



# **A Guide to Prayer**

**Ss Alban and Stephen Catholic Church**

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## **Introduction:**

It is a common lament among Roman Catholics, indeed amongst people of all faiths, that they find prayer difficult, and are looking for better ways to make this important aspect of their lives more meaningful. Similarly they think that others are much better at prayer than they themselves are, but this is often not the case.

This booklet is intended to give parishioners some alternatives to supplement their existing approach to prayer. The sections contained herein are only brief but contain links to promote investigation on something that may work for you. Perhaps joining one of the parish groups will help, or maybe you would prefer trying a tip or two that will assist your individual prayer, or inserting a few well-chosen words into an internet search engine will generate many more.

If prayer is not an optional extra – not just for Holy people who have the leisure – we might feel somewhat discourage if we are unsure of what to do when we pray. Maybe it helps to say, “how could I not pray, seeing the relationship God has and wants with me”? But are there any practical, tried and tested approaches to prayer?

*(see <https://rcdow.org.uk/faith/faith-matters/autumn-2009/fr-john-edwards/>)*

## **What is Prayer?**

Prayer is the means by which we spend time talking to God as you would friends, relatives, or work colleagues. It is through this that we establish our unique relationship with God that serves as the cornerstone of our spiritual lives. We should not underestimate the value and power that healthy communication with God realises. It is also common practice to ask Our Lady or favourite saints to intercede for us to foster our relationship with God.

It's a journey that requires commitment and perseverance, an invitation to journey through life and beyond where growth in holiness and into eternal life is the goal and one which allows us to become our true selves, the person God intended us to be.

*Quote: St Therese of Lisieux 'For me prayer is an outburst of the heart, a simple gaze directed towards heaven, a cry of gratitude and love in trial as well as in joy. It is something wonderful and supernatural that expands my soul and unites me to Jesus'*

## **Why Should I Pray?**

- Give thanks and glory to the Lord our God and pay Him homage
- Share our joys and happiness and express gratitude for all the good things that He sends
- Express the trials, difficulties and tribulations that we encounter and ask for His grace to overcome these
- Enlist His help and mercy, presenting our intercessions and petitions; our hopes and dreams
- Ask the Holy Spirit for inspiration (as suggested by the word)

*Quote: Padre Pio de Pietrelcina 'Prayer is the best weapon we possess. It is the key that opens the heart of God.'*

## **How Do I Pray?**

We are called to offer both communal and private prayer. We pray as a community attending Mass and other services, and perhaps we could consider making our participation in these more meaningful or take up opportunities to attend more frequently or try other types of service to those that we normally do.

It is with personal prayer that many people seem to struggle – how this is approached is very individual, do not be afraid to experiment to find a method that suits you. The key is to have a willingness to pray and to find an environment conducive to this where you can clear your mind of other thoughts:

- many have a routine of a fixed place, free from distractions and interruptions, ensuring any resources are to hand;
- make time and persevere with commitment; trying to pray is praying –never give up trying!
- some like gentle background music;
- others light a candle or have a crucifix/statue/picture/other religious artefact to give them a focus;
- prayer without words is also an option, sit in stillness and silence in the presence of God and experience His peace and love;
- some pop into a church;
- others are simply able to close their eyes in different situations and concentrate for a few minutes;
- it is quite common to use seasonally themed prayer books *e.g.* during Advent, Lent, Octave of Christmas, Eastertide;
- if you drift off task, if an action to be taken comes to mind write it down and leave it for afterwards, do not worry just regather your thoughts and continue;

- quality is better than quantity, set yourself reasonable targets, do what is manageable well and allow the Holy Spirit to guide your next steps.

There is no necessity to kneel, find what is comfortable and more conducive to you or vary your posture depending on what you wish to convey, each is symbolic in its own way:

- Kneeling expresses humility and reverence, recognising Him to be the Lord of all
- Standing/Walking around shows us as a prayerful procession, part of the mission summoned by the Lord to the glory of heaven
- Sitting or lying down proclaims that we are relaxed and comfortable in the Lord's presence in the knowledge that He will listen and guide us

*Quote: Pope Paul VI 'If you have lost the taste for prayer, you will regain the desire for it by returning humbly to its practice'*

*St Mother Teresa 'You can pray while you work. Work doesn't stop prayer and prayer doesn't stop work. It requires only that small raising of the mind to him: I love you God, I trust you, I believe in you, I need you now. Small things like that. They are wonderful prayers.'*

### **Types of Prayer:**

Traditionally Catholic prayers fall into different types:

1. Adoration: Praising God for His glory and majesty *e.g.* the Gloria
2. Contrition: Asking for God's forgiveness and expressing our sorrow for failing to do His will *e.g.* The Penitential Rite
3. Petition: Asking God for a favour and to express our total dependence on Him *e.g.* Prayers of the faithful

4. Thanksgiving: Showing God gratitude for His unconditional love  
*e.g.* Prayers after Communion
5. Faith: Expression of our fundamental beliefs and the sacrifices that God has made for us in our calling *e.g.* the Creed
6. Hymns: In singing we are giving praise to God, offering our intentions often reflecting on the messages from the psalms. St Augustine says 'When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, meditate in your heart on that which you utter with your lips.'
7. Rosary: The purpose of the Rosary is to help keep in memory certain principal events or mysteries in the history of our salvation, and to thank and praise God for them. St John Paul II said 'To pray the Rosary is to hand over our burdens to the merciful hearts of Christ and His mother.'
8. Contemplative: Focuses on having a mystical experience with God. First, clear your mind of outside concerns, many do this by repeating a word or phrase over and over again until fully focused, remain sitting still and in silence to listen for direct guidance from God and feel his presence. St Therese describes it as 'nothing else than close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.'

*Quotes: St John Paul II and St Mother Teresa 'While these are certainly fundamental and crucial prayers that all Catholics should know, authentic prayer leads us closer to full union with Jesus this requires dialogue. We must listen first, and then respond to His message'*

*'Prayer joined to sacrifice constitutes the most powerful force in human history.'*

Find out more: Simply search for the type of prayer on the internet. There are references to prayers of different types in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, part 4 is titled 'Christian Prayer'.

**Find out more on contemplative prayer:**

Books: *Finding your Hidden Treasure* by Benignus O'Rourke OSA

*Into the Silent Land* by Martin Laird

*Guarding the Heart – A Guidebook of Contemplative Prayer Practices*

by Michael Connell

*Letters from the Heart* by John Main OSB

*Everything Belongs* by Richard Rohr OSF

Web: [WCCM.org](http://WCCM.org) (World Community for Christian Meditation – Lawrence Freeman OSB –the [schoolofmeditation.org](http://schoolofmeditation.org)).

[contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org) (Fr Thomas Keating, Centering Prayer – has free mobile app and a training course for Opening to the Presence of God

[cac.org](http://cac.org) (Centre for Action and Contemplation – Richard Rohr)

[henrinouwen.org](http://henrinouwen.org)

[contemplativeprayer.org.uk](http://contemplativeprayer.org.uk)

**Top Tips from Parishioners:**

The following are examples of things that work for other people, perhaps something here may be worth considering:

- ✓ Pray familiar prayers slowly (Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be), stop after each line and meditate on the meaning of each phrase and how it has affected you today, creating aspirations for the future
- ✓ I read the readings of the day, pausing after each passage to meditate, offer intentions and thanksgiving before finally reading a reflection on the passages

- ✓ I use headphones to listen to recordings/podcasts of scripture readings/reflections, praying silently
- ✓ I find a fixed time of day and venue that suits me, ensuring I am still and quiet, taking a few moments to clear my mind of other thoughts first
- ✓ To make prayers and readings at Mass more meaningful, I arrive early to gather my thoughts and put me in the right mood before going through the readings to gain a clearer understanding of their meaning and how they influence me.
- ✓ Make an effort to think of the impact on you of the words that are sung in the hymns
- ✓ 'Lectio Divina' (meaning divine reading) is powerful as a means of learning to listen to God speaking to us as we read the scriptures. First, read the passage (e.g. gospel of the day), identify a word or phrase that stands out. Reread the passage prayerfully and ask what is God saying to me in this reading? Final read of the passage reflecting on what is God asking of me? For a visual way of trying Lectio Divina see [www.transpositions.co.uk/visual-lectio-divina](http://www.transpositions.co.uk/visual-lectio-divina)

*Quote: St Therese 'I have not the courage to look through books for beautiful prayers. I do as a child who has not learned to read, I just tell Our Lord all that I want and he understands'*

### **What Happens at a Small Community Prayer Group:**

These provide great opportunities for communal prayer, reflection and meditation, plus a chance to meet and share prayer/faith experiences/hopes and fears with others. Each group has its own identity and does not follow the same procedure but all usually cover the themes mentioned. Many, but not all, follow the diocesan faith sharing booklet for a particular season to provide the focus. There



are several groups operating within the parish – details can be found on the noticeboard at the back of Church, please contact the leaders for further information.

N.B. If you do not want or cannot join a group the diocesan booklet can be used by anyone, *e.g.* families and individuals, and is available at the back of Church.

### **Prayer Services:**

There are a multitude of opportunities to attend a prayer group/service in the parish. Check the bulletin to see further details and for other suggestions.

### **Courses on Prayer:**

At various times of the year the parish offers diverse courses on prayer or with prayer as a key component. Keep your eye on the bulletin to view details of the examples given below and others that are also advertised.

*Finding Silence:* Usually held twice a year – one a day course in the parish centre and the other, a retreat

*Advent and Lent Talks:* There are usually more courses available at these times, both in our parish and surrounding area, some of which will focus on aspects of prayer – check the noticeboards and bulletin.

*Inter-denominational prayer groups and services:* Be open to attending these to widen your appreciation of prayer – see bulletin and noticeboard for details

*Strength to Strength (CaFE [www.faithcafe.org](http://www.faithcafe.org)):* A six session DVD series designed to give practical help to those wishing to pray more in their daily lives, inspired by the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The sessions are: Pray for the day, Food for thought, the life of Prayer, Pray before you speak, Lord teach us to pray, Give us this day

*Niland Centre:* The Niland conference centre (on the site of the former Rosary Priory school in Bushey) offers a range of courses, many of which are advertised in our bulletin, but the full list is available at [www.nilandconferencecentre.co.uk](http://www.nilandconferencecentre.co.uk).

### **Resources:**

Find out more: Simply ask the priests or others in the parish if they know of types of resources that you are interested in or just insert appropriate words into an internet search engine.

There are a multitude of books, websites, podcasts, etc. that can be used to support prayer, some examples are given below and a quick internet search will reveal many more:

MSC	<a href="http://www.mscmissions.ie/spirituality">www.mscmissions.ie/spirituality</a>	Prayers, thoughts for the day
Heart to Heart	<a href="http://www.mscmissions.ie">www.mscmissions.ie</a>	Prayer book of MSC
Daily Examen	<a href="http://www.ignatianspirituality.com">www.ignatianspirituality.com</a>	Prayerful reflection on the events of the day
Wednesday Word	<a href="http://www.wednesdayword.org">www.wednesdayword.org</a>	Reflections on Sunday readings
Catholic Truth Society	<a href="http://www.CTSbooks.org">www.CTSbooks.org</a>	Multitude of types
CAFOD	<a href="http://www.cafod.org.uk">www.cafod.org.uk</a>	Link on home page to vast array of prayers,

		liturgies and reflections
Pray as you go	<a href="http://www.pray-as-you-go.org">www.pray-as-you-go.org</a>	Daily prayer exercises
Radiant Light	<a href="http://www.radiantlight.org.uk">www.radiantlight.org.uk</a>	Prayer inspired by Elizabeth Wang

The Bible Study Tools website ([www.biblestudytools.com](http://www.biblestudytools.com)) gives many results for 'prayer' and for 'pray', which can then be filtered by books of the Bible.

The Prayer Room has many books that may be of help, do have a browse and there is a CTS display in the porch with publications to purchase.

Books: the following have been recommended:

- *Finding Sanctuary* by Abbot Christopher Jamison
- *Word into Silence* by John Main OSB
- *Interior Castle* by St Teresa of Avila
- *God Rebuilds* ([www.goodnewsbooks.co.uk](http://www.goodnewsbooks.co.uk)) A parishioner's story of how God's love can transform and heal through the power of the Holy Spirit as the importance of prayer is experienced during a journey of adversity.
- New Testament Reflections: Commentaries/interpretations of New Testament scripture can be found in several publications *e.g.* [www.alivepublishing.co.uk](http://www.alivepublishing.co.uk)

Podcasts: the following have been recommended:

- Liturgy of the hours ([www.divineoffice.org](http://www.divineoffice.org)) is the official set of prayers (also called the Breviary) marking the hours of each day, sanctifying the day with prayer

- National Catholic reporter ([www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)) is an independent RC news source
- Office of the day ([www.universalis.com](http://www.universalis.com)) for prayers of the day
- Glenstal ([www.churchservices.tv/glenstal](http://www.churchservices.tv/glenstal)) broadcasts each day
- Taize podcasts [www.taize.fr/en](http://www.taize.fr/en) recordings of chants/songs
- Discerning Hearts ([www.discerninghearts.com/catholic-podcasts](http://www.discerninghearts.com/catholic-podcasts)) gives a selection of prayers, devotions, reflections and novenas, including Daily Examen

Apps: the following have been recommended:

- *Pray as You Go* covers daily contemplative exercises including a guided rosary and stations of the cross
- *Sacred Space* is guided prayer sessions using meditation and prayer with the Holy Spirit.
- *Bible in One Year* from htb breaks down the bible into 20-minute chunks with audio including commentary and prayer. A way to cover the entire bible in a year.
- *3 Minute Retreat* is a 3 minute opportunity to engage with the readings of the day in a brief but meaningful way.