

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" Catechism n. 2558

The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (Part One)

and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two),

so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ,
sharing his communion with God (Part Three).

We are invited to believe in the mystery,

celebrate it,

and live by sharing Jesus' relationship with God ('Life in the Spirit').

Sharing in Jesus' relationship is prayer.' (Part Four).

What is Prayer?

- Therese of Lisieux writes: ‘For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy’ (Story of a Soul)
- Teresa of Avila speaks of prayer as: ‘intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with the One who we know loves us’(Life 8.5).
- ‘Look at Him’, she writes, ‘He never takes his eyes off you’(Way of Perfection 26.3).
- John of the Cross reminds us that ‘the language which God hears best is silent love’(Maxims on Love 53).

Beginning to pray

‘Each of us has a soul, but, since we do not prize souls as is deserved by creatures made in the image of God, we do not understand the deep secrets that lie in them’ (Teresa, Interior Castle VII.1.1).

‘The soul is a paradise where the Lord says he finds his delight.’

(Interior Castle I.1.1)

‘In its centre very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.’ (Interior Castle I.1.3)

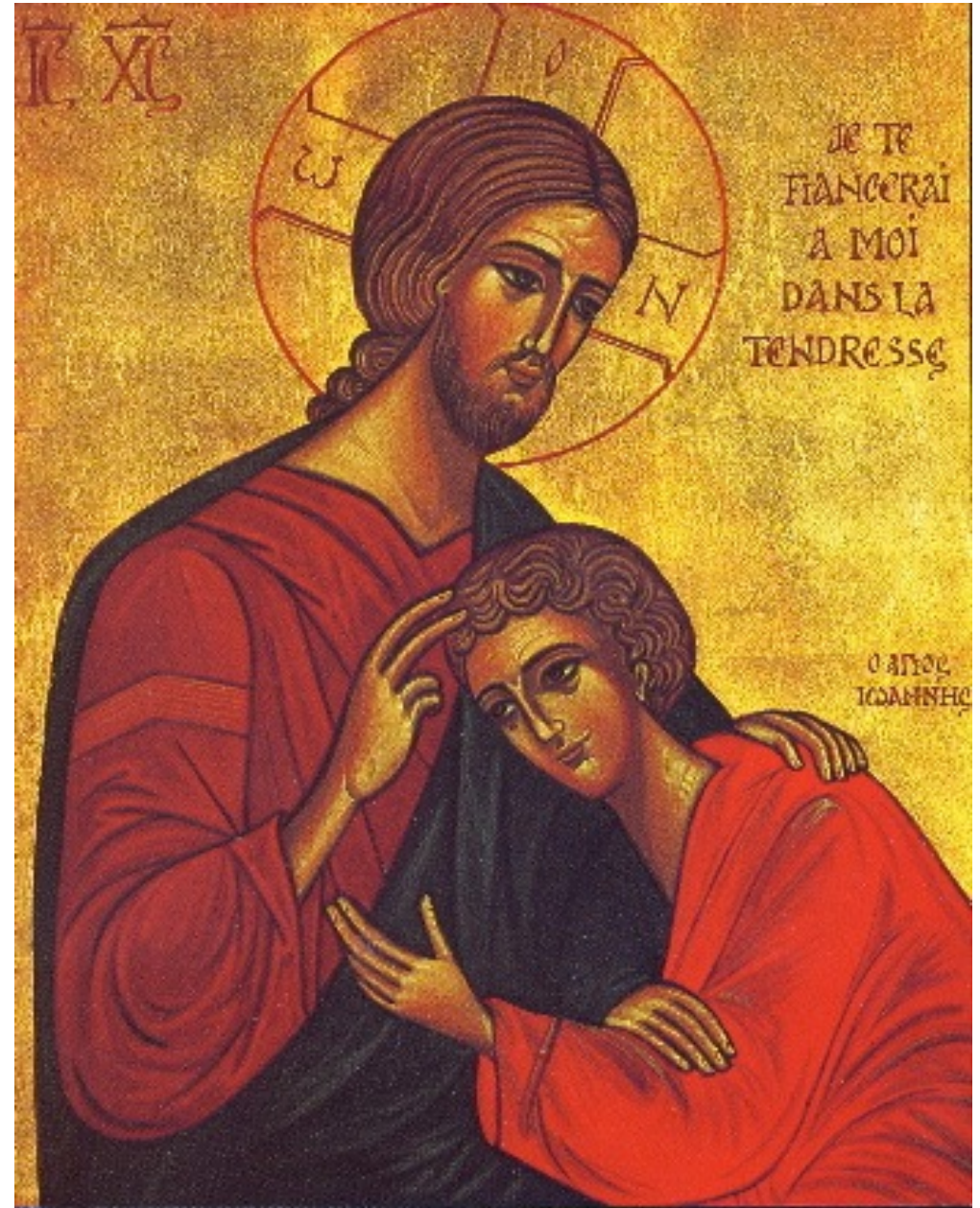
‘Let us exert ourselves, for the love of the Lord. Let us abandon our reason and our fears into his hands. Let us forget this natural weakness that can take up so much of our attention ... Care only about moving quickly so as to see the Lord’(Interior Castle III.2.8).

Teilhard de Chardin (1934)

- ‘Some day, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation,
- we shall harness for God the energies of love.
- And then, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire’.
- The soul needs to breathe
prayer is essential
- Heart speaking to heart



- In Jesus we see God's love revealed in a human heart and a human life.
- In offering us his Spirit, Jesus is offering us himself, and so a share in his own communion with God, his own prayer.
- 'All are called to union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, towards whom our whole life is directed'(Vatican II, LG n.3).



Sharing in Jesus' Prayer

The icon of the Trinity by the early fifteenth century Russian mystic Rublev is a beautiful statement of prayer.

The scene is a Christian reflection on the scene in the Abraham story when Abraham and Sarah are visited by three divine guests (Genesis 18:1-15)



John 14:15-18, 23

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father,

and he will give you another Advocate,

to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive,

because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, because he abides with you,

and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you ...

If you love me you will keep my word,

and my Father will love you, and we will come to you

and make our home in you.

Watch Jesus

- as he leaves the house where he is staying and finds a secluded place where he can be alone in prayer (see Mark 1:35).
- weeping over the city (see Luke 19:41).
- on the mountain of transfiguration (see Mark 9:2)

Watch Jesus

- in the upper room of the last supper (see John 17)
- in his agony (see Matthew 26:36-46)
- on the cross of Calvary (see Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34-46; John 19:26-30).

Through the gift of the Spirit we are invited to pray with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me'(Galatians 2:20).

This transformation is a gradual process, as Paul tells us: 'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit'(2Corinthians 3:18).

Some Basic Principles ('Yielding to Love', chapter II)

1. It is important not to forget that, since prayer is loving communion with God, and since God is always the one to begin the communion, the best prayer is the prayer which God is offering.

Let us gratefully accept and treasure whatever communion God is offering us now, for God knows our present capacity to respond. We need to remember that to turn towards God is already to be in prayer.

2. We must constantly remind ourselves that God is offering us the intimacy of this communion.

3. The value or quality of our prayer is measured by the fruit which it produces in our lives: our obedience, our humility and especially our love.

Teresa writes (Interior Castle IV.2.8):

‘It is in the effects and deeds following afterwards that one discerns the true value of prayer.’

4. Whatever happens, Teresa tells us: ‘we must not abandon prayer’(Life 8.5). If we do, she offers the only remedy: we must ‘begin again’(Interior Castle II.1.10).

5. We should not expect the journey to be one of simple progression: ‘There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it is not necessary often to return to the beginning’(Teresa, Life 13.15).

6. It is important to follow the advice of Teresa and ‘set our eyes on Christ’ (Interior Castle I.2.II).

Jesus will journey with us leading us to a deeper knowledge of the true God – a knowledge that comes through love.

He will also lead us to a deeper knowledge of our real selves, for in Jesus we see what it means to be made in God’s image and likeness. We see also who we are called to be.

Furthermore, we see by comparison how sinful we are. This acts as a warning. It nurtures humility and safeguards us from thinking that any value we have comes from ourselves.

It reinforces our longing to gaze on God, the sole source of all good.

7. If we are serious about prayer we must be resolute in turning away from sin, for it blocks out the light of God and opens our souls to darkness.

We will need a resolute will to detach ourselves from whatever is cluttering up our lives and holding us back.

This will vary from person to person, and according to each one's state of life.

If we are serious about prayer we must try to live virtuous lives in obedience to God's will as revealed to us through the ordinary means of God's providence.

There is much for us to do.

A surfer has to struggle out to the deep beyond the breakers,
but once there s/he must wait for the wave.

The silkworm spins the silk, but then has to wait
for the time for the emerging of new life.

It is up to us to clear debris that is blocking a spring,
but then we have to wait for the water.

A sailor must unfurl the sail, but then must wait for the wind.

So it is with prayer.

Ultimately it is a process of waiting, but in prayer we know in faith
(even if we do not experience it) that God is certainly offering Himself to us.

Luke's description of the Annunciation (1:26-38) is a portrayal of prayer.



LA VERNA

Jesus' Baptism is also portrayed by Luke (3:21-22) as a prayer scene.





‘ Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white ...

a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!” When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone’(Luke 9:28-35).’



At the Last Supper we are invited into the depths of Jesus' intimacy with God. While offering himself to his friends as he offers the broken bread and the poured out wine, we are told that he offered thanks to his Father (Luke 22:14-20).

The Greek verb for 'offer thanks' is eucharisteô (from which our word 'Eucharist')





‘He loves me and gives
himself for me’
(Galatians 2:20)



‘The law of social existence demands that the central value which unites a group should be expressed and celebrated in community. If the religious community knows that it exists only because it is brought into being by the grace of the Spirit, it will need to look towards its source of continued existence. Would we be too categorical if we affirmed that a religious community is risking its very fraternal texture as soon as it ceases to live in prayer its relation to God.’

[J. Tillard OP “La communauté Religieuse” NRT May 1972,519].

“I wish to indicate another condition for the authenticity of your witness and for its full apostolic efficacy: to offer your heart-felt and responsible adherence to community life. Living in a religious community is a concrete expression of love for others, and it is a secret of serene and harmonious personal maturation. Acceptance of one’s brother, with his qualities and his limitations, the effort to coordinate one’s own initiatives with decisions matured together, the self-criticism imposed by continuous confrontation with the evaluations and points of view of others, become not only a very effective training ground of human and Christian virtues, but also a precious opportunity for constant verification of the earnestness with which one endeavours to put into practice in life the obligations assumed in the religious profession.”

[JPII Papal Audience for Brothers in Clerical Religious Orders]