

THE LITURGY: MORE THAN PRAYER

While private prayer is most essential for God's People, the public worship of the Church—the liturgy, shared whenever and wherever “two or three are gathered together” in Christ's name—is equally essential.

The liturgy, however, is more than prayer. It is

- ✧ the gathering of the faithful;
- ✧ the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs;
- ✧ the proclamation of the Good News of salvation in Christ, the Word of God;
- ✧ the intercession for the Church and the whole world;
- ✧ the offering of all things to God in the name of Christ;
- ✧ the remembrance, celebration, and participation in Christ's death and resurrection;
- ✧ the anticipation of Christ's Second Coming; and
- ✧ the experience of “the communion of the Holy Spirit and the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven.”

It is indeed true, as many will contend, that we need not participate in the Church's liturgy if we merely come to pray. However, if we wish to live the fullness of Christian life, then the liturgy is absolutely vital!

Because Christ Himself said, “Be holy, as I too am holy,” we ask and seek that very thing, so that we who have been made holy in Baptism may persevere in what we have begun to be. For this we pray daily. We have a daily need of being made holy, so that we who sin daily may be cleansed again of our sins by continual sanctification. We pray that this sanctification may abide in us, and we make this petition in our constant prayers, asking it day and night, so that the sanctification and life, which is received from the grace of God may, by His protection, be preserved (Saint Cyprian of Carthage).

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PRAYER





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Christ prayed regularly. In the process He taught us, his People, to pray as well. He taught us the Lord's Prayer and promised us that we will be granted whatever we ask in His name:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and to him who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Mt 7:7-8).

In the *Sermon on the Mount*, we find Christ's primary teaching concerning prayer:

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Pray then like this: Our Father, who art in heaven... (Mt 6:5-9).

With these words Christ teaches us how to pray properly and about the importance of personal, or private, prayer.

PERSONAL PRAYER

As God's People, we must pray personally and privately as Christ taught. If we pray only at the public liturgy of the Church then, even there, our prayer will be shallow and weak. We must pray

alone, behind closed doors, not merely in our rooms, but in the "room of our hearts," as the saints teach us. Within ourselves we must

- ✧ ask God for what we need;
- ✧ thank Him for what we have;
- ✧ praise Him for His mighty holiness and His tender mercy and love;
- ✧ complain and lament before Him over our frustrations, confusions, and sorrows; and
- ✧ seek from Him light in the face of darkness and comfort in the midst of affliction.

THY WILL BE DONE

We can ask God for anything. Nothing is too small or insignificant. But we must ask with Faith, possessing the conviction that God does hear and that He does answer in the way known only to Himself. Furthermore, this means that our only genuine and unchanging petition is the one taught us by Christ in word and deed: "Thy will be done!"

When we ask God to give us what we need and to enable us to accomplish His will, we cease placing "demands" on God. We seek not our desires, but His, striving to discern His will and to make it our own. We cannot take prayer seriously unless we are willing to follow unconditionally that which the answer to our prayer will compel us to do.

HOW TO PRAY

We know we must pray, yet we are often uncertain as to how we are to pray. While the Holy Fathers offer us an endless number of recommendations concerning prayer, these instructions can easily be synthesized into two basic rules:

- ✧ We must be brief in our prayer.
- ✧ We must be regular in our prayer.

Brevity brings about humility while ensuring that we accomplish that which we are really capable of accomplishing. It prevents us from falling into despair over trying too much. When praying, we must not be concerned with quantity, for Christ teaches that our "many words" often serve to guarantee that our prayers will go unheard and unanswered. It is not the length of our prayers which is critical, but rather the spirit in which they are offered.

Regularity means setting aside a certain portion of our day for prayer, thereby ensuring continuity in our presence before God. Regular prayer serves to remind us that the remembrance of God is a natural part of our daily lives and that the accomplishment of His will is the only purpose for which we truly pray.