

Prayer

Prayer is the relating of the self or soul to God in trust, penitence, praise, petition, and purpose, either individually or corporately. A prayer is a form of communication, a way of talking to God. Prayer may be formal or informal. While formal prayer is an important element of Christian worship, prayer itself is not synonymous with worship or adoration.

The Origin of the Term

The word pray is first found in Middle English, meaning to "ask earnestly." It comes from the Old French *preier*, which is derived from the Latin word *precari*, which simply means to entreat or ask. In fact, although pray is not often used this way anymore, it can simply mean "please," as in "pray continue your story."

Talking to God

While we often think of prayer primarily as asking God for something, prayer, properly understood, is a conversation with God. Just as we cannot hold a conversation with another person unless he can hear us, the very act of praying is an implicit recognition of the presence of God here with us. And in praying, we strengthen that recognition of the presence of God, which draws us closer to Him. That is why the Church recommends that we pray frequently and make prayer an important part of our daily lives.

How Should I Pray?

How one prays depends on the purpose of one's prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in discussing the five types of prayer in paragraphs 2626 through 2643, provides examples and pointers on how to engage in each type of prayer.

- [CCC 2626 through 2643](#)
- [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

Most people find it easier to begin praying by making use of the traditional prayers of the Church. Structured prayer helps us focus our thoughts and reminds us of the way in which to pray.

But as our prayer life deepens, we should advance beyond written prayer to a personal conversation with God. While written prayers or prayers that we have memorized will always be a part of our prayer life, the Sign of the Cross, with which Catholics begin most of their prayers, is itself a prayer.

Prayer is Conversation

Prayer is a conversation with God

- [Conversation](#)

Faith

Prayer depends on the liveliness of our faith. Without faith, there is no prayer. Either I believe that there is more to reality than the sun, moon, and stars or more than the people I meet on the street or in the privacy of my home, or I shall not pray. Those who believe, pray; those who do not believe, do not pray. Those who believe much, pray much; those who believe little, pray little. Those who believe deeply, pray deeply; those who believe weakly, pray weakly. We pray as we believe, neither more nor less. Faith is the condition for prayer. It is also the measure and the norm of the quality and quantity of our prayer.

The God of faith is not a solitary deity but the eternal Father, Son, and Spirit. Each truly and fully God, and each truly distinct, but one divine nature, one God.

Expressions of Prayer

Catholics pray in different ways. The Catechism names three major expressions of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer.

- [Divina Resources](#)

Vocal Prayer

Vocal prayer is giving voice to what is stirring in our hearts and in our souls. Vocal prayer can be as simple and uplifting as “Thank you, God, for this beautiful morning.” It can be as formal as a Mass celebrating a very special occasion. It can be as intense and immediate as the prayer Jesus uttered in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

Most Catholics learn traditional prayers from the time they were young. These normally include the Sign of the Cross, the Hail Mary, the Lord’s Prayer, and a mealtime blessing. They might also include prayers at waking and bedtime. Over time many people learn other prayers, such as the Memorare, a prayer asking Mary, the Mother of God, to pray for us in our time of need.

Catholics often pray in groups. When two or more people gather together to raise their minds and hearts to God in prayer, their prayer is called communal prayer. Examples of communal prayer are the Rosary, Devotional prayers, Novenas, Litanies, Classroom prayers, Lectio Divina, and, most importantly, the Mass. Standing together at Mass reciting the Creed (“I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth . . .”) is a powerful experience that both expresses and shapes our faith. Though we might say the same prayers over the course of our lives, their meaning grows and changes with our life experiences. Our vocal prayers are not just “going through the motions,” they are the expression of a living faith.

At Mass, the presider invites each one of us to “Lift up your hearts.” When we honestly say “We lift them up to the Lord,” we know we are truly praying, for that is what prayer is—lifting our hearts to God.

Meditation

To meditate is to reflect on or think about God. When we meditate, we keep our attention and focus on God so that we can recognize his presence in our daily lives and respond to what God is asking of us. When we meditate, a variety of things can help us to concentrate and to spark our imaginations. We may use Scripture ([Lectio Divina](#)), Traditional prayers; Religious images ([Visio Divina](#)). Meditation, also known as reflective prayer, leads us to a conversation with God. Remembering that we are in God’s presence, we can listen to him speak to us. We enter into God’s sacred time and space and know that he is with us at all times and in all places.

Contemplative Prayer

When we rest quietly in God’s presence, we engage in contemplation. In contemplation, we spend time with God in wordless silence, aware that he is with us. To understand how contemplation occurs, we can compare it with thinking on—or contemplating—a beautiful sunset. We are conscious of its impact, but our reaction is wordless. When we experience God personally, we feel his love and wait for him to speak to us in his own way. The key is to make time to relax and listen in God’s presence, to seek union with the God who loves us.

Links

[Catholic Doors](#) [Catholic Online](#) [IBreviary](#) [USCCB](#)

