



Overview of Common Catholic Spiritualities

This document breaks down the unique values, prayer styles, and spiritual missions of eight major Catholic spiritualities. It's meant to help people identify which spirituality they most naturally align with, whether through contemplation, service, teaching, or joyful community. Think of it as a guide to understanding how you best connect with God and live out your faith.

This is not a comprehensive guide as spiritual expressions evolve, and many people blend traditions or resonate with newly emerging movements. This overview is a starting point for understanding how your faith might take shape in daily life.

Carmelite 🌹

Core Values: Silence, solitude, mystical prayer, detachment from distractions.

Prayer Life: Deeply contemplative, focused on silent meditation, personal prayer, and mystical experiences. Practices mental prayer and Lectio Divina.

Approach to God: Finds God in stillness and solitude, preferring an intimate and interior relationship with Him over structured, communal prayer.

Spiritual Mission: Withdraws from worldly distractions to focus on deep union with God, often through asceticism and detachment.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Mental prayer, Lectio Divina, extended silent retreats.

Order: Discalced Carmelites (OCD), Carmelites of the Ancient Observance (O. Carm.)

Key Figures: St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Ávila, St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Modern Application: Ideal for those who seek deep contemplation and solitude as a means of growing closer to God.



Ignatian 🎓

Core Values: Intellectual faith, discernment, education, social justice.

Prayer Life: Uses structured discernment (Ignatian Spiritual Exercises, Examen of Conscience), combining prayer with active engagement in the world.

Approach to God: Sees God in all aspects of life, including work, study, and service. Encourages intellectual inquiry and theological exploration.

Spiritual Mission: Strives for spiritual and intellectual formation, seeking to shape leaders in faith and reason. Often involved in higher education, social justice, and missionary work.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Daily Examen, Ignatian contemplation, spiritual journaling.

Order: Society of Jesus (SJ)

Key Figures: St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, Fr. Pedro Arrupe.

Modern Application: Great for those who are drawn to critical thinking, teaching, or finding faith in everyday life.

Franciscan 🦒

Core Values: Simplicity, poverty, humility, service to the poor, love for creation.

Prayer Life: Focuses on simple, heartfelt prayer, often in nature, seeing God's presence in creation (Canticle of the Creatures).



Approach to God: Believes in serving Christ by serving others, particularly the marginalized. Prefers direct action over deep theological speculation.

Spiritual Mission: Dedicates life to helping the poor, promoting peace, and living simply. Advocates for environmental stewardship and social justice.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Volunteering, praying with nature, embracing simplicity.

Order: Order of Friars Minor (OFM), Capuchins (OFM Cap), Conventual Franciscans (OFM Conv)

Key Figures: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare of Assisi, St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Modern Application: Ideal for those passionate about charity, social justice, environmentalism, and simple living.

Dominican 📖

Core Values: Preaching, teaching, defending the faith, intellectual formation.

Prayer Life: Deeply rooted in Scripture, theology, and reasoned argument (Lectio Divina and the Rosary are central).

Approach to God: Seeks truth through study, debate, and philosophical reflection. Prefers structured theological discussions over purely personal experiences.

Spiritual Mission: Focused on evangelization through preaching and teaching, using reason and faith together. Defends Catholic doctrine against misunderstandings.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Lectio Divina, praying the Rosary, theological study.

Order: Order of Preachers (OP)



Key Figures: St. Dominic, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Catherine of Siena.

Modern Application: Perfect for those drawn to theological discussions, apologetics, teaching, and defending the faith through reason.

Benedictine 🏰

Core Values: Stability, order, community, structured prayer, hospitality.

Prayer Life: Follows a rigid prayer schedule, including the Liturgy of the Hours and monastic disciplines. Prefers reverent, meditative Masses with Gregorian chant.

Approach to God: Finds God in daily discipline and structure, seeing prayer and work (Ora et Labora) as equally sacred. Community living and hospitality are highly valued.

Spiritual Mission: Dedicates life to prayer, work, hospitality, and education, often in monasteries. Focuses on stability and rhythm in life.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Liturgy of the Hours, communal meals, stability in daily rhythm.

Order: Order of St. Benedict (OSB)

Key Figures: St. Benedict of Nursia, St. Scholastica, St. Anselm.

Modern Application: Great for those who thrive on routine, stability, structured prayer, and building strong faith-based communities.

Oratorian 🎵

Core Values: Joyful worship, community, music, hospitality, personal spiritual growth.



Prayer Life: Worship is vibrant, engaging, and communal, often incorporating music, art, and joyful celebrations (Oratories focus on informal prayer and fellowship).

Approach to God: Believes faith should be expressed outwardly through joy, fellowship, and creative worship. Finds God in community and shared experiences.

Spiritual Mission: Focuses on bringing people together in faith, hospitality, and the arts. Encourages lay involvement in Church life.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Group prayer, creative worship, music ministry.

Order: Congregation of the Oratory (CO)

Key Figures: St. Philip Neri, Bl. John Henry Newman.

Modern Application: Ideal for those who love community gatherings, engaging worship, and informal yet deep spiritual exploration.

Salesian

Core Values: Youth formation, joy, education, evangelization.

Prayer Life: Incorporates interactive faith experiences with young people, focusing on mentorship, fun, and practical spirituality.

Approach to God: Sees joy and community as central to faith. Believes education is a way to transform lives. Encourages practical Catholicism over rigid rituals.

Spiritual Mission: Dedicated to guiding and mentoring youth, especially in education, faith formation, and vocational training. Creating positive environments for young Catholics.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Youth ministry, spiritual mentorship, playful catechesis.



Order: Salesians of Don Bosco (SDB), Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA)

Key Figures: St. John Bosco, St. Mary Mazzarello.

Modern Application: Best suited for those drawn to youth ministry, Catholic education, and evangelization through joy and mentorship.

Missionary Orders 🌍

Core Values: Evangelization, global outreach, spreading the Gospel, charity work.

Prayer Life: Often active and on-the-go, integrating prayer into daily mission work. Uses Scripture, liturgical prayer, and personal devotionals.

Approach to God: Finds God through encountering new cultures, evangelizing, and direct missionary work. Views faith as something to be shared actively.

Spiritual Mission: Focuses on traveling to new places to spread the Gospel, establishing schools, churches, and charitable organizations in underserved areas.

Helpful Traditional Practices: Daily Mass, mission trips, intercessory prayer.

Order: Missionaries of Charity, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, Society of African Missions (SMA)

Key Figures: St. Francis Xavier, St. Mother Teresa, St. Isaac Jogues.

Modern Application: Ideal for those who feel called to serve globally, engage in missionary work, and help others encounter Christ in new places.



Additional Resources:

1) Books

1. The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything by Fr. James Martin, SJ

- A modern, relatable introduction to Jesuit spirituality for laypeople.

2. Interior Castle by St. Teresa of Ávila

- A classic Carmelite work exploring the stages of spiritual growth through contemplative prayer.

3. Introduction to the Devout Life by St. Francis de Sales

- A cornerstone of Salesian spirituality, focused on lay holiness in everyday life.

4. Francis of Assisi: A New Biography by Augustine Thompson, OP

- Offers a fresh, scholarly look at the life and spirituality of St. Francis and the Franciscan movement.

5. The Rule of St. Benedict

- A foundational text for understanding Benedictine spirituality and monastic discipline.

6. Dominican Spirituality: Principles and Practice by William A.

Hinnebusch, OP

- A helpful guide for understanding Dominican intellectual and preaching traditions.

2) Websites

1. Jesuits.org – <https://www.jesuits.org>



- Overview of Jesuit spirituality, vocations, and Ignatian resources.

2. Franciscan Media – <https://www.franciscanmedia.org>

- Articles, prayers, and insights rooted in Franciscan values.

3. Carmelite Spirituality – <https://ocarm.org>

- Official site of the Carmelite Order with deep resources on contemplative prayer and saints.

4. Order of Preachers (Dominicans) – <https://www.op.org>

- Covers Dominican life, mission, and global outreach.

5. Salesians of Don Bosco – <https://www.salesians.org>

- Resources about youth-centered spirituality and education.

6. Benedictine Monasticism – <https://www.osb.org>

- Site of the Order of St. Benedict, with a focus on liturgical life and community.

7. New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia – <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/>

- Detailed historical entries on nearly every order and tradition.

3) Articles

- **“Catholic Spirituality – Introduction” – Catholic Australia**

- Offers a clear overview of different modes of prayer and spiritual expression within the Church, discussing how various spiritualities contribute to Catholic identity [Individual Spiritualities](#)

- **“Spiritualities of the Catholic Church” – Our Sunday Visitor**



- Provides summaries of major Catholic spiritual traditions, including Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, Jesuit, and more, with guidance on how to explore them America [American Magazine - Spiritual Tradition](#)

- **“Ignatian Spirituality” (Wikipedia overview)**

- A well-researched summary of Ignatian spirituality and its origins in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, including core principles like the Examen and finding God in all things America https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatian_spirituality

- **“Catholic Spirituality” (Wikipedia)**

- Covers the broader landscape of Catholic spiritual life, explaining how different orders and lay traditions share a common goal while expressing unique charisms America https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_spirituality

- **“Spiritualities of the Catholic Church” – America Magazine**

- Although coverage is broader, this includes reflections on how Jesuit, Dominican, and Franciscan identities shape institutional life and lay engagement [Future of Religious Life](#)

Coming Soon 🔍

We plan to connect you with resources to find local parishes, priests, spiritual directors, and lay communities that align closely with your spiritual approach. Our goal is to help you practice your faith in ways that feel authentic and grounded in your spiritual identity.