need to make a distinction between our earthly fathers and our heavenly Father. Our earthly fathers are frail, carnal, and sinners by nature of being human. The God in heaven is perfect. All of us have a natural, subconscious tendency to superimpose on God our relationship with our earthly father. For instance, those who have earthly fathers that are overly indulgent end up thinking that God the heavenly Father is also permissive. Those who have earthly fathers that are stern generally have a picture of the heavenly Father as an exacting judge.

That ought to make us think. We need to spend a lot of time in prayer asking God to overrule the mistakes we have made with our children. Yet when the Bible says, “Our Father which art in heaven,” it’s telling us we need to look past our flawed earthly relationships and know that He is our perfect model and that we can approach Him directly. You don’t have to see God through the broken glasses of your family experience.

## “HALLOWED BE THY NAME”

So we have approached God because He’s our Father in heaven. And our first petition to our God is “Hallowed be thy name.” Now the name of God is a central issue in the great controversy between good and evil. The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is to defend the glory of God.

The devil has slandered God’s name. Do you know someone who has said, “If God is love, then why do innocent children die?” Insurance companies call earthquakes, floods, and other natural disasters “Acts of God.” What kind of reputation does that give God? The devil is a master at smearing the character of our Father. He has God, the good, wonderful, loving, longsuffering, merciful One, portrayed as a cruel, indifferent tyrant arbitrarily punishing His creatures. God’s name has been defiled by the devil.

Thus the purpose of the Christian, by God’s grace, is to defend the name of God as much as we can, to reveal who He really is. Unfortunately, we need to pray “hallowed be thy name” because we’re not very good at it. Even in the Bible, we see God’s own people do more to dishonor His name than the full-fledged pagans. And times really haven’t changed much since antiquity.

Remember, we said the Lord’s Prayer somewhat mirrors the Ten Commandments. The third one commands, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7). Using God’s name in profanity is only one small part of breaking this commandment. But taking God’s name is like a wife taking her husband’s last name. When you’re a baptized Christian, you take the name of Christ, but if you live like the devil after you’ve taken Christ’s name, you’re taking His name in vain. Who

does more harm to the Christian cause the pagans or professed Christians who live like the world?

Christians should be advertising for the goodness of God, but in many cases Christians do more harm. Instead, all around the world, we see professed Christians attacking and killing others, such as in Ireland, Africa, and Croatia. What does that do to God's name? Jesus says, "Love your enemies ... overcome evil with good" (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:21). Christ is slandered because of the bad behavior of those who take His name in vain. So "Hallowed be thy name" is asking God to help us, in word and deed, honor His precious name

"THY KINGDOM COME"

We are in the middle of a battle between two kingdoms. An enemy kidnapped the world when Adam and Eve surrendered the dominion that God had given them over the earth. Ever since, the priority of God's children has been to "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33).

Of course, we must make two distinctions when we speak of God's kingdom—the spiritual and the physical. We know that the spiritual kingdom of God is very much alive in the world today, because Luke 17:21 says, "The kingdom of God is within you." When Jesus began preaching after His baptism, He said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). This aspect of the kingdom is available now. If you have accepted Christ into your heart, then He reigns from His throne in your heart. Paul says, "Let not sin ... reign in your mortal body," but rather let Jesus be your King and rule over all that you do (Romans 6:12). That's the first kingdom we should seek after: God's spiritual kingdom within our hearts.

But someday the meek will inherit the earth and God's literal kingdom is going to rule over this world with a very real and physical kingdom. Do you think we would need to pray, "Thy kingdom come," if God's kingdom was already established? When Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, as recorded in Acts 1, the disciples asked, "Will You at this time restore the kingdom?" Jesus answered, "It is not for you to know times or seasons" (Acts 1:6, 7 NKJV).

The central message in the book of Daniel is that the kingdoms and idols of the world, whether they are made of gold, silver, bronze, or clay will all disintegrate before the Rock of Ages—the kingdom of God. "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44 NKJV).

For the time being, we are ambassadors of another empire, advertising for a kingdom that will someday fill the earth. Christ said, "I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon me" (Luke 22:29 NKJV). When the thief on the cross turned to Christ and said, "Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom," he accepted Christ as his King (Luke 23:42 NKJV). That's why he'll be in the kingdom, because he had the spiritual kingdom that begins in your heart.

The phrase "the kingdom of God" is found 70 times in the New Testament. Why? Because there are two kings at war, Jesus and the devil, who says he's the prince of this world. That's why we still need to pray that His kingdom will come: first within us, then someday around us.

"THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"

Contrary to popular belief, God's will in this world is not always being done. I respectfully disagree with the notion that everything that happens is in accordance with the Creator's will. When something bad happens, like a tornado, you inevitably hear someone say, "Well, it must

have been the will of God.” I don’t believe that’s what the Bible teaches, and if that’s really true, why would God have us pray that His will be done?

Conversely, not everything that appears to be good is from God’s storehouse either. Sometimes the devil may even cast prosperity in someone’s path to stall or derail their longing for God. You and I have no idea what’s going on behind the spiritual veil, which is why we have to pray, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

You and I naturally have our wills twisted and confused by our carnal desires. We need to pray that God’s grace and His Spirit will guide our wills into conformity with His. We also need to learn what His will is for us, and we find the best expression of that in the Word. For beginners, the simplest form of God’s will is called the Ten Commandments. “I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8 NKJV). So when we pray “Thy will be done,” we’re really praying that His will be done in us through submission and obedience.

Of course, Jesus is the perfect example of doing God’s will here on the earth. In John 6:38, He proclaims, “For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (NKJV). In the garden of Gethsemane, facing separation from the father, Christ petitioned God three times with, “Not My will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 NKJV). Is it always easy to do God’s will? No. If it was a tremendous struggle for Jesus, we will also need to pray, “Thy will be done”.

## A GREATER WILL

When God created most things, He merely spoke them into existence. But when He made Adam, he took dust from the ground, formed it with His hands, and breathed life into it. He made humanity from the earth. So when we pray, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,” we’re also admitting we’re really just clay. “In earth” also means in us. We’re humbling ourselves before God, recognizing that in our rebellion, our wills are perverted. When we pray “Thy will be done,” we’re giving Him permission to use us according to His purpose.

The Lord will never force His will on you because of the precious gift of freedom. He’s not going to force you to pray, “Thy will be done.” You have to choose to do it, to surrender your will, to be His servant, and give Him permission to activate His power and plan in your life. When you understand that secret, you’ll unlock the storehouses of heaven’s power.

But be advised, it works the other way too. Many of us are harassed by the devil because we give the devil our will. You may choose who your master is. And when we, through constant surrender, comply with the temptations that the devil puts in our path, we start giving him increased power to activate his desires in our lives. And ironically, when we exercise our freedom to submit to the devil, we, inch by inch, lose our freedom! The devil possesses our natures, and we become his slaves.

Yet it is possible to be filled by God’s Spirit. Would you like that experience? Most of us are struggling somewhere between the willing spirit and weak flesh, but when you understand that by choosing and saying, “Lord, I want you to be my God. I want you to take control. I surrender my will. I’m giving myself to you. I am powerless on my own,” you are then giving Him the power to release His will in your life. He’s waiting, but He can’t force it on us. So remember that when you pray, don’t forget to ask, “Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.”

## THE LORD’S PRAYER AND US

In World War II, a British soldier was seen creeping back in from the front lines. He was captured by his own army and accused of conspiring with the enemy, as he had not been given



permission to leave. He said, "I have been out in the woods praying." His fellow soldiers mocked him and immediately ordered him to offer up some evidence. He simply told them he was by himself and that he just needed to pray. His captors threatened to charge him as a traitor, saying, "You're going to be executed unless you pray right now and convince us that you were really praying."

The private then fell on his knees and began to offer an eloquent, heartfelt prayer as one who was about to meet his maker. But by the end of the prayer, the commander in charge said he was free to go. "I believe your story," he said. "If you had not spent so much time at drill, you would not have performed so well during review." He then added, "I can tell from the way you prayed that you are on regular speaking terms with God."

The times of our prayers should be frequent and regular, but even more important the content should be outward. I frequently catch myself beginning with "gimme" prayers: "Dear, Lord, give me this and give me that" and near the end, I add, "God, I praise your name." According to the pattern Christ gave us, that's backwards. I know I underscored this point already, but it's worth repeating. God has convicted me that my prayers are too selfish, and I need to keep Him and others first in mind when I go to the Father in prayer.

Although we're about to focus on prayer for ourselves, I feel that before we delve into these absolutely necessary facets of prayer, we need to make sure we have the right order of prayer in mind. Obviously, we should pray for our needs, but as Jesus indicated, when we pray, we want to acknowledge God's holy name, His purposes, and His kingdom before all other things. And all of our needs must be viewed in the context of His will. With that careful reminder, we can continue our study and discover what happens when we ask the Lord, "Teach Us to Pray!"

"GIVE US THIS DAY ..."

Bread represents many things in the Bible. First, "daily bread" means the provisions necessary for sustaining life from day to day. Of course, this is a pattern of prayer, so it doesn't mean that you can't also pray for water, clothing, and other needs. When we pray for our daily bread, we're really asking God to supply the basic necessities of our everyday lives.

Should a wealthy person with their cupboards full still pray "Give us this day our daily bread"? Yes, absolutely. Never take the blessing of basics for granted. Remember Job's full barns were all lost in one day.

God is telling us that we should feel confident to come before our Lord, asking Him to fulfill our needs. Of course, He is already well aware of these needs, but He wants us to know that it is He who provides all truly good things for His children. For instance, when the Jews went through the wilderness, they prayed for food, and God rained manna from heaven, showing His continual, loving provision. Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask—He wants you to!

Remember, though, that when we pray, "Give us ... our daily bread," it doesn't mean that God expects us not to go out and earn it. Some people think they can pray the Lord's Prayer and then sit back and do nothing, expecting Him to answer. When the Lord rained down manna, the Jews went out to collect it. They didn't lie back with their mouths open, waiting for it to fall directly into their mouths. Notice too that the manna fell outside the camp; it didn't rain on their tents. Part of getting the bread is going out and harvesting it where we work. After that, the Jews had to knead the manna and bake it; only after working could they consume their daily bread. We must likewise invest ourselves in the process and not become lazy with the Lord's blessings. Don't forget that giving us our bread day by day also includes this understood caveat: "six days shalt thou labor."

## “... OUR DAILY BREAD”

Is food all that is entailed in “daily bread”? As with most lessons in the Bible, “our daily bread” has a very important spiritual application. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus teaches, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” using the word “bread” to describe all the temporal needs of humanity.

Most important, He would later say, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). Christ was not speaking only of our physical needs, but instructing us to invite God into our hearts every day. The bread represents Jesus, our spiritual food, which is far greater and more fulfilling than any physical bread on earth.

How often do we need to be spiritually fed? All through its sacred pages, the Bible speaks of praying daily. “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray” (Psalm 55:17). Daily bread, daily communion with the Lord, should be our top priority. Why do we not say, “Lord, give me a month’s supply”? Most of us don’t fret from day to day that the refrigerator is going to be empty, so we don’t often appreciate the implications of praying for daily bread. Although those who lived through the Depression may understand such a concept, few Americans today, living in a society of such massive abundance, have ever really struggled from day to day searching for something to eat. In fact, some of us have months of food in the pantry.

But many of us don’t have even a few minutes of spiritual food stored up in our hearts and minds. Which bread is more important, the physical or the spiritual? How many of us have a month’s supply of spiritual bread? We need to collect some every day. You can’t live tomorrow solely on what you’ve collected today. Some have a few calories stored up, having memorized Scripture, and it’s going to come in handy, but if you want your Christian experience to be vital and full of life, you must have daily devotions. You’ve got to go out and gather that spiritual manna. One final thought: The Bible doesn’t say, “Give me this day my daily bread. Rather, Jesus teaches us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” It’s our bread, friend. It’s not my bread. We ought to be as concerned about the needs of others as much as, or more than, our own.

Scripture teaches, “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). We should be doing that physically, assisting the weak by offering our resources and our strength to help them. We should also do it spiritually, by lifting each other up in prayer, offering one another’s petitions on our knees. And we must do this daily, persistently. “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them” (Luke 18:7)?

## “AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS”

Did you know Jesus makes only one direct commentary on the Lord’s Prayer? In Matthew, when He finishes teaching the prayer, He adds, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:14, 15). Christ reveals a connection between the vertical and the horizontal relationship—right in the middle of the Lord’s Prayer. Perhaps we should listen!

Is this God saying, “I’ll make you a deal: You all forgive each other—no bitterness, no grudges, no more talking about the bad things you did to each other—and I’ll forgive you”? Is that what God says? Is that the gospel? No, that’s not what leads to our forgiveness. We’re not saved by the basis of our works. Instead, the gospel says that we are to come just as we are to God, and He will forgive us. However, God says, “Now that you’re forgiven, I expect you to forgive each other.”

However, although you're not saved by your works, if you continue to live in defiance, you'll be lost because it's evidence that you're not serious about following Jesus. The mercy and grace of God cannot be cultivated in a heart that's embracing a bitter and unforgiving spirit. Have you ever been betrayed by a friend? Has someone ever talked badly about you? We've all been hurt. And often, we become defensive and start viewing that person narrowly, and we may even wonder if we can dig up a little dirt to even the score. Is that the spirit of Jesus, "who when he was reviled he reviled not again"?

The Bible says that when we realize the high price Christ has paid for our forgiveness, it makes it easier for us to forgive one another. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). We need to be willing to forgive one another, and God points this out to us repeatedly in Scripture. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25, 26 NKJV).

Can you mentally forgive a person even though you may not feel like it? Yes, just like you can accept forgiveness even though you might not feel forgiven. It's done by faith. You can choose to forgive others who have harmed you. Even though you may never be able to forget what happened, you can say, "Lord, by your grace I am going to forgive them." You make that conscious choice, and then the grace of God follows.

When you accept the forgiveness of God, His grace naturally follows. You must first have faith that God is going to help you forgive. "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matthew 5:7). If we can't forgive each other, God can't forgive us, because our hearts are not open either to give or receive forgiveness. That's serious, isn't it? It's going to require an act of grace—a miracle—for us to be able to do that.

#### "AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION"

This particular petition is the one that is most misunderstood. At a glance, it almost seems as though we're begging God not to tempt us. "Please, Lord, we know you don't want to tempt us. Yet if I don't ask you not to tempt me, you're going to tempt me." That's a really poor translation. In fact, James 1:13 says, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

We're not pleading, "Lord, please don't tempt me." So what is this really saying? Well, because we are naturally prone to walk toward temptation, we're asking God to lead us away from it. Translated more precisely, the prayer would go more like this: "Lead us away from our natural bent to temptation."

Do we need to pray that prayer? You bet! We are prone to playing too close to the edge. One minister says that when the Lord says to flee temptation, we often crawl away hoping it catches up with us. It's like gravity inside our hearts, pulling us toward sin. So we have to plead with God to help us resist that force.

The devil likes it when we crawl, because it's easier to catch us with those little compromises. The convicted spy Aldrich Ames said that he didn't wake up one day and say, "I think I'm going to be a spy. I think I'm going to turn everything over to the Russians for money." One day, very innocuously, he met a Russian who asked, "Could you give me a phone directory? I'll give you a lot of money." It was just a phone directory, but then little by little, he gave them more and more until one day he sold them nuclear secrets. This is how the devil works with temptation—little compromises. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered Uriah, and lied to his

people. And it began with a small, lingering, lustful look. We should pray, "Lord, lead me away from even the little things, because that's how the big things start."

"BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL"

I really like the seventh petition, which says, "but deliver us from evil." We live in a world drowning in the murky blackness of sin. The only thing that really gives Christians long-term hope is that God promises things aren't always going to be this way. We're looking for ultimate deliverance, and when we utter "deliver us," we're talking about Christ coming on the white steed—the King of kings and the Lord of lords establishing His kingdom and wiping out every last vestige of evil reigning in the world today.

"Deliver us" takes us away from evil and separates us from it eternally. Another way to phrase it is, "deliver us from the evil one." And we ought to be praying not only that God keeps us from temptation, but that He also delivers our brothers, because the devil is powerful and cunning, far greater than we are by ourselves. That's why we so desperately need God to lead us.

In speaking of the second coming, Christ said, "Pray always" (Luke 21:36). I'm not sure how often that really means, but look at your own prayer life and see if it measures up. The full text reads, "Pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and stand before the Son of man." Are you praying always? Jesus also said that we ought to pray that our flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day (Matthew 24:20). Have you prayed that prayer? Every day, every hour, we should be praying to be delivered from evil so that we can escape what is about to happen in this world. Pray that we will be ultimately delivered and saved from evil within and around us. You can't be saved from an evil world until you're first saved from an evil heart.

"FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER, AND THE GLORY, FOR EVER"

This powerful culmination is found only in Matthew, and what it speaks about is riveting. We are in the midst of a great controversy. The devil says he is the rightful king and that he has the power. Yet Christ, before He ascended to heaven, established His preeminence: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). This prayer reinforces that we should never forget who is in charge of this universe. The prayer doesn't say, "Thine will be the kingdom," rather "Thine is the kingdom." Indeed, all the petitions in the Lord's Prayer are only possible because Christ is the power. He has control over all things now.

The devil lives for pride, to bring glory to himself. The Christian's motive is to bring honor to God, to give Him the glory. That's why Satan hungers to be a god. He wants the glory he doesn't deserve. The end of this prayer sets the record straight in our own minds and hearts, confessing before God that we know His character and goodness will be soon vindicated.

"AMEN"

Jesus said, "In this manner pray." It's not so much His prayer, but our prayer. It's the prayer of those who want to follow Him. That's also why this prayer must be something that flows from a truly converted heart. It ought to be a definition of your spirit and attitude. One author put it this way:

"I cannot say 'our' if I live only for myself. I cannot say 'Father' if I do not endeavor each day to act like his child. I cannot say 'who art in heaven' if I'm laying up no treasures there. I cannot say 'hallowed be thy name' if I am not striving for holiness. I cannot say 'thy kingdom come' if I'm not seeking to hasten the blessed hope. I cannot say 'thy will be done' if I am disobedient to his word. I cannot say 'in earth as it is in heaven' if I'll not serve him here and now. I cannot say 'give us this day our daily bread' if I am selfishly hoarding for the future. I cannot say 'forgive us

our debts' if I harbor a grudge against anyone. I cannot say 'lead us not into temptation' if I deliberately place myself in its path. I cannot say 'deliver us from evil' if I do not long for holiness. I cannot say 'thine is the kingdom' if I do not give Jesus the throne of my heart. I cannot attribute to him 'the power' if I fear what men may do. I cannot ascribe to him 'the glory' if I'm seeking for my own honor. I cannot say 'forever' if I'm living only for temporary earthly rewards."

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, it must be in a spirit of complete surrender. And if we're going to be ready when Jesus comes, we need to learn to pray the way Jesus taught. The essence of prayer is bound up in loving God with all our hearts, for we cannot really love Him if we aren't getting to know Him. If we're not communicating our sorrows and our joys, even our most intimate secrets, how can we love Him?

Question: "Why pray? What is the point of prayer when God knows the future and is already in control of everything. If we cannot change God's mind, why should we pray?"

Answer: For the Christian, praying is like breathing. It is easier to do it than to not do it. We pray for a variety of reasons. For one thing, prayer is a form of serving God (Luke 2:36-38) and obeying Him. We pray because God commands us to pray (Philippians 4:6-7). Prayer is exemplified for us by Christ and the early church (Mark 1:35; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 3:1; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:1-3). If Jesus thought it was worthwhile to pray, we should also. If He needed to pray to remain in the Father's will, how much more do we need to pray?

Another reason to pray is that God intends prayer to be the means of obtaining His solutions in a number of situations. We pray in preparation for major decisions (Luke 6:12-13); to overcome demonic barriers (Matthew 17:14-21); to gather workers for the spiritual harvest (Luke 10:2); to gain strength to overcome temptation (Matthew 26:41); and to obtain the means of strengthening others spiritually (Ephesians 6:18-19).

We come to God with our specific requests, and we have God's promise that our prayers are not in vain, even if we do not receive specifically what we asked for (Matthew 6:6; Romans 8:26-27). He has promised that when we ask for things that are in accordance with His will, He will give us what we ask for (1 John 5:14-15). Sometimes He delays His answers according to His wisdom and for our benefit. In these situations, we are to be diligent and persistent in prayer (Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1-8). Prayer should not be seen as our means of getting God to do our will on earth, but rather as a means of getting God's will done on earth. God's wisdom far exceeds our own.

For situations in which we do not know God's will specifically, prayer is a means of discerning His will. If the Syrian woman with the demon-influenced daughter had not prayed to Christ, her daughter would not have been made whole (Mark 7:26-30). If the blind man outside Jericho had not called out to Christ, he would have remained blind (Luke 18:35-43). God has said that we often go without because we do not ask (James 4:2). In one sense, prayer is like sharing the gospel with people. We do not know who will respond to the message of the gospel until we share it. In the same way, we will never see the results of answered prayer unless we pray.

## **Pope Francis' five finger prayer guide.**

1. The thumb is the closest finger to you. So start praying for those who are closest to you. They are the persons easiest to remember. To pray for our dear ones is a “sweet obligation.”
2. The next finger is the index. Pray for those who teach you, instruct you and heal you. They need the support and wisdom to show direction to others. Always keep them in your prayers.
3. The following finger is the tallest. It reminds us of our leaders, the governors and those who have authority. They need God's guidance.
4. The fourth finger is the ring finger. Even that it may surprise you, it is our weakest finger. It should remind us to pray for the weakest, the sick or those plagued by problems. They need your prayers.
5. And finally we have our smallest finger, the smallest of all. Your pinkie should remind you to pray for yourself. When you are done praying for the other four groups, you will be able to see your own needs but in the proper perspective, and also you will be able to pray for your own needs in a better way.

This is a simple way to prayer that even kids can get. It is eminently practical, and it is certainly grounded in the Catholic tradition. Indeed, what I like most about it is the end. By praying for others we can begin to see our own needs in greater perspective. It is an important lesson, one that pops up in Catholic Social Teaching quite often.