

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the OCIA
Second Sunday of Lent • Year C • March 16, 2025

*Eternal God
and Father,
our light and Salvation,
keep our eyes
firmly fixed
upon your Son, Jesus,
and upon the gift
we are given in him,
our citizenship
in Heaven.
Amen.*



Sunday Word

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18

Psalms 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Luke 9:28b-36

The Eye of the Soul

Abraham puts his faith in the promises of God. As he offers sacrifice to the Lord, Abraham prays, falling into a trancelike state. He sees but not with his eyes. A smoking fire pot and a flaming torch pass between the offerings. This mystical vision symbolizes the Covenant God establishes with Abraham.

Stand Firm in Faith

Christ will change our earthly bodies. His glory will fill us as he conforms us to himself. Stand firm in this promise, a promise that will be made manifest in God's good time!

Listen!

The voice from Heaven reveals to Peter, James, and John that Jesus is the Chosen One, God's Son. They are commanded to listen to all that Jesus says. Dazzled by his glorious appearance, they fall silent and ponder the meaning revealed on the mountaintop.

Church Teaching: Contemplative Prayer

Every Ash Wednesday, the Church proclaims the same Gospel (Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18), which presents Jesus' teaching on prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These three religious disciplines help set the tone for the Lenten season as a preparation for or recalling of Baptism. The First Reading and the Gospel for this Sunday portray two occurrences of prayer: the trance, or vision, of Abraham and the mountaintop Transfiguration of Jesus as he is praying.

There are three basic expressions of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplation. Vocal prayer uses words that are recited or sung or prayed silently. Examples of vocal prayer are the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, litanies, the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass, other liturgical texts, and so on. Prayer that is meditational might begin with vocal prayer, but it shifts into a reflective process that engages thought, imagination, emotion,

and desire. Examples of meditational prayer are lectio divina and guided meditation. Prayer that is contemplative may begin with meditation, but it then shifts into a more direct or complete union with the Lord as the person praying becomes totally present to God as a self-offering to be purified and transformed.

Given its highly affective contour, concrete or outward examples of contemplative prayer are difficult to provide. But tradition further ascribes to contemplative prayer the following features:

- It is a *gift*, a grace, accepted only in humility and poverty, where the person is drawn into a deep union with God.
- It is a *wordlessness*, an inner stillness, a letting go in order to be drawn into the holy presence.
- It is a *gaze of faith*, fixed on Jesus, where his countenance illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and compassion for all.

Great mystics such as Saint Teresa of Jesus (Teresa of Ávila) and Saint John of the Cross strove for this form of prayer. Teresa's gift to the Church was her description of contemplation in *The Interior Castle*. Inasmuch as God calls to the heart of every believer, the inner gaze afforded by contemplation is available to all those who gather up their hearts and recollect their whole beings under the prompting of the Holy Spirit so as to enter the presence of the Lord, who awaits.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

God leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him. Each believer responds according to the heart's resolve and to personal expressions of prayer. While Tradition names three basic forms of prayer, these forms have one common trait: composure of heart.



Key Terms

PRAYER

The activity by which one elevates the mind and heart to God in praise of his glory, in petition made to him for some requested good, in thanksgiving for a good received, or in intercession for others' needs. By prayer the believer experiences union with God through Christ in the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2559).

MYSTIC

Describes one whose experience of God's presence is intense, direct, and life-changing but not necessarily associated with extraordinary phenomena (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2014).

TRANSFIGURATION

The mountaintop event in which Jesus, speaking with Moses and Elijah, was transformed in appearance as witnessed by Peter, James, and John. This transformation revealed to them Christ's divine glory (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 554).

Voices of Faith

The incomprehensible magnificence of the Godhead overwhelms the perceptions of our body. If the sharpness of bodily vision cannot bear the ray of the sun directly into watching eyes, how may the corruption of human members endure the glory of God? . . . Perhaps they were so heavy with sleep that they saw the radiance . . . after their rest. Keeping vigil, they saw his majesty, because no one sees the glory of Christ unless he is vigilant.

—Saint Ambrose

Institutes completely devoted to contemplation, composed of either women or men, are for the Church a reason for pride and a source of heavenly graces. By their lives and mission, the members of these Institutes imitate Christ in his prayer on the mountain, bear witness to God's lordship over history and anticipate the glory which is to come.

—Pope Saint John Paul II

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2698 (basic rhythms of prayer in the life of the Christian), 2709 (seeking Jesus in contemplative prayer)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 35 (God Calls Us to Prayer), especially the section entitled "Contemplative Prayer," page 474

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

567 (times suitable for prayer), 571 (contemplative prayer)