



From Deacon Mark Miller's Desk

A frequent "New Year's resolution" is to spend more time in prayer. A good way to turn the resolution into action is to focus on how we pray because not all prayer is the same. The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes five basic types of prayer [paragraphs 2626 – 2643]. Fr. Carl Arcosa, pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church in Livermore, California, provides brief descriptions of each type of prayer and examples of each type.

Adoration and Worship

In prayers of adoration or worship, we exalt the greatness of God, and we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things. The Mass and the other liturgies of the Church are full of prayers of adoration or worship, such as the Gloria (the Glory to God).

Petition

Outside of the Mass, prayers of petition are the type of prayer with which we are most familiar. In them, we ask God for things we need—primarily spiritual needs, but physical ones as well. Our prayers of petition should always include a statement of our willingness to accept God's Will, whether He directly answers our prayer or not.

Intercession

Prayers of intercession – praying for others – is another form of petition, but they are important enough to be considered their own type of prayer. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes (# 2634), "Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did." In a prayer of intercession, we're not concerned with our needs but with the needs of others.

Thanksgiving

Perhaps the most neglected type of prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving. While praying "Grace" before meals is a good example of a prayer of thanksgiving, we should get into the habit of thanking God throughout the day for all the good things that happen to us and others. Consider including the Grace After Meals prayer as an excellent practice.

Praise

Prayers of praise acknowledge God for what He is. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church (# 2639) notes, praise "lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory." The Psalms are perhaps the best-known example of prayers of praise.

During his 2020 catechesis on prayer, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of intercessory prayer which he defined as "prayer which asks on behalf of another." Those who are accustomed to pray, said Pope Francis, "never turn their backs on the world." If prayer is not engaged with every aspect of human existence – its joys and sorrows, its hopes, and anxieties – it becomes a "decorative" activity.

Men and women of prayer, the Pope said, always "keep the doors of their hearts wide open," even when they seek solitude and silence. They pray for those who do not pray, or do not know how to pray, as well as for those "who have erred and have lost the way." In their solitude, those who pray "separate themselves from everything and everyone" precisely in order to "rediscover everything and everyone in God."

Prayer is "simply human," Pope Francis said. "The human heart tends toward prayer." But prayer necessarily involves love for our brothers and sisters. Human experience, said the Pope, "is present in every prayer, because no matter what errors people may have committed, they should never be rejected or discarded."

Pope Francis insisted that when those who pray offer prayers for sinners, there should be no judgment or condemnation: those who pray, pray for all, and first of all for themselves. The Holy Father suggested, for this very reason, a prayer that all can pray: "Lord, no one is just in your sight; we are all debtors, each with an outstanding balance to pay; no one is sinless in your eyes. Lord, have mercy on us!"

The Church, too, said Pope Francis, "has the mission of practicing the prayer of intercession" – and this duty is especially incumbent upon those who have responsibility for others. "Like Abraham and Moses," he said, "they must at times 'defend' those entrusted to them before God." In fact, the Pope said, by praying to God, they are "guarding them with God's eyes and heart, with His same invincible compassion and tenderness."