

Week One - Prayer as God's Gift and Initiative in Our Lives

Prayer as God's Initiative

“It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you.” (John 15:16)

“God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.” (CCC 2567)

Prayer as God's Gift

“*If you knew the gift of God!*’ The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is He who first seeks us and asks for a drink. Jesus thirsts; His asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for Him.” (CCC 2560)

“*You would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*’ Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: ‘They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!’ Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.” (CCC 2561)

Working Definitions of Prayer

“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy.” (St. Therese of Lisieux)

“For mental prayer, in my opinion, is nothing else than the intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” (St. Teresa of Avila)

“Prayer stands before God as an honored ambassador. It gives joy to the heart. I speak of prayer, not words. It is the longing for God, love too deep for words, a gift not given by man but by God's grace.” (St. John Chrysostom)

“Prayer is the breath of the Holy Spirit.” (St. John Paul II)

“My hour of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament is like an oxygen tank that revives the breath of the Holy Spirit.” (Archbishop Fulton Sheen)

The Heart as the Source of Prayer

“Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole person who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of our prayer are in vain.” (CCC 2562)

“The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place ‘to which I withdraw.’ The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.” (CCC 2563)

A Living Communion as the Goal of Praying

“In the New Covenant, prayer is a 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... Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with Him.” (CCC 2565)

“Prayer is a loving relationship that impels one to speak gently and affectionately with the Lord. Prayer requires an atmosphere of silence... an interior experience that aims to remove distractions caused by a soul’s anxieties, thereby, creating silence in the soul itself...” (St. Anthony of Padua)

Being Honest About the Challenge to Respond to God’s Initiative

“I went to pray but nothing happened. I just sat there. After a little while, I started to feel uncomfortable. I wasn’t sure what to say. To be honest, I wasn’t sure if anyone was listening anyway. I tried to talk to God, but I just heard the echo of my own thoughts. Then some random stuff started to fill my head. I remembered some past experiences, and then I got a little upset. I got out my rosary to keep myself busy, but as I started through the prayers, I got distracted by someone who walked out of the chapel. Then I was alone. And I felt really alone. I started to get bored, and my eyes began to close. I started nodding off. Then suddenly I woke up, and I got really irritated. This is useless, I thought. I will never be able to pray. So I got up and left.”

Practical Points for Praying this Coming Week

*Befriend silence, allow yourself to be curious about and gentle towards your heart

**15 minutes of quiet prayer – focusing on intentionally entering into God’s Presence