



# PRAY ALWAYS

**A Catholic Study of Prayer for Inmates**

**Part 2: Prayer in the New Testament**

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*“Then he told them  
a parable about the  
necessity for them to  
pray always without  
becoming weary.”*

Luke 18:1

Nihil Obstat: Reverend Thomas Knoebel,  
Censor  
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A Catholic Study of Prayer for Inmates

## Part 2: Prayer in the New Testament

### Study Instructions

#### **This Study contains:**

- 1) *Introduction*
- 2) *Study Sections*
- 3) *Review Test* pages

#### **Begin the Study:**

- 1) Read *Introduction*.  
Do the *Review Test* page at the end of the study booklet.
  
- 2) Read all *sections* of the study.  
Do the *Review Test* pages at the end of the study booklet.

#### **Instructions:**

- Tear out carefully only the pages called *Review Test* at the end of the study booklet after you have completed them.
- Send these *Review Test* pages to Dismas Ministry, Be sure to add your name and address on each sheet. If the name/address box isn't big enough, put your name/address on the back of each sheet.
- Your *Review Tests* will be reviewed by Dismas Ministry.
- You will receive a *Certificate* after completing this study.

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Milwaukee, WI 53207

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# Introduction

In the first section of *Pray Always: Part 1-Prayer in the Old Testament*, we learned from Genesis 3: 8-13 how God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve. God wanted to be with them and speak with them only because he had made them and loved them. This was a wonderful gift freely given to Adam and Eve, even though they did not continue to appreciate it. They discovered their ability to say “no” to God and tried to hide from him in their guilt and shame. Unfortunately, each of us in our own time and place has repeated that “no” of our first parents.

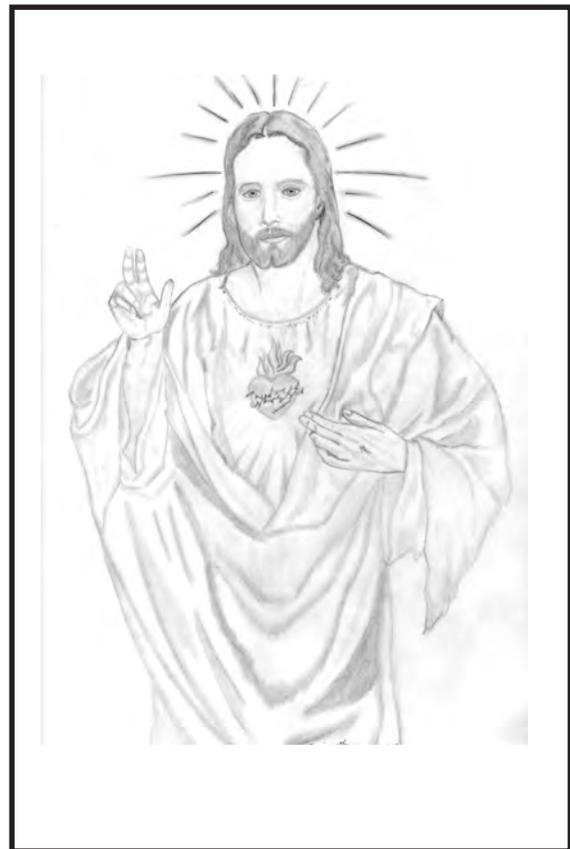
We also saw in Exodus 3: 1-14 how once again God came to Moses and spoke to him from the burning bush. God told him to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground.

In this section of the prayer study, we will see how God has come to all of us and has spoken to us through his only begotten son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus we are invited to walk once more in the garden with God, to be with him and speak with him as his sons and daughters. We also are like Moses who heard God’s voice speaking to him from the burning bush. In the gospels, the new burning bush is Jesus because through him—his words and actions—we hear and see God speaking to us.

This part of the study course focuses first of all on the example of Jesus who teaches us how to pray. It also includes the examples of those who knew and followed Jesus—his mother Mary, the disciples and many other people described in the New Testament.

Therefore, prayer is a call from God who is not only the creator of all things, but also our loving and merciful father, who wants to be with us and to speak with us. Answering that call requires a change of heart. Like our first parents we must not hide from our guilt and shame, but admit that we have sinned in all the ways that we said “no” to God. After all, where can we hide that God does not see us, from God who sees everything, even our most hidden thoughts: “...*God who knows the secrets of the heart?*” (Psalm 44: 22).

Like Moses we must take off our shoes and draw near to God with total humility. We realize that we are on “holy ground,” standing before him as someone he has made and has redeemed. We might feel totally unfit to stand in God’s presence, but nevertheless, God seeks us and wishes to be our friend. Who are we to refuse God? Hebrews 4: 16 encourages us: “*So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and favor and to find grace for timely help.*”



As the friends of God know, prayer has consequences. God will ask us to change, to do things that are not easy. We read in Jeremiah 7: 3 that God said: “*Reform your ways and your deeds, so that I may remain with you in this place*” That is why many of us might hesitate to get too close to God. We are afraid that God will ask us to change. We might be called to leave our comfort and serve his cause. Like Moses we might have to leave our hiding place in the desert and help to free God’s people who are in bondage. In a way, we need to be careful about what we pray for. We might be asked to change, to do something we haven’t done before. We might have to change the way we think and feel. We might realize that what we find so hard to accept in ourselves, it hard for other people to deal with too.

But bringing our weakness to God’s strength makes new things possible. As God said in Ezekiel 36: 26, “*I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts.*” God can change our cold, selfish hearts into generous, loving hearts. God can make us totally new if we are willing to walk with him and open our hearts to him in prayer.

As we study the New Testament, we are privileged to once more walk in the garden and stand on holy ground with Jesus. This great privilege is ours every time we open the Word of God, because he is truly present and active in his Word. There God’s Spirit guides us and speaks to us in the Word-made-flesh, Jesus our savior, who has taught us to bring an open heart to God and “*...pray always without becoming weary*” (Luke 18: 1).

### **Prayer Is for Everyone**

Anyone can pray. We don’t have to be a special person or be good enough. God will hear us, even if we feel angry or depressed. Some prayers recorded in the Bible, especially in the Psalms were even offered to God in anger or grief. Just remember that we are talking with our heavenly Father and that he wants what is best for us. He always hears us, but is not always going to do what we say, or in the time that we expect it. Prayer is not an automatic dispensing machine. Prayer is not so much about getting things as about learning and growing. The more we pray the more we will grow spiritually.

When we can’t think of anything to say in prayer, we can read a favorite passage of the Bible and pause to meditate on the words that touch our hearts. Setting aside quiet time to simply wait and listen for God to answer us is also a form of prayer. Sometimes printed prayers are helpful, but we should not be afraid to tell God whatever is in our hearts or on our minds, even the questions we want to ask Him. Prayer is a conversation with God who loves us unconditionally and always listens to us.

It is important at this point to clear up the criticism that some well-meaning Christians make about the way Catholics pray. According to the Catholic Church, prayer also can be addressed to Mary the mother of Jesus, the saints and the angels. This is because prayer is simply speaking to or asking them for something, which the Bible encourages us to do. Praying to them as fellow creatures is not idolatry because *we are not worshipping or adoring them*. We simply are

speaking to them or asking them for help in the original meaning of *pray*, from the Latin word *precari*, to ask or beg. A prayer like the *Hail Mary* is taken directly from the Bible. The first part of this prayer is what the angel spoke to Mary in Luke 1: 28 and the next part is what Elizabeth her cousin said as she greeted and blessed her as “*the mother of my Lord*” (Luke 1:43).

The following are some basic aspects of prayer:

Prayer can be simple (Matthew 6: 7),

Prayer can be private (Matthew 6: 6),

Prayer can be public (Acts 7: 59-60),

Prayer can include our needs and those of others (Matthew 6: 9-13; James 1: 5, 1 John 5: 16).

Prayer comes from our love of God and one another (1 John 4: 7,20).

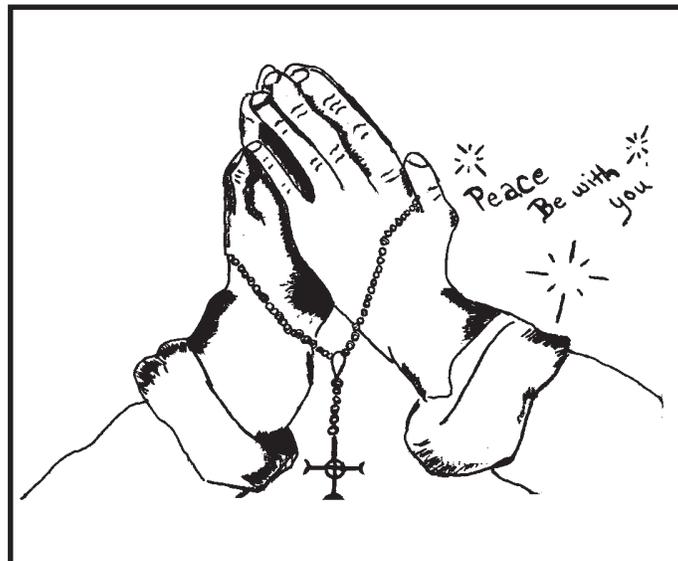
As we pray, these also are some things to remember:

“*Ask, and it will be given to you*” (Matthew 7: 7),

God may deny what is not good for us: “*You ask and you do not receive, because you ask wrongly...*” (James 4: 3),

God always ready to hear us: “*...while they are yet speaking, I will hearken to them*” (Isaiah 65: 24),

God wants us to hear him. The prophet Isaiah revealed God’s disappointment when there was no response from those he loves: “*...when I called, no one answered...*” (Isaiah 66: 4).



# 1. Jesus and Prayer

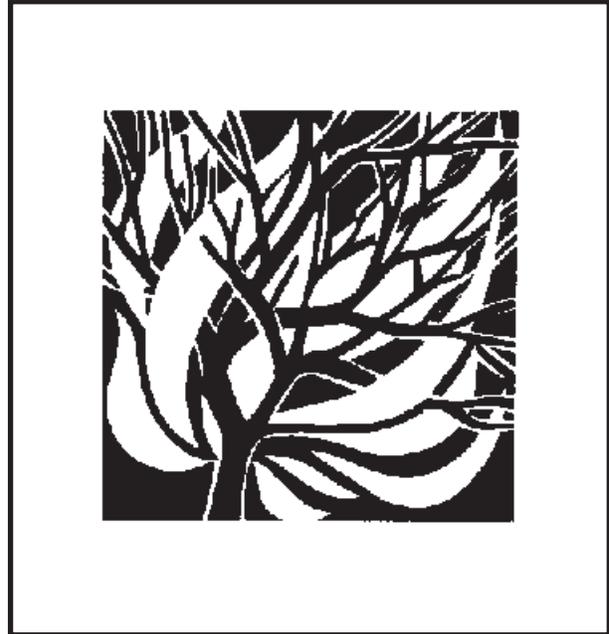
## Jesus Our Intercessor

*“In times past, God spoke in partial and various ways to our ancestors through the prophets; in these last days, he spoke to us through a son, whom he made heir of all things and through whom he created the universe, /who is the refulgence of his glory, /the very imprint of his being, /and who sustains all things by his mighty word” (Hebrews 1: 1-3).*

In Jesus, our brother who is the Son of God, we see the perfect model of prayer. He now lives at the Father’s side, where he sustains all things by his powerful word, the word of his prayer on our behalf.

We turn now to the powerful example of prayer given to us by Jesus himself during his earthly ministry. The whole life of Jesus was one prayer to his Father: *“Your will be done.”* He walked and talked prayer. He breathed and ate prayer, as He told his disciples, the will of God was his food.

Jesus truly is like the “burning bush” in whom we meet God speaking to us. He too invites us to stand on holy ground wherever we are, as we pray *through him, with him and in him* to God our Father.



### Jesus Learned to Pray

After Jesus was born, he was brought up in a typical Jewish household. He learned from his parents, Mary and Joseph, to follow the customs and keep the Sabbath and holy days of the Jewish faith prescribed by Moses:

*“... ‘The following are the festivals of the LORD, my feast days, which you shall celebrate with a sacred assembly. For six days work may be done; but the seventh day is the sabbath rest, a day for sacred assembly, on which you shall do no work. The sabbath shall belong to the LORD wherever you dwell’ ” (Leviticus 23: 2-3).* Among the feast days described in Leviticus 23 are: Passover, Pentecost, New Year’s Day, Day of Atonement and Feast of Booths.

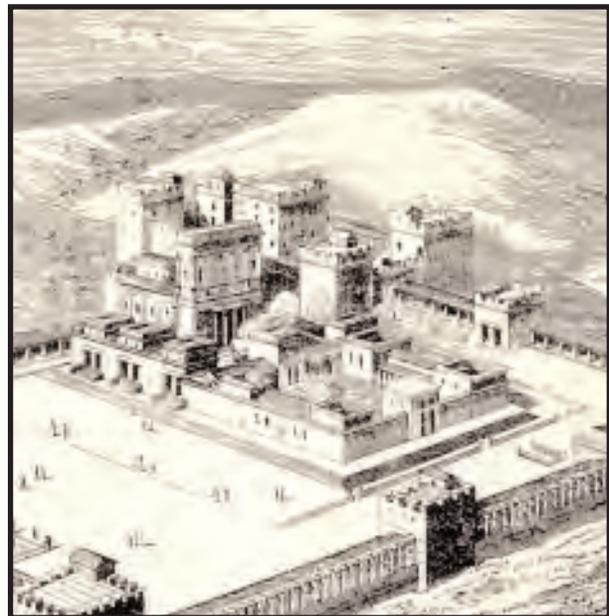
Therefore, Jesus also was circumcised according to the covenant God made with Abraham long before the law of Moses: *“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised...that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me” (Genesis 17: 10-11).*

As loyal followers of the Jewish tradition, the parents of Jesus carried out this ancient sign of the covenant: *“When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord,...’ ”* (Luke 2: 22-23). When Jesus was presented at the temple, his parents offered two turtle doves – the offering of the poor. *“Such is the law for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl child. If, however, she cannot afford a lamb, she may take two turtledoves or two pigeons, the one for a holocaust and the other for a sin offering”* (Leviticus 12: 7-8). Like the mother of Jesus, in our poverty we can offer what little we have to God who lovingly accepts the gift of our hearts.

Going to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover was a regular event in the lives of Jesus and his family. *“Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover,...”* (Luke 2: 41). In the well-known story called the “finding in the temple” the twelve year old Jesus stayed behind with the teachers in the temple area, while his parents started for home.

*“Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances”* (Luke 2: 44). We can imagine Jesus with the other pilgrims, visiting, praying and singing as they traveled to the holy city: *“Those times I recall.../When I went in procession...to the house of God, /Amid loud cries of thanksgiving, /with the multitude keeping festival”* (Psalm 42: 5).

Among the other things we learn from this story is that Jesus lived and prayed with a large, extended family and neighbors. As a growing child, he was influenced in the way he worshiped by his parents and relatives, as well as others in the community.



Even though he learned to pray and celebrate the holy days in the Jewish tradition, Jesus also had a special relationship with God as his only begotten Son. The instructions he received from others only went so far. Jesus also was taught directly by the Spirit of God, as he explained to his parents when they found him in the temple. He responded to his worried parents by asking: *“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”* (Luke 2: 49). By saying he “must be” Jesus might have meant that he had a special relationship with God. Whatever he meant, his words were a mystery to his parents because *“...they did not understand what he said to them”* (Luke 2: 50). This chapter sums up the early, years of Jesus’ life by saying: *“And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man”* (Luke 2: 52). In other words, the young Jesus learned and grew to become a person of prayer in both human and divine ways, until it was time to leave home and set out to accomplish his Father’s business once more.

## **Prayer When Tempted**

At some point, Jesus went to the Jordan river to see his cousin, John, who was preaching a powerful message of repentance: “ *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand* ” (Matthew 3: 2). John also was baptizing those who listened and wanted to reform their lives. In a move that surprised John, Jesus also came up to him and asked to be baptized. But after John at first refused, he gave in to Jesus who had said: “*Allow it for now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness*” (Matthew 3: 15).

After being baptized, Jesus stepped out of the water and had a powerful, prayerful experience. He saw the sky open and the Spirit of God come over him like a dove. Then he heard his Father’s voice saying: “ *This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*” (Matthew 3: 17). After he experienced this: “*Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil*” (Matthew 4:1). For forty days and nights while he fasted and prayed, Jesus relied on the Spirit of God to nourish and guide him. At the end of his fast, however, Jesus was hungry and so the devil took the opportunity to approach him. He tempted Jesus three times: to change stones into bread, to throw himself down so that the angels could take care of him, and finally, promised to give him all the kingdoms of the world if he would prostrate himself in homage before him.



At each temptation Jesus strongly resisted the devil’s offer to serve his own interests. After each temptation, Jesus responded to the devil with the powerful words of scripture found in *Deuteronomy 8: 3; 6: 16; 6: 13*.

It is interesting to note that even the devil could quote scripture as he did when he used Psalm 91: 11. The difference is that the devil only used it, he did not take it to heart. After the final temptation Jesus routed him with the words: “*Get away, Satan! It is written:/ ‘The Lord, your God, shall you worship /and him alone shall you serve’* ” (Matthew 4: 10).

This encounter between Jesus and the devil teaches us a great deal about Jesus and about prayer. Even though he had all the advantages of his Father’s presence and the guidance of the Spirit, he still shared our human nature: “*Surely he did not help angels...therefore he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested*” (Hebrews 2: 16-18). This adds special meaning to the words that Jesus gave us in the Lord’s Prayer. He also was speaking from his own experience with temptation when he said: “*...deliver us from the evil one*” (Matthew 6: 13).

We cannot expect more from ourselves, and should not be surprised when we are tested in the

same way. Like Jesus was, we will be tempted even when we are praying. Sometimes the most unclean thoughts of lust, pride and revenge will enter our minds, like images on a TV screen. But if we do not dwell on them and quickly dismiss them as Jesus did, they do not make us bad persons. Every temptation is an invitation to adore something other than God. Whenever we feel tempted we can turn to the words of scripture as Jesus did, and to the powerful prayer he gave us to overcome the devil: “Away with you, Satan!”

## Nights in Prayer and Time Away

In the same way that Jesus went to be alone in the desert before beginning his ministry, he also did this in shorter periods during his ministry. He would leave the activity of public life to find a quiet place, and spend whole nights in prayer: *“He would withdraw to deserted places to pray”* (Luke 5: 16). No doubt this gave him greater strength to face the constant challenges of his enemies, or sometimes, the conflicts and lack of progress of his own followers.

One day, after the apostles returned to tell him about their successful mission, Jesus said to them: *“Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while”* (Mark 6:31). Perhaps they were excited and wanted to keep working. They might have thought:

“Why stop now, let’s keep going, we’re doing a great job!” But Jesus taught them the balance between action and prayer. Prayer must be the foundation of our actions, or eventually they will be like the wheat that grew without deep roots and eventually withers away.

For Jesus, it wasn’t just a good feeling to pray, it was necessary. That is why the gospels tell us: *“...he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spend the night in prayer to God”* (Luke 6:12). After one such night, his disciples encouraged him to eat: *“Meanwhile, the disciples urged him, ‘Rabbi, eat.’ But he said to them, ‘I have food to eat of which you do not know.’ ”* (John 4: 31-32). The disciples did not understand what he said, wondering if someone else had given him food. But Jesus patiently explained what really fed him: *“My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work”* (John 4: 33).

We do not know exactly what it was like for Jesus to be God’s Son, but his communion with the Father while alone at night must have been an amazing source of strength. Sometimes Jesus pulled back the curtain a little to give his disciples a glimpse of his relationship with God: *“But I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you this so that you might have peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world”* (John 16: 32-33). As his disciples, we can strive to live in the spirit of Jesus, as scripture encourages us to do: *“You belong to God, children,...for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”* (1 John 4: 4).



Although Jesus was speaking of his new law of love when he said the following, he also was offering prayerful for people who feel overcome by life that is too busy: *“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light”* (Matthew 11: 28-30). Like Jesus, we can find rest and strength in God because he knows above all what is best for us and whose will is the only way.

### **Jesus Teaches Us to Pray**

During his ministry Jesus offered many instructions on how his followers ought to pray. These instructions came from his own prayers and his keen observations of others, and were intended to show the right path. Prayer, as it was often practiced then and now, can be without the right spirit, and for the wrong reasons. If our heart is not in it, or if we do not come humbly before God, it is on the wrong footing. Jesus clearly taught the wrong and right way to pray in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee stood proudly and prayed: *“O God, I thank you, that I am not like the rest of humanity...or even like this tax collector”* (Luke 18: 11). On the other hand, the tax collector stood humbly at a distance and said: *“O God, be merciful to me a sinner”* (Luke 18: 13). Jesus went on to say that the tax collector was pleasing to God because he had humbled himself before God.

There also is a right way to prepare ourselves even before we begin to pray. *“When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions”* (Mark 11: 25). This need to forgive is something that Jesus taught about prayer that often goes unnoticed or ignored. We are to start out by forgiving anyone who has caused us harm. If we tried doing that whenever we started to pray it would have real consequences and bring about serious changes in our dealings with others, whether this concerns a member of our family, someone living next to us, or even a stranger. Certainly, it is not easy to forgive, but Jesus lays down this central challenge of his gospel – if we want to be forgiven, we must forgive others.

To emphasize this point, when Jesus was preaching about anger and reconciliation, he added this about prayer: *“Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5: 23).

This same call to forgive, which is the heart of the gospel message, also is found in the Lord’s Prayer. One day, after they discovered Jesus praying, his followers said to him: *“Lord, teach us to pray...”* (Luke 11:1). In response, Jesus said: *“This is how you are to pray:*

*‘Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,*

*as we forgive our debtors;  
and do not subject us to the final test,  
but deliver us from the evil one' ” (Matthew 6: 9-13).*

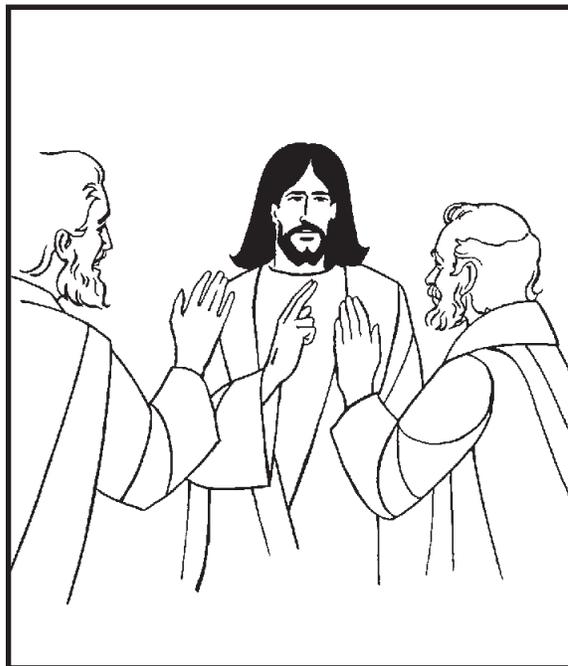
The very first word Jesus uses in this prayer gives us an insight into his relationship with God. God is his *Father*, but the English word does not give the true meaning of what Jesus said. He called God “*Abba*” which is an Aramaic word (the language of Jesus) that means “*Papa*” or “*Daddy*.” Jesus gives his followers a new word and a closeness that comes from his own closeness with God. *Abba* as a form of prayer is not found in the Old Testament. It is unique to Jesus, and is his special gift to his followers.

In addition, the need for us to forgive was so important that after he taught this prayer, Jesus singled this out and repeated it again: “*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions*” (Matthew 6: 14-15). Nevertheless, this simple teaching is one of the most difficult to carry out, and perhaps the most ignored by those who say they live by the gospel. At the very end of his life, Jesus preached forgiveness by example, when he forgave his enemies who crucified him. Before he died he also forgave the criminal next to him who repented. Without hesitating Jesus replied: “*Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise*” (Luke 23: 43).

## **Praying in Spirit and Truth**

Such forgiveness can only take place in a spirit of truth, where the wrongs done and the wrongs suffered are recognized, admitted and dealt with. If we are not open to admitting the wrong we have done to another, any attempt at forgiveness will not be true or have meaning. Since humility is truth, we must reach the point where we humbly admit the truth of our actions and their consequences on others and ourselves. Because God is truth, our prayers and our lives must be based on truth:

*“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth; and indeed the Father seeks such people to worship him. God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth” (John 4: 23-24).*



This lesson of truth was born out in the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well. When Jesus brought up her many past husbands, and that the man she was living with now was not her husband, she immediately accepted the truth about herself. In fact, she went back to her town and said to the people: “*Come see a man who told me everything I have done. Could he possibly be the Messiah?*” (John 4: 29). God is

absolute truth from whom nothing is hidden: *“No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account”* (Hebrews 4: 13). Jesus forgives and heals the hearts of those who do not try to hide their faults but are open to the truth and pray for his help.

## **The Promise of His Presence**

Because God is love he also is one. Therefore, peace and harmony among people are signs of his presence. In fact, Jesus gave his promise to be present when and wherever his followers gathered as his people:

*“Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18: 19-20). Although it is always an ongoing task, the members of Christ’s Church are called to live in unity by admitting and forgiving the hurts they cause one another.

At the end of Matthew’s gospel we see Jesus on the mountain taking leave of his disciples. He sent them out to baptize and make disciples of every nation. Then he promised: *“And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28: 20). There are many ways that Jesus has kept his promise to be with us: in his Word, in the Eucharist, in the gift of his Spirit and in his people.

## **The Persistence of Prayer**

Jesus told many stories or parables to teach a lesson. One of his parables on prayer actually had a humorous side to it. The parable of the persistent widow was meant to show the need to pray and not get discouraged. According to the story there was a widow who went to a judge with a reputation for being fearless and asked for a decision in her favor: *“Render a just decision for me against my adversary”* (Luke 18: 3). At first the judge refused to listen to her but she kept coming back and insisting that he help her. The judge finally said to himself: *“While it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me”* (Luke 18: 4-5). We can almost here the audience enjoying a good laugh at the judge’s remark. Like the good story teller that Jesus was, he used this humor to make his point: *“Will not God then secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will he be slow to answer them? I tell you, he will see to it that justice is done for them speedily”* (Luke 18: 7-8).

## **Being Vigilant in Prayer**

Another side of persistence in prayer is being watchful in the midst of life’s distractions and temptations. It is easy to get caught up in getting rich, gaining power, or enjoying “good times” and partying. We might fool ourselves that these things will never end:

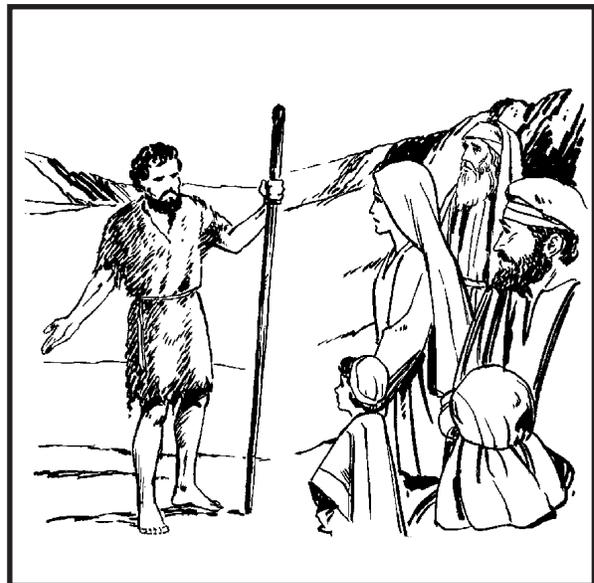
*“Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of daily life, and that day catch you by surprise like a trap. For that day will assault everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Be vigilant at all times and pray that you have the*

*strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21: 34-36).

But the end will come for each and every one of us, whether it is a downfall because of our sins, or our own death or the end of the world—whenever that will take place (cf. 2 Peter 3: 11-13). Since nothing lasts forever, the real question is: who will still be with us when we reach the end of the road? Most likely our so-called friends will not be there, but God will. So if we want to avoid the trap that false living sets for us, we must be on our guard and pray. We must ask God daily for the strength to stand up for what is right and good—for what really matters. If we do, we will find Christ standing up for us when our end is at hand. He is truly the best friend we have beyond all others.

## **The Prayer of Divine Reassurance**

While John the Baptist was being held in prison by Herod, he heard about the things Jesus was saying and doing. He sent his disciples to Jesus with the question “*Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?*” (Matthew 11: 3). Perhaps in the darkness and loneliness of prison John needed to be reassured. His heart looked for some comfort and humbly asked for a word of support from Jesus. He received his answer in the message Jesus sent back about the blind seeing, cripples walking and the dead rising. Then he added: “*And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me*” (Matthew 11: 6). Like John, we can rely on Jesus especially when we feel alone, abandoned and God’s plan is not clear to us.



## **Answers to Prayer**

Jesus taught us to look at life through spiritual eyes, to recognize what is an empty promise or a dead-end road. He knew that we might pray for many things but not get the answer we wanted. Is it because God does not hear us, or does not care? Or is it because we might be asking for something that is not good for us? He teaches us to ask our heavenly Father by trusting in his goodness:

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him”* (Matthew 7: 7-11). In this way Jesus taught his followers that not all prayers are answered in the way we expect, but that God always hears us.

## Listening to the Voice of God

Our prayers often take the form of asking God for things. In that case, we do the talking while we expect God to listen. Actually it is pride to think that we know what is best for ourselves or others. We know what we want but rarely ask God what he wants. Yet he is the creator of all things and the redeemer and sanctifier of the human race. Listening to God should be an important aspect of our prayer, but often it is the last thing we do, or even forget. Jesus taught the importance of listening to God by word and example. His attitude might take us by surprise, since he is the Son of God: *“I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me,...”* (John 5: 30).

Jesus asks his followers to listen to him carefully and follow him faithfully: *“...the sheep hear his voice, as he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice”* (John 10: 3-4).

Jesus himself had the attitude of listening to the Father and trusting totally in whatever way the Father would answer him. His heart was filled with gratitude because he knew that his *Abba* always heard him regardless of the outcome: *“And Jesus raised his eyes and said, ‘Father, I thank you for hearing me. I know that you always hear me,...’* (John 11: 41-42).

## Prayer and Faith

When the disciples were not able to heal a boy with a mental condition, Jesus asked that the boy be brought to him: *“...and from that hour the boy was cured”* (Matthew 17: 18). Afterward, the disciples came to Jesus in private, no doubt embarrassed, and asked him why their efforts and prayers were unsuccessful in driving out the demon. Jesus explained: *“Because of your little faith. Amen, I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you”* (Matthew 17: 20-21).

On another occasion Jesus said to his disciples: *“If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it”* (John 14: 14). The challenge for his disciples then and for us now is: what should we ask for? It is important to come up with the right question. Jesus helps us find the answer by referring to the kind of relationship that should exist between himself and his followers: *“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you”* (John 15: 7). This is much like the words of St. Augustine: “Love, then do what you will.”

This brings to mind the vine and branches that Jesus spoke about: *“Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches...without me you can do nothing”* (John 15: 4-5). If our relationship with Jesus is like a branch to a vine, we will want whatever he wants. His work will be our work. We will ask for what is good for others and ourselves. Our faith and trust will be based on God’s will.



## **Prayers of Healing and Miracles**

It is clear in all of the gospels that healing and miracles were a great part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus healed in many ways, laying his hands on people or simply touching them with his finger or when someone touched his clothing. But Jesus also healed and worked wonders by command, using only his voice. Each of these commands is really a healing prayer in action. There are many examples of Jesus using a command in each of the gospels. The following are some of them:

### **THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW**

The Paralytic: *"Rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home"* (Matthew 9: 6).  
Woman with a Hemorrhage: *"Courage, daughter! Your faith has saved you"* (Matthew 9: 22).  
Healing the Blind: *"Let it be done for you according to your faith"* (Matthew 9: 29).  
Man with a Shriveled Hand: *"Stretch out your hand"* (Matthew 12: 13).  
The Canaanite Woman: *"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish"* (Matthew 15: 28).  
Two Blind Men: *"Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes,..."* (Matthew 20: 34).  
Cursing of the Fig Tree: *"May no fruit ever come from you again."* (Matthew 21: 19).

### **THE GOSPEL OF MARK**

Expelling a demon: *"Quiet! Come out of him!"* (Mark 1: 25)  
Curing a Leper: *"I do will it. Be made clean"* (Mark 1: 41)  
Calming the Storm: *"Quiet! Be still!"* (Mark 4: 39)  
Healing the Demoniac: *"Unclean spirit, come out of the man!"* (Mark 5: 8)  
Jairus's Daughter: *"Talitha koum," which means "Little girl, I say to you, arise!"* (Mark 5: 41)  
Healing of a Deaf Man: *"Ephphatha!" (that is, 'Be opened!')* (Mark 7: 34)

### **THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

Cure of a Demoniac: *"Quiet! Come out of him!"* (Luke 4: 35).  
Cleansing of a Leper: *"I do will it. Be made clean"* (Luke 5:13).  
Curing the Paralytic: *"I say to you, rise, pick up your stretcher, and go home"* (Luke 5: 24).  
Raising the Widow's Son: *"Young man, I tell you, arise!"* (Luke 7: 14).  
The Penitent Woman: *"Your faith has saved you; go in peace"* (Luke 7: 50).  
A Possessed Boy: *"Bring your son here"* (Luke 9: 41).  
Cure of the Stoopd Woman: *"Woman, you are set free of your infirmity"* (Luke 13: 12).  
Sabbath Cure: *"...he took the man, and after he had healed him, dismissed him"* (Luke 14: 4).  
Cleansing of Ten Lepers: *"Go show yourselves to the priests"* (Luke 17: 14).  
The High Priest's Servant: *"Then he touched the servant's ear and healed him"* (Luke 22: 51).

### **THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

Miracle at Cana: *"Fill the jars with water"* (John 2: 7).  
The Royal Official's Son: *"You may go; your son will live"* (John 4: 50).  
Sick Man at the Pool: *"Rise, take up your mat, and walk"* (John 5: 8).

Multiplication of the Loaves: *“Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were reclining there, and also as much of the fish as they wanted”* (John 6: 11).

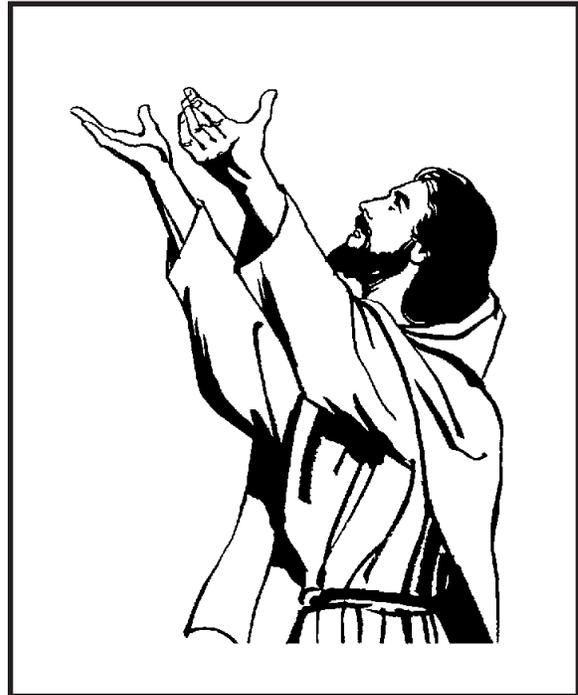
The Adulteress: *“Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more”* (John 8: 11).

The Man Born Blind: *“Go wash in the Pool of Siloam”* (John 9: 7).

Raising the Dead: *“Lazarus, come out!...Untie him and let him go”* (John 11: 43-44).

## **The Beatitudes**

The beatitudes (taught by Jesus in his sermon on the mountainside) are not exactly prayers because his words were spoken directly to those who had gathered around him. However, they do point out the way that the followers of Jesus should live. They are like a road map to happiness that Jesus has given us. They change the way we look at life and how we ought to live as followers of the gospel. Because the beatitudes are the foundation on which we should build our spiritual lives, they help us understand how to pray and what we should pray for. They have been referred to as a “bombshell” because they take the world’s values and turn them upside down. Even if we possess everything that the world has to offer, if that is all we have, we are really very poor. Many saints have recognized this and changed their lives accordingly. One well-known example was St. Francis of Assisi.



The beatitudes are found in Matthew 5:3-12 and in Luke 6:20-26. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus follows the beatitudes with a teaching about the importance of forgiving others: *“...if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Matthew 5: 23). The same is true in Luke’s gospel, Jesus follows the beatitudes with a lengthy teaching about forgiving our enemies and says: *“Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful”* (Luke 6: 36). Therefore, it is very clear that the beatitudes are meant by Jesus to influence the way we forgive and the way we pray.

## **Prayer of Praise**

The beatitudes provide us with a window into the heart of Jesus as well. They point to how he looked at things with the eyes of his Father. He saw the “little ones” of the world as having great value. That is why the Catholic Church today promotes what it calls the “preferential option for the poor” because God favors the poor and the outcast—the people the world overlooks and undervalues. This is why Jesus prayed: *“I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike. Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will”* (Matthew 11:25-26). This is why the Son of God was not born in a great Roman palace, but in an out-of-the-way place in a hillside cave among simple shepherds. God chooses to bless and to be found among the poor.

## Prayers of Sighing and Lament

As much as Jesus wanted to reach the hearts of everyone, some resisted him and did not allow it to happen. Not everyone was willing to listen to his words and enjoy the happiness and blessings of his gospel. When some Pharisees confronted him and asked him for a sign, Jesus could not melt the hardness of their hearts. It was then that he prayed without words—with a sigh that came from deep within him:

*“The Pharisees came forward and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. He sighed from the depths of his spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign? Amen, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation’ ”* (Mark 8:11-13).

Knowing there was little he could do to change them, he got into the boat and left them. This is a lesson for everyone who does their best to help change the mistakes or bad choices of someone they love. A time comes when we realize that we cannot “fix” them, and we have to let go of our effort. Then we can pray as Jesus did, with a deep sigh as we leave them in God’s hands.

Later on toward the end of his ministry, when Jesus was going to Jerusalem, he came in full view of the city. He knew he could not keep it from being destroyed and it moved him to tears: *“As he drew near he saw the city and wept over it, saying ‘If this day you only knew what makes for peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes...you did not recognize the time of your visitation’ ”* (Luke 19:41-42, 44).

This is another reminder for us as followers of Jesus. When we ask God for the conversion of others, we should recall that not even Jesus could reach everyone during his ministry. Human beings have been created with free will, because this makes loving God and others a choice. However, as we know from our first parents and all human history until now, we also have the ability to deny love to God and others, and this has caused untold misery for the human family. It is a cause for tears even for the Son of God who hung on the cross pleading for mercy: *“In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death,...”* (Hebrews 5: 7).

## Prayer of Transfiguration

The disciples must have observed Jesus in prayer often, in the countryside, in the synagogues and in the temple. But not all of them had the rare sight that Peter, John and James witnessed when Jesus took them with him to a mountain to pray. *“While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white...Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my chosen Son; listen to him.’ After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen”* (Luke 9: 29, 35-36).

Matthew’s account of the “transfiguration” as it is called, adds a few more details about the three apostles: *“When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and do not be afraid’ ”* (Matthew 17: 6).

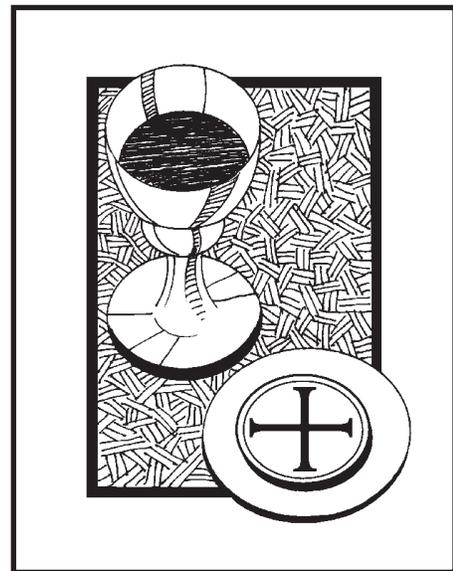
In prayer, there is a time for speaking and standing before God, and there is a time for silence and adoration in his awesome presence. As prophet reminds us: *“...silence before him, all the earth!”* (Habbakuk 2: 20).

Sometimes when God gives us a gift it leads to a responsibility, or he gives a grace in prayer that is followed by a test of our love and loyalty to Christ. When Jesus singled out Peter, John and James, he might already have been thinking of his passion and death, and the test that this would put his followers through. Jesus was thinking of his passion when he said to Peter: *“Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers”* (Luke 22: 31-32). He gave Peter the gift of leadership, but great responsibility came with it. These three apostles witnessed his transfiguration because they would be tested by his crucifixion. At times in our own prayer we reach a “mountaintop” of peace, but then we must return to the valley where we face the trials of life strengthened by God’s grace.

## **The Last Supper Prayer in the Face of Death**

*“I am troubled now. Yet what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But it was for this purpose that I came to this hour”* (John 12: 27).

Some of the greatest prayers offered by Jesus were uttered during the evening before his arrest and crucifixion. They reveal the depth of his suffering, his concern for his followers, his love for the Father and his unshakable trust in God’s plan to save humanity. One thing is clear, in a very human way Jesus was willing to open his heart and share his thoughts and feelings with those he loved—even if they did not totally understand what was happening. Jesus prayed for his disciples because his passion and death would shake them. Fully aware of the test ahead, he told them: *“This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken,...”* (Matthew 26: 31).



After he had gathered his followers together in the upper room to celebrate one last Passover with them, he gave this traditional Jewish meal an entirely new meaning:

*“He took the bread said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you’ ”* (Luke 22:19-20). Jesus was praying with simple gifts to offer, but the bread and wine became not just symbols, but his body and blood. The gift of his body and blood was a unique way to show his love and remain with the disciples always, as often as they prayed this meal in his memory.

## **The Promise of His Presence (John 14-17)**

These four chapters of John’s gospel (14-17) can be regarded as one long prayer that Jesus shared with his disciples. In these chapters he pours out his heart and shares with his Father and everyone gathered with him, everything that he desires and is willing to suffer for their sake

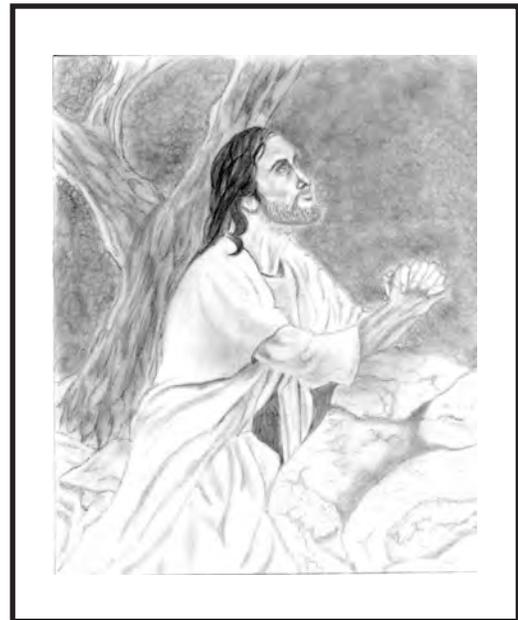
and for his Father's glory. As the mood deepens and the disciples realize that their leader is headed for a final confrontation with his enemies, Jesus reassures them: "...but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16: 33).

He asks God to protect them, to guard them from the evil one, to consecrate them with the truth, that they may be one and that God's love for Jesus may live in them, and that Jesus "...may be in them" (John 17: 26). This is what the Catholic Church calls the doctrine of the "Divine Indwelling." It means that Christ keeps his promise to live in the hearts of his followers. That is why Paul prayed in Ephesians 3: 17: "...that Christ may dwell in your hearts..." and could write about "...his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8: 11). As his followers we are faced with the many daily trials and the major crises that come our way. It is encouraging for us to know that we have within us and among us his powerful presence, as 1 John 4:4 reminds us: "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

When the meal was over Jesus got up from the table, left the upper room and went out to fulfill God's will: "Father, the hour has come! Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you..." (John 17: 1). The "hour" is his passion and death that lead to his resurrection.

## The Prayer of Agony in the Garden

The humanity of Jesus is very obvious during his prayer in the garden, when he wanted his friends to stay and pray with him. He "...began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, 'My soul is sorrowful even to death' " (Mark 14: 33-34). He fell to the ground and prayed with sweat dripping from his body: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will" (Mark 14:36). He knows what is God's plan for him, yet his human nature shrinks from the horrible suffering he is about to endure. He throws himself in the arms of his "Abba" for comfort and strength. As he said to Peter and the disciples when he found them sleeping instead of praying with him: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26: 41).



When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?" (Mark 14: 37). We can sense the anguish of Jesus as he kept returning to his disciples and then praying alone. There was no comfort to be found anywhere except in God, yet even that comfort seemed to be absent for the time being (Matthew 26:36). We might even call this prayer of Jesus in the garden the prayer of abandonment. Over the centuries, it has been a custom for Christians to pray during a "holy hour" at night, as a way to accompany Jesus during this time of darkness in the garden. It is way Christians have tried to respond to his question to Peter: "Could you not keep watch for one hour?" (Mark 14: 37).

## Prayers During His Passion and Death

Because it is sacred scripture—the *Word of God*—every sentence is rich in meaning, especially as we study the words of Christ during his passion and death.

*“When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left.”* (Luke 23: 33).

The mistreatment and disrespect that criminals at a public execution experienced, were also heaped on Jesus. His clothes were taken away, divided and won with a roll of dice. People stood nearby watching while the leaders were jeering at him. The soldiers made fun of him too, and offered him some sour wine. And over his head was a sign words that mocked him: “King of the Jews.” Even one of the criminals crucified next to him mocked him.

In that great and deep darkness of nature and spirit, Jesus hung between heaven and earth. It is an old tradition to meditate on the “*Last Words*” of Jesus. These words are the final requests and prayers that Jesus uttered before he died. They provide a wonderful example to follow and a rich legacy for his followers to meditate on in every age.

It is striking that while the wounds in his hands and feet were still fresh, he was able to intercede for those who crucified him. This was his great priestly prayer as he sacrificed his life to save not just his executioners but every human being:

*“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34). To the very end, he was teaching us to rely totally on God our “Abba” and confirm that forgiveness is the heart of the gospel. It was the very reason he was offering up his life. From now on, all sacrifices except his were meaningless, because once and for all he was offered himself so that the sins of humanity would be forgiven. He entered:

*“...heaven itself, that he might now appear before God on our behalf. Not that he might offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters each year into the sanctuary with blood that is not his own; if that were so, he would have had to suffer repeatedly from the foundation of the world. But now once for all he has appeared at the end of the ages to take away sin by his sacrifice”* (Hebrews 9: 24-26).

Since Jesus was familiar with sacred scripture, especially the psalms as prayers of worship, it would be natural for him to pray one of them during his passion. He chose *Psalms 22*:



*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Mark 15: 34). This psalm seems to be written about his passion. So many of its words are remarkably close to what Jesus suffered.

The following speaks of humiliation and mockery:

*“All who see me mock me;  
they curl their lips and jeer;  
they shake their heads at me:  
‘You relied on the LORD—let him deliver you;  
if he loves you, let him rescue you’ ”* (Psalm 22: 8-9).

Another passage refers to severe thirst:

*“As dry as a potsherd is my throat;  
my tongue sticks to my palate;  
you lay me in the dust of death”* (Psalm 22: 16).

And again another passage could describe a crucifixion:

*“So wasted are my hands and feet”* (Psalm 22: 17).

Finally, there is the following:

*“...they divide my garments among them;  
for my clothing they cast lots”* (Psalm 22: 19).

Besides making sure that his mother was not left alone after his death, Jesus provided all his followers with a spiritual mother. This is the deeper meaning of his words when he looked at Mary standing near his cross and said: *“Woman, behold, your son”* (John 19: 26). And then said to the disciple John: *“Behold, your mother”* (John 19: 27). From that moment, when John took Mary into his care, he accepted her for all the disciples of Jesus then and now. John’s new mother is also our mother. That is why the Catholic Church teaches that Jesus gave Mary to all of us as his dying request.

The thirst that Jesus referred to was a terrible one. Crucifixion drained the body of fluids and blood, so that the throat of the victim became parched and very painful. In the words of Psalm 22 it was like baked clay. Yet this thirst also stood for his *thirst for souls*, for whom he was willing to suffer and die. In John 19: 28 he says simply: *“I thirst.”*

His thirst had already begun to be quenched when the criminal next to him said: *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”* (Luke 23: 42). Jesus replied: *“Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise”* (Luke 23: 43).

If pressure on the lungs during crucifixion made it difficult for the victims to breathe, it is remarkable that Jesus was able to cry out in a loud voice: *“Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”* (Luke 23: 46). A dying man with hardly any breath would not have done that. Perhaps that is why the Roman soldier, who probably had seen many people die, was so impressed: *“When the centurion who stood facing him saw how he had breathed his last he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’ ”* (Mark 15: 39).

John describes how Jesus took a final sip of the soldier’s wine and spoke his last words:

“ *‘It is finished.’ And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit*” (John 19: 30). “It is finished” means more than “It’s over.” It means Jesus had won the race and reached the finish line—as a victor. He accomplished what he set out to do—surrender totally to the Father’s will, no matter the cost to himself. It is a prayer of victory and a return to the Father of the gift of his life. His final prayer was a loud cry as he “...*breathed his last*” (Mark 15: 37) and “...*gave up his spirit*” (Matthew 27: 50). The image of Jesus crucified is God’s eternal sign of his love for us. In Jesus we see both our own misery and God’s gift of mercy.

## **Eternal Life**

After his death, the lifeless body of Jesus was placed in a tomb carved out of a rocky hillside nearby. According to the world’s thinking, it should have been the end of his ministry. But according to God’s plan, his death was just the beginning. As Jesus had taught earlier in his ministry, that surely referred to himself:

*“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit”* (John 12: 24).

Jesus gave his promise of new and eternal life to every follower of his gospel:

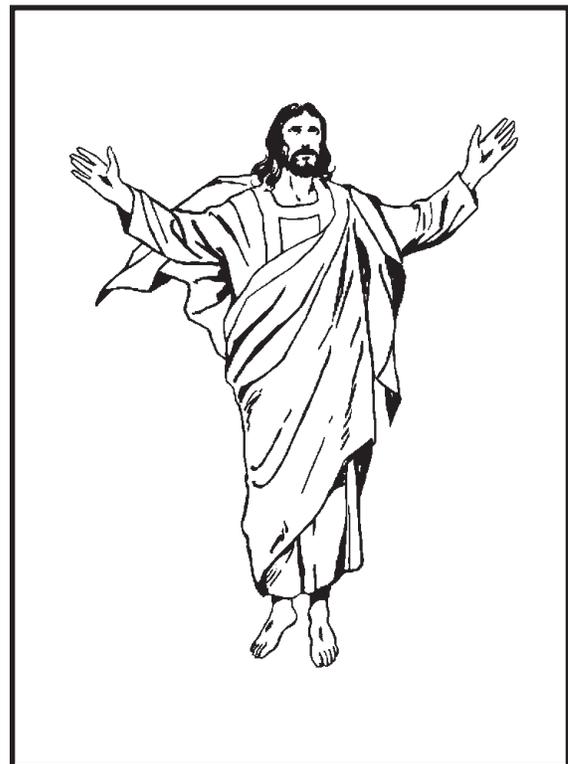
*“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death”* (John 8: 51).

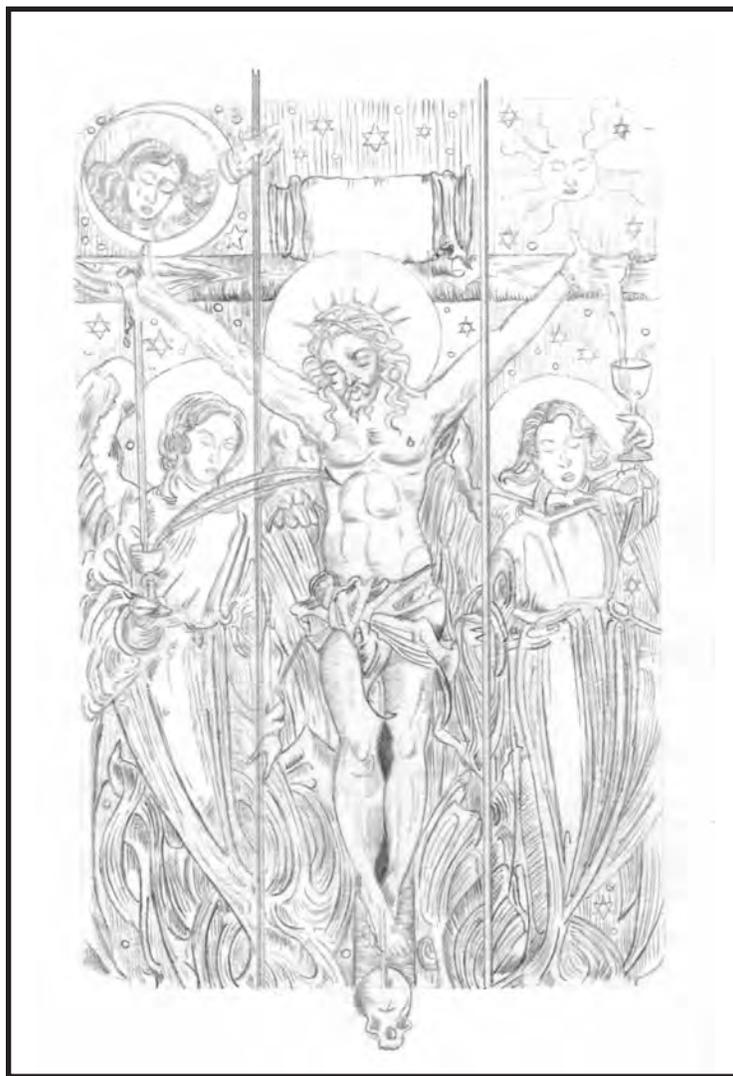
## **Prayer of Peace**

This hard-earned life we have received is not to be kept to ourselves. It is to be shared with others, according to this final prayer of Jesus after rising from the dead:

*“ ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’ ”* (John 20: 21-23).

Once again, in his final blessing and prayer for us, Jesus returned to the central teaching of his gospel—*forgiveness!*





*“Father, forgive them,  
they know not what they do”*  
Luke 23:34.

## 2. Mary and Prayer

Because she was unique in God's plan of salvation for the human race, and she alone was chosen to give birth to God's Son, we can look to Mary as a foremost example of what it means to be a model of prayer. In the example of her prayers and actions she showed us what it means to be a selfless servant of God and a loyal disciple of the Savior.

### MARY IN THE GOSPELS

The gospels show us how Mary prayed and prepared herself for the coming of the Savior, and was present at all the great moments of our salvation.

### The Prayer of "Yes" to God

Mary lived a normal life as young woman in a small town of Galilee. She was engaged to a man name Joseph, so she was making plans for her wedding like many other women of her age. But without warning, a heavenly messenger appeared one day, with news she could hardly understand. The messenger said: "*Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.*" (Luke 1: 28). The gospel account says that Mary was very troubled by this apparition and its mysterious words. Because she wondered what all this meant, the angel went on to reassure her: "*Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and [he] will be called Son of the Most High...and of his kingdom there will be no end*" (Luke 1: 30-31, 33). Mary still did not understand, so she dared to ask: " '*How can this be since I have no relations with a man?*' " (Luke 1: 34). Then the angel answered that the Holy Spirit would bring about the birth of this child. That is why the child would be the Son of God. After announcing that her cousin Elizabeth would also have a son the angel stated: "*...nothing is impossible for God*" (Luke 1: 37). With that, "*Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word'*" (Luke 1:38). From that moment on her life changed forever, even though things might seem normal for a while.



### Guided by a Dream

It was no easy thing for Mary to be "*...found with child...*" (Matthew 1: 18). She was engaged to Joseph but the child was not his. Being a person of faith and devoted to God's will, Joseph

must have prayed and certainly struggled with what to do about it. He realized that Mary could be publicly embarrassed and exposed to the law for her “sin.” He was thinking of quietly divorcing Mary. As it happened several other times during the life of Joseph, an angel came to him in a dream and said: “...do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1: 20). When he woke up, Joseph took the message of the dream to heart. He accepted Mary as his wife and welcomed her into his home. Such was this quiet hero, the man of faith and courage, who became the guardian of Jesus and the husband of Mary.



## Elizabeth's Prayer in Praise of Mary

Mary was not one to stay with her own good news. She immediately prepared for the journey and “...set out and traveled...in haste...” (Luke 1: 39) to her cousin’s village. She was going to help Elizabeth during the final months of her pregnancy. When the two women met, they were filled with joy at God’s goodness. Elizabeth was so filled with joy that she cried out with the words that have become part of the “Hail Mary” prayed by the Catholic Church for centuries: “...blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1: 42). Elizabeth received her guest, who was younger than her, with great humility: “And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:43 ). The Catholic Church took her words to heart and has taught that Mary, as the mother of the Lord was the mother of God. Why? Because Jesus could not be split in two with a sword like Solomon’s. He was both human and divine with one mother. The first part of the Hail Mary, of course, comes from the words spoken earlier by the angel Gabriel: “Hail favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1: 28). In praying the Hail Mary, the Catholic Church does so with confidence that it this prayer has its roots in the Bible:

*Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with you. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*

## The Song of Mary – The “Magnificat”

In a manner typical of others in the Hebrew scriptures, and like her namesake *Miriam* who sang and danced in celebration of her people’s Exodus, Mary burst into a prayerful song of joy and praise for what God had done for her and his people. This beautiful prayer composed and sung by Mary is sometimes referred to as the *Magnificat*. It is given that name because it is the first word that begins the song in Latin.

“And Mary said:  
‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;

*my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
 For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;  
 behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.  
 The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
 and holy is his name;  
 His mercy is from age to age  
 to those who fear him.  
 He has shown might with his arm,  
 dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.  
 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones  
 but lifted up the lowly.  
 The hungry he has filled with good things,  
 the rich he has sent away empty.  
 He has helped Israel his servant,  
 remembering his mercy,  
 according to his promise to our fathers,  
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever”*  
 (Luke 1:46-55).



A whole book could be written about this magnificent song. It shows Mary's intelligence and strength, her love for God's people. Her words mirror the beatitudes Jesus taught in his sermon on the mount, and his gospel of God's mercy. Her song expresses God's preference for the poor, the hungry and the lowly ones. It gives the glory to God and not herself. It is no wonder that God chose such a mother for his Son.

## **A Prophetic Blessing**

About three months later, after Elizabeth's baby was born, Mary returned home to Nazareth. The birth of John, however, was a cause for great celebration in the family of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was filled with prophetic spirit and sang a beautiful song that is still sung and recited by the Church to this day.

It begins with joyful words of blessing:

*“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel  
 for he has visited and brought  
 redemption to his people.”* (Luke 1: 68).

The song ends with the prophetic words:

*“And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,  
 for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
 to give his people knowledge of salvation  
 through the forgiveness of their sins,  
 because of the tender mercy of our God...”* (Luke 1: 76-78).

Already, the gospel theme of forgiveness of sins was present in Zechariah's prophecy.

## The Birth of Jesus - Glorifying and Praising God

The birth of Jesus was truly the answer to Mary's prayer for her people. Like many others, she had listened to the scriptures, heard the prophecies about the Messiah, and longed for the day when he would appear and bring salvation to God's people. Little did she know the part she would play in God's plan until the angel appeared and she became the mother of the Messiah. The beautiful story unfolds after she and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem to be counted in a census:

*"While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2: 6-7).*

Tradition places the actual birthplace in one of the caves on the edge of town that were used by shepherds for shelter. The simple words have a deeper meaning—the manger was a feedbox where animals ate. This was a fitting place for the *Word-made-flesh* who gave his body as our spiritual food in the Eucharist. The fact that there was no room already set the stage for the rejection of Jesus by many of his people. Regarding childbirth itself Jesus once said: *"When a woman is in labor she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy because a child has been born into the world"* (John 16: 21). It was a labor of love resulting in a quiet moment of joy for Mary and Joseph who attended her.



## The Prayer of Meditation

*"Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart"* (Luke 2: 19). In these few words we see how Mary carefully observed how God's plan was unfolding, not as the world expected, but as God had designed it from all eternity. As she was growing in humility, she was also gaining the wisdom that comes from quietly and faithfully meditating on God's word and his wonderful ways. Her quiet heart was a living example of Psalm 143: 5: *"I ponder all your deeds, /the works of your hands I recall."*

## Prayer of Prostration and Homage

Sometime after Jesus was born, astrologers traveled from the east with a star guiding them, to find the newborn king in order to pay him homage. Their arrival in Jerusalem caused a disturbance in the palace of Herod. The chief priests and scribes searched the scriptures to find out where the Messiah was supposed to be born. Herod then sent the astrologers to Bethlehem

with the instructions to return after they had found the child and give him a report. The visitors set out once again, and the star appeared to guide them to the place where Jesus was:

*“They were overjoyed at seeing the star, and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts...”* (Matthew 2: 10-11).

Prostrating, as these visitors did before Jesus, was a traditional manner of paying homage to royalty or dignitaries. It was a *prayer in action* just as their precious gifts represented their desire to give him the best they had—the gifts they brought with them over a great distance. Like Joseph, they too were visited in a dream by an angel who warned them to return home by another route to safeguard the child.

### **Following God’s Dream**

Once again Joseph found himself in a difficult spot regarding Mary and the child Jesus. Herod was determined to protect his power and remain on the throne. He was willing to destroy any threat, even if it was from the Messiah. He gave orders that any boy in Bethlehem who was two years old or under to be killed. Once again, Joseph who could be called “the dreamer” like his ancestor in Genesis, was guided by an angel’s voice in another dream:

*“Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you”* (Matthew 2: 13).



### **Prayer of Presentation**

When the time came according to the Law of Moses for Mary to be purified, and the child Jesus to be presented in the temple to the Lord as a first-born male, the family traveled to Jerusalem to carry out these duties. In her poverty Mary offered two turtledoves as the law allowed. Although the Messiah was unknown and numbered among the poor, Jesus did not escape the notice of Simeon. *“This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him”* (Luke 2: 25). The Spirit revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Simeon entered the temple at the exact time that the parents of Jesus were performing their duties:

*“...he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:*

*‘Now, Master, you may let your servant go  
in peace, according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel’ ”* (Luke 2: 28-32).

## **The Prayer of Marvel**

To marvel is to be full of wonder. As Mary and Joseph were “marveling” at all this, Simeon blessed them and then turned his attention to the mother of Jesus and spoke mysterious words: “*Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed*” (Luke 2: 34-35). This did not mean that Mary would die by the sword. It meant that her heart would be pierced with sorrow as her son was crucified.

There also was an eighty-four old prophetess who was always in the temple fasting and praying day and night. She also entered the temple when all this was happening and offered thanks to God for this child who would deliver God’s people. As the parents of Jesus returned home to Nazareth, this powerful event of prophecy and prayer must have made a great impression on them. The memory of it remained until the evangelist recorded it. Marveling at what God has done (or is doing, if we are able to realize it) is also a way of praying.

## **Prayer of Lost and Found**

Mary and Joseph used to go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the feast of the Passover, and when Jesus was twelve years old they went as usual. When they joined their traveling party and began the journey home, Jesus was not with them but they assumed he was in the group. But when they looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances they did not find him. Every parent can imagine the panic that set in. Where could he be? Was he lost? Was he in danger? As they retraced their steps to Jerusalem they must have prayed continually for God’s help to find him.

After three long days they finally found him. He had stayed behind to be with the teachers in the temple. When his parents came up to Jesus, it was Mary who spoke to him: “*Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety*” (Luke 2: 48). Perhaps typical of a youth who did not grasp why his parents were so worried, Jesus replied: “*Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” (Luke 2: 49).

Yet when Joseph and Mary prayed to find Jesus, they received an answer far greater than they expected. They found Jesus, but also had to give up part of him to his role as the Son of God. For Jesus was beginning to realize that his real Father was calling him to serve his people. But for Jesus also, this plan of God would be postponed for a few more years. As the gospel related: “*He went down with them then and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them;...*” (Luke 2: 51). As for Mary, she had much to ponder: “*...and his mother kept all these things in her heart*” (Luke 2: 51). Mary was keeping a great deal in her heart, as she meditated on the goodness and wisdom of God’s plan for his people and what her role might be in it. Would she remain in the background or would she be asked to do more for God?

## **Prayer of Confidence**

Some years later, Jesus left home and set out to see John the Baptist who was preaching and baptizing across the Jordan river. After being baptized by John and hearing the voice of his

Father say to him *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”* (Mark 1: 11), Jesus went into the desert in obedience to the Spirit and remained there praying and fasting for forty days. When he emerged from that experience and his trial with the devil, he began to gather his first disciples. Not long after, Jesus and his disciples were invited to a wedding in the town of Cana, and joined the celebration. It also happened that *“...the mother of Jesus was there”* (John 2: 1). This was the setting for the first miracle of Jesus, or “sign” as John’s gospel calls it. It also was the wedding that marked the beginning of his ministry. It came about with the involvement of his mother: *“When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ ”* (John 2: 3).

In a real way, Mary was simply being a typical mother and concerned guest. We know from the previous descriptions of her that she was a thoughtful, reflective person. So it would not be unusual for her to notice that the wine for the guests had run out. Her motherly heart felt pity for the newly weds who were about to be embarrassed and disappointed at their own wedding. It should have been a happy celebration, but it seemed headed for disaster.

So Mary did the natural thing, she told her son about the problem. When Jesus said: *“Woman, how does your concern affect me?”* (John 2: 4) his reply did not shake her confidence. She simply turned to the servers and said: *“Do whatever he tells you”* (John 2:5). In many respects, her words are like her consent to the angel before she became pregnant: *“May it be done to me according to your word”* (Luke 1: 38).

The outcome of it all was that Jesus changed six stone jars of water into the best wine of the day. When the head waiter said to the groom: *“...you have kept the good wine until now”* (John 2: 10), perhaps only Jesus understood that he was the Father’s “choice wine” after all the patriarchs, kings and prophets had their day. Only later would his disciples see the connection. In her quiet way, Mary’s intercession helped bring about a great moment in salvation history at Cana. Perhaps she was only being a good mother that day, but in due time she would be the mother of the Church. *“After this, he and his mother, [his] brothers and his disciples went down to Capernaum...”* (John 2:12).



## **The Family of Jesus**

One day, while Jesus was speaking to the crowd that had gathered to hear him, his mother and family arrived and sent word that they would like to speak with him:

*“[Someone told him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, asking to speak with you.’] He said in reply to the one who told him, ‘Who is my mother? Who are my broth-*

ers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother’ ” (Matthew 12: 47-50).

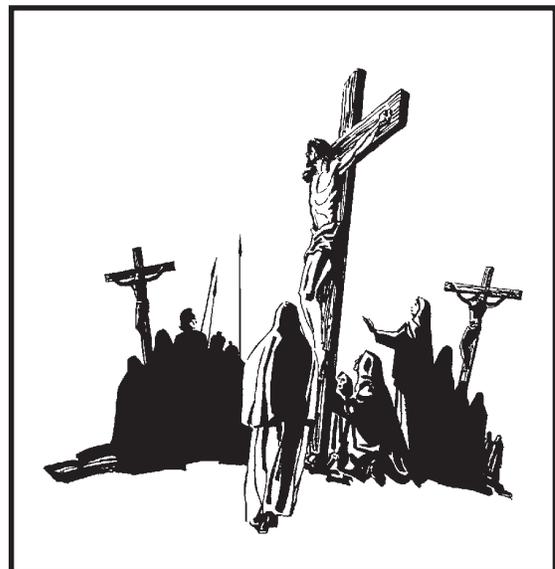
The response of Jesus might seem harsh to our ears, especially because we have always been taught the commandment to honor your father and your mother. But Jesus is always the teacher for all people, not just a few, and the heart of his gospel message embraced a whole family of brothers and sisters. We do not know if he did meet with them after his remarks, but we do know that the words did not turn Mary or the members of his family away from following him. Mary and others show up in other parts of the gospels and they clearly are his loyal followers even during his passion, death and resurrection.

If the words of Jesus were a hard pill to swallow at the time, the humility of Mary took the medicine Jesus handed her, and she grew in her appreciation of her Son and the gospel he was preaching. Mary was too well-grounded in faith and humility not to realize that in the ministry of Jesus, God’s will was what mattered most. The will of God was what Jesus prayed and worked for, and as his mother, that was all that she wanted and prayed for too. We know that Mary “got it” that day, even if it was a difficult moment to realize that once more her Son was *about his Father’s business*. The only way that anyone could belong to the family of disciples was to be totally devoted to the will of God. Such devotion brought her to the foot of the cross in wordless prayer for her dying Son and that the Father’s will be done.

### **Wordless Prayer at the Cross**

*“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala” (John 19: 25).*

It is remarkable that Mary is described as *standing* at the cross. She was not sitting on the ground from feeling weak, or fainting from grief. She was standing at her post next to her crucified Son. She saw every moment of his horrible suffering and did not run away. She was very strong even though her own heart was pierced with suffering. Above all, she had faith in her Son even as the crowd around her was mocking him. If she would have prayed aloud, she might have said: *“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done...according to your word”* (Luke 1: 38).



Hers was a living prayer, a prayer of witness without words, because no words of Mary during the crucifixion were recorded in scripture. This was the mysterious fulfillment of Simeon’s prophesy years ago when she presented her first-born Son in the temple:

*“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed”* (Luke 2: 34-35).

## MARY IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

### Praying in the Midst of the Church

After the ascension of Jesus into heaven the entire group of apostles returned to Jerusalem and gathered in the upper room where they were staying. They were joined by Mary the mother of Jesus, and several others:

*“All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14).*

At one point there were about a hundred and twenty disciples present when Peter led the group in finding someone *“...to take the place in this apostolic ministry from which Judas turned away to go to his own place”* (Acts 1: 25). The disciple Matthias was chosen to join the apostles. These were the days before the Holy Spirit came upon the group and formed them into a force that transformed the world.

This is the last we hear of Mary in the *Acts of the Apostles*, but she was in the midst of her Son’s disciples, faithfully waiting for the Holy Spirit that was promised by Jesus, to guide and empower them to spread his gospel.



### 3. The People of the Gospels and Prayer

There are many beautiful examples of prayer provided by the people who encountered Jesus in the gospels. Some simply praised him, others asked to be taught the truth, or turned to him for help and healing. Still others were helped by Jesus even though they did know who he was.

#### THE PRAYER OF THE SHEPHERDS

True to God's way of doing things, the quiet birth of Jesus was not announced publicly to the Jewish or Roman authorities. It was made known to simple, poor shepherds through angels. In their encounter with these heavenly visitors the shepherds' prayer was one of total awe: *"...they were struck with great fear"* (Luke 2:9). But after the angels left the shepherds wasted no time acting on the good news: *" 'Let us go, then, to Bethlehem, to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went in haste..."* (Luke 2: 15-16). God has a special love for the poor, so the shepherds were the first to see the newborn Messiah and his poor parents.



The shepherds, with Mary and Joseph, were the first to pray in honor of the Messiah's birth: *"Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen..."* (Luke 2: 20). All of this was according to God's plan. The infant in the manger was the answer to the prayers of great prophets, kings, judges and leaders, but also the "little ones" like the shepherds. In the shepherds' prayer, we learn that God tells us not to be afraid of him and to realize how much He values us, no matter what others think of us.

#### THE PRAYER OF SEEKING

Several years after his birth and the *hidden* years of his upbringing, Jesus began his public ministry. One day John the Baptist sent his own disciples to Jesus with the question: *"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"* (Luke 7:20). They came with a question that everyone who follows Jesus might ask as they prayerfully reflect on his gospel. Their question echoes what the great saint and teacher St. Anselm put into his famous saying: *faith seeking reason*. In other words, as believers our minds still seek to understand what we believe. As Peter wrote: *"Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope"* (1 Peter 3:15). Jesus was not offended by John's disciples and their search for truth. He invited them to look at his deeds: blind people see, lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news. Like John's disciples our prayer can be a request to know Jesus better and understand our faith.

## THE PRAYER OF UNWORTHINESS

Throughout the gospels we encounter people whose prayers were amazingly humble. They put their egos aside when asking Jesus to heal another person. The centurion who appealed on behalf of his servant was such an example:

*“ ‘Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, suffering dreadfully.’ He said to him, ‘I will come and cure him.’ The centurion said in reply, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed...’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed...And Jesus said to the centurion, ‘You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you.’ And at that very hour [his] servant was healed” (Matthew 8: 5-13).*

The Church has taken this prayer of humility and included it the Mass, just before Communion is distributed to the people. Both priest and people express their unworthiness to receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, repeating this humble centurion’s prayer..

## THE PRAYER FOR SIGHT

Sometimes other people in the gospels who approached Jesus were bolder in their prayer, especially when they felt desperate and knew that Jesus was nearby.

*“Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, ‘[Lord,] Son of David, have pity on us!’ The crowd warned them to be silent, but they called out all the more, ‘Lord, Son of David, have pity on us!’ Jesus stopped and called them and said, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ They answered him, ‘Lord, let our eyes be opened.’ Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight, and followed him” (Matthew 20: 30-34).* They kept praying even when those around them told them to be quiet. They received eye sight and faith that day.

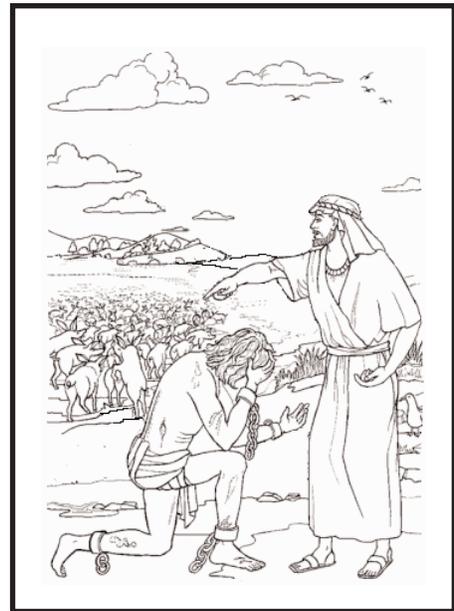


## THE PRAYER FOR LIBERATION

Although this next passage involves an exorcism (casting out a demon) it also describes a desperate prayer for healing by a very unhappy person. The healing of the “*Gerasene demoniac*” is a remarkable story about a person who not only frightened others who tried to put him in chains, but also was living with great inner pain. He desperately needed to be free of the forces that were beyond his control. No doubt deep in his soul he longed for healing, but he could not find the strength or words to ask it for himself. Only his inner demons responded when this poor man tried to approach Jesus:

*“When he got out of the boat, at once a man from the tombs who had an unclean spirit met him. The man had been dwelling among the tombs, and no one could restrain him any longer, even with a chain. In fact, he had frequently been bound with shackles and chains, but the*

*chains had been pulled apart by him and the shackles smashed, and no one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the hillsides he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones. Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!'* ” (Mark 5: 2-7).



Despite his inner torment, this person still prayed with his body, throwing himself to the ground before Jesus. In the meantime, Jesus reached out to him by first addressing the unclean spirit who possessed him. He demanded that it leave him. It is interesting that this demon was named *Legion* because “*There are many of us*” (v. 9). It also pleaded with Jesus to be left alone. The prayer of this tortured, possessed man was answered when *Legion* left him. When the local people came to see what had happened, they found him, “*...sitting there clothed and in his right mind*” (v. 15). The prayer of this “demoniac” especially touches those who feel overcome by addictions or emotions that feel out of control. Another word for holiness is *wholeness*, and our word *saint* comes from the same word that means *sanity*. With God’s healing power can bring us health in body, mind and soul.

## THE PRAYER OF UNBELIEF

In the ancient world, many emotional and physical problems were thought to be caused by “demons.” This was because unseen forces seemed to overtake people with symptoms they could not explain otherwise. The Greek word “*daimon*” was used for demonic possession as well as illness and its effects like seizures or convulsions. In the following passage, a desperate father has a son with a life-threatening illness since childhood. He brings him to Jesus and prays for his help:

*“Teacher, I have brought to you my son possessed by a mute spirit. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid”* (Mark 9: 17-18).

Jesus asked for the boy and when they placed him in front of Jesus “*...the spirit immediately threw the boy into convulsions. As he fell to the ground, he began to roll around and foam at the mouth*” (v. 20). After telling Jesus that when this has happened before, he often fell into fire or water where he was in danger of being killed. He added: “*But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*” (v. 22). Jesus noticed that the father used the word “*if*” and repeated it: “*‘If you can!’ Everything is possible to one who has faith*” (v. 23). Realizing that Jesus wanted to heal his son and his own weak faith, the father cried out with a prayer that every christian can share: “*I do believe, help my unbelief!*” (v. 24). Then with one command Jesus told the spirit to never enter him again and freed the boy from the grip of his terrible condition. The boy remained on the ground as if dead, so Jesus took him by the hand, helped him stand up and gave him back to his father. The father who prayed and the son who was cured both had their

lives restored that day. Later, when the disciples asked why they couldn't drive out this spirit, Jesus said: *"This kind can only come out through prayer"* (v. 29).

## THE PRAYER TO BE MADE CLEAN

In contrast to the father who said to Jesus *"if you can"* the next story show us someone who said *"you can"* even though he was an outcast from the community because of his disease.

*"Now there was a man full of leprosy in one of the towns where he was; and when he saw Jesus, he fell prostrate, pleaded with him, and said, 'Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean.' Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, 'I do will it. Be made clean.' And the leprosy left him immediately"* (Luke 5: 12-13).

Here was a man who was forced to live apart from other people because were disgusted by his appearance but also because it was against the law to touch him. But without hesitating Jesus put out his hand and touched him. In doing so, Jesus ignored the law and welcomed this *"outcast"* of society.

Just as he did for this leper, Jesus is willing to reach out to us and touch our sores when we turn to him for healing. He knows exactly who we are and where to find our sores, and goes directly to them. Sometimes we ourselves do not know where our sores are - we are *"in denial"* about the real causes of our spiritual or emotional pain. Jesus is our Divine Physician who knows us better than we know ourselves. This story teaches us that God is never repulsed by us or our problems and *can* heal us.

## THE PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

One time a Pharisee invited Jesus to come to his house for a meal and Jesus accepted. But when he reclined at the table, a *"sinful woman"* found out that Jesus was there and came to him. In spite of her critics, she bravely put her prayer into action:

*"Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment"* (Luke 7: 37-38).

The Pharisee who invited Jesus watched all this and thought that if Jesus was really a prophet he would know what kind of woman was touching him. Jesus knew what his host was thinking, as the gospel states: *"Jesus said to him in reply, 'Simon, I have something to say to you'"* (v. 40). It must have surprised Simon to realize that Jesus read his thoughts. Nothing is hidden from God, neither our thoughts nor the real motives for our actions, even when they appear to be good. God sees the human heart and does not judge as human beings do. Despite her reputation, this woman presented herself with great courage at the feet of Jesus. At that moment, before her accusers, she poured out her heart



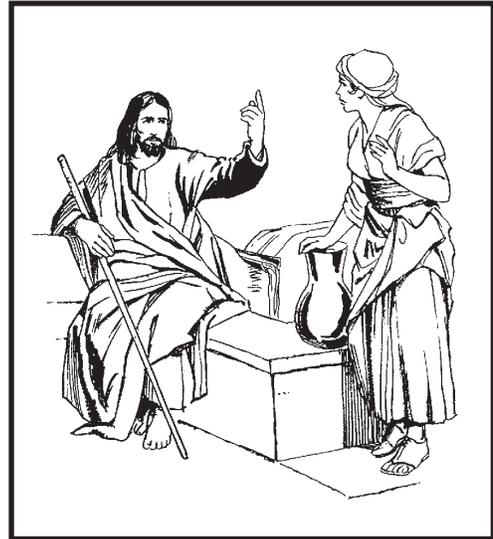
to him. And Jesus, who was not greeted with a kiss from his host and did not get his feet washed, read the hearts of the host and this “unwelcome” guest. As usual, Jesus sided with the outcast, defending her prayer and the sincerity of her heart. Then he invited his host to take a deeper look at this woman:

*“Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered”* (vs. 44-45).

In response to this woman’s repentant prayer, Jesus honored her courage and love: *“So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little”* (v. 47). Then he turned to her and spoke directly to her, restoring her dignity and self-worth: *“Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace”* (Luke 7: 48-50). Because of her repentant prayer and the forgiveness she received, this woman was set free.

## THE PRAYER FOR LIVING WATER

Sometimes we ask God for something that we *think we want*, but receive what God *knows we need*. This was the case with the Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the public well near her home town. It was a remarkable setting for her prayer, because it happened in Samaria where no “good” Jew would travel. Secondly, it took place in public between a man and a woman, much to the surprise of the apostles. Once again, Jesus was not concerned about what people might think. His focus was on the spiritual wellbeing of the person before him. Jesus spoke first and seemed to focus on his thirst for water. *“A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’”* (John 4: 7).



They were alone for while because the apostles were in town buying food. The woman did not give Jesus a drink but responded: *“ ‘How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?’...Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’”* (John 4: 9-10). Jesus wasted no time in taking their discussion to a level deeper than bodily thirst. Since the words “living water” can also mean “flowing water” the woman did not follow Jesus at first. She wondered how Jesus could get water from the deep well without a bucket. But Jesus kept leading her to his deeper meaning: *“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life’”* (John 4: 13-14). She still did not understand what Jesus was talking about: *“The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water’ ”* (v. 15).

Only when Jesus told her everything about herself, recalling all the husbands she’d had, did she

begin to realize that Jesus was someone very special. She went from calling him a prophet, to saying that he was the Messiah: “*Jesus said to her, ‘I am he, the one who is speaking with you’*” (v. 26). This woman’s prayer for living water is every person’s prayer for more than the world has to offer. She became a believer along with the people of her town who invited Jesus to stay with them. Jesus accepted their invitation and remained for two days. At the end of his stay, each one had found their own spring of water welling up within them: “*...they said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world’*” (v. 42).

## THE PRAYER OF FINAL CONVERSION

One of the most remarkable examples of repentant prayer in the gospels is given by a man who was crucified with Jesus\*: “*When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him and the criminals there, one on his right, the other on his left*” (Luke 23: 33). As often happens in life, two people react in totally different ways to the same situation: “*Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us.’ The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply, ‘Have you no fear of God, for you are subject to the same condemnation? And indeed, we have been condemned justly, for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes, but this man has done nothing criminal.’ Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’*” (Luke 23: 39-43).

Like the leper who said “can” this repentant criminal did not say to Jesus “if” he entered his kingdom but “when.” With this one word he showed remarkable faith in the One dying next to him who looked like a total failure. How this man made such a leap of faith is a mystery known to God alone. But it was witnessed by those standing nearby who recorded it in Luke’s gospel. His story inspires others who might hesitate to believe in God’s mercy and love. He dared to believe in God’s mercy, and when he threw himself upon it, Jesus gave him total pardon and the promise of eternal life. However, after Jesus died, this *good thief* hung on the cross alone until the soldiers broke his legs and he also died. Before then, with Jesus gone, he might have felt the “dark night” that so many saints have experienced at some point during their lives—like the abandonment that Jesus felt during his crucifixion. But, as the Bible reveals:



“*Even darkness is not dark to you, and night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to you*” (Psalm 139: 12).

\*An ancient tradition gives the name *Dismas* to this saint who also is called the *good thief*. He is the patron saint of the last minute conversion and the second chance.

## 4. The Disciples and Prayer

Those who were first followers of Christ, the apostles and disciples who were eyewitnesses of Jesus' ministry also have left us a legacy of prayer. No doubt they followed the way in which Jesus gathered them and prayed with them while he was on earth. Certainly the psalms would have been a regular part of their daily prayers, as well as reading passages from the Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament), and recalling the words and deeds of Jesus that would form the Christian scriptures (The New Testament). Besides formal prayers, however, they left us the legacy of their spoken and unspoken prayers as they encountered Jesus in his ministry and his resurrection.

### PRAYER OF OBEDIENCE

The challenge of following Jesus sometimes brought his disciples to the point where they simply had to trust in him, even though their own efforts had brought them nothing to show for it. This was the case when Jesus told Peter and his fishing crew to drop their nets into the lake for a catch of fish, even though they had fished all night without any luck: "*Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets*" (Luke 5: 5). Such a prayer of obedience to the greater plan of God, even when it does not seem to make sense, it is a total surrender of the will.

### PRAYER IN THE MIDST OF FEAR

Another time on the sea, the disciples found themselves in the midst of a storm with Jesus asleep on a cushion. When the huge waves began to fill the boat with water, "*They woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'*" (Mark 4: 38). As soon as Jesus woke up, he calmed the wind and the water, so that the disciples were filled with awe. Martin Luther King once said: "True peace is peace amidst the storm" so when we are feeling overwhelmed we can find calm at the center of the storm in prayerful reliance on God who cares about us and holds us in his power. Another time at sea, after night had fallen, the disciples tried to row against the wind, but "*...they were tossed about*" (Mark 6: 48). Jesus appeared suddenly, only to terrify them, because they thought they were seeing a ghost. "*But at once he spoke with them, 'Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid!'* He got into the boat with them and the wind died down" (Mark 6: 50-51). There are times when our prayer is simply our terror in the night as God seems to be far from us, yet faith teaches that he is in the same boat with us. After all, Jesus also endured the terrors of Gethsemane before he suffered and died.

### PRAYER WHEN OVERWHELMED BY NEED

There is another kind of feeling overwhelmed when the needs of others seem beyond our ability to help them. This happened to the disciples when a huge crowd had followed Jesus into the countryside and listened to him teach for three days. When Jesus indicated that they should find food for them, they said to him: "*Where can anyone get enough bread to satisfy them here in this deserted place?*" (Mark 8: 4). How many times have Christ's followers prayed in this same way as they faced great hunger, homelessness, illness and disaster – needs that seemed overwhelming? Then we are thrown upon the goodness of God and the generosity of the community.

## PRAYER OF SHARED JOY

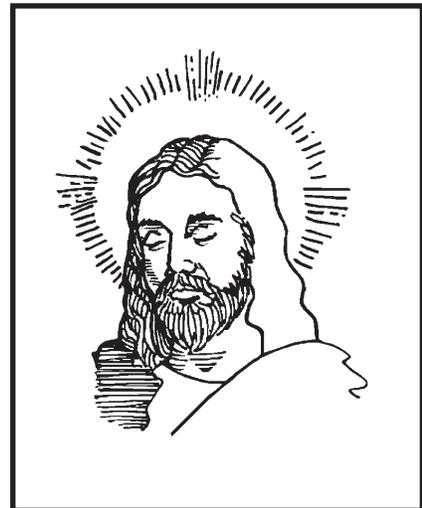
*“The apostles gathered together with Jesus and reported all they had done and taught”* (Mark 6: 30). There are times when we, like the apostles, come to Jesus and share with him all that we have done in his name. We know the deep and rewarding joy of working for his glory, spreading the gospel – “teaching” the good news he has shared with us, to give freely to others for their happiness.

## MISGUIDED PRAYER

There story in the gospels that provides us with an example of prayer that is misguided: *“Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached him with her sons and did him homage, wishing to ask him for something. He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She answered him, ‘Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom.’ Jesus said in reply, ‘You do not know what you are asking’ ”* (Matthew 20: 20-22). Like the mother of these two disciples, we might ask for what is not for God’s glory but what will advance our own name or the plan we think is best. This passage reflects the one in Mark 10: 35 where James and John say to Jesus: *“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* The answer to this kind of prayer is the same that Jesus gave his disciples then: *“It shall not be so among you”* (v. 26). True prayer seeks humbly and only the will of God. All else is misguided.

## PRAYER OF TRANSFIGURATION

As the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us, there is *“...a time to be silent, and a time to speak”* (Ecclesiastes 3: 6). When Jesus chose Peter, James and John to go with him to the mountain –and it was he who chose them–they found that very quickly they were without words before the greatness of God. Suddenly the appearance of Jesus changed so that *“...his face shone like the sun and his cloathes became white as light”* (Matthew 17: 2). When Moses and Elijah appeared beside Jesus Peter started to say, *“Lord, it is good that we are here...”* as he suggested setting up tents for them (v. 4). However, his words were cut off when *“...a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him’ ”* (v. 5). At such a moment human words failed and there was only one response: *“When the disciples heard this, they fell prostrate and were very much afraid”* (v. 6). This deep wordless prayer within the cloud ended when *“...Jesus came and touched them, saying, ‘Rise, and do not be afraid’ ”* (v. 7).



There are moments of prayer when we have no more words as we sense God’s infinite goodness, mercy and love. This is called *contemplative prayer*, and as the Cistercian monk Fr. Thomas Keating has said, “Silence is God’s first language.”

## PRAYER IN THE FACE OF DEATH

The prayers of Martha and Mary began simply by presenting their need to Jesus without even mentioning a cure for their brother Lazarus:

*“So the sisters sent word to him, saying, ‘Master, the one you love is ill’ ”* (John 11: 3).

For some reason Jesus did not go immediately to see his friend. And while he finally was on the road, Lazarus died. Martha’s prayer “*even now*” grew deeper in faith: “*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him; but Mary sat at home. Martha said to*

*Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. [But] even now I know that whatever you ask of God, God will give you.’ ”* (John 11: 20-22).

When “*Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise’ ”* (v. 23) Martha’s thoughts went ahead to the final resurrection: “*Martha said to him, ‘I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day’ ”* (v. 24). So great was her belief in Jesus that she was able to see beyond her grief and set her sights on a more distant hope. Then Jesus spoke those comforting words used to this day in Christian burials: “*‘I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe in this?’ ”* (John 11: 25-26). Martha’s faith kept pace with the words of Jesus: “*She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world’ ”* (v. 27). When Mary came to meet Jesus on the road, she echoed the faith of her sister: “*...she fell at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ ”* (v. 32).

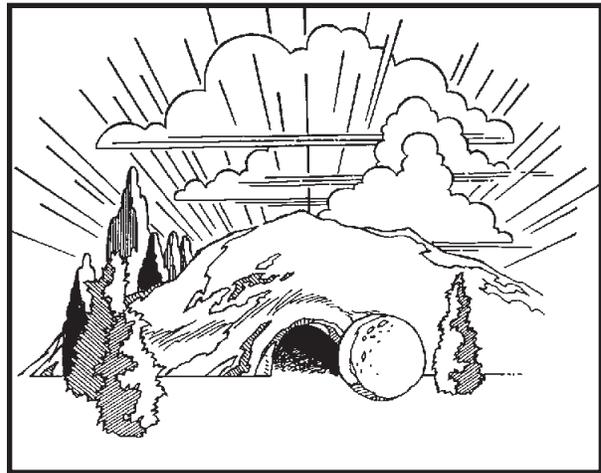
When Jesus arrived at the tomb—a cave with a stone rolled across the entrance—he asked that the stone be rolled away. Then he thanked his Father who *always hears him* and “*...cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, tied hand and foot with burial bands and his face was wrapped in a cloth. So Jesus said to them, ‘Untie him and let him go’ ”* (John 11: 43-44). Many who witnessed that day “*...what he had done began to believe in him*” (v. 45). Never once did the faith and trust of Martha and Mary falter, even after their brother died. They have given us an example of unshakable faith in Jesus who, like his Father, always hears us.

## THE PRAYER OF JOYFUL WELCOME

As Jesus prepared to enter Jerusalem, his disciples could not hold back their joy as they announced his arrival in the city. The Church relives this prayer each year on Palm Sunday.

*“The very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and strewed them on the road. The crowds preceding him and those following kept crying out and saying:*

*‘Hosanna to the Son of David;*



*blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord;  
hosanna in the highest' ” (Matthew 21: 1-11).*

The Church also has included this joyful prayer in the Mass, before the consecration when the community of believers looks to the arrival of the Lord in the transformation of the bread and wine into his Body and Blood. (See also Mark 11: 1-10, Luke 19: 28-40 and John 12: 12-19).

#### THE PRAYER OF SOUL-SEARCHING

Faith also has its moments of soul-searching, when we need God’s guidance and strength to remain loyal to the promises of our baptism to pattern our lives after the gospel. We may think we have arrived in the spiritual life. Then something happens that causes us to re-examine our loyalty. This happened to those gathered with Jesus at the final Passover: *“And while they were eating, he said, ‘Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely it is not I, Lord?’ And he said in reply, ‘He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me’ ” (Matthew 26: 21-23).* At times our own weakness causes us to be uncertain of our loyalty to Jesus. We are faced with the knowledge that we are capable of denying him when we ignore the needs of others, fail to stand up for what is right or to defend the truth. And yet as followers of Jesus we have *dipped into the same dish* as we have broken bread with the Lord in the Eucharist.

#### THE FAILURE TO WATCH AND PRAY

Sometimes in prayer our human frailty takes over completely, when the grief or tragedy is almost too much to understand or to bear. At such times we are no different than the disciples. We find it difficult to “watch and pray” as Jesus asked Peter, James and John to do while he agonized in the garden. Even after repeated requests from Jesus, they did not stay awake and pray with him: *“Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him” (Mark 14:40).*

#### THE PRAYER OF BREAKDOWN

*“And immediately a cock crowed a second time. Then Peter remembered the word that Jesus had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows twice you will deny me three times’ He broke down and wept” (Mark 14: 72).* In these few short words the gospel describes how Peter was brought face to face with his own failure and the memory of what Jesus had foretold about him. Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself, and yet his tears, as bitter as they were, did not lead to despair but to the realization of how much Jesus loved him. We may break down as we realize all that we have done or not done, or the lies we have lived. But our weakness and failure can be the point of a new beginning. It sometimes is darkest just before the dawn as we discover the gift to believe in God’s mercy.



## THE PRAYER OF SILENT VIGIL

After Jesus died, and as evening came on, his body was removed from the cross, wrapped in linen and placed in the nearby tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. *“Then he rolled a huge stone across the entrance to the tomb and departed. but Mary Magdalene and the other Mary remained sitting there, facing the tomb”* (Matthew 27: 61). For these faithful followers of Jesus who remained in silent vigil at the grave of Jesus, there was nothing left to do but face the stark reality of what had been done to Jesus. Things were totally out of their control as all human power was at an end, and they were left totally in the hands of God.

## THE PRAYER OF DAWNING FAITH

When *“...Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb...”* (John 20: 1) she ran to tell Peter and the disciple (described as the one whom Jesus loved) that the body of Jesus was gone. Immediately they took off running to see for themselves, with Peter lagging behind. When the other disciple arrived first he looked down into the tomb, but did not go in until Peter arrived and entered first. They saw the burial cloths lying there with no body in them, and the facial cloth rolled up separately. Although it does not say Peter believed, John’s gospel does say that the other disciple *“...saw and believed”* (John 20: 8). Because he was the disciple whom Jesus loved, it is as if love set the stage for belief. The disciple’s reaction to the empty tomb was a type of prayer that each of us can appreciate. When we faced with a great mystery that has no explanation except God’s power, we are filled with awe, humility, faith and joy at what God has done.

## THE PRAYER OF REUNION

Mary of Magdala, also a person of great love, had returned to the tomb with the two disciples. But after they left, she *“...stayed outside the tomb weeping. And as she wept, she bent over the tomb and saw two angels in white sitting there, one at the head and one at the feet where the body of Jesus had been. And they said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken my Lord, and I don’t know where they laid him.’ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?’ ”* (John 20: 11-15). Mary might have been so filled with tears that she did not recognize Jesus, because she mistook him for a gardner. But when Jesus said her name, *“Mary!”* (John 20: 16), she recognized him immediately. Her prayer was answered as she found again the love of her life. Jesus, however, had work for her to do and told her: *“Stop holding on to me,...”* (John 20: 17). She was to be the “apostle to the apostles” as early Christian writers called her, and announce to them that he was alive: *“But go to my brothers and tell them ‘I am going to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’ ”* (John 20: 17).



Like Mary, our spiritual lives cannot be just “Jesus and me” without concern for our brothers and sisters. We hold Jesus in our prayers and in the Eucharist, but then serve him in the other members of his body as we share his good news with them.

### THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

On the same day that Mary Magdalene was told: *“He is not here; he has been raised up.*

*Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee—...”* (Luke 24: 6), two disciples were traveling to a village outside of Jerusalem. On the way they met a “stranger” who asked what they were discussing. So they told him about the death of Jesus and how they were hoping he was the one to set them free: *“ ‘Besides all this, today, the third day since these things happened, some women of our group have just brought us some astonishing news’ ”* (Luke 24: 22). After they had shared all this, the stranger began explaining to them every part of scripture that had to do with Jesus. When they got close to the village, he seemed to be going further, *“But they pressed him: ‘Stay with us...’ So he went in to stay with them. When he had seated himself with them to eat, he took bread, pronounced the blessing, then broke the bread and began to distribute it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him;...”* (Luke 24: 30).



To this day, we gather as the Church to recall the scriptures and to invite the Lord to “stay with us” as we open our eyes and recognize him again in the breaking of the bread.

### THE PRAYER OF DOUBT DISPELLED

The story of how the apostle Thomas changed from a doubter to a believer in his Master is a very moving one. He stubbornly resisted the attempts of the other disciples to convince him that Jesus was alive: *“Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail-marks and put my hand into his side I will not believe”* (John 20: 25). In response to his unbelief Jesus suddenly arrived through locked doors and after a greeting of peace began showing Thomas his hands, inviting him to touch them as well as his pierced side. We can only imagine what the face of Thomas looked like, but we do have his words *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20: 28). These few short words have become a prayer of faith for the believers of every age – even though they have not seen the Lord as Thomas did that day. But there are the comforting words of Jesus: *“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed”* (John 20: 29).

### THE PRAYER OF THE LEAP OF FAITH

Later on Peter and a group of disciples went fishing but caught nothing all night. At dawn they began to return to shore, where Jesus was standing and said to them: *“Cast your net over the right side of the boat and you will find something”* (John 21: 6). They did, but could not pull in the net because it was so heavy with fish. *“So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord.’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he...jumped into the sea”* (John 21: 7). Without hesitating Peter went to Jesus even though he had betrayed him. A person of less faith and love would have stayed away in shame. But Peter jumped into the water believing that “the Lord” would accept him back. Prayer is the leap of faith that nothing can keep us from Christ.

## ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

At first the followers of Jesus continued to honor the Sabbath, to worship in the temple and celebrate the Jewish holy days: *“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o’clock hour of prayer”* (Acts 3:1). But they also gathered together for their own prayers using the upper room where Jesus shared his last meal with them—the gift of the Eucharist. But as more believers joined them, they began to meet in other places, even in private homes. During this time they were becoming the new people of God. In this first brief description we see how a spirit of unity and prayer marked the first Christian community:

*“When they entered the city, they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon, the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers”* (Acts 1:13-14).

In the next chapter of Acts, after they had gathered in one place and the Holy Spirit with the sound of wind and tongues of fire had descended on them, we are given another glimpse into the life of the first Christian community:

*“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers”* (Acts 2:42).

We do not know exactly what *“the prayers”* were; perhaps they were the psalms or intercessory prayers, or an early collection of Eucharistic prayers. One thing is certain—prayer was central to their life together.

As the number of disciples continued to grow, the need arose to organize themselves into various roles. The apostles called the community together and suggested that they choose seven men who were known to be deeply spiritual and wise, to help with taking care of the needy. This would ease the burden on the apostles:

*“...whereas we shall devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word”* (Acts 6:4).

This was agreed upon by everyone in the community, and the seven deacons were presented to the apostles: *“...who prayed and laid hands on them”* (Acts 6:6).

### THE PRAYER OF LAYING ON HANDS

In blessing the seven deacons, the apostles placed their hands on them. This gesture of blessing that was used by these first members of the Church had its origin in Jesus himself, as we saw in the gospels. This gesture of Jesus (e.g. Mark 6: 5) had its roots in the Old Testament:

*“And the LORD replied to Moses, ‘Take Joshua, son of Nun,*



*a man of spirit, and lay your hand upon him. Have him stand in the presence of the priest Eleazar and of the whole community, and commission him before their eyes. Invest him with some of your own dignity, that the whole Israelite community may obey him' ” (Numbers 27: 18).*

This use of the hands in prayerful blessing and to bestow a special role is found throughout the rest of Acts. When the apostles realized that the people of Samaria had been baptized in Christ's name but had not received the Holy Spirit, they sent Peter and John to pray with them: *“Then they laid hands on them and they received the holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17).*

In another instance this gesture was used by the leaders of the church in Antioch to send Paul and Barnabas on their mission. It also is interesting that the Greek word for *“liturgy”* is used when referring to *worshipping*:

*“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, completing their fasting and prayer, they laid hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13: 2-3).*

## PLACES OF PRAYER

Acts 16: 5 refers to the growth of the *“congregations”* which most likely did not gather to pray publicly or in churches, but met wherever they could find room, often in homes like that of the convert Lydia. But individual believers, like Paul and his companions as they traveled, often prayed wherever they happened to be, whether it was along a river bank or even in a jail!

*“On the sabbath we went outside the city gate along the river where we thought there would be a place of prayer” (Acts 16:13).*

When Paul and Silas were arrested for disturbing the peace with their preaching they were stripped, flogged and put into maximum security with their feet chained to a stake:

*“About midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened, there was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook; all the doors flew open and the chains of all were pulled loose” (Acts 16:25-26).*

Prayer can take place in any setting, as long as we lift our minds and hearts to God. After the example of Paul and Silas we might also hope that our prayers would rock our prisons to their foundations so that our chains might come loose!

## THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

As was already mentioned in Acts 2: 42, the congregation of believers continued to devote themselves to the *“breaking of the bread.”* This was more than a meal symbolizing their unity. It was a celebration and memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. It was the promise of Christ to be with his followers always:

*“On the first day of the week when we gathered to break bread, Paul spoke to them...and he kept on speaking until midnight” (Acts 20: 7).*

The following passage clarifies this even more:

*“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf”* (1 Corinthians 10: 16).

It has been the constant and faithful teaching of the Catholic Church that our Eucharistic prayer is directly tied to the belief of the first Christians who gathered to “break bread.” As Paul taught in this passage from 1 Corinthians 10: 16, when the bread and cup are blessed they truly become the body and blood of Christ.

## **THE EPISTLES**

### **THE ABBA PRAYER - OUR FATHER**

In his great letter to the believers living in Rome, Paul reminded these first Christians of the special word that Jesus used when speaking with God, and during his earthly ministry also taught his followers to use. As Christians we are not to consider ourselves distant from God, like the servants of royalty, but members of his family. We are God’s beloved children:

*“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ ”* (Romans 8: 14-15).

Paul also uses this same word in Galatians 4: 6: *“As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ ”* He encourages us to see ourselves for what we really are – children of the God. We can speak to him as our “Papa” (which is what *Abba* means in Aramaic) because he loves us and embraces us as his family. This should give us tremendous comfort and confidence when we come to him with all our faults and weaknesses, as well as the gifts we use for his service.

### **PRAYER WITH THE HELP OF THE SPIRIT**

Even so, we may have difficulty in knowing how to pray. We may have a number of reasons why we feel that way—we do not have the right words, feel like we are not really connecting with God. When need help to pray, Paul reminds us that we have the Spirit whom Jesus has sent to be our helper. We only need to call on him:

*“In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings”* (Romans 8: 26).

Sometimes life in general, and our spiritual lives in particular, can seem like a test of strength and endurance. Therefore, when we pray Paul encourages us to: *“Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer”* (Romans 12:12).

But to make sure that we do not pray in a vacuum, that is, unaware or unconcerned about the

needs of others, Paul follows up this advice with a reminder to care for needs of others as if they were our own. We are to treat everyone with the same respect, forgive injuries, live at peace with everyone, even to the extent of feeding our enemy, so that we ourselves are not overcome by evil, but are overcoming evil with good. This is a tall order that cannot be accomplished without the help that comes from prayer.

## THE PRAYER OF BUILDING COMMUNITY

In Paul's day there were many exciting things happening in the community of believers. It was necessary to discern what was good and useful for the wellbeing and unity of God's people. Paul had this to say about the gift of tongues or glossalalia as it also is called:

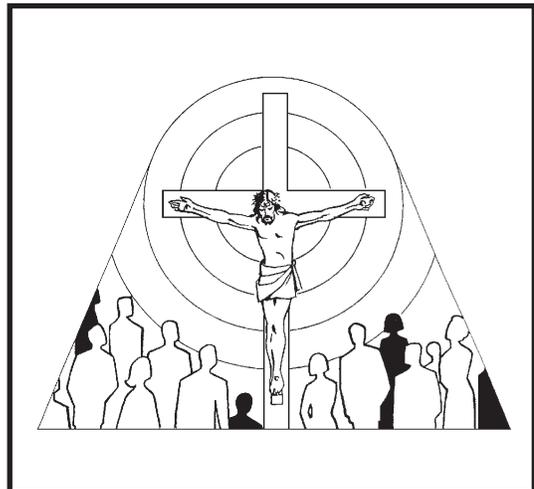
*"[For] if I pray in a tongue, my spirit is at prayer but my mind is unproductive. So what is to be done? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind. I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind. Otherwise, if you pronounce a blessing [with] the spirit, how shall one who holds the place of the uninstructed say the 'Amen' to your thanksgiving since he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks very well, but the other is not built up"* (1 Corinthians 14:14-17).

Paul admits that he also has spoken in tongues, but he explains that what is important is that other worshippers are not excluded and that the community is "built up." Christian prayer is with and for the community. It is not isolated or for the benefit of just a few. Paul goes on to say that he would rather speak five understandable words than ten thousand ones in a tongue no one understands, in order "...to instruct others..." (v.19).

## PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Prayer on behalf the needs of others, or *intercessory prayer*, is a solid Christian tradition based in scripture and the practice of the first followers of Christ. It is the responsibility of the Church to console and to offer intercessory prayer for its members, as well as all people who are in need:

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God"* (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).



Christian prayer is never meant to be totally focused on oneself, but to include the needs of the whole body of Christ. Even when we are praying by ourselves, we are not alone because we are joined to the entire body of Christ, as well as those who have died in Christ. We belong to Christ and all his members wherever they are, and our prayers strengthen one another in accord with the wisdom and will of God. When we feel weak it is a happy truth that we can rely on the strength of others, by calling on their prayers to help us:

*“For we rejoice when we are weak but you are strong. What we pray for is your improvement”*  
(2 Corinthians 13: 9).

This special calling from God to pray for everyone is spelled out clearly in the following passage:

*“First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone...that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.*

*For there is one God.  
There is also one mediator between God and the human race,  
Christ Jesus, himself human,  
who gave himself as a ransom for all”* (1 Timothy 2: 1-6).

## PRAYER FOR THE SICK

This next scripture passage shows how the Christian community used many forms of prayer: *hymns* (see Canticles at the end of this book), *praying with church leaders*, *anointing with oil and confessing sins to one another*. Each of these was for the purpose of healing the body and giving spiritual support to one another:

*“If anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church and they should pray over him and anoint [him] with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven.*

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed”*  
(James 5:13-16).

In our prayers we should ask God for wisdom and knowledge, and include whatever is best for others—what really matters. This is especially true if we live in a society that holds values that are at odds with the gospel and thinks little of the will of God:

*“And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God”* (Philippians 1: 9-11).

Although we live in this world, Paul reminds his followers and us that we should always keep the day of Christ in mind, seeing everything in that light, as we wait peacefully and joyfully for his coming:

*“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4: 6-7).

Paul goes on to encourage Christ's followers to spiritually strengthen themselves by keeping focused on what is good rather than evil. Because of God's grace, he is able to give himself as an example to follow:

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you"* (Philippians 4: 8-9).

## PERSEVERING IN PRAYER

We are encouraged to be faithful in prayer and not give up, as we thank God for what he has done in the past, is doing now and will do in the future:

*"Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving"* (Colossians 4: 2).

Life hands us many challenges and there seem to be endless reasons to pray for the needs of others and our own needs. As people sometimes say, "my prayer list grows longer everyday":



*"With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones and also for me..."* (Ephesians 6: 18-19).

At times scripture indicates that it the unique Christian calling is to pray always:

*"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus"* (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18).

Paul repeats this special calling, referring also to the traditional manner of lifting hands in prayer: *"It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands..."* (1 Timothy 2: 8).

And Paul is someone who has taken upon himself this same practice of constant prayer. That is why he can speak of himself as an example: *"...as I remember you constantly in my prayers, night and day"* (2 Timothy 1: 3).

## THE PRAYER OF PRIESTLY PEOPLE

Christ is our model and mediator in intercessory prayer. We pray with him for the salvation of the world, fully aware that we ourselves have been redeemed by the blood of our high priest:

*"But when Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all...with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption"* (Hebrews 9: 11-12).

Hebrews reminds us that because Jesus is our high priest, who has given his life for the forgiveness of sins, our hearts must be patterned after his. As we have heard in the gospels Jesus has teaches us to leave our gift at the altar and reconcile with those we have hurt or who have hurt us. Since this can seem like an impossible task at times, the word of God helps us:

*“Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating between soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him, but everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account”* (Hebrews 4: 12-13). As we pray, the sword of God’s word cuts both ways: reconciliation with God includes reconciliation with one another.

Because we are members of Christ’s body and he is our high priest, we are a *priestly* people. Through us, his Church, Christ continues his presence on earth in order to invite all people to hear the gospel and find salvation in him. As his body we continue to gather and celebrate his sacrifice and to carry on his work of worshipping the Father and interceding for all humanity:

*“But you are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”* (1 Peter 2: 9).

As his members, the Church has been called from darkness to light, and we are still on the way. We are not perfect by any means, as the Church reminds us:

*“All members of the Church, including her ministers, must acknowledge that they are sinners.<sup>300</sup> In everyone, the weeds of sin will still be mixed with the good wheat of the Gospel until the end of time”<sup>301</sup>* (Catechism of the Catholic Church, Article 9, Paragraph 9, #827). <sup>300</sup> Cf. 1 Jn 1:8-10 <sup>301</sup> Cf. Mt 13:24-30

## PRAYER FOR THE COMING DAY OF GOD

In 1 Peter Christians are called *strangers*, meaning we are passing through this world and are here for only a short time compared to eternity. We live fully aware that our earthly journey will end. Since heaven is our real home we need to live accordingly:

*“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and sojourners to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against the soul”* (1 Peter 2: 11).

Peter is trying to inspire us because this world and everything in it going to pass away. One day the world will be dissolved in a consuming fire sent by God. The good news is that this will usher in a new and eternal state where God’s justice will reign.

*“Since everything is to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought [you] to be, conducting yourselves in holiness and devotion, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God”* (2 Peter 3:11-12).

In light of the *day of God*, Christians are called to make a choice to live for eternity rather than time, focusing on the spiritual rather than just the material, of choosing what is lasting over what is passing. When the *day of God* comes, humanity’s “day” will be over. Therefore, as Christ’s followers are to wait for the *day of God* and look forward to its coming.

The *day of God* refers to God's eternal reign that will follow the *day of the Lord* when the heavens and earth will be destroyed. The *day of God* will be God's complete, final triumph and his eternal reign. Therefore, Christians should wait and long for that day. "*The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be serious and sober for prayers*" (1 Peter 4:7).

No one knows when the end will come, both with regard to our own deaths, and to the end of the world. But we must watch and pray, like the wise virgins who kept their lamps burning. Peter's purpose in providing us with this message is to help us to prepare and to encourage us give glory to God:

*"Therefore, beloved, since you are forewarned, be on your guard not to be led into the error of the unprincipled and to fall from your own stability. But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory now and to the day of eternity. [Amen]"* (2 Peter 3: 17-18).

## REVELATION

### THE PRAYER OF VICTORY

The Book of *Revelation*, or *Apocalypse* as it also is called, is the last book of the Bible. It is one of the most difficult books to understand because it is filled with symbolism. The use of symbols is typical of apocalyptic writing, which was popular during the centuries just before and after Christ. This book was written to provide encouragement to early Christians who were being ruthlessly persecuted. In a way, it could be regarded as one long prayer for deliverance and hope in God's victory.

When they read or heard this book persecuted Christians realized that Christ was "*the Lamb*" referred to in the book, and that he and his heavenly Father would be victorious in the end. Those who remained faithful to Christ, even at the cost of their lives, also would see their own victory fulfilled when Christ came in glory at the end of time. They also could take comfort in realizing that the forces of evil further God's plan even though they are not aware it. It may not always seem like it, but in the end, God is the Lord of history and the God of salvation.

*Revelation* describes an epic spiritual struggle between the forces of good and evil. And the followers of Christ who were caught up in this struggle on earth, were given a heavenly vision to sustain them during their sufferings. By this time, Christians had seen both Peter and Paul put to death, and perhaps many of the other apostles as well. Countless members of the Christian community were being put on trial and sentenced to death by the sword, beheading and fire. They were being tortured for public sport in the coliseums of the Roman empire.

God's people were in great need of encouragement. The vision of victory that *Revelation* brought was a much-needed message for the persecuted followers of Jesus then and in any age when suffering for the gospel occurs:



*“After this I had a vision of an open door to heaven,...”* (Revelation 4:1).

The vision showed the heavenly court with a view of the throne of the eternal God who reigns over all ages, past, present and future:

*“ ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,  
who was, and who is, and who is to come’ ”* (Revelation 4: 8).

The majesty and awe surrounding the One seated on the throne is so great that it inspires hope and confidence in those who are suffering on earth:

*“Worthy are you, Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things;  
because of your will they came to be  
and were created”* (Revelation 4: 11).

Revelation assures God’s people that their prayers are reaching heaven, and that they are valued as God’s own people:

*“Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which were the prayers of the holy ones. They sang a new hymn:*

*‘...for you were slain and with your blood  
you purchased for God  
those from every tribe and tongue,  
people and nation.  
You made of them a kingdom and priests for our God,  
and they will reign on earth’ ”* (Revelation 5: 8-10).



In contrast to the thrones of earthly rulers—who brought bodily harm to God’s people—his throne was infinitely more beautiful. It gave them hope and victory in the midst of their present suffering:

*“I looked again and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne...They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice:*

*‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain  
to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength,  
honor and glory and blessing’ ”* (Revelation 5:11-12).

God’s suffering people look for the salvation that comes from God alone, not the powers of earth that cannot prevail forever. They take comfort that God is seated on his throne, and with him is Christ their shepherd who will care for them tenderly:

*“The one who sits on the throne will shelter them.  
They will not hunger or thirst anymore,  
nor will the sun or any heat strike them,  
For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them.  
and lead them to springs of life-giving water,  
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”* (Revelation 7: 15-17).

These passages are very similar to the scene Jesus described in his parable of the last judgment:

*“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him”* (Matthew 25: 31-32).

This is how the Book of Revelation describes that same final event in the words of the twenty-four elders as they fell down in worship before God and his Anointed One:

*“For you have assumed your great power  
and have established your reign.  
The nations raged,  
but your wrath has come,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,...”* (Revelation 11: 17-18).

In the Christian vision of final victory, God is the real king of the nations. He alone is holy and all nations must come and worship before him once everything has been revealed and judged.

When Christ comes and his judgment has been completed, the whole crowd of heavenly and earthly witnesses will join in an awesome celebration of victory described by the vision:

*“Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said:*

*‘Alleluia!  
The Lord has established his reign,  
[our] God, the almighty.  
Let us rejoice and be glad  
and give him glory.’ ”* (Revelation 19:6-7).

What Christian would not thrill at the description of this scene and long for the day of its coming, especially those who are oppressed and imprisoned hoping to be set free or to remain strong as they witness to Christ and his gospel? Ever since Christ died, rose from the dead and ascended to his Father, the Church has prayed for his return in glory:



*“Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”* (Revelation 22: 20). This prayer is *“Maranatha”* in Aramaic.

# Canticles in the New Testament

We already have encountered some of the *canticles* or *songs* contained in the New Testament: Luke 1: 46-55 (*Mary's Magnificat*) and Luke 1: 68-79 (*Zechariah's Canticle*). Although *Simeon's Prophecy* (Luke 2: 29-32) was spoken to the parents of Jesus, it might also be regarded as a canticle since the Church has put its beautiful words to music and sung it for centuries.

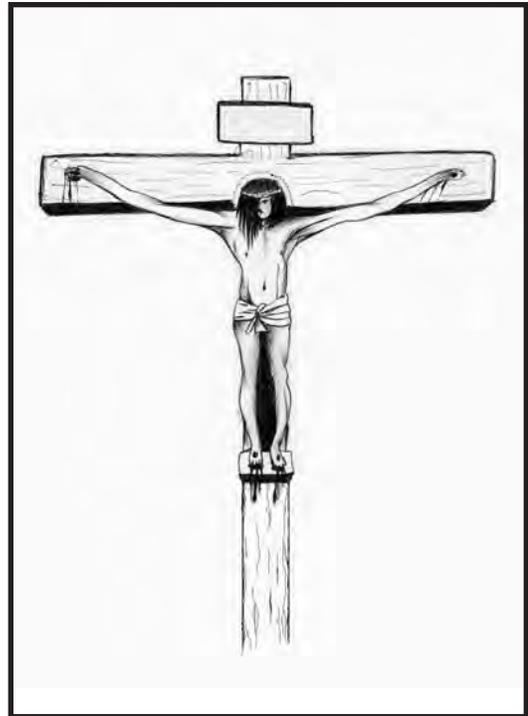
The other canticles listed here are thought by scripture scholars to be hymns that were created by the early Christians and sung by them during worship. They were included in scripture because of their beauty and their message:

## **Ephesians 1: 3-10**

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved.”*

## **Philippians 2: 6-11**

*“Who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
something to be grasped.  
Rather, he emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
coming in human likeness;  
and found human in appearance,  
he humbled himself,  
becoming obedient to death,  
even death on a cross.  
Because of this, God highly exalted him  
and bestowed on him the name  
that is above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus  
every knee should bend  
of those in heaven and on earth and  
under the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.”*



## **Colossians 1: 15-20**

*“He is the image of the invisible God,  
the firstborn of all creation.*

*For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,  
the visible and the invisible,  
whether thrones or dominations or principalities or powers,  
all things were created through him and for him.  
He is before all things,  
and in him all things hold together.  
He is head of the body, the church,  
He is the beginning, the first-born of the dead,  
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.  
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,  
and through him to reconcile all things for him,  
making peace by the blood of his cross  
[through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven.”*

### **Revelation 11: 17-18**

*“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,  
who are and who were.  
For you have assumed your great power  
you have established your reign.  
The nations have raged,  
but your wrath has come,  
and the time for the dead to be judged,  
and to recompense your servants, the prophets,  
and the holy ones and those who fear your name,  
the small and the great alike,  
and to destroy those who destroy the earth”*

### **Revelation 12: 10-12**

*“Now have salvation and power come,  
and the kingdom of our God  
and the authority of his Anointed.  
For the accuser of our brothers is cast out,  
who accuses them before our God day and night.  
They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
love for life did not deter them from death.  
Therefore, rejoice, you heavens,  
and you who dwell in them.  
But woe to you, earth and sea,  
for the Devil has come down to you in great fury,  
for he knows he has but a short time.”*

### **Revelation 4: 11**

*“Worthy are you, Lord our God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things;  
because of your will they came to be and were created.”*

## Revelation 5: 9-10,12,13

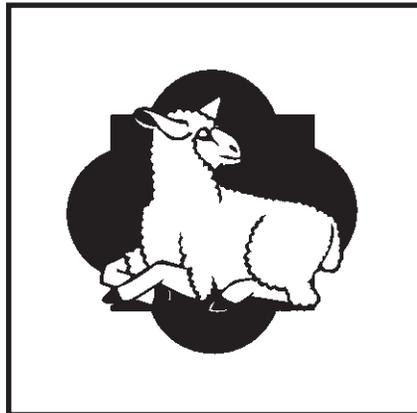
*“They sang a new hymn:*

*‘Worthy are you to receive the scroll  
and break open its seals,  
for you were slain and with your blood  
you purchased for God  
those from every tribe and tongue,  
people and nation.*

*You made them a kingdom and priests for our God,  
and they will reign on earth.’*

*‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain  
to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength,  
honor and glory and blessing.’*

*‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb  
be blessing and honor, glory and might,  
forever and ever.’”*





**REVIEW TEST**  
**Pray Always: Part 2**  
**Introduction**

*After completing all the test pages carefully  
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1. Unfortunately, each of us in our own time and place has repeated that “no” of our first parents, Adam and Eve.  True  False

2. In the New Testament, why can we think of Jesus as the new burning bush?

---

3. According to Psalm 44: 22 there are some things that even God does not see.  True  False.

4. What kind of hearts does Ezekiel 36: 26 say God will give us?

---

5. Whenever we open the Word of God, Jesus Christ is what? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Not everyone can pray. We have to be a special person or be good enough.  True  False

7. No prayers recorded in the Bible were offered to God in anger or grief:  True  False

8. When we can't think of anything to say in prayer, what can we do?

---

9. Give two of the basic aspects of prayer:

---

10. Why does James 4: 3 say that God may deny what we ask for?

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**REVIEW TEST**  
**Pray Always: Part 2**  
**1. Jesus and Prayer**

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1. According to Hebrews 1: 3 who or what is Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
2. After Jesus was born, he was brought up in a typical Jewish household. What did he learn from his parents? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What are the feast days described in Leviticus 23? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. When Jesus was presented at the temple why did his parents offer two turtledoves? \_\_\_\_\_
  
5. Going to Jerusalem for what celebration was a regular event for Jesus and his family? \_\_\_\_\_
  
6. “Jesus progressed steadily in wisdom and age and grace before God and men” (Luke 2: 52). In other words, what does this mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. After Jesus was baptized and stepped out of the water what did he see? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. In Matthew 3: 17 what did he hear his Father say? \_\_\_\_\_
  
9. In what three ways did the devil tempt Jesus?: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
10. Jesus responded to the devil with the words found in which book of the Bible? \_\_\_\_\_
  
11. The devil could quote scripture but why didn’t it make any difference with him? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
12. Even though he had the advantages of his Father’s presence and the guidance of the Spirit, what did Jesus still share with us? \_\_\_\_\_

13. What is every temptation an invitation to do? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Whenever we feel tempted we can turn to the words of scripture as Jesus did, and to the prayer he gave us to overcome the devil. What is that prayer? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Prayer must be the foundation of our actions, or eventually they will be like what? \_\_\_\_\_
16. As Jesus explained in John 4: 33, what really fed him? \_\_\_\_\_
17. In John 16: 32 why does Jesus say he is not alone? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Why was the tax collector's prayer pleasing to God? \_\_\_\_\_
19. "When you stand to pray, why should we forgive anyone against whom we have a grievance?" \_\_\_\_\_
20. "Abba" as a form of prayer is not found in the Old Testament. It is unique to Jesus, and is his special gift to his followers.  True  False
21. If any attempt at forgiveness will be true or have meaning what must we be open to? \_\_\_\_\_
22. According to Hebrews 4: 13, what "...lies bare and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must render an account"? \_\_\_\_\_
23. According to Matthew 18: 20 where two or three are gathered in his name who is in their midst? \_\_\_\_\_
24. There are many ways that Jesus has kept his promise to be with us. What are they? \_\_\_\_\_
25. The parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18: 3-8 was meant to show what? \_\_\_\_\_
26. Not all prayers are answered in the way we expect, but God always hears us.  True  False.
27. Jesus healed in many ways, laying his hands on people or simply touching them with his finger or when someone touched his clothing. But Jesus also healed and worked wonders by using what else? \_\_\_\_\_
28. The commands of Jesus can be regarded as what? \_\_\_\_\_

29. Although they are not exactly prayers, because the beatitudes are the foundation on which we should build our spiritual lives, what do they help us understand? \_\_\_\_\_

30. Because God favors the poor and the outcast—the people the world overlooks and does not value, the Catholic Church promotes what it calls: \_\_\_\_\_

31. What gift was a unique way for Jesus to show his love and remain with the disciples always, as often as they prayed this meal in his memory? \_\_\_\_\_

32. What made the humanity of Jesus very obvious during his prayer in the garden? \_\_\_\_\_

33. What did Jesus’ human nature recoil from in the garden? \_\_\_\_\_

34. In Luke 23: 34, what was the great priestly prayer of Jesus as he sacrificed his life to save not just his executioners but every human being: \_\_\_\_\_

35. Many words of Psalm 22 are remarkably close to the passion of Jesus. Provide an example: \_\_\_\_\_

36. “It is finished” means more than “It’s over.” What else does it mean? \_\_\_\_\_

37. In John 13: 24, “unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies” what will it remain? \_\_\_\_\_

38. Jesus gave his promise to every follower of his gospel. What is that promise? \_\_\_\_\_

39. According to John 20: 20 the first prayer of Jesus when he stood before his disciples behind locked doors was: \_\_\_\_\_

40. In John 20:21-23 Jesus returned once again to the central teaching of his gospel. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_



**REVIEW TEST**  
**Pray Always: Part 2**  
**2. Mary and Prayer**

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1. In the example of her prayers and actions what did Mary show us?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Mary had no difficulty understanding the angel's visit and his words:  True  False
3. After announcing that her cousin Elizabeth would also have a son what did the angel tell Mary?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What did Joseph plan to do about Mary before an angel spoke to him in a dream? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What words spoken by Elizabeth became part of the prayer known as the "Hail Mary"?  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Why is Mary's song (Luke 1: 46-55) sometimes referred to as the Magnificat?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. In Mary's song, what has God done for the lowly? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How does Mary's Song mirror the beatitudes and the gospel of God's mercy?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Already, the gospel theme of forgiveness of sins was present in Zechariah's prophecy. What words of his show this? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Besides Joseph and Mary who first offered prayers in honor of the Messiah's birth? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Why did the three astrologists prostrate themselves before Jesus?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. Why did Mary offer two turtle doves at the presentation? \_\_\_\_\_
13. "...you yourself shall be pierced with a sword..." (Luke 2: 34-35). Simeon meant that Mary would die by the sword.  True  False
14. Mary and Joseph used to go to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover.  True  False
15. According to John 2: 1 Jesus and his disciples were invited to a wedding in Cana. Who else happened to be there? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Mary's intercession at Cana helped bring about a great moment in salvation history:  True  False
17. Who is brother and sister and mother to Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Mary never understood that in the ministry of Jesus, God's will was what mattered most:  True  False
19. No words of Mary during the crucifixion were recorded in scripture:  True  False
20. After the ascension who also joined the apostles?:  
\_\_\_\_\_



**REVIEW TEST**  
**Pray Always: Part 2**  
**3. The People of the Gospels**  
**and Prayer**

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1. In their encounter with these heavenly visitors the shepherds' prayer was one of total awe. How does Luke 2:9 describe it? \_\_\_\_\_
2. In the shepherds' prayer, we learn that God tells us not to be afraid of him and to realize \_\_\_\_\_
3. Like John's disciples our prayer can be a request to know Jesus better and \_\_\_\_\_
4. The Church has taken this prayer of humility and included it the Mass, before Communion is distributed. Whose prayer is it? \_\_\_\_\_
5. *The crowd warned the two blind men to be silent, but what did they do?* \_\_\_\_\_
6. Despite his inner torment, the "demoniac" still prayed with his body by doing what? \_\_\_\_\_
7. The prayer of the "demoniac" especially touches those who feel what? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Realizing that Jesus wanted to heal his son and his own weak faith, the father cried out with a prayer every christian can share: " \_\_\_\_\_ "
9. Jesus ignored the law and welcomed the leper who was an "outcast" of society. What does this teach us? \_\_\_\_\_
10. When the "sinful woman" came to Jesus in the Pharisee's house, in spite of her critics what did she bravely do? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Because of her \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, the woman in Luke 7: 48-50 was set free. (Fill in the missing words)
12. Like the woman at the well, sometimes we ask God for something that we *think we want*, but receive \_\_\_\_\_.
13. *The woman at the well said to Jesus, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may not be thirsty."* Her prayer is every person's prayer for \_\_\_\_\_.
14. The repentant criminal on the cross prayed: "*Jesus, remember me if you come into your kingdom.*" True or False
15. The criminal known as the *good thief* is the patron saint of what two things? \_\_\_\_\_



**REVIEW TEST**  
**Pray Always: Part 2**  
**4. The Disciples and Prayer**

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1. In Acts 1: 14 what marked the first Christian community? \_\_\_\_\_
2. According to Acts 2:42 what 4 things did the first Christian community devote themselves to?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. In Acts 6:6 when the deacons were presented to the apostles what did the apostles do?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. For Jesus in Mark 6: 5, what gesture had deep roots in the Old Testament? \_\_\_\_\_
5. The word “liturgy” was first used in which scripture passage? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What were Paul and Silas doing as their fellow prisoners listened in Acts 16:25-26?  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Acts 2: 42, the congregation of believers devoted themselves to the “*breaking of the bread.*” This was more than a meal symbolizing their unity. What was it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 10: 16 that when the bread and cup are blessed they:  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Paul reminded the first Christians in Romans 8: 15 of a special word that Jesus used when speaking with God. What was this word? \_\_\_\_\_
10. What does “Abba” means in English? \_\_\_\_\_
11. According to Romans 8: 26 why does the Spirit help us in our weakness?  
\_\_\_\_\_
12. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 14: 14-16 what is important to remember about the gift of tongues?  
\_\_\_\_\_
13. What is intercessory prayer? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Christian prayer is never meant to be totally focused on oneself, but to include what?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. What kinds of prayer are listed in James 5: 13-16? \_\_\_\_\_
16. What should we learn to value *up to the very day of Christ* according to Philippians 1: 9?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. What does 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18 indicate as our unique Christian calling? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Because we are members of Christ’s body and he is our high priest, what are we?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Why should Christians wait and long for the *day of God*?  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. According to Revelation 22: 20 the Church prays for the return of Christ in glory with what prayer?  
\_\_\_\_\_ What is this prayer in Aramaic? \_\_\_\_\_



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