

Prayer



Catholic Definition of Prayer

The word prayer by definition means “to ask.” It is an act of lifting mind and heart to God.

Types of prayer

Adoration—In this form of prayer we give God the adoration that is due, recognizing His sovereignty as Lord and Creator of all. When we adore God, we aren’t asking for anything, we are meditating on the attributes of God and giving credit where credit is due for all that He has given.

Contrition—We are all sinners, and we all break God’s law. This is why this form of prayer is especially important. This is where we admit to God the times we have sinned and ask His forgiveness. If we have committed mortal sin we go to the Sacrament of Penance.

Thanksgiving—This is the prayer where we thank God for all He has done for us. He has created us, redeemed us, and continues to bless us. He is deserving of all love and respect, and this is a prayer of gratitude.

Petition—This is where we bring our requests to God, for ourselves and for others. We trust in the Lord and His plan, and have faith that He will hear our requests.

How Catholics Pray

Often Catholics are asked why they only pray “prepared” prayers instead of just speaking to God. This question usually comes from those who aren’t familiar with the Catholic Faith. Catholics absolutely pray to God in their own words, and use spontaneous prayer. So why then do we also use the rote prayers?

Memorized prayers can give you the words to pray when you might otherwise be struggling to find words, such as in a difficult situation. They can also be unifying, such as when a group of Catholics sit down to a meal, and even if they first pray in their own words, they are able to pray the meal blessing prayer (a memorized prayer) all together as one.

The two most well know rote prayers are the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The Our Father was given to us by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. When we pray this prayer we are praying the words literally given to us by Jesus.

The Hail Mary is also a Scriptural prayer, and is not worship of Mary. The words, “Hail Mary, full of grace” and straight from the angel Gabriel in Scripture, and the words “Blessed are you among women” are from the Elizabeth, and are taken right from Scripture. At the end we ask Mary to pray FOR us, just as we ask fellow Christians here on earth to do.

Pray Without Ceasing



In Thessalonians 5:17 we are instructed to pray without ceasing. When you stop and consider that command, it's a pretty tall order! How do we live out such a command as the Body of Christ? How do we know that someone is praying every moment of every day?

This is where the Liturgy of the Hours comes in. The Liturgy of the Hours is the prayer of set passages of Scripture, mostly the Psalms, at set times of the day. All clergy and religious orders are required to pray it, and many lay people pray it as well. The prayers are divided into Morning, Midday, Evening, and Night Prayer. When you take into account the worldwide Church, and all of the different time zones, the Catholic Church is truly in prayer at every moment, fulfilling this command from Scripture, and constantly praying for the world. We are praying in unison, the same prayers and the same Scripture. The regular Catholic at the parish prays the same prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours as the Pope.

The Rosary



Often when people think of Catholic prayer, they think of the Rosary. This prayer is sometimes misconstrued, with its many Our Father and Hail Mary prayers as "vain repetitious prayer," or as "Marian worship." To come to either of these conclusions is to not know or understand the rosary and what it truly is. So what is the Rosary?

It is the prayer of the Gospel—the Bible on Beads. It is both meditative and vocal prayer. When you see someone praying the rosary you see the beads slide through their fingers, and hear them saying the Our Father and Hail Mary prayers. These familiar prayers are repeated to help us with the meditative aspect of the Rosary, which we will get to in a minute. First, we will cover vain repetitious prayer, and how that is not what the Rosary is. It is true that the prayers of the Rosary do repeat, but they are not vain. Jesus did not condemn repetitious prayer, he condemned *vain* repetitious prayer. In fact, Jesus Himself prayed repetitive prayers, such as in the Garden of Gethsemane before His passion and death. The repeated prayers of the Rosary are not vain, because while we pray them we meditate on the life of Jesus Christ. The only thing that can defeat the evil in the world is the mysteries of the life and death of Jesus Christ, and when we pray the Rosary we meditate on them and wield them like a spiritual sword. For instance, the third joyful mystery of the rosary in the birth of Christ. As we pray the memorized prayers we know so well, we meditate on this event, perhaps on how it changed the world, and its implications in our own lives.

Why the Hail Mary as the main meditative prayer? Think of it this way. If you are trying to learn about the life of someone you love, would you rather look at photos of their life by yourself, or with just you and them, or with the enlightenment that comes from the input of their mother?

Lectio Divina



It is important to spend time with the Word of God often, daily, if possible. While even simply reading Scripture is beneficial, praying with it bears great fruit. The practice of Lectio Divina (Latin for *divine reading*) is an ancient way of reading Scripture, as a prayer, that is still practiced by Christians today. The process can be tailored to each person, and is often a bit different for everyone but the main steps are as follows:

- 1.) **Lectio (Read)** - Choose a passage of Scripture, maybe the Gospel for the day or a Psalm. About 5-10 verses is a good length. Read the text straight through, pay attention to any footnotes, and consider the context of the reading.
- 2.) **Meditatio (Meditate)** - Read the Scripture through again slowly, and consider what it might be saying to you regarding your own life, or a situation in your life.
- 3.) **Oratio (Pray)** - Read the Scripture again. Take your meditations from the previous step to God in prayer and listen quietly for Him to speak to your heart in response.
- 4.) **Contemplation (Contemplate)** - This step is where you simply sit quietly in the presence of the Lord and enjoy being in His presence. Consider the contentment of an elderly couple, at peace in each other's presence and thrilled to be spending time together.
- 5.) **Action**—Take away one action item from your time with the Lord to put into practice in your life.

Morning Offering and the Examen Prayer

These two prayers are recommended as the "bookends" of the day. Let's look at each one in turn.

The Morning Offering: The phrase "offer it up" is common among Catholics, and it can seem a bit odd without any explanation. To offer up something, be it an inconvenience, a trying situation, etc., is to offer your suffering as a prayer, joining it with the suffering that Christ experienced on the cross (2 Corinthians 1:5). This is a good and pious practice, but sometimes it's hard to remember amidst the happenings of your day to actually carry it out. The Morning Offering Prayer is a great way to offer all aspects of your day for whatever intentions you would like, or for the world. It's great to pray in the morning before your day starts.

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer You my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Your Sacred Heart, in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world, in reparation for my sins, for the intentions of all my relatives and friends, and in particular for the intentions of the Holy Father. Amen.

The Examen Prayer—This prayer is a review of your day before bed. If you did Lectio Divina in the morning and had an action item you were working on, you could examine your day in light of that, but any review of your day is beneficial. Here are the normal steps to the Examen Prayer:



the EXAMEN

The *Examen* is a method of reviewing your day in the presence of God. It's actually an attitude more than a method, a time set aside for thankful reflection on where God is in your everyday life. It has five steps, which most people take more or less in order, and it usually takes 15 to 20 minutes per day. Here it is in a nutshell:

- 1** Ask God for light.
I want to look at my day with God's eyes, not merely my own.
- 2** Give thanks.
The day I have just lived is a gift from God. Be grateful for it.
- 3** Review the day.
I carefully look back on the day just completed, being guided by the Holy Spirit.
- 4** Face your shortcomings.
I face up to what is wrong—in my life and in me.
- 5** Look toward the day to come.
I ask where I need God in the day to come.

Version of the Examen from *A Simple Life-Changing Prayer* by Jim Manney © Loyola Press

Helpful Hints on Prayer

The most important thing to remember about prayer, is that it is an act of lifting mind and heart to God. Despite our best efforts we will get distracted, interrupted, or feel as though we aren't praying correctly. Often people think that prayer is something that should come easily, but in reality prayer takes work. We have to discipline our minds and hearts, and truly make an effort to enter into it, turn our mind back to it when we get distracted, and remember that it's not just about saying words, but about having a conversation. The Lord loves you, and He wants to hear from you. If you are sincerely trying to raise mind and heart to God, you are praying.

It's normal to experience dryness in prayer at some points, and the important thing is to just keep praying. If you are struggling with prayer, don't be afraid to reach out and ask for help or direction. Many people go through life never quite sure if they are praying as they should be. The Church has been around for thousands of years and knows a thing or two about prayer, so don't be afraid to ask someone you trust for help. And no matter which style of prayer you prefer, know that God is delighted with your efforts.



For me, *prayer* is a surge of the *heart*; it is a simple look turned toward *heaven*, it is a cry of recognition and of *love*, embracing both *trial* and *joy*

SAINT THERESE OF LISIEUX



