

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Fifth Sunday of Lent • Year B • March 25, 2012

*Ever-living God,
you have formed us
and you know us
as a father
knows his children.
Open our hearts
to your grace
so that we might
seek you in prayer;
and in seeking you,
find what we need
for life.
Amen.*

Sunday Word

Jeremiah 31:31–34
Psalm 51:3–4, 12–13, 14–15
Hebrews 5:7–9
John 12:20–33

Master of All

God conveys the message to his prophet that the Lord alone is master of the Covenant. Though the people have sinned, the Lord will forget their iniquity and create a new covenant, planting it within their hearts.

Source of Salvation

Christ obeyed the plan of his heavenly Father even unto death. For that reason, he has become the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him—for all who submit their lives to Christ.

Cry from the Heart

Jesus speaks from the heart to his Father and a response is heard. The hour of the Son has arrived, the hour of his glorification on the Cross. As Jesus is lifted up in that saving event, all men and women will be drawn up into the Paschal Mystery.

Church Teaching: Christian Prayer

A Window into Effective Prayer

Each of the readings for this Sunday relates to the subject of prayer. These passages speak of the closeness of prayer, as well as the model of prayer we have in Jesus.

The First Reading suggests the intimate relationship engendered by prayer. The prophet Jeremiah conveys God's word to the people that the Lord will establish a new covenant with them, one whose precepts will be written directly upon their hearts. Everyone, young and old, shall "know" God and thus their outward observance of the Covenant will spring up from this inner conviction. To "know" the Lord God in the biblical view is to share deeply, closely and personally.

The Second Reading, from Hebrews, mentions how Christ himself offered prayer to the Father, with "loud cries and tears." Jesus' prayer was on our own behalf and led not only to his total self-offering, but to his "perfection" as our source of salvation.

Finally, in the Gospel Jesus speaks directly to his heavenly Father and an answering voice is heard. Prayer essentially is our communication with God. We speak and he listens. He speaks to us and we listen; even when prayer is wordless.

More than the Mouth

The practice of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of God, whom we acknowledge as Father, Son and Spirit. This communion is always possible for the believer, because we have been united with Christ in the Sacrament of Baptism, the gateway to life in the Trinity.

Therefore, the mouth is not the place from which prayer issues forth. Rather, the center of the human person is the location from which prayer wells up. Authors have described this center as the soul, the heart, or the “spirit” of a person. Regardless of the terminology, true prayer comes from the deepest, most hidden core where human decisions originate. It is the place of authenticity. It is the place from which we choose the way of life or the way of death. It is the meeting place, the plane of encounter, because as an image of God we are created to live in relationship, in Covenant with him.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

Some important points flow from this understanding of prayer. First, prayer is itself a gift from our Creator God. That is why prayer can sometimes go beyond words or rationality. It can be contemplative, even ecstatic, where we are “swept up” into an experience of God. Second, the Holy Spirit, the Master of true prayer, is the artisan of the living tradition of prayer. Whatever form prayer takes (blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving or praise) and whichever way it is expressed (vocally, meditatively or contemplatively)—the Spirit is its guide. Third, prayer places us uniquely in touch with the Virgin Mary, whose cooperation with the Holy Spirit opened the way to salvation. Our best pray acknowledges Mary in that we ourselves may assent to God’s Spirit and surrender to his plan of salvation.

Key Terms

PRAYER

Lifting up one’s mind and heart to God, communing with God; being lifted up or communing with the Lord God (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2559).

FORMS OF PRAYER

There are five forms of prayer: *adoration* acknowledges God as God; *petition* asks for one’s self; *intercession* asks for another; *thanksgiving* thanks God; *praise* lauds God for his own sake (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2625).

EXPRESSIONS OF PRAYER

There are three expressions of prayer: *vocal* uses words; *meditation* uses Scripture, holy icons, liturgical texts, spiritual writings; *contemplation* uses silence and wordlessness (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2699).

Voices of Faith

God wills that our desire should be exercised in prayer, that we may be able to receive what he is prepared to give.

—Saint Augustine

There is another aspect of prayer which we need to remember: silent contemplation. . . . Have we perhaps lost something of the art of listening? Do you leave space to hear God’s whisper, calling you forth into goodness?

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2740 (efficacious prayer), 2742 (persistent prayer), 2744 (vital necessity of prayer), 2745 (prayer and Christian life)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 35, especially the section entitled “Prayer in the New Testament,” pages 466–468

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

534 (prayer), 540 (psalms and prayer), 541 (Jesus learned to pray), 549 (Holy Spirit and prayer)