

# *PRAYER AS AN ONGOING RELATIONSHIP IN LENT*

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Bishop Robert Barron, in a recent homily, noted that prayer is a friendly dialog with God. There are two types of prayer: (1) vocal prayer and (2) mental prayer. Vocal prayer is the most common type of prayer. For example, vocal prayer includes recitation of the Our Father, Hail Mary, the Divine Office, and the speaking parts of the Holy Mass. Mental prayer is a focus on meditation and contemplation commonly associated with monastic communities. The purest form of the intermingling of vocal prayer and mental prayer, besides the Holy Mass, is the Holy Rosary. In the Holy Rosary, we recite the Our Father and Hail Mary and at the same time meditate on the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious, and Luminous mysteries. As we travel through Lent, I would like to propose some suggestions for vocal prayer and mental prayer to reinforce our Lenten discipline. As a wise priest once said about suggestions during a retreat, "take what you want and leave the rest".

There is a long-standing tradition of praying the Seven Sorrows of our Blessed Mother Chaplet. The Chaplet is similar to the Holy Rosary, but instead of the mysteries we meditate on the Seven Sorrows of our Blessed Mother, while praying seven Hail Marys between each of the Seven Sorrows. Another practical tool for keeping our minds and hearts on our Blessed Mother during Lent is a "tenner rosary." The tenner rosary is a single decade of the rosary that fits easily in the front pocket or purse. When walking down a street or waiting in a line, you can pull out this small rosary and pray a decade of the rosary for a family member or a friend. This small practice can catch on even after Lent. I have spent a significant amount of time in the line at Trader Joe's praying my tenner rosary and the line moves faster! Also, a prayer that can be recited throughout the day is the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer is "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Ever-Living God. Have Mercy on Me a Sinner.**" In sum, vocal prayers to try this Lent are repetition of the Jesus Prayer, the recitation of the Divine Mercy or Seven Sorrows Chaplet, variations of the Stations of the Cross and any one of a plethora of Novenas.

The act of mental prayer is a meditation on the deep love and mystery of God. A well-known practice of mental prayer is Lectio Divina which has been promoted by the Benedictine Order since the middle ages. Lectio Divina is a slow reading of a Bible passage and meditating on the meaning of the words or placing yourself in the scene from the Bible. The Carmelite method of mental prayer envisions an intimate conversation with our Lord. St. Teresa of Avila, when speaking of mental prayer, noted: "He dwells in the human heart in a special manner. Close your eyes then look at Him, present there with you. This gaze is already a prayer." I once asked a Carmelite Nun, what is the basis of her spirituality. She said, "We stand with our Blessed Mother at the foot of the cross, gazing at our Crucified Lord." There are a ton of books to assist with meditation. Mental prayer is a discipline that becomes easier with regularity and practice and can start gradually at just five or ten minutes a day. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta said, "We have only today. Let us begin."