

Aspects of Prayer

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. ~ Matthew 21:22

THE LORD'S PRAYER, more commonly referred to as "The Our Father," is a masterpiece of the Gospel and is at the heart of Jesus' teaching. In it the Lord brings together the essential aspects of prayer that are found throughout the Scriptures. It is the most revered prayer among Catholics and is recited every time the Church gathers to celebrate the Eucharist.

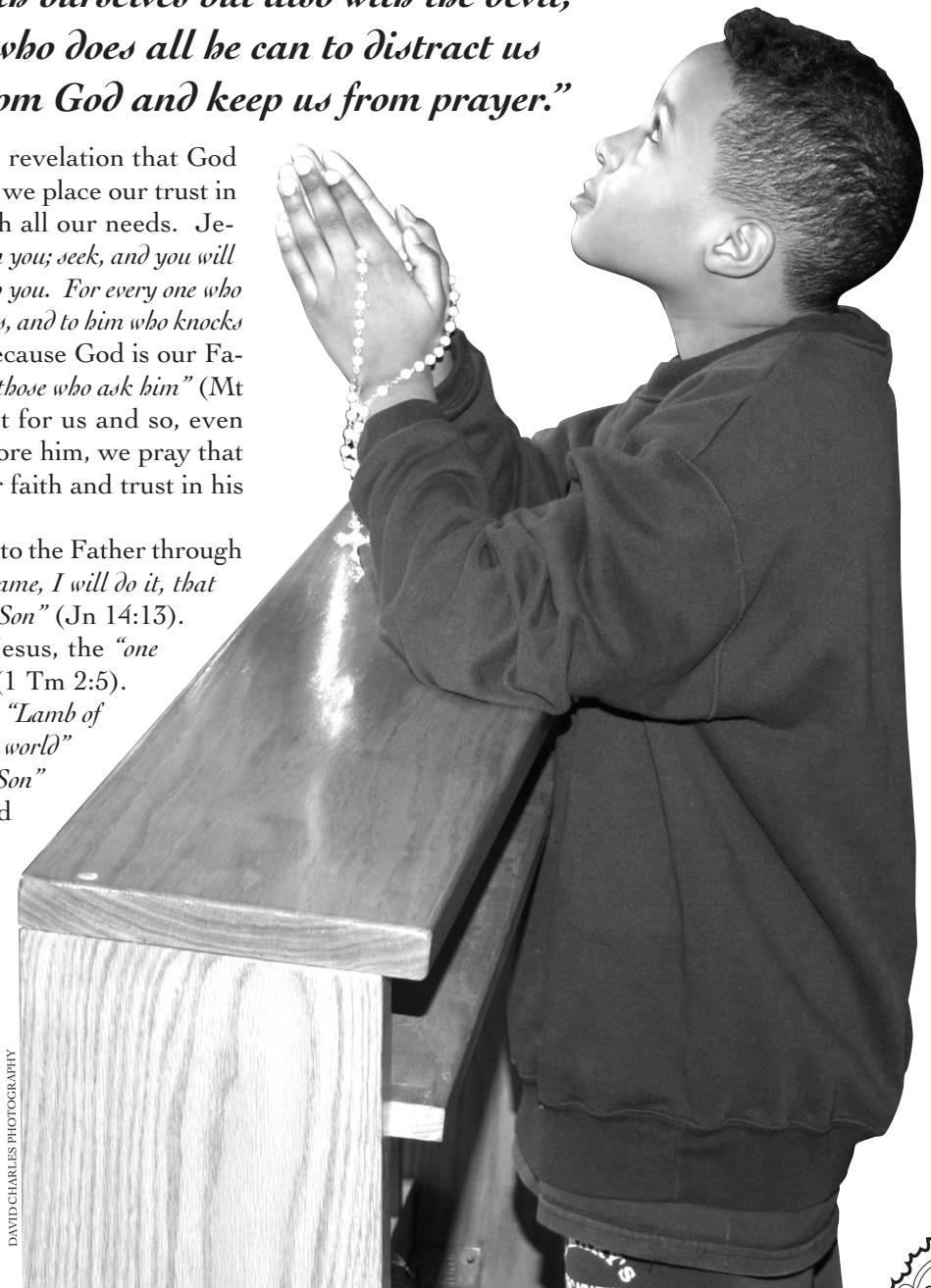
The prayer begins with the revelation that God is our Father. As his children, we place our trust in him and come before him with all our needs. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Mt 7:7-8). Because God is our Father he will give "good things to those who ask him" (Mt 7:11). He knows what is best for us and so, even before we place our needs before him, we pray that his will be done to express our faith and trust in his Providence.

Jesus also taught us to pray to the Father through him: "whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (Jn 14:13). For this reason, we pray to Jesus, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tm 2:5). He is our Lord and Savior, the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), the Father's "beloved Son" (Mk 9:7; Lk 3:22), and our Good Shepherd (see Jn 10:11). We invoke the name of Jesus — which means "God saves" — and, by keeping his name on our lips, make our lives a constant prayer. We beg his mercy in the traditional sinner's prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (see Mk 10:47; Lk 18:13).

Another aspect of prayer is the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the Spirit that has been sent into our hearts who teaches us to recognize God as Father (see Gal 4:6). Scripture says, "the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26).

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In his encounter with the Samaritan woman, Jesus describes the water that only he can give as the water of the Spirit which will become in each of us *“a spring of water welling up to eternal life”* (Jn 4:14). Authentic prayer arises out of this spring and is sustained by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Scripture reminds us that in this life we are involved in a spiritual battle not only with ourselves but also with the devil, who does all he can to distract us from God and keep us from prayer. Jesus said to his disciples, *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Mt 26:41). Many of us have complained that, with our jobs and families, we “don’t have time” for prayer. Solving this problem is more about making time than finding it. Prayer has to become a priority in our life because too much is at stake in prayer. *“Be sober; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith”* (1 Pt 5:8-9).

St. Paul exclaims, *“Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you”* (1 Thes 5:17). The command to pray without ceasing may seem impossible,



A military priest prays over a wounded soldier during World War II

but keep in mind that it is the Holy Spirit in each of us that prays on our behalf. A “morning offering” dedicates the day. Saying the name of Jesus throughout the day is one form of constant prayer. Through this prayer, we call upon the Holy Spirit for help and sanctify all the activities of daily life. In this way, our whole life becomes an offer-

ing in prayer to God.

Prayer at all times also means that we set aside specific times for prayer. Prayer upon awakening and just before sleep, and prayer before meals, should be part of the daily rhythm of prayer. Many people go to Mass daily. The Liturgy of the Hours (see handout of this title) is an extended form of daily prayer. Prayer at Sunday Mass helps keep the entire day and week holy, and the cycles of the liturgical year (see handout on The Liturgical Year), with its great feasts celebrating the story of our salvation and its celebration of the lives of the saints, create a seasonal rhythm that, over time, becomes embedded in the Christian’s life of prayer.

(CCC 451, 2650, 2652, 2664-2668, 2697-2698, 2725-2745, 2761-2762, 2770, 2780)