

45. Moods of Prayer (Catechism n. 2623-2649)

With the death of Jesus, it was his Spirit, the Spirit of Love who is the communion that Jesus has with his Father, who carries on the mission of teaching Jesus' disciples how to pray and of making prayer possible by drawing the community into Jesus' own communion.

n. 2623 'On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of the Promise was poured out on the disciples, gathered "together in one place"(Acts 2:1). While awaiting the Spirit, "all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer"(Acts 1:14). The Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls for her everything that Jesus said (see John 14:26) was also to form her in the life of prayer.'

It is for us to be open to receive Jesus' Spirit. We need to be attentive and focused. It is especially in the Eucharist that we are privileged to enjoy this intimate communion as we are invited in spirit to be present in the upper room with Mary and the Saints to welcome the Spirit who welcomes us as we are and sends down upon us the fire of the special gifts we need to carry on Jesus' mission of love.

n. 2624 'In the first community of Jerusalem, believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers"(Acts 2:42). This sequence is characteristic of the Church's prayer: founded on the apostolic faith; authenticated by charity; nourished in the Eucharist'.

The foundation of prayer is Faith-Love-the Eucharist.

The Catechism goes on to speak of the various 'moods' of prayer.

Prayer of Blessing (*Catechism n. 2626-2627*)

God is the source of every blessing. When the liturgy speaks of our ‘blessing God’, it is speaking of our acknowledging God’s gift of Himself to us, blessing us in every situation. See *Yielding to Love* Chapter 8 ‘A heart open to holiness’.

Paul speaks beautifully of this prayer in Ephesians 1:3-14

Ephesians 1:3-8

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
blessing us in Christ
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
⁴for he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world
to be holy and blameless before him in love,
⁵destining us for adoption as sons for himself through Jesus Christ,
according to the good pleasure of his will,
⁶to the praise of his glorious grace
that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved
⁷in whom we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of our trespasses,
according to the riches of his grace
⁸that he lavished on us
with all wisdom and insight

Ephesians 1:9-14

⁹making known to us the mystery of his will,
according to his good pleasure that he determined in himself,
¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ,
things in heaven and things on earth, in him
¹¹in whom we have also obtained an inheritance,
having been destined according to the purpose of him
who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,
¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ,
might live for the praise of his glory
¹³in whom you also, hearing the word of truth,
the gospel of your salvation, and believing in him,
were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit,
¹⁴who is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption
as those who are God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

Prayer of Adoration (Catechism n. 2628)

When we are drawn into Jesus' prayer we experience a profound sense of awe before the mystery of the infinite.

See *Yielding to Love* Chapter 9 'A Silent Heart' (page 94):

'If we are to learn to pray we must learn to be silent. To be silent we must learn not to be afraid of solitude. Jesus lived in communion with God in every circumstance, but he still withdrew at times from people and from activity to be alone and pray: 'In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed'(Mark 1:35). He invites us to share this experience: 'Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret'(Matthew 6:6). It is especially in solitude that we experience the truth that we are never really alone: 'You will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me'(John 16:32). God is in the centre of our soul drawing us to God's self.'

We come to realise that the feelings and thoughts, that can be like an internal video that captures our attention and concern, are like the changing weather that happens around a mountain.

In prayer we come to know that we are the mountain, not the weather, for we are in communion with the still and constant God.

Prayer of Petition (*Catechism n. 2629-2633*)

See *Yielding to Love* Chapter 13, pages 123-126.

Jesus offers us the following advice: ‘I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? If you then, who are [when compared to God] evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!’(Luke 11:9-13).

Paul reminds us: ‘The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words’(Romans 8:26). Jesus’ own prayer, the Our Father’ is a perfect example of a Prayer of Petition (*see Catechism n. 2759-2865*). We will be reflecting upon it in the final lecture.

Prayer of Intercession (Catechism n. 2634-2636)

See Yielding to Love Chapter 13, pages 126-130:

‘Among the many wonderful stories in the Hebrew Scriptures, there are two especially memorable ones which speak of the power of intercessory prayer. One is where Abraham pleads with God to spare Sodom (Genesis 18:20-32). The other is where Moses is helped by Aaron and Hur as he prays for victory against Amalek (Exodus 17:8-13; see Prayer n. 43). The power of intercessory prayer is mentioned also in the New Testament. Jesus himself, we are told, is interceding for us with his Father: ‘Christ Jesus, who died, was raised. He is at the right hand of God, interceding for us’ (Romans 8:34). ‘He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them’(Hebrews 7:25). ‘If we sin, we have Jesus Christ as our advocate with the Father’(1John 2:1).

Because of this we are encouraged to approach God with confidence: 'Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need'(Hebrews 4:16).

Did not Jesus himself tell us: 'Everyone who asks receives; everyone who searches finds; everyone who knocks will have the door opened'(Matthew 7:8 and Luke 11:10).

As we pray for each other, however, let us keep in mind the point made earlier in regard to all prayers of petition: we may ask for anything, but we must know that only God knows what is best.

There is comfort in knowing that someone is praying for us. The love thus shown us can ease what can otherwise be experienced as a profound spiritual loneliness. The prayer of another can encourage us to look towards God in faith, trusting that 'the Lord will fulfil his purpose for me'(Psalm 138:8).

We are encouraged also by the words of Deuteronomy: 'It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed'(Deuteronomy 31:8).

When things are hard we can easily think that there is no hope. When others enfold us in their prayer, we are reminded that we are held in love and that God will continue to fulfil in our lives the purpose God has for us.

We might wonder how effective such prayer is when the person for whom we are praying does not know? It is usually good to tell the other person that he or she is in our prayers. But if this is not possible, or not appropriate, we are reminded that we are all connected to each other even when we are unaware of the connection.

We are like branches on a vine. If one branch draws in nourishment from the sun, all the other branches are helped. Ultimately the best help we can give anyone is to be close to God ourselves. A prayerful and open heart draws in grace and this helps the person for whom we are praying. Indeed the whole world benefits from such prayer, for it opens up the world to draw down the fire of God's love.

Of course, other people's prayer for us does not substitute for our own openness to God or our own response to God's grace. Likewise we cannot live other people's lives for them. But we can surround each other with grace. We can draw each other close and encourage each other to believe in God's love, and even when we are not conscious of other people's prayer, this prayer is working 'like radium in the dark'(James McAuley), giving out the spiritual energy of love.

Prayer for other people's needs can tend to take over our prayer and we can do it with anxiety and be so preoccupied going over the sickness or the troubles of those we love that there may be in reality very little communion with God going on. There is a way of expressing our concerns for others while at the same time not being distracted from a genuine faith-communion with God.

Firstly, let us be aware that God loves those for whom we wish to intercede. God has been gracing them long before we thought to pray for them. God is gracing them now. In our prayer our desire is to be in communion with all the members of the church, living and dead.

Then let us imagine taking the person for whom we are praying into our hearts. Incidentally, this is a good way also to listen to people: take them and what they are saying into your heart and listen to them there. If someone has requested our prayers, let us take that person into our heart, and then, from our heart, let us hold him or her up to God. A strenuous effort of concentration is not required, just simple awareness, as we might stand in the presence of a picture or of a sunset.

Finally, let us put the request aside and just be in the presence of God. We do not have to keep on reflecting that we are there on behalf of another: we have already made that clear. We just are in the presence of God. God knows our intention that God's love will flow freely in this other person, as we pray it does in us. It is enough that God knows and that we are open to welcome God's love.

To pray for others we do not have to be clever or eloquent or even perceptive of their needs; just be ourselves as we are: simple, a little confused perhaps, but wanting God's will, or wanting to want God's will for ourselves and others. It is God's business to take things on from there. We are to do what we can do.

We are to fill the water pots with water, and we are to 'fill them to the brim', but we must leave the wine-making to God (see John 2:7-10).

It is up to us to remove the stone, but the words 'Lazarus, come forth' belong to God (see John 11:41-44).

We are dry bones; clothing these bones with flesh and breathing the Spirit of life into them is the work of God (see Ezekiel 37:1-14).

In this way the prayers we pray for others are more trusting. We entrust to the heart of God those whom we have taken into our heart. Do not go over and over their problems. Rather, we are to be ourselves in communion with God in simple trust, and spend the time of prayer open to God's grace and praying that the will of God will be done in our lives and in the world, and that we may be a vehicle of God's grace to others.

God certainly hears our prayer, and, in a way that remains beyond our understanding, our prayer opens a way for grace to enter into the lives of others. It is not for us to know the state of readiness of the others to receive this grace, nor the ways in which their reception might affect their lives. We must leave all this to God.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (*Catechism n. 2637-2638*)

The fact that our most beautiful prayer is called 'Eucharist' (= 'Thanksgiving') highlights the importance of gratitude. Saint Ignatius of Loyola advised the members of the Jesuits to always begin their prayer with thanksgiving. Whatever our situation, however dark things may be for us, to begin our prayer with thanks requires of us that we look for the light, for the moment of grace that lifts the dark curtain and lightens our heart. Spiritual Writers assure us that if we look carefully we will always find this grace. Looking for it stops the dark closing in on us, and reminds us of the constant presence of God – something Jesus experienced in his Agony and on the Cross.

Prayer of Praise (Catechism n. 2639-2643)



Praise is close to Blessing. It is a joyful, loving acknowledgment of God.

It is allowing ourselves to be drawn into the dance that is the life of the Trinity.

It is living what we pray at the Eucharist: ‘Through him (Jesus), with him and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honour and glory are yours, almighty Father, for ever and ever. Amen.’

Longing for God

‘O Lord, all my longing is known to you;
my sighing is not hidden from you’(Psalm 38:9).

‘As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?’(Psalm 42:1).

‘O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.’
(Psalm 63:1)

‘When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord’(Jeremiah 29:13).

‘God does not place his desire and love in the soul except according to its desire and love. Anyone truly loving God must strive not to fail in this love, for you will thereby induce God, if we may so express it, to further love you and find delight in you’(John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 13,12).

‘Do the truth in love’ (Ephesians 4:15)

We pray as we are, and from the actual situation in which we are. God hears the cry of the poor. God hears the cry of the sinner. God hears the cry of the broken-hearted. On our side, for our prayer to be sincere, we must genuinely want to do what Paul speaks of in the Letter he wrote to the Gentile Churches before he was taken off to Rome in chains. He expected never to see again the communities that he had founded and among whom he had worked. Among the many beautiful things he shared with them in what came to be known as the Letter to the Ephesians, he summed up his advice in the words; “Do the truth in love’. It is possible in the name of love to fudge the truth, whether it be to please others or to protect ourselves. Paul tells us to do what is true. That is our first consideration. As we do what is truthful we are to do it as lovingly as we can. Prayer arising from the heart of someone who wants to be committed to the truth and wants to love is genuine prayer. The ‘mood’ of our prayer is to follow our heart while keeping it open to the inspiration of Jesus’ Spirit – the gift that he promises to pour out upon us all.

There is a yearning

