



EMBRACING THE DIVINE SPARK:

NOURISHING YOUR PRAYER LIFE

Session 2

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Let's review ...

Prayer

* Let's review the basics

▪ What *is* prayer?

- ✦ Prayer is an honest, personal communication with God
 - ◆ Honest - from the heart
 - ◆ Personal - creation and maintenance of one's relationship with God
 - ◆ Communication - Speaking & Listening

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. CCC¶2559

Prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. CCC¶2565

Elements of Prayer

- ✧ Prayer as communication can be
 - Individual
 - Communal / group
 - In a special place
 - Anywhere
 - At specific times
 - Spontaneous
- ✧ Prayer is for *our* benefit
- ✧ Prayer takes practice
 - Like physical exercise: Easy at the beginning level; higher levels require more effort

Foundations of Prayer

Objective Perspective

- ✧ Belief in God
- ✧ God is knowable to humans
- ✧ God wants us to know him

The decision to pray – to converse with God – is a radical decision in this secular world. It means that we who pray have a belief that

1. There is a God
2. That God cares for us and wants us to talk with him

Go to p. 10 of How to Listen and read the highlighted portion

Foundations of Prayer

- ✧ Belief in God
 - Although it seems obvious...
 - A recent poll has indicated that less than 50% of Americans profess a belief in God
 - Although we may think that we can never change, Jesus gives us examples to the contrary -
 - But what is common to all of those examples is the ability to talk with and listen to Jesus.

(After the 2nd subset)

Without going into the existential proofs of his existence (that should be the subject of a class in apologetics), we have faith in his existence, that he has spoken to us, and that these have been recorded in Scripture.

God does not speak to us in myths, but in real history. There **is** a real, tangible connection between God and mankind. AND, God continues to reveal himself to us in our lives as we continue to find him, experience him, and know him in the real world. (See pp. 16-17, *How to Listen...*)

Go to the last 2 bullets

Examples:

Lepers and the blind man who asked to be healed

Woman with the hemorrhage

Woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her

hair

These were prayers as they were asked by words and from their hearts, without reservation.

As we will discuss later in the series, listening to these scripture passages from the Gospel, is listening to the Word of God and is one form of prayer

Foundations of Prayer

- ✧ God is knowable to humans
 - God created humans in his image and likeness – *Gen. 1:27*
 - God is within us – *The Divine Spark*
 - God has gifted humanity with:
 - Knowledge
 - Reason
 - Memory
 - Free Will*
 - Collective Memory

Foundations of Prayer

- ✦ God is knowable to humans
 - God has gifted humanity with:
 - Free Will
 - ✦ To love God &
 - ✦ To love neighbor as yourself - Community
 - ✦ To make choices
 - ◆ Moral good vs. moral evil
 - ◆ Between 2 things of moral good
 - ◆ Consequences
 - ◆ Evil of relativism
 - ◆ Evil of overvaluing spiritual life as to negate the good that is present in the material world

Foundations of Prayer

- ✧ God wants us to know him
 - To know him is to know what are the right choices
 - God is good; God wants us to choose good
 - ✦ What is evil?
 - Pursuing moral virtue & shunning vice
 - Recognizing the purpose God intended his gifts to be used & using them accordingly
 - ✦ For example, the 10 Commandments
 - DISCERNMENT

Definition of evil - p. 21 *Listening to God...*

Discernment

This is a gift from God that pours out on us, flowing from the presence of God within us. What we discern is the distinction between that which comes from God and that which is not from God.

We need God as a counterpoint to that which is not & vice versa – bad times give meaning to good.

What do we expect out of life?

Commitment

1. God as your highest priority
2. To go to heaven and to avoid hell
3. To accept God's revelation on *his* terms

God as your highest priority

Describe the metaphor of the Olympic athlete training only an hour or two each week.

1. Do I really want to know God? – To hear him, I must be open to hear him blotting out all other influences or distractions
2. God calls us to love him with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength. This requires total commitment. Alternatively, if I am unwilling to do this, not only am I incapable but I may be disinterested in knowing his will. If I am not all in, something else is more important.
3. There is no easy way – no magic pill, potion or incantation. This requires commitment and work, but then anything of value requires this. For example, love takes work; we must choose to love every day.
4. His command to pray constantly does not mean to recite prayers or talk to God 24/7; it means to always be open to his presence – his love – always. God may not be in the thunder, but in a whisper.

Commitment to go to heaven and not hell

1. This seems pretty self-evident, but it is not a given. Not everyone will go to heaven; we cannot just say that since God loves us, he won't let us go to hell. We have to try to live as he wants us to live – to be holy as the Father is holy – and to honestly seek forgiveness with a contrite heart when we have sinned. That sincere confession must

be accompanied by an equally sincere desire and commitment not to commit that sin again.

2. Wanting to avoid hell is admirable, but it is an incomplete sentiment. The fear of hell is not a bad motive to avoid sin, but it is still not enough to sustain a life of virtue and joy. It is a negative focus and does not allow us to pursue the positive aspects of life such as love. We end up acting passively and not actively seeking our goals. The goal is to get to heaven and spend eternity totally enveloped in love. *A positive goal, powerfully sought with intense desire, will make it possible to take great risks and engage in the great adventure of faith.* Think about the Act of Contrition – it is acceptable to confess to avoid damnation, but it is preferable to confess because our sins keep us from God and we want to be with him and do as he wants and commands. (Our hearts are restless...)
3. God wants us to desire eternal life in joy and light with God, the angels and the saints. He wants us to want to share eternity with him and in his love. This role is not passive – not merely as an observer, but as an active participant giving and receiving love eternally. We are called to share in the same love that is in the Trinity.

To accept God's revelation on *his* terms

God *is* God... Who should we listen to; who should we follow/ model? His terms may not be what we want, but they are what we need.

Talking to God

Talking to God

- ✦ If God knows what is in my heart, why do I need to talk to him?
 - We need to give voice to our thoughts
 - Think things through
 - Organize what is on our minds/hearts
 - Communication builds relationships
 - Intimate sharing
 - Even in quiet, time spent together creates lasting bonds

Talking to God

✠ Traditional Prayers

- Should not be considered inferior to spontaneous prayers
 - They serve a different purpose
 - They are a way to start the conversation
 - They are theologically correct
 - ✧ Many come from Sacred Scripture
 - ✧ Sometimes spontaneous prayer may express untrue notions of God and our relationship with him

The Our Father comes from Jesus himself. The Hail Mary is a combination of words from the angel Gabriel and from Elizabeth when they addressed the Blessed Virgin

Talking to God

✠ Let's look at the Act of Contrition

O my God.

I am heartily sorry for having offended you.

I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell.

But most of all because they offend you, who are all good, and deserving of all my love.

I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin.

O my God – We are speaking directly to God; this should cause a personal reflection upon these words and what is in our hearts.

I am heartily sorry for having offended you. – This indicates the depth of our sorrow and is a profound expression of our deepest selves.

I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of heaven and the pains of hell. – Sin is not an insignificant faux pas, but is a grave matter that separates us from God with grave consequences.

But most of all because they offend you, who are all good, and deserving of all my love. – Sin goes beyond the fear of punishment, but attacks the very love of God, which is above all loves. It hearkens to the commandment to love God with your whole heart, your whole mind, and your whole soul – your very being.

I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin. – In addition to making a firm resolve to amend our sinful nature, this recognizes that we need divine help – the grace from God – to avoid sin.

Listening to God - Listening for God

To understand and know God, one must embrace the existence and central importance of the divine spark within. This requires [\(Click\)](#)

Listening to God -Listening for God

- ✦ We should avoid talking so much in our prayer to God that we do not give him a chance to speak back to us.
- ✦ Listening to God means allowing an attentive silence that makes it possible to hear him speak to us in the intimacy of our minds.
 - At times, we may sense words being addressed to us interiorly
 - At times, we may just experience a feeling of calmness and peace
 - At times, there may just be an emptiness or hollowness
 - At times, we may not like what we hear because it corrects or challenges our behavior and expectations
- ✦ Accordingly, **one needs to avoid distractions so as to be able to be quiet in his presence**

Listening to God -Listening for God

- ✦ Prayer is a gift of God's grace
- ✦ Prayer is not a technique that is under our personal control; it is not a method by which we can guarantee or attain a certain state of consciousness.
- ✦ Our role in the relationship is to seek him and ask for his help with a respect for his divine dignity, such as I might show to my fellow human beings.

Prayer is a gift of a personal relationship with God who personally reaches into the depths of our hearts and minds and lovingly addresses our needs, questions, and desires.

God is not under our control; he initiates the relationship and graciously guides it in such a way as to make us far better and more loving than we would ever know how to be on our own. The techniques, methods, etc. that we use are to bring us to a place where we can more easily converse – talk and listen to God. **The prayer method is not what causes the relationship with God any more than our speech patterns cause our friendships.**

Listening to God – Listening for God

- ✠ The 5 “P’s of Prayer”
 - Place
 - Posture
 - Passage
 - Peace, and then back to
 - Passage (again)
- ✠ Let me suggest that you place a time limit, start slowly, do it regularly, increase the time if you can, and let the Holy Spirit move you.
- ✠ Remember that prayer takes practice.

Since we know that the Scriptures are definitely the Word of God, let us use praying the Scriptures as an example as to how to listen to God.

Place – Somewhere that is quiet and free from distractions. For Moses it was Mt. Horeb where God spoke to him with smoke, cloud, thunder and trumpet blast and where he spoke with Elijah in a small whispering sound. Jesus, before any major facet of his life and ministry, separated himself from everyone and went to pray. For me, I found it in the middle of a field, in a deer stand, before the Blessed Sacrament – especially within St. Peter’s Basilica, and in the shower. Experiment to see what works for you, including making a special sacred space within the home.

Posture – We will discuss the liturgical meanings of various postures of prayer, especially in the context of the liturgies. But the key is to find something that is a balance between peaceful listening to God and alertness.

Passage – Choosing a passage from Scripture. Let me suggest that “Bible roulette” is not ideal. You should have some kind of a strategy. You can use the daily Mass or Sunday Mass readings. You may use other guides like the Liturgy of the Hours, the Psalms, directed reflections such as Jesus Calling, perhaps one of the Mysteries of the Rosary.

After reading the passage, ask the Holy Spirit to help and guide your prayer. A person who tries to pray the Holy Scriptures without the help of the Holy Spirit will merely try to think about and study the passages – this “technique” may not allow God to reveal himself to you in a personal manner so as to create that personal relationship that is desired. You will know about God, not know God. We will examine a specific style or technique called *Lectio Divina* in a couple of weeks. One of the gifts that comes from praying the scriptures is that no matter how often you may pray a certain passage, God reveals different and new insights.

As I said earlier, prayer is not a technique of human skills; it is part of your relationship with God. This is another reason why we rely upon the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ways to approach scripture in prayer:

Imagination – Imaginatively use your senses. Visualize the place of the passage. Imagine hearing the sounds associated with the location and occasion. Consider the smells or taste, if appropriate. Picture the scene and then re-read the passage placing yourself in the mix. Then see if a word, passage or feeling emerges and focus upon that.

Logic – Consider the actual words and determine what you can conclude from them. What would be the outcome or next steps? Where does that take you?

Peace – Once you sense the presence of the Holy Spirit, PAUSE, and be at peace. Feel the calmness and just be for a while. (If you don't feel the presence, pause, then too and be still to let the other distractions fade away before you continue.) Enjoy the sense of peace. If ideas or words come, great, but don't force it. Enjoy the peace and let them come, if and when they are meant to. When that peace begins to fade, return to the –

Passage again and invite and enjoy that peace again. God comes in that peace. Repeat until the time you have allotted has expired.

Listening to God -Listening for God

But, what if I don't feel God's peace in prayer?

- ✦ Is there some area of sin in our lives that we have not brought before God?

- ✦ Is there some place that God wants me to go; do I need to grow more spiritually, i.e., take the next step in maturing my relationship with God?

Is there some area of sin in our lives that we have not brought before God?

The first step calls for an examination of conscience and, if the sin is serious, we should seek reconciliation and penance. Am I offending others or do I need to change in some way? This examination itself may take some time, but it is necessary to remove impediments to our relationship with God. Those impediments will adversely affect our ability to openly and honestly converse with God through prayer.

The second option has nothing to do with moral failures on our part but, requires us to determine if God wants us to take the next step in maturing our relationship with him. A withdrawal of peace is not necessarily a punishment but a gentle motivation for us to grow. Use the analogy of learning how to walk.

Thus, if I don't feel God's peace in prayer the first step is to examine my conscience. If I don't find anything that offends my conscience, then consider asking the Lord, "Where do you want me to go? What's the next stage?"

Question –

What are your
concerns/impediments in your
prayer life?

Before the question –

Some people may not even start to pray because they know that they do not pray as deeply as the mystics of the past or they feel that their prayer is just superficial. Some don't get past the prayers that they have memorized as a child and become frustrated because they **know** that it is superficial. But this is not a reason to abandon prayer; it is a call to deepen one's prayer.

Remember that prayer takes practice and one cannot expect to start at the deepest level of prayer from the outset. Short, memorized prayers have a value as a place to start. What we need to seek is an awareness of the presence of God. As a child develops means of communication with their parents, so we develop our ability to communicate with God.

Note that the intensity that one wishes is never at the same level always. For example, when one is happy and wishes to give thanksgiving is different from one who is in the depths of despair and needs help to get through a crisis.

**Come, Holy Spirit,
fill my heart with your gifts.**

Let my weakness be penetrated with your strength this very day that I may fulfill all the duties of my state conscientiously, that I may do what is right and just.

Let my charity be such as to offend no one, and hurt no one's feelings; so generous as to pardon sincerely any wrong done to me.

**Assist me, O Holy Spirit,
in all my trials of life, enlighten me in my ignorance, advise me in my doubts, strengthen me in my weakness, help me in all my needs, protect me in temptations and console me in afflictions.**

**Graciously hear me, O Holy Spirit
and pour your light into my heart, my soul, and my mind.
Assist me to live a holy life and to grow in goodness and grace.**

Amen.