

A Life of Prayer

For most of us prayer is something we do at church, or anywhere when we're in real trouble. Prayer is that formal exercise we do by saying just the right words to implore that God out there to intervene in the here-and-now. The best prayers, most Anglicans believe, come from *The Book of Common Prayer*, and are formally read kneeling.

But Holy Scripture calls us to pray constantly, without ceasing. Not only in our parish church, but everywhere, even on the street corner and in our closet. Not only on our knees, but walking, standing, even lying down.

Another commonly held misconception is that prayer is synonymous with worship. Spiritual directors tell us that such a view limits the effectiveness of prayer and reduces worship to mere lip service. The word "worship," in Hebrew, comes from God having trust-worthiness, so much so that one can bow or prostrate before Him without worrying about being defenseless.

The word "pray" means to speak, or better, to communicate. It has the same etymology as orator and oral. For Christians, prayer is spiritual communications. Though Protestantism limits spiritual communication only with God, Anglican tradition is more inclusive, like the Roman and Orthodox understanding, that prayer is appropriate for the entire Communion of Saints in the Church Militant, Expectant, and Triumphant. Fr. John McCausland, SSIE, in his book, *The Church's Answers*, calls prayer "the vehicle of inter-communication" with the whole Church.

Only God is worthy of our worship (trust), but spiritual communication is the duty of all Christians, living and dead [Eph 6:18,19]. Asking our guardian angel to pray for us, or praying to our patron saint to intercede on our behalf, or charging our

PRaise. In both the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New, the word for "praise" can also be translated as "honor." When we acknowledge someone for an accomplishment we honor them. Each of us has our own heroes, whether they be friends, sports figures, statesmen, or churchmen. St. Peter commands us to honor all the Saints [1 Peter 2:17] and the Collect for the Visitation asks God's help in honoring the Blessed Virgin Mother. Since we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves, by honoring our Church's heroes we, a priori, honor God. Ultimately, it is God's very Being that draws our praise. This type of prayer is often called arrow prayer on ejaculatory prayer because of their brevity and spontaneity.

THANKSGIVING. We are taught early in life to be grateful and to thank one another for gifts or efforts on our behalf. In the same way we thank the Communion of Saints for supporting us by their fellowship "of love and prayer" and surrounding us "by their witness to [God's] power and mercy." Most importantly of all we give thanks to God, the Giver of all good things.

CONFESSiON. As we ask each other for forgiveness so we must approach our Father of All Mercies for His reconciling absolution. But in order to receive God's forgiveness He asks us to 1) acknowledge and admit our offense(s), 2) be penitent (sorry that we hurt Him), and 3) intend to change/amend our ways (*metanoia*, repent). A prayer of confession should contain all three essential elements. We are called to confess to Almighty God, to His Church, and to a priest [79 BCP 447].

OBLaTION. Prayers of offering are especially pleasing to God because, instead of always asking, oblation prayer gives. Though our gifts are always unworthy, God accepts them in his love. The Mass is the most perfect Prayer of Oblation, but the offering of our daily life and work (as the Benedictine motto says: *labore est orare*, i.e. to work is to pray) is also an accept-

able sacrifice.

INTERCESSION. Since it is the duty of all saints to pray for one another, we intercede and ask the supplication of our friends, the saints in heaven, and our parish family. The Prayers of the People at the Eucharistic Liturgy are excellent guides for interceding on another's behalf.

PETITION. This type of prayer, also called supplication, is probably the most common. Many otherwise faithful Christians believe it is selfish to pray for themselves; yet it is God's will that we ask, knock, and seek. Although an exclusively "gimme" mentality is not spiritually healthy, we must, by our petitions, acknowledge our complete dependence on God for everything. And, following our Lord's example, our final petition must always be: "not my will, but Yours."

MEDITATION. Reflecting on a Biblical theme or a Devine attribute, this type of prayer takes preparation and ordinarily requires a block of time and a quiet environment. Probably the most famous examples are found in St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. Meditative prayer is discursive, meaning that the focus or reflection systematically moves from one theme/attribute to another in a progressive or formational manner so as to deepen our insight or stimulate our holy affections.

CONTEMPLaTION. Like meditative prayer, contemplative prayer requires time and conducive surroundings. Being non-discursive (i.e. not moving from subject to subject) this prayer focuses with ever increasing depth on God. St. Theresa of Avila writes, "contemplation is divine union in which the Lord takes His delight in the soul and the soul takes its delight in him" [*The Way of Perfection*]

MODES OF PRAYER

There are two modalities of prayer depending upon the media of transmission.

VERBAL and MENTAL. St. Thomas Aquinas called them, respectively, Prophetic and Mystical. Prophetic (Greek: *pro* for + *phania* to speak) because verbalized prayer speaks for the common good of the community and is meant to inform in the physical world as well as the spiritually. Mystical (Greek: *mystos/myein* to be closed of the lips/eyes) because such communication is to/for the spiritual world alone. All nine types of prayer can be either spoken or thought, though meditation and contemplation lend themselves more effectively to mental than to verbal prayer.

METHODS OF PRAYER

There are two techniques of praying, depending entirely upon the number of praying persons and whether or not they are praying in community

PRIVATE and CORPORATE. Private (or individual) prayer involves a sole person, alone or in a disconnected group praying singly for his/her own intentions. Corporate (or common) prayer involves two or more in community expressing their common concerns and intentions. Private prayers can often be imposed upon corporate prayer, constructively, as with individual supplications within the context of the Prayers of the People, or destructively, as when an individual separates him-/herself from the community at prayer. Perhaps the most common example of a dysfunctional, or destructive, mode is when the person praying is distracted from the corporate intentions and begins to pray for their own intentions. Private prayer is most often conceived as being mental though it is probably verbal as often as not. Corporate

prayer is of necessity verbal.

STYLES OF PRAYER

Style has to do with the source of initiation as well as the manner of presentation. In the past the terms Formal and Informal have been used to designate the different styles of prayer. However, there seem to be more important aspects to style than just the degree of formality. Perhaps a better sense of terminology comes from the etiology of prayer. This understanding would then suggest the use of the terms Extemporaneous / Charismatic and Codified / Liturgical.

EXTEMPORANEOUS. This charismatic style of prayer comes from an immediate need whether on the part of the person praying, or, if praying in the spirit, from a need known to God. Another valid term to describe this style might be spontaneous since it is internally-activated by need or the Spirit who dwells in our bodily temple, and is impulsive, and indigenous.

LITURGICAL. More rehearsed than extemporaneous prayer, this style of prayer is most often written (as in a prayer book) or memorized (as in certain rote prayers such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, or Holy Michael). Though some denominations discount codified prayer as lacking in sincerity, such is not necessarily the case. Even though read prayers can be "hollow," they can also express the corporate intention in a refined and honed style. Written prayers can be a God-send during those "dark nights of the soul" when extemporaneous prayer is spiritually impossible.

LEVELS OF PRAYER

Although there are a variety of different systems for attempting to identify the depth or height of our spiritual communication, a biblical model fits flawlessly. We are commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and

strength.

STRENGTH. The first level of prayer is the prayer from necessity. That is, we recognize a need and we pray about it. We ask God to solve the physical / emotional / psychological problem.

MIND. A deeper level of prayer is the prayer of the intellect. We understand ourselves to be in relationship with the Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Sanctifier (et al.) and we want to get to know Him better. Thus we enter into an exploration of that relationship, seeking to know God better and more fully.

HEART. A still deeper level of prayer is the prayer of the affections. When we love someone we want to communicate with them and so we often talk with them even when there is no problem or Need.

SOUL. The final, and deepest level of prayer is the prayer of our spirit to God's Spirit. It involves giving ourselves to God in a constant and complete way. The prayer of the soul unites our will to God's. And because He is in us and we in Him, we pray without ceasing; we are in total communication.

ANSWERS TO PRAYER

The 100th Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, said that God only had three answers to prayer; Yes, No, or Not Now. Although most of us pray with the expectation of receiving a Yes, it is an indication of our ability to trust (worship) as to whether or not we can accept the negative answers, knowing that God loves us so much that He wills only good to those who love Him.

Let Us Pray

Amori Christi et Ecclesiae



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