

Prayer

Before dawn, in a quiet place.

In short. The Church teaches that prayer is “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.”¹ It is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit.²

Key points

- Humility is the foundation of prayer.¹
- Jesus taught his disciples the Our Father, which the Church calls the summary of the whole gospel.^{3,4}
- Christian Tradition has kept three expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative and contemplative.⁵
- Prayer always presupposes effort, and its habitual difficulty is distraction.^{6,7}

Try this, this week

1. **Pray the Our Father slowly, once.** Stop on any line that catches you.
2. **Pick a time and a place.** Five minutes at the same time each day is a good start.
3. **Read Mark 1:35 and Matthew 6:5–13.** Notice where Jesus prays and how he tells us to pray.
4. **When your mind wanders, simply come back.** Do not scold yourself; just begin again.

“And rising very early, going out, he went into a desert place: and there he prayed.”

Mark 1:35, Douay–Rheims

Watch out: what this does not mean

- Prayer is not a technique we master alone: it is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part.⁶
- Prayer and life go together: “We pray as we live, because we live as we pray.”⁶

Common questions

What if I do not know what to say?

The Catechism says we are ready to receive the gift of prayer only when we humbly acknowledge that we do not know how to pray as we ought.¹ St. Paul writes that the Spirit helps our infirmity and “asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”⁸

Why do my prayers seem unanswered?

The Catechism admits that some even stop praying because they think their petition is not heard.⁹ It asks two questions in return: why do we think our petition has not been heard, and how is our prayer heard, how is it “efficacious”?⁹

Remember: Start small: same time, same place, a few honest words.

Sources

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| 1. CCC 2559 | 6. CCC 2725 |
| 2. CCC 2565 | 7. CCC 2729 |
| 3. CCC 2759 | 8. Romans 8:26 (Douay–Rheims) |
| 4. CCC 2761 | 9. CCC 2734 |
| 5. CCC 2699 | |

Quotation above: Mark 1:35, Douay–Rheims. Catechism: official text on vatican.va.

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