

## INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER AND THE SACRAMENTS

*This is the confidence which we have in him,  
that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.*

—1 JOHN 5:14

### SCRIPTURE READING

*Either before you arrive or as you wait for class to begin, find this short passage from Sacred Scripture in your Bible or through an online search. Reading it will prepare you for this week's material.*

—Matthew 6:5–15

### OPENING PRAYER

O God, who gives us the gift of true prayer and of peace, graciously grant that, through the offering of our lives, we may do fitting homage to your divine majesty and, by partaking of the sacred mystery, we may be faithfully united in mind and heart. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.



### SESSION 3 VIDEO LESSON: INTRODUCTION TO PRAYER AND THE SACRAMENTS

*As you watch the video lesson, refer to these key highlights. Feel free to use the space provided to take notes.*

- ♦ The goal of Christian life is to become like God—to “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4).

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- ♦ Prayer is the raising of our minds and hearts to God.

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- ♦ Prayer involves both body and soul in one coordinated movement to God.

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- ♦ Prayer takes four main forms: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication.

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- ♦ A sacrament is an “efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC 1131).

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- ♦ A sacrament is a peculiar type of sign that *actually causes* what it signifies.

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## *Wisdom of the Saints*

For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux



### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

*Take a moment to answer these questions with a partner or with the group.*

1. What role does the body play in prayer?

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2. In what sense are the four kinds of prayer interconnected? How are they united in their origin and end?

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3. How is it that the sacraments are said to cause grace?

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## *Catechism Connection*

Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.

—CCC 2564

### **LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS**

*Discuss these questions with a partner or the group, or meditate on your own.*

1. Do you think of prayer primarily as a conversation between friends or as a burdensome obligation? Why is that so, and how can your prayer move toward conversation with God?

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2. Which form of prayer do you think you practice most often: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, or supplication? Why might that be? Where might God be prompting growth?

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3. How do you hope to see the sacraments “work” in your life?

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### WITNESS TO CONVERSION

*After concluding your group discussion, return to watch the second video where converts to the Catholic faith discuss their conversion and how they live today as Catholics.*

### Rome to Home

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God.

—Pope Paul VI, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 59



## KEY TERMS

**Prayer:** The raising of our hearts and minds to God.

**Liturgy:** The participation of the Church in the “work of God” through divine worship and the proclamation of the Gospel. Through the liturgy, Christ, our High Priest, continues the work of our redemption through the Church’s celebration of the mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection (see CCC 1067–69).

**Adoration:** The prayer that acknowledges God as God, Creator, and Savior, the Lord and Master of all that exists. Adoration is due to God alone who creates and saves man and who answers our prayers. It is the highest reverence that can be shown to someone through the worship of sacrifice.

**Sacrament:** An efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.



## *God’s Word*

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 4:4–7





### **CLOSING PRAYER**

Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

### **AT HOME REVIEW**

*Read this review of the material. Write down any questions you still have after doing so.*

#### **Meeting Christ in Prayer and Sacrament**

In the Catholic faith, we speak often about the life of grace and the virtue of charity. Charity is the very love of God poured into our hearts. Another name for charity is friendship—that shared love which knits hearts together and forges communion. It is for this reason that you will often hear the saints described as “the friends of God.”

Because of this intimate and interpersonal quality of holiness, the Catholic tradition stresses the importance of encountering the Person of Christ—of drawing near to and following Christ as beloved and friend.



In this section, we consider two ways in which we meet our divine friend and are transformed by his friendship: prayer and the sacramental life of the Church.

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God. It orders our relationship to God by giving him the praise he is due and by surrendering our hearts to our Lord and Beloved. A human person can share his heart with God, with angels, and with fellow men, but to God alone belongs that highest form of worship, which we call adoration. In adoration, we make a sacrifice of the whole of our life. We turn to God also in contrition as an expression of sorrow for our past sins. Furthermore, there is prayer of thanksgiving, which makes known to God our gratitude. Finally, there is prayer of supplication, or petition, in which we ask God for what we need. This also can include the needs of others, which is called intercessory prayer.

Prayer is both interior and exterior; interiorly, we offer him prompt devotion, and exteriorly, we offer him everything from hymns to humble postures. Prayer, as we have described, begins in *adoration*, the offering of the whole of one's life to God. It also takes the form of acts of sorrow or *contrition* as we lament our many offenses and resolve to turn from sin. Prayer bursts forth in *thanksgiving* when we recognize favors received and the many blessings of God's providence. And finally, it dares to ask God for what we need, which is often given the name *supplication*. These are the four types of prayer (adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication), often recalled through the acronym ACTS.

Prayer gradually converts our hearts to love what God loves. We profess that God grants the desires of those who fear him. His answers may not take the shape we originally had hoped, but he always hears our petitions. We can never go wrong when we pray devoutly and perseveringly for what makes our salvation possible. And in the end, we always receive the one thing necessary—Jesus Christ—in whom lies all our hope.

In the Catholic tradition, we use certain vocal prayers a lot in our liturgy and devotions. When his disciples asked Jesus how to pray, he offered the words of the Our Father—that greatest of prayers—which adorns the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and many of our devotions. From the lips



of the angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth, we learn the first half of the Hail Mary, and in the Middle Ages, pious tradition added the second, the “Holy Mary” response. In addition to these prayers, the Glory Be, the creeds, the responses of the Mass, and a handful of other prayers form the basic vocabulary of our worship. These prayers create a kind of pious culture and a liturgical life, bringing us into the presence of God.

Our prayer culminates here on earth in the sacramental life of the Church. Sacraments make the Incarnate Lord present among us; in the sacraments, we have certainty that we meet Christ and that power goes out from him to heal and to perfect us. They are the Lord’s perfect medicine for the healing of our souls, which have been weakened and wounded by our sins.

The *Catechism* defines a sacrament as an “efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (CCC 1131). All of the sacraments, we believe, are instituted by Christ. The seven sacraments of the new law are Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. In each sacrament, words and actions are combined and applied to the body and soul of the recipient; thus, they communicate the very grace of Christ.

The different sacraments correspond to different aspects of our spiritual life, and each of the seven sacraments communicates something distinct. In Baptism, we are born in grace and conformed to Christ. In Confirmation, we are sealed with the grace and made spiritually mature. In the Eucharist, we are nourished in grace and associated more perfectly with the mystical body. In Penance, we are healed of sin by grace and restored to communion with God. In Anointing of the Sick, we are given the grace to unite our sufferings to Christ’s and, in some cases, to prepare for death. In Holy Orders, the priest receives grace to order and serve the mystical body in the Person of Christ. Finally, in marriage, the couple is given the grace to build up the mystical body with children and sanctify the home and the world.

St. Augustine described a sacrament as “the sign of a sacred thing insofar as it sanctifies men.” Catholics do not think of the sacraments as empty rites or holy play-acting; rather, they are efficacious (effective),



saving mysteries—real causes of grace. It's a bit like how our words or symbolic gestures can sometimes bring about a new reality: when a man presents an engagement ring to a woman and asks her to marry him, and when she nods her head and puts the ring on her finger, these words and actions really put them in a new relationship of being engaged to marry. In a higher way, God, by his power, acts *through* the sacramental signs to bestow grace on us; that is, these sacramental signs *cause* grace.

In every sacrament, God is the principal cause and giver of grace, and the minister is his instrument. As the Council of Trent puts it, the sacraments communicate grace *efficaciously*, by the very carrying-out (*ex opere operato*) of the sacramental action. That is to say, when the minister uses the proper words and actions, while intending what the Church intends in administering the sacrament, then the sacrament causes its supernatural effect. When the priest says "This is my Body," it truly becomes the Body of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread. When the priest says "I absolve you," you are truly forgiven your sins and are returned to friendship with God if you are repentant.

Some might question the validity of a sacrament administered by a sinful deacon, priest, or bishop. However, we know that the minister of a sacrament acts *in the person of Christ* (*in persona Christi*), as his instrument. Provided that the minister intends to do what the Church intends, the sacrament communicates grace. The personal holiness of the minister may add to the efficacy of the sacrament, but a sinful minister does not detract from the spiritual effect of the sacrament itself (even if he might cause other bad effects, like scandal). Just as a sick doctor can still heal others, Christ can even use sinful ministers to give his healing grace.

In the end, what we celebrate in prayer and sacrament is God's gift of himself. Through the intimacy of worship, God calls us deeper into the saving mysteries of his passion, death, and resurrection and invites us, his beloved friends, into a yet more perfect communion. And so, by growth in prayer and by worthy and devout reception of the sacraments, we draw near to our divine friend who has promised to give us nothing less than himself.

**I STILL HAVE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:**

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**DIGGING DEEPER**

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Ratzinger, Joseph. *The Spirit of the Liturgy*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014.