

## Lesson: Prayer – what and why

Continuing our examination and study of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, we hear today: "For we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the "Spirit himself intercedes...and the one who searches hearts knows what the intention of the Spirit is."

What, then, is prayer?

- ✍ "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."
- ✍ BUT, when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or
- ✍ "Out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart?
- ✍ **Humility** is the foundation of prayer.

This is what leads St. Paul to write to the Romans: We do not know how to pray as we ought." Only when, in all humility, we acknowledge that we don't know **how** to pray as we ought are we finally **ready** to receive **freely** the gift of prayer from God – and the fruits of our prayer in our lives.

Where does prayer come from? No matter the language of our prayer, it is the whole person who prays (that's why we Catholics do, as I call it, "Stand up, Sit down, Fight, Fight, Fight" – standing to pray, sitting to listen attentively, kneeling in adoration and penance. It's why the Catholic Church is such a "sensual" Church – bells and smells, statues and icons). But, trying to name the source of prayer, Scriptures speak sometimes of the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than 1000 times!). According to Scripture, it is the *heart* that prays. **If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.**

I believe this is what today's Gospel is reminding us in giving the parable of the weeds and the wheat – but we have to understand exactly what these "weeds" were. They were a weed that grows alongside the wheat – and when they've grown together, because the weeds have learned to "camouflage" themselves, you can't tell them apart from the wheat – and so they get all mixed up together and you can't tell them apart. BUT, the grain the weeds produce aren't good for making bread – because they are toxic and will kill! But, it's almost impossible to tell the weeds from the wheat.

Who sowed these weeds in the field? The "enemy" has done this – the devil. The devil has perverted so much in this world and made things that are truly poisonous to our spiritual lives appear to be wheat – when they are, in fact, the poisonous weeds!

Keeping our lives rooted in Christ in prayer and the Sacraments helps us to distinguish the weeds from the wheat – the good from the bad – so that we can root out the weeds and throw

them on the fire – while allowing the fruit of our prayers – the grain – to grow and produce an abundant harvest for eternal life.

## Illustration: How to pray

But, how are we to pray? How do we go about learning this process of discerning weeds from wheat?

Well, it is Jesus Himself who teaches us how to pray by his own example and words:

- ✍ Jesus prays before every decisive moment of His mission (before the Father “speaks from the cloud” at his Baptism and at the Transfiguration; and before the fulfillment of the Father’s plan of love through his passion and death on the cross.
- ✍ He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of His apostles: at the election and call of the 12; before Peter’s confession of Jesus as the “Christ of God” and again that Peter’s faith might not fail.
- ✍ Jesus’ prayers ask the Father to help him be able to fulfill the Father’s will as His humble and trusting Son.
- ✍ Jesus often went away, into solitude, to pray.
- ✍ When Jesus prays, he:
  - Confesses the Father; acknowledges and blesses Him because of what he has revealed to the childlike.
  - Then he thanks the Father for listening to His prayer.
  - Finally, he asks that the Father’s will be done through Him.
- ✍ Jesus teaches us to – go to your room, close your door, and pray to your Father in secret...

THERE is the model for all our prayers!

St. Theresa of Lisieux suggested that we actually need to **prepare** to pray like this:

- ✍ First, realize in whose presence we place ourselves – do this by repeating a short “mantra” like “Jesus, have mercy on me” or “Jesus, I love you.”
- ✍ Then, sit in silence for a few minutes to remove the distractions of the day from our minds
- ✍ Then ask the Holy Spirit to guide your prayer.
- ✍ NOW, you are ready to **begin** to pray.

## Application: Prayer in our daily lives

There are so **many** sources for our prayer. There are several wellsprings where Christ waits for us in order that the Spirit can help us pray from our hearts:

- ✍ First, the Sacred Scriptures. Remember Fr. Thoms told you that we were to “dust off our Bibles” and put them to use? Here it is! “The Church forcefully and specially exhorts all the Christian faithful to learn the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ by frequent

reading of the divine Scriptures.” It is here that dialogue with God can take place – as He speaks to us in the Sacred Scriptures: for “we speak to Him when we pray; we listen to Him when we read the Sacred Scriptures.”

- ✍ The Liturgy is also a great source of prayer. Here, at Mass, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present, and communicates the entire mystery of salvation. Our payers “internalize and assimilate” the liturgy during and after we’ve attended Mass.
- ✍ Here, the Spirit teaches us how to pray: with faith and in hope – and hope does not disappoint.
- ✍ Pray in the events of each day. It is important to bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations – and all of these moments of prayer become the yeast of today’s Gospel that causes the dough to rise.
- ✍ Pray to the Father, pray to Jesus, pray to the Holy Spirit, ask Mary to pray for you, ask the saints to pray for you.
- ✍ Most importantly, **persevere** in your prayer. There is never a moment when it is impossible to pray – we don’t just have to reserve it for tests at school and times of illness and struggle.

**Every day** must be filled with prayer. Make your morning offering – offering all that you say and do that day to God. Conclude your day reviewing it – asking forgiveness for your failures and thanking God for the graces he gave you. At every moment of the day, ask God’s help and the intercession of the saints that, in humility, you might be able to do God’s will in your life – leading you to holiness.

Get a book of Catholic prayers – learn the old standard Catholic Prayers – to the Holy Spirit and to St. Michael, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet – read the Scriptures – then will our prayers truly be from humble hearts. And when all else fails and we have no words for our prayer, remember that the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness and helps us to pray as we ought.

Prayer is a dialogue with God. By now, you’ve spoken to God and told Him what you want. Now, for the rest of this Mass... listen to God, and allow God to speak to you in the depths of your heart.