

## The Fourth Task of Catechesis—Teaching Individuals How To Pray With Christ

*And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find<sup>9/19/2007</sup>;  
knock and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11:9)*

*Conversion to Christ and communion with him lead the faithful to adopt his disposition of prayer and reflection. Jesus' entire life, death and Resurrection were an offering to his Father. His prayer was always directed toward his Father. Catechesis should invite the believer to join Christ in the Our Father. Prayer should be the ordinary environment for all catechesis so that the knowledge and practice of the Christian life may be understood and celebrated in its proper context."<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

#### What is Prayer?

Part Four of the Catechism, on Christian Prayer, contains a wealth of both information and inspiration. The CCC defines prayer as "a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God."<sup>2</sup> Prayer is at once gift, covenant relationship and communion.<sup>3</sup> The CCC also says:

- Prayer is bound up with human history, for it is the relationship with God in historical events. (2568)
- Attentiveness of the heart in seeking God's will is essential to prayer. (2570)
- Prayer is expressed by both words and deeds. (2570)
- Prayer restores us to God's likeness and enables us to share in God's love. (2572)
- Prayer is the battle of faith, marked with perseverance. (2573)
- The Psalms are at once personal and communal prayers. (2586)
- It is God who calls us into the "mysterious encounter" of prayer. (2591)

#### The Prayer of Jesus

- He learned to pray from his mother. (2599)

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<sup>1</sup> NDC, no. 20

<sup>2</sup> CCC, no. 2558

<sup>3</sup> CCC, nos. 2559-2565



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- He learned to pray in the words and rhythms of the Jews. (2599)
- He voiced thanksgiving and petitions in his prayers. (2603-2604)
- He prayed in solitude and with others. (2602)
- The Our Father is the prayer Jesus taught us. (2759)
- We should pray urgently, unceasingly, and with a humble heart. (2613)
- The "Jesus Prayer," is based on Mt 9:27 and Mk 10:48: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" (2616)
- "There is no other way of Christian prayer than Christ." All Christian prayer is prayed "in the name of Jesus." (2664) Jesus' name "contains the presence it signifies." (2666)

### The Holy Spirit

- Instructs us in our life of prayer inspiring new expressions of Jesus' forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. (2644)
- Forgiveness is the first movement of the prayer of petition. (2631)
- Intercessory prayer is prayer for another. (2647)
- In the Holy Spirit we celebrate the liturgy in hope and expectation of Christ's return. (2657)
- Love, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, is the source of prayer. (2658)
- The traditional form of petition to the Holy Spirit is to invoke the Father through the Son to give us the Holy Spirit. (2671)
- The Holy Spirit is the "interior Teacher of Christian prayer," "the artisan of the living tradition of prayer." (2681)

### Mary as model of pray-er

- "Mary is the perfect *Orans* (pray-er) of the Church." (2679)
- The prayer of the Church is united with Mary's in hope. (2679)
- We can and should ask Mary and the saints to intercede for us and for the whole world. (2683)

### The Liturgy of the Eucharist

- Is both source and summit of the prayer of the Church. (1324)
- The Word of God, the liturgy of the Church, and the virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the sources of prayer. (2662)

### Infancy


Parents are the child's first catechists in prayer. God is able to approach the child through the baby's parents, family and faith community. The infant begins to learn that prayer is how we talk to God. Christian parents can create an



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environment of prayer that fosters the infant's budding faith. Parents and family members can:

- Sing or play comforting church hymns.
- Bless the child before going to sleep at naps or night time, and before leaving the house.
- Celebrate the seasons of the liturgical year to acquaint the infant with what prayer can look, sound, smell, taste and feel like throughout the year. Suggested seasonal celebrations in the home can include an Advent wreath, Advent calendar, crèche scene at Christmas, ashes at Lent, palms on Palm Sunday, and lilies and other examples of new life at Easter. Prayers to accompany these seasonal activities are available.
- Establish a routine of praying in the morning and at bedtime. Form a ritual together that includes singing, stories, kisses, hugs, and the blessing of loved ones and friends.
- Say meal prayers regularly as part of daily life for the child.
- Model unconditional love, patience, gentleness, kindness, and acceptance. The infant is coming to know the love of God through those interacting with them on a regular basis.




Baptismal preparation sessions are very important occasions to share resources with parents and godparents about the importance of a regular prayer life for the family. Simple prayers should be provided for family use.

### Preschool Children

At this stage the immediate family serves a primary role in teaching the child the importance of prayer. Modeling of love, care, and forgiveness are most important. The more that prayer can be woven into the very fabric of everyday life in the home, the more natural it becomes for the child. The preschooler watches others and learns to imitate. When prayer at home is regular and consistent, that is, upon rising, before meals, at bedtime, in emergencies, at special celebrations such as birthdays, or at occasions of loss, such as when a pet dies, it becomes as natural as breathing. The child learns that prayer is our lifeline to God. Children at this stage have extensive religious imaginations and a great natural sense of awe and wonder.

Parents, siblings, and other family members, as well as preschool teachers and catechists, can nurture the prayer life of the preschool child in the following ways:

- Teach the child to fold his or her hands in prayer.
  - Teach the motions and, eventually, the words of the Sign of the Cross.
  - Bless the child upon rising, going to bed, and leaving the house to remind the child of the ever-presence of God.
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- Expose the child to religious items that they can touch and feel, such as crosses and crucifixes, rosaries, Bibles, candles, statues, and other sacred objects that speak to them symbolically.
- Participate regularly at Mass. This instills within the child the understanding that the Church is communal and is bigger than the family.

Parish nurseries provide opportunities to build on the child's understanding of Church. From the youngest age, prayers, Bible stories, and Christian hymns should be part of the nursery experience. Although unable to articulate it at this point, the preschool child is absorbing the world around him or her in very important and formative ways. The preschooler begins to see that there are many ways to pray: alone, with one or both parents, as a family, and as a faith community.

### Children in Elementary School

During this stage of developing faith, the Christian begins to create his or her personal prayer life. It becomes very natural, when a child has been steeped in a prayerful environment, to turn to God and pray for all manner of things. During the elementary years, the child's experience of various forms of prayer should be broadened, so that he or she realizes that there are many ways of praying: formally and informally, quietly and aloud, individually and communally, with and without words, with Scripture or song, at Mass, at home or outside. Parents and catechists can:

- Use the prayer Jesus taught us, the Our Father, to demonstrate the various movements of prayer: praise, adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, petition.
- Provide fun ways to memorize formal prayers of the Church during these years for lifetime use (i.e. Sign of the Cross, Hail Mary, Our Father, Glory Be, Act of Contrition, the Rosary, Angel of God, the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds, etc.).
- Help the child understand the Mass, pointing out the various parts and expounding on the meaning.
- Teach about the Psalms, showing how these ancient prayers express nearly every emotion known to humanity. We can talk to God about everything!
- Introduce other types of prayer during this stage, such as guided meditation, writing letters to God or journaling, spontaneous prayer and the forming of petitions, the rosary, praying with Scripture, praying through art, praying through music, visiting prayerful sites such as grottos, cathedrals, or places of natural beauty.
- Seek to help elementary age children know *how to pray* (introduce many ways to pray), *when to pray* (always, but a regular routine is helpful), *why to pray* (prayer is the way that our soul breathes and we grow in our



relationship with Christ) and *where to pray* (everywhere, but some places are more prayerful).

The Church, Catholic school, and/or Parish School of Religion become important supplements and supports to the family during the elementary years. The importance and place of community is seen as the child prepares within the context of the faith community to receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Whereas the child's prayer life up to now has been primarily personal and familial, it now becomes communal in a tangible way.

### Children in Middle School

Teaching students in this age group about prayer involves building on and practicing what they already know. While most youth this age are reluctant to verbalize their prayer in public, because of self-consciousness, they may be very comfortable sharing in prayer with a group where they feel safe. During this stage of development they can begin to do theological reflection with Scripture as a part of their daily prayer. Catechists and parents can help them to see what Scripture has to say about the events of their lives. For the middle-school student the following prayer helps and aids are suggested:

- Help them to become better acquainted with the Bible. Where can they find helpful Scripture to deal with: self-esteem, rejection by friends, moral decision-making?
- Encourage the reading of Proverbs. These are helpful and age-old maxims that may help them realize there is a moral order to the universe.
- Continue the work of the previous stage in sharing wide and varying Christian prayer methods, types, forms, and styles.
- Teach the students how to "pray the newspaper" by creating petitions based on current events.
- Study the words of the Nicene Creed in depth so that they better understand what it is that Catholics profess.
- Introduce saints as models of prayer. Our Lady is certainly the best model of pray-er, but other saints such as Thérèse of Lisieux, Joan of Arc, John of the Cross, and Ignatius, among others, have contributed greatly to the tradition of prayer in the Church.

Many Catholic parishes have special youth groups for junior high students. This can be an ideal setting for young men and women to feel safe enough to share their faith and further develop their prayer lives. Junior high students should be helped to integrate their faith life with social, recreational, family, and parish life.

Continuing to learn ritual and traditional prayer is important; fostering private, individual prayer is also important. Young adolescence is an opportune

time to encourage and model shared prayer and spontaneous prayer as well. Catechetical and youth ministry gathering activities are great times to model shared prayer inviting the participants to pray in their own words aloud. This is best achieved in prayer experiences that connect to the lived experiences of young adolescents. There exist volumes of resource books for prayer with young teens that "pray" their experiences in ways meaningful to them.

### High School Adolescents

Developing a regular prayer life is crucial for adolescents. Continuing to grow in relationship with Jesus Christ will provide strength and wisdom as teens make decisions that will affect the rest of their lives. Habits of prayer that have been developed in earlier life will serve the teen well as they become increasingly independent of their parents and more dependent on friends and significant others. A sense of belonging is crucial at this stage, making the inclusiveness of teen participation in all parish ministries very important. It is also a prime time for the fruit of service to emerge as an outgrowth of prayer life. Teens are often ready to go out and change the world for the better and they have the energy! Some suggestions include:

- Remind the teen of the importance of regular and consistent patterns of prayer.
- Continue to share the various forms and expressions of prayer with them.
- Pray for them and let them know that you are.
- Provide time for the teen to talk about their faith in a safe environment. Pray with them for their concerns.

Churches can offer youth group activities in order to help teens integrate their prayer life with service, liturgical participation, and Scripture study. Retreats and lock-ins offer time-outs for teens to view their lives from a new perspective; to decide what they really believe as a Christian. Prayerful discernment is an art that can be introduced to teens along with the practice of contemplative prayer.

Youth ministry events and gatherings should always include an element of prayer with young people actively involved in planning and leading roles. This affords the opportunity for praying the experiences and hungers of young people in a way that will impact their spiritual needs. There are a variety of resources available from major publishers to help the youth minister and catechist in preparing prayer with youth. Not all prayer has to be planned. Simple prayer can be offered before and after trips, meals, and even conversations. Introducing teens to various styles and methods of prayer can influence their spirituality for life; lectio divina, quiet meditation or guided meditation, spontaneous prayer, traditional prayer, journaling, and many more styles of prayer can be appealing to



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young people and open their minds and hearts to experiencing in God in ways they never imagined.

### Young Adults

Young adults have most likely evaluated the faith they were raised in and decided for themselves just what is to be kept and what is to be discarded. They have most likely surveyed their most important values and decided to be true to them. Ideally, the power and practice of prayer has been real and regular in their lives, and they can now use prayerful discernment to sort out what they are being called to in this life. What career or vocation will they pursue? Will they marry? Do they feel called to the priesthood or the religious life? These are monumental decisions that require guidance through prayer.

Often, if they have been away from the Church for awhile they may return at this time, especially at the occasion of the baptism of a child. Young adults are asking the "big questions" of life: Why am I here? What am I supposed to do with my life? Why is their suffering?

Parishes can:

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- Form young adult groups for Scripture study or reflection on a topic.
  - Provide information on lectures and formative events that will help them to grow in their faith.
  - Provide a resource library with topics of interest to young adults.
  - Educate young adults about spiritual direction; provide a list of spiritual directors in the area.

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### Adults

Adults can be helped to see the importance of regular and consistent prayer. Hectic lifestyles militate against this, but to be a *disciple* requires *discipline*. Adults can be helped to explore the tradition of prayer in the church. Reading and workshops on various forms of prayer are available. The adult is encouraged to go on a retreat at least once a year in order to view his or her life from a fresh, prayerful perspective. It has been said that the three most common places where adults pray are the bathroom, in the car and outdoors. Couples can nurture their prayer lives by praying together on a daily basis. The saints of the Catholic tradition can be mentors for adults, modeling how to pray in everyday activities as well as in time of great hardship.

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### Parishes can:

- Offer a variety of classes on various forms of prayer such as centering prayer, lectio divina, contemplative prayer, Ignatian, Augustinian, and other forms and ways of praying.
- Offer information on local retreats and/or plan a parish retreat.
- Offer a school of prayer which teaches about the earliest traditions of prayer in the Church and invites adults into a daily routine of prayer.
- Provide regular opportunities to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, especially Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer.

### Senior Adults

For seniors, there are many ongoing issues of loss. Loss of health, independence, physical capacity, and/or career can be countered by an ever-growing dependency on God. Many elders find great solace in participating in daily Mass. For others, the rosary is a constant companion. Seniors can be a great source of wisdom in teaching about the power and practice of prayer. Prayer and Scripture groups can be offered, especially during the day, when it is easier for older adults to participate. These types of groups may also provide an important social function for older adults. Bus trips to Shrines and pilgrimage sites are also popular for those who are ambulatory.

Seniors who can no longer come to church because of physical limitations must rely on the ministry of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist who bring "Church" to them. They can also be encouraged to participate in Mass via radio or television (the Hallmark cable channel shows Mass from Notre Dame every Sunday at 8 a.m.)

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### Parishes can:

- Help convene pray and Scripture groups for older adults, preferably during the day.
- Have special seasonal gatherings such as Soup and Scripture Luncheons during Lent.
- Send prayerful lectionary-based pamphlets or other devotional materials out to elders through the mail or Eucharistic visitors to the sick.
- Form grief/loss groups to pray through losses as a faith community.
- Have an elder person organize a prayer chain for the parish.
- Invite elders to visit religion formation classes to share their life of prayer, and how prayer has been important in their lives.
- Identify volunteers who will become prayer partners with those in nursing homes.

9/19/2007