

PERSONAL PRAYER

WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT



Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. - John 15:4

A Catholic Booklet for Free Distribution

By connecting to Jesus in prayer, we can be like the fruit-bearing branches which receive strength and nourishment from the main trunk of a tree. The reverse is also applicable. Without regular and sincere personal prayer in our daily schedule, the connection to God is cut off and true Christian discipleship will cease to exist.

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THE PRESENCE OF GOD

God is omnipotent (all powerful) and He is omnipresent (present everywhere) - present even in the depths of our beings, provided that we allow for this to happen through our co-operation. His presence needs to be desired, sought after and accessed. While one can never really qualify to meet God, a sincere and desiring heart is all that is needed.

O God, a humble and repentant heart you will not reject. – Ps 51:17

These days, people are talking about a lot of signals – radio signals, television signals, WiFi, phone signals, etc. It is certain that the signals exist. However, this does not mean we don't need to access the signals. We do. For example, a dish antenna and a television set bring the TV shows into your living room.

- Without the installation of the dish antenna or the television set, of what use are the existing satellite signals?

- Of what use is your cell phone if it is switched off?
Can anyone reach you?

- Can a landline telephone conversation take place if the cable is disconnected?



Similarly, though the Almighty God is present everywhere, a 'CONNECTION' from our end HAS to be in place.

PRAYER is what we use to access the tangible presence of God in our lives.

A PRO-ACTIVE APPROACH

Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart.

– Jer 29:12-13



It takes a step from our end - a desire which translates into an effort. The time of prayer may not be very enjoyable in the beginning, but in time, this could become the most joyful part of the day!

Prayer may start by being a mere activity but with the grace of God and a pro-active approach, prayer becomes enjoyable.

We are all called into relationship & friendship with the Lord. As this friendship develops on a personal level, we are called to enjoy His company in our personal prayer time more and more.

To be noted is that this communion will inevitably have a positive influence on our interactions and how we relate to the people around us.

In ways one cannot see or fully understand, it is certain that personal prayer positively affects the different situations that we come across in our day to day life.

Prayer brings about the perfect absorption of the food of our good actions, and distributes them into all the members of the soul.

- St. Bernard

ARE YOU WITH GOD ?

The question is not about whether God is with you.
The question is ***“Are you with God?”***

A common cause for distractions during prayer is that we fail to focus on the One to whom we are addressing.

Be fully present to Him and be aware that He is fully present to you at all times.

Gaze, centre your attention, look at Him. He never takes His eyes off you.

– St. Teresa of Avila

Distractions cannot be avoided. The desire to overcome these is what matters. A person completely relying on the grace of Jesus and depending on Him fully, will rise above the situation and overcome the obstacle.

My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. – 2Cor 12:9

The outcome of Personal Prayer

Loving God (which in turn enables loving yourself and then your neighbour) is a universal call and commandment. One can love Him more by knowing Him more. This happens by seeking Him more in times of prayer in the presence of the Holy Spirit who fulfils the promise of Jesus.

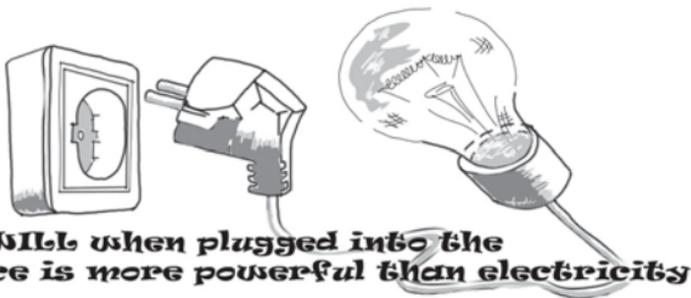
When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. – Jn 16:13

As we regularly spend time with Jesus in prayer, His attitudes ‘rub off’ on us and this causes a slow transformation which, in turn, affects the way we think, behave and live our lives. Listening to His voice and obeying Him accordingly is the core aspect of Christian discipleship. Times of prayer do not yield quick-fix solutions to our problems, but through the bonding and intimacy with God, we can experience Jesus calming the storms in our life, enabling a more joyful outlook.

**Prayer is the OUTER response to one’s
INNER relationship with the Father.**

Jesus has to be placed as the centre and the focus. Praying is a sign of one seeking Him with the realisation that without His grace, we are nowhere.

Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me, you can do nothing. – Jn 15:5



In short, personal prayer allows our love for God to increase. We also increase in knowledge of His ways and in righteousness. A transformation takes place and we get more in tune with listening to His voice, thus helping us into an obedience to what He is asking from us. Through all this, we become better witnesses to the gospel and become co-workers in His vineyard. This is the unfolding of the universal call for all Christians – to connect to Him and access His ‘divine power’ which is actually available freely and in abundance.

His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature.
– 2Pet 1:3-4

Being participants of divine nature finally causes others to see Jesus in us, as God deeply desires for all His children.

If the lungs of prayer and of the Word of God do not nourish the breath of spiritual life, we risk suffocating in the midst of a thousand daily cares. Prayer is the breath of the soul and of life.

- Pope Benedict XVI

The best way to start prayer is to consciously lift your heart to God.

The difference between just saying prayers and truly praying:

Saying prayers can be the same as praying, but not necessarily. This depends on whether the prayers are said with a sincere thirst for God, a deep desire to get closer to Him and the fire of the Holy Spirit within.

Then this becomes praying.

Reading from prayer books is not an end in itself. For personal prayer, this practice is best done only if it functions as an aid and leads to a more engaging time with God later. On a deeper level, prayer is more than just vocal and definitely not something limited to words. Prayer is not something coming out only from the mouth, but something which erupts from the depths of our beings.

If it is communication with the 'divine', how can authentic prayer be superficial?

And of what use are our words to God if our hearts are absent?

When we pray, the voice of the heart must be heard more than that proceeding from the mouth. - St Bonaventure

A “parrot” refers to a person who just says something without really understanding the words spoken. He utters words perhaps as a type of ‘rule’ and does not sincerely mean them. A worshipper on the other hand, utters words which overflow from the heart and truly connect him to God in a deep way.



Let us not be in the category of people which Jesus talks about -

This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. – Matt 15:8

Some basic guidelines for Prayer

The calling of the Christian is for deeper prayer at any point of time. This takes discipline and an effort and most importantly, a desire to know God more and more. *Persistence is the key to strengthening one's prayer life.*

While no fixed rules are a mandate, there are a few points to consider as an aid in the process, at least for a start before the deeper aspects of personal prayer are experienced.

- Choose a suitable time & location where distractions are the least, like a chapel. Decide on a duration, say 20 or 30 minutes for a start.
- Choose a comfortable posture; perhaps one which allows a better disposition of heart; like kneeling, for at least some time.
- Start with words of thanksgiving and try to focus your attention on Him.
- Ask for the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you through the time of prayer as without the Holy Spirit, prayer becomes a mere activity and can be dull, boring and meaningless.

Broad divisions of a time of Prayer

If you are someone struggling to concentrate during personal prayer or wondering how to spend quality time with God, you can consider devoting about 3-5 minutes to each of these aspects of prayer, only for a season, until the 'ball starts rolling' and the Holy Spirit leads you into other ways of connecting to God in prayer.

1. THANKSGIVING:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. – Ps 100:4

2. REPENTANCE FROM SIN:

Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful. – Joel 2:13

3. INSPIRATION FROM SCRIPTURE (BIBLE):

The Word of God is living and active... It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. – Heb 4:12

4. SURRENDER:

Not what I want but what you want. – Matt 26:39

5. PETITION:

In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

– Phil 4:6

6. INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS:

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone. – 1Tim 2:4

7. RESTING IN GOD’S PRESENCE IN SILENCE WITHOUT WORDS:

Be still, and know that I am God! – Ps. 46:10



This final stage of silence is necessary for our hearts to be able to listen to God’s voice, during the time of prayer and also after, which is during the day or oncoming days.

Some graces to pray for regarding Personal Prayer

1. Pray for grace to be repentant, clean in heart and mind and to desire holiness.
2. Pray for grace to draw closer to the Lord in times of prayer and to enjoy deeper & more intimate times of prayer with Him.
3. Pray for the grace to forgive offenders and see the situation through the eyes of God.
4. Pray for the grace to be committed to spending time with Him every day in prayer and spiritual reading - this allows Him to work in your life in a way you would never think or imagine.
5. Ask God to lead you into an ideal timing and location for your personal prayer. Tell Him that you do not want to be lukewarm or slack in this.
6. Pray for inner transformation – that God makes you the person He wants you to be.
7. Pray for God's Will to be done in each and every situation of your life.

Conclusion – Choosing the better part!

Personal prayer CANNOT be replaced by Mass, Rosary, prayer meeting, novena, group intercession, praise & worship, etc. though these aspects are important.

Neither can personal prayer be replaced by adopting a habit of ‘talking to God’ throughout the day, though this too is important & highly beneficial. If one is truly seeking God, then it will be seen that a time is set aside daily to be alone with Him. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to Him. This was considered a good thing and Jesus stated that she had chosen the better part. (Lk 10:42)

Personal prayer cannot be replaced by anything else because it is the core issue of our walk with God. It is between you and God on a one-to-one personal basis.

In ways we may not comprehend or understand, sincere personal prayer results in an empowering inner transformation and causes the growth of a personal relationship with Jesus – the only thing that one would carry forward from this life into Eternity!

Some quotes on PRAYER from Catholic Saints

Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God.

- St. Teresa of Kolkata

The good thoughts which God gives you in prayer are relics. Gather them carefully together in order to translate them into acts, and you will gladden the heart of God. - *St. Vincent de Paul*

Prayer is in fact the recognition of our limits and our dependence. We come from God, we are of God, and to God we return. - *St. John Paul II*

Without prayer, we have neither light nor strength to advance in the way which leads to God.

- St. Alphonsus de Liguori

Prayer is the only channel through which God's great graces and favours may flow into the soul; and if this be once closed, I know no other way He can communicate them.- *St. Teresa of Jesus*

Some points on PRAYER from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

He who humbles himself will be exalted. Humility is the foundation of prayer. – CCC 2559

If our hearts are far from God, the words of prayer are in vain. – CCC 2562

The life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of God and in communion with Him. – CCC 2565

The prayer of faith consists not only in saying “Lord, Lord.” but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan. – CCC 2611

Whether our prayer is communal or personal, vocal or interior, it has access to the Father only if we pray ‘in the name’ of Jesus. – CCC 2664

The Church invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit as the interior Teacher of Christian prayer. – CCC 2681

The content of this booklet is an article by Vinay Silva published in August 2016 in 'The Tabor Kirana', a Catholic magazine of the Bangalore archdiocese.

Prayer is an investment – like sowing a seed. This handy booklet will help you strike the right balance in your prayer life, so that you can reap an abundant harvest.

- Fr. Adrian Mascarenhas

Each one's relationship with God is unique. Yet, each one of us can be aided in the spiritual journey by being enlightened by the Lord. May the Lord help you through this book in your own prayer experience.

- Fr. Ronnie D'Souza, SJ

This little booklet, if read with the proper dispositions, can help the reader to genuinely grow in "a personal relationship with Jesus – the only thing that one would carry forward from this life into Eternity!". (p15)

+ Filipe Neri Ferrão

(Archbishop of Goa and Daman)