

FORMS OF PRAYER

BACKGROUND READING



In Scripture we find five forms of prayer: blessing and adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. Let us examine each of these individually.

Blessing and Adoration

We worship God through prayers of blessing and adoration. Blessing is the basic movement of Christian prayer: an encounter between God and the human person. God first blesses us, and we send our prayers up to Him, blessing Him and asking for His blessing upon us. Adoration is the attitude of the human person before God acknowledging that God is his or her creator and that he or she is a creature. The *Catechism* says, “Adoration is homage of the spirit to the ‘King of Glory,’ respectful silence in the presence of the ‘ever greater’ God” (CCC 2628). We can only truly receive God’s blessing and respond with blessing in return when our heart’s attitude is that of adoration.

Prayer of Petition

Petition is a form of prayer in which we ask God for good things, including our needs and our wants. There are many words found in the New Testament that express the prayer of petition: “ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat,

cry out, even ‘struggle in prayer’” (CCC 2629). We summarize all these shades of meaning in the word “petition.” But whatever form of prayer we use, we always express something of our relationship with our God. When we petition God for the things that we need, we acknowledge that we are God’s creatures who have sinned and who are in need of His divine assistance. This acknowledgment is an important part of the proper “attitude of the heart” that we must have whenever we pray.

The next step, once we have acknowledged that we are sinners before God, is to seek God’s forgiveness, as the *Catechism* explains: “The first movement of the prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness*” (CCC 2631). This is why we begin each celebration of Mass by asking forgiveness in the Penitential Rite—the prayer in which we respond, “Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy, Lord, have mercy.”

Once we have asked for God’s forgiveness, we can then ask Him for the things that we need. The Christian prayer of petition “is centered on the desire and *search for the Kingdom to come*, in keeping with the teaching of Christ” (CCC 2632). This desire is expressed when we pray in the Our Father, “Thy Kingdom come.” But just because we should always pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God, that doesn’t

mean that we shouldn't pray for our daily needs and concerns. God knows that we have earthly needs, and they are in fact part of our preparedness in order to work for the coming of the Kingdom. God wants to answer our temporal needs (food, clothing, shelter, friendships, and so forth) but we ask for them in relationship to the coming of His Kingdom.

Prayer of Intercession

The prayer of intercession is also a prayer of asking or petitioning. But instead of focusing on personal needs, it is concerned with the needs of others. The *Catechism* defines intercession as “a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners” (CCC 2634). When we intercede for others we participate in this ministry of Christ's. To intercede through prayer means to stand between a person and God asking for the things that this person needs. We become a bridge to God, through prayer, for another.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

The prayer of thanksgiving is a form of prayer in which we give thanks to God for every gift He has given us. Scripture tells us to “in all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). We can give thanks to God for hearing and answering our prayers even as we request them, because we have faith. Our faith believes the Word of God that reveals to us the truth that God loves

us, hears our prayers, and desires to answer them according to His will. Because we have faith, we can always give thanks as we pray.

Sometimes it is hard to understand how God answers our prayers. When we encounter difficult circumstances, or answers that were not what we wanted, we can be tempted to think that God did not hear us, or that He doesn't love us. Only through faith, which does not see and yet believes, can we trust in God's loving plan in answering our prayers. When we give thanks to God we are participating in Christ's thanksgiving, which is expressed most fully in the Eucharist.

Prayer of Praise

Praise is the form of prayer by which we celebrate God's goodness. As the *Catechism* explains, “Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS” (CCC 2639). In the Mass we pray the “Gloria,” which begins, “Glory to God in the highest.” When we sing God's praise we are joining with the heavenly choir who forever sings praise to God. The prayer of praise should be continually in the heart, and on the lips, of God's children.

We should conclude with the thought that the Eucharist expresses all forms of prayer. It is a pure offering of thanksgiving and adoration that glorifies God. It is a sacrifice of praise that satisfies all our needs. There is no better way of offering our hearts to God than by inviting Jesus into our hearts in the Blessed Sacrament!