

Prayer: The Stairway to Heaven

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"He dreamed that a stairway was set up on the ground with its top reaching to heaven; angels of God were ascending and descending on it." Gen.28:12-13

Definition of Prayer:

Lifting our hearts and minds to God. Prayer is conversation with God.

"Prayer is the key of Heaven." - St. Augustine

"Prayer is a royal gate through which we enter into the heart of God."

- Ven. Louis of Granada

"Prayer is union with God" - St. John Vianney

The Four Main Purposes of Prayer:

1. Adoration: Proper worship of God due to Him as our creator, redeemer, and sanctifier.
2. Thanksgiving: Gratefulness to God for His spiritual and material gifts to us. Thus, in prayer we thank God for our life, our faith, our family, etc.
3. Reparation: To obtain pardon for our sins and remission of their punishment. In prayer we remember that we are sinners, we are sorry for our sins and ask forgiveness, and we seek to do penance for our sins through prayer. St. Ambrose says:"When prayer is poured forth, sins are covered."
4. Petition: In prayer we can ask God for what we need, both for our body and for our soul, for spiritual and material goods, for ourselves and for others.

The Seven Main Qualities of Prayer are:

1. **Devotion:** Putting our hearts into our prayers. "These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15:8)
2. **Fervor:** An intense desire to serve and love God through our prayer. "And falling into agony He prayed the more earnestly. And His sweat became as drops of blood running down upon the ground."(Luke 22:43,44)
2. **Perseverance:** We need to persevere in our prayer and not give up prayer so quickly. We need to continue to pray everyday. Christ says:"Which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him in the middle of the night and say to him,'Friend, lend me three loaves'...I say to you, although he will not get up and give to him because he is his

friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him all he needs."
(Luke 11:5-10/ See Also: Luke18:1-8, Matt.24:13).

"The deceiver knows that if a soul perseveres in practicing prayer it will be lost to him."
- St. Teresa of Avila "By humble and faithful prayer, the soul acquires, with time and perseverance, every virtue." - St. Catherine of Sienna

We should pray at least 15 minutes everyday otherwise our relationship with God would not develop. Since God is the most important Person in our life we should speak to Him everyday. We spend far more time each day simply eating or in recreation and entertainment. Our soul is more important than our body. And God is certainly more important than anyone or anything else in our life, so He deserves to be a priority. Concerning how often we should pray scripture says:- pray always (Luke 18:1)- pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)- pray at all times (Eph 6:18 and Acts 6:4).

4. **Humility:** "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6. See also: Matt.6:1-6,Luke 18:9-14).
5. **Attention:** How can we expect God to listen to our prayer if we are not paying attention to it? (See: Matt.6:7,8) Some degree of involuntary distraction in prayer is inevitable, but we should try to minimize it. St. Edmund says:"It is better to say one Our Father fervently and devoutly than a thousand with no devotion and full of distraction."
6. **Faith:** "Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) "Those who trust in you cannot be put to shame." (Daniel 3:40) "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matt. 19:26)
7. **Right Priority:** When we pray we need to have the right priority, namely that of God's will over ours. Jesus prayed: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will."(Lk.22:42)

Does God always answer our prayers? Yes. There are three answers to prayer- yes, no, and wait. No prayer is unanswered, and no prayer is unheard. St. Thomas teaches that God does not give us what we ask for in prayer if it is not favorable to our salvation. We must ask for what is in keeping with God's will for us. Christ teaches:

"...Do not be anxious, saying, 'what shall we eat?' or, 'what are we to wear?' (for after all these things the unbelievers seek); for your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides." (Matt. 6:31-33) "For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own soul?" (Matt. 16:26)

We must trust in God's wisdom, and not in our own foolishness. St. Augustine says: "We ought to be persuaded that what God refuses to our prayer, He grants to our salvation.

So we should understand that though God gives not what we wish, he gives what is for our good. When you are ill, you may ask for something that is bad for you, which the physician knows to be so. Suppose you ask for cold water: if it is good for you, the doctor will give it at once; if it is not, he will refuse it, but that does not mean that he does not hearken. In denying you your wish, he has hearkened to you for your health. So let charity, brethren, be in you: let charity be in you, and you need have no care. Even when your request is not granted, you are heard, though you know it not. He who faithfully prays to God for the necessities of this life is both mercifully heard, and mercifully not heard. For the physician knows better than the sick man what is good for the disease."

Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament:

Among the best places to pray is in a church where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle. Praying in the presence of Christ Himself helps set our hearts on fire with the love of God. (See Matt.26:40,41.)

The Benefits of Prayer:

Increased union with God, grace, faith, love, and help to resist temptation and keep the commandments. "Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation." (Matt. 26:41) Prayer is opposed to sin. It is virtually impossible to persevere in habitual mortal sin and persevere in prayer. One must cancel out the other, either you will persevere in prayer, or you will persevere in sin. You cannot persevere in both.

Concerning the Power of Prayer the Scripture teaches:

"The fervent petition of a holy man is powerful indeed."(James 5:16-18 See also:2 Kings 20:1-6,Joshua 10:12-14,Daniel 6). Elijah was only a man like us, yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain and no rain fell on the land for three years and six months. When he prayed again, the sky burst forth with rain and the land produced its crop.

Concerning the Power of Prayer the Saints teach:

"God governs the world, but prayer governs God Himself! - St. John Chrysostom

"I know something stronger than God: the man who prays. He makes God say:'Yes', when He had said 'No!'" - St. John Vianney

"He who prays, is saved; he who prays not, is damned!" - St. Alphonsus

"As our body cannot live without nourishment, so our soul cannot spiritually be kept alive without prayer." - St. Augustine

“The Rosary is the most divine of prayers after the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.”

- St. Charles of Borromeo