

Advent Mission

MONDAY: Getting More From Prayer

Purpose of this Mission: To get you to **Pray, Worship, and Confess**

- It is **not** about praying *more*, going to *more* Masses, or going to confession *more*
- It is **all** about making the **MOST** of your time in Prayer, at Mass, and in Confession

PRAYER. What is it?

"Prayer is by nature a dialog and a union of man with God..."
St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

- Prayer is a **conversation** with God.
- Prayer involves both **speaking** and **listening**.
- Prayer involves our **senses, memory, and imagination**.
- Prayer is a **gift** from God. When we don't feel like praying, pray for the desire to pray!
- Prayer requires **silence**, which is not the *lack* of conversation, but what makes conversation possible!

Note: Prayer is a dialog with God. 'Prayers' are the methods or vehicles of that dialogue: Words, prayers (Hail Mary, Our Father, Jesus Prayer), novenas, adoration, Scripture, Examen, etc. Use what you are comfortable with.

"In your prayers there is no need for high-flown words, for it is the simple and unsophisticated babbling of children that have more often won the heart of the Father in heaven..."
St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*

PREPARE for Prayer:

- **Location**. Find a place with few distractions.
- **Distractions**. Turn off all electronics. Go to the bathroom. Eat. Quench thirst. Remove any obstacles.
- **Routine**. Begin and end prayer with your usual method. Commit to the *length* of your prayer period.

SUBSTANCE of Prayer:

- **Thoughts, Feelings, and Desires** are the substance of prayer.
- Thoughts, feelings, and desires are **NEUTRAL**. What we do with them can be either good or evil. They may be promptings from the Lord, impulses of our own fallen nature, or temptations from the enemy.
 - We bring these to prayer to find out who/where they come from and what to do with them.
- **Communicate** your substantial thoughts, feelings, and desires to God with the ARRR model
- **ARRR** is an acronym meaning Acknowledge, Relate, Receive, Respond.
 - It aims at being honest and consistent in our prayer before the Lord.
 - Spend your prayer time (10 - 60 minutes) conversing with him using this guide.
 - This model becomes more natural the more you use it.

Acknowledge - be aware of your *thoughts, feelings, and desires*. What is moving in your heart? What are you thinking about? What are you feeling? What are you desiring? Don't judge yourself. Just acknowledge the strongest inclinations on your mind, heart, and will.

Relate - tell Jesus everything. You have acknowledged what is stirring within you: the good and the bad, the trivial and the important, the lovable and the shameful. Now relate it to Jesus. Share it with the Father. Offer it to the Holy Spirit. Bring it to Mary so she can take it to God with you.

Receive - God loves you. Right now, in this moment. After relating to him all that is moving within you, be open to receive his love. Receive his grace, his help, his mercy, his gentleness, his peace, his life. Linger with his love. He may send a word to delight you. Cherish it.

Respond - peace, gratitude, joy, generosity. These are some of the effects of praying, among many others. Good prayer moves us to charity. Respond to his gifts you have received by sharing them with others.

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Example 1

- You recently helped your sister with a project when she asked and never got as much as a thank you. You **feel** anger at her. Instead of lashing out at her as you've done in the past, you bring it to prayer. After relating it to the Lord, the other **memories** of being taken advantage of by her comes to light. You see that this is where the anger comes from. It is not an isolated incident. The Lord gives you a new awareness of your family's past. Could the uprising of this anger be his way of calling you to address your concerns with your sister? You decide to wait till the intensity of the anger subsides and tell your sister that while you love helping her, you would greatly appreciate a thank you in the future. She had no idea her actions affected you like this and will try to change!

Example 2

- You had a stressful week at work, and your wife has been snappy with you at home. The **thought** comes to mind that you are a real *failure*. Instead of allowing this thought to bring you to despair as it has in the past, you take it to prayer. You ask God where the thought of failure comes from. You look at the crucifix on the wall and a new thought presents itself to your **imagination**: Jesus would be seen as a real failure too. Knowing that Jesus was not a failure but the victor over sin and death, you are able to laugh off the thought of being a failure: it doesn't come from God, so ignore it...it's not true! You tell your wife you love her and her mood toward you softens. You go to work the next day more ready to take on its challenges.

Example 3

- You receive a request to volunteer more time at your parish. You have conflicting **desires**. You want to help out, but you also want time for yourself and your family. Instead of immediately responding to the request with a yes or no, you say you will take it to prayer. In prayer, you ask the Lord which desire belongs to him and which belongs to you. After a few days, you haven't received a clear response from God. You get distracted by TV during prayer. One day as you pray with this in mind, your mind wanders to what Netflix program you are going to watch that night. As you gently draw yourself back to prayer from this distraction, you **sense** that your behavior of bingeing on Netflix shows has complicated your life and prayer rather than made you a more relaxed person. This perception leads you to the realization that in this case your desire for more time comes from a selfish part of yourself. With this in mind, the desire to volunteer at the parish reveals that this is the Lord's desire. You take the volunteer position and are filled with new zeal for your faith, and strive for a healthier lifestyle in turn!

TAKEAWAYS:

- Prayer is a **conversation** with God.
- Prayer takes our **thoughts, feelings, and desires** to God.
- These inclinations are **neutral**. Do not judge yourself for thinking, feeling, or desiring this or that!
- **Acknowledge & Relate** these inclinations, **Receive & Respond** to know what to do with them.
- God will use your **senses, imagination, and memory** to speak to you in prayer. Pay attention.
- God uses our **senses** to help us look, hear, and perceive his activity.
- God uses our **imagination** to help us creatively receive his Word (Scripture, Sacraments)
- God uses our **memory** to help us recall our history with its healing and wounds.
- If you get distracted in prayer, **gently** and **calmly** bring yourself back. It happens to everyone.
- If the **same distraction** comes up time and again in the same prayer period, it may be the Lord asking you to **look more closely** at it. You may have to change a part of your life for him.
- Prayer is **life-giving!** You may not receive an answer right away, but every moment spent with God is rewarding, even if nothing seems to happen. You have 'wasted' time with the Lord of Lords! Congratulations!

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TUESDAY: Getting More Out of Mass

MASS. What is it?

"The most important purpose of Holy Mass [is] to be a memorial...not only of [Christ's] suffering and death but of his whole life and being..." | Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer*

- Mass is a **Meal** shared by the Church:
 - Feast on the **Word** of God (a real encounter with God's Word: Jesus Christ)
 - Feast on the **Flesh** of Christ (a real encounter with God's Eucharist: Jesus Christ)
- Mass is a **Sacrifice** offered by the Church:
 - A sacrifice of **Thanksgiving** ('Eucharist-ing) to God
 - A sacrificial **Memorial** (makes present to us the whole life of Christ)

ARRR & the Mass

- Yesterday, we discussed the model for prayer: **A**cknowledge, **R**elate, **R**eceive, **R**espond
- Today, we will see how Mass, like all communication, is also structured by this model:
 - (1) **Introductory Rites: ACKNOWLEDGE** God's presence and our sinfulness
 - **Acknowledge** his presence with sign of the cross ('In the name of the Father...')
 - **Relate** your sinfulness in the penitential rite ('I have sinned through my most grievous fault')
 - **Receive** his mercy for your sins ('may almighty God have mercy on us...')
 - **Respond** to his love with joy and zeal (Gloria and Collect Prayer)
 - (2) **Liturgy of the Word: RELATE** our lives to the Word of God proclaimed to us
 - **Acknowledge** the Word ('The Word of the Lord...thanks be to God')
 - **Relate** the Word (God relating his Word to us, us relating our lives to his Word)
 - **Receive** the fruits of the Word (What moved, delighted, and challenged you?)
 - **Respond** to the Word with charity (intercessory prayers for the Church and world)
 - (3) **Liturgy of the Eucharist: RECEIVE** the greatest gift of God, the Eucharist
 - **Acknowledge** the Lord ('Behold the Lamb of God')
 - **Relate** your need to him ('Lord, I am not worthy...')
 - **Receive** the Eucharist (Though we are unworthy, the Lord chooses to dwell in us!)
 - **Respond** to the gift (Prayer after Communion...mind what it is calling you to do with the gift!)
 - (4) **Concluding Rites: RESPOND** by 'announcing the Gospel' and 'glorifying God by our lives'
 - **Acknowledge** the Lord's presence ('The Lord be with you')
 - **Relate** your perception of his presence ('And with your Spirit')
 - **Receive** God's blessing ('May almighty God bless you, the Father, Son, & Holy Spirit')
 - **Respond** by living the commission ('Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life')
- Mass is the **perfect prayer** of the Church, a communication between God and his people, so it makes sense that ARRR is found at every turn in the Mass. Remain open to this model at Mass!

COMING PREPARED for Mass:

- **COME** to Mass knowing your **sins**, the **scriptures**, and the **grace** you will ask for.
 - Have a simple awareness of what **sins** and failings you are coming with. Don't hold them in!
 - Pay close attention to the **scriptures**. Relate them to your life. They are stories you enter into!
 - Ask for a particular **grace** at every Mass. What do you need most from God this week?
- **LEAVE** Mass knowing your **response** to God's mercy, the Word, and the Eucharist.
 - What will you do differently this week? What do you need to change in your life?
 - How has his mercy, Word, and Eucharist transformed you?

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TIPS for getting the MOST out of Mass...

Before Mass Begins:

- **READ** the Sunday Scriptures a few days beforehand (USCCB.org provides easy access to readings)
- **JOURNAL**. Come with a notepad to write down thoughts, insights, and takeaways. Review these at the end of each month and year. You will be amazed at what you learn and how you grow!
- **ARRIVE** a few minutes early to pray and reflect (what am I here for today? what do I most need?)
- **EXPECT** God to show up at Mass. Expect to be transformed. Mass is an obligation for us only because God has already obligated himself to be there!
- **TURN OFF** your phone. Unless you are really expecting an emergency call from someone, you will not need your phone at Mass. Scripture readings, Mass parts, and songs are all available in your pew.

During Mass:

- **PARTICIPATE**. Yes, that means responding, singing (softly if you can't hold a tune!), sitting near another parishioner so you can share your peace with them.
- **PAY ATTENTION** to the words of the prayers. What is God trying to tell his Church in the Collect Prayer, Eucharistic Prayer, and Prayer after Communion? See if you can sum it up each week with a few words.
- **THANK** God. Mass is a gift and a blessing. If Mass seems boring, remember the Eucharist you will receive. You may consider staying after Mass a minute or two to say thank you to God and to solidify how he is calling you to respond to his grace this week.

En-during Mass:

- **NO MASS IS PERFECT**. No, not even the Last Supper...Judas left after communion. If you demand a Church that does 'church' perfectly, you will never be satisfied! Church is made up of sinners.
- **OFFER** distractions to God (remember, God also invited the crying babies to Mass!)
- **MISTAKES** happen. Priests and ministers are fallen human beings...they err. Bad homilies, musical off notes, server blunders, hospitality oversights, sound system malfunctions occasionally happen. God realizes this. The Holy Spirit still comes! Expect God to show up even at messy liturgies!
- **DISTRACTIONS** happen. If you get distracted by your thoughts or another person, gently call yourself back to attention. Sit in a front pew to focus attention on the sanctuary and not on what others are doing.
- **CHANGE IT UP**. Periodically sit in a different place in the Church. It will give you a new perspective and allow you to meet new people. If you get distracted often, it may help keep Mass fresh and interesting.

After Mass 'Aftermath':

- **RELISH** throughout the week the grace, mercy, Word, and Eucharist you received at Mass.
- **PREPARE** yourself for Mass next Sunday. Consider the greatest blessings and challenges of the week. Bring those with you on Sunday.
- **SHARE** your experience at Mass with at least 1 person (outside your immediate family) every week. Instead of telling people they "have to go to Mass," just share your graced experience with them and let them decide whether or not they want to join in. Give them time, but keep the relationship open by sharing prophetically how God is working in your life. Don't be pushy or imposing. We all know they need God, but they may need some time to realize this for themselves.

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WEDNESDAY: Getting More From Confession

CONFESSION. What is it?

- Absolution of post-baptismal sin to restore the penitent to communion with God and the Church
 - All sin ruptures our communion with God, so it is God alone who can forgive sins
 - Sin also breaks our communion with the Church, so God chooses priests to mediate forgiveness

CONFESSION. What is it **NOT**?

- Counseling, chit-chat, AA 5th Step, listing every single minor infraction
 - These are all important, but there is a place for them outside of confession

WHEN can God forgive?

- God forgives perfectly: completely & immediately. Reconciliation is our acceptance of his forgiveness
 - God forgives our minor, less serious (**venial**) sins **whenever we seek his pardon & show contrition**.
 - Receiving his forgiveness of venial sins happens during the Mass:
 - **Penitential Rite**: "Lord, have mercy" (these words aren't just teasers!)
 - **Eucharist**: "Behold him who *takes away the sins of the world*"
- Daily confession of our sins is the regular way God forgives venial sin
- Sacramental Confession is the regular way God forgives mortal sin

WHAT do I confess?

"For if the sick person is too ashamed to show his wound to the doctor, the medicine cannot heal what it does not know..." | St. Jerome, Commentary on Ecclesiastes (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1456)

- **All serious and mortal sins**
 - Mortal sins are (1) serious, (2) committed with full knowledge of its seriousness, (3) freely chosen
 - Mortal sins destroy divine life in us. Venial Sins chip away at this divine life.
 - Some serious sins are not mortal because the person lacks full knowledge of its gravity, an inability to choose freely, habit or pathological disorders
 - Some examples of serious sins: murder, violence, hatred, theft, cursing God, rape, incest, adultery, fornication, pornography, masturbation, perjury, calumny, etc.
- The **venial** sins that are challenging you the most
 - Venial sins are less serious sins. They are your everyday faults and failings.
 - You should be confessing your everyday sins to God...everyday! Confession should not be a rapid-fire list of all these venial infractions you committed...does that really *help* you to grow?
 - Tell the priest the ones that are troubling you the most, but take ALL of them daily to God.

HOW OFTEN should I confess?

- All Catholics are obligated to confess *serious sins* at least once a year
- A good practice is to go during Advent and Lent
- Confessions throughout the year can be good check-ins with the Church about the state of your soul, offer you good counsel, and encourage you to keep progressing in moral virtue!

HOW LONG should confession take?

- If you haven't been to confession for a week or 50 years, confession should take 5 minutes or less!
- Enter confession knowing your serious & habitual sins, confess them in a straightforward manner, listen to counsel from the priest, receive absolution, and do penance.

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PREPARE for Confession:

- **EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.** Become aware of all serious sins you have committed, and what venial sins are weighing heavily on your heart that you would really like to work on changing. Let the Ten Commandments, Beatitudes, Seven Deadly Sins, the Gospels & apostolic letters, and your conscience guide you.
- **ROOTS.** While it's important not to dwell on sin, it is important to find the roots of that sin. Confession provides an opportunity not only to trim the leaves off the weed, but to uproot it entirely. Ask in prayer: "When did this sin first enter my life? What strong inclinations surround this sin? Do any persons or situations in my life compound my struggle with this sin? Share the ROOTS of your sinfulness with the priest (this is not reliving the details, but unearthing the underlying causes of sin: fear, loneliness, despair, hatred, guilt, shame, selfishness, arrogance, etc.). Search your past with Christ.
- **WOUNDS.** Sin causes deep wounds. When we sin, we wound our relationships (with self, others, and God). When others sin against us, they wound us. Left untreated, these wounds bleed out. Some of them require a bandaid, but others require deep surgery from our Divine Healer. How have you been wounded by sin (your own or others)? This question is difficult to answer because we prefer hiding our wounds from others, from God, and even from ourselves: "Oh, I'll be fine" may be what we say, but it is necessary to give all wounds to Jesus. **ARRR** prayer can help you acknowledge and relate these wounds, so as to receive his healing and respond with grateful love.

Examples of good examination of conscience:

- Jane is a compulsive shopper. She recently realized she shops to fill an emptiness in her heart left by her son's untimely death. She takes this to Jesus and realizes she is not done grieving.
- Patrick started viewing internet pornography on business trips a few years ago and has 'successfully' hidden it from his family. He discovers that, although hidden, his intimacy with his wife and family is impaired. He brings his problem to Jesus and finds that a deep loneliness and fear of failure underlies this sin. He seeks now to heal from these wounds.
- Barb gossips around certain people. Wanting to change, she searches her heart with Jesus and sees that she gossips because her parents never let her express her feelings to them. She recognizes that she needs to forgive her parents and confide her feelings in her best friend from now on.

CONFESSING your sins

- **CLARIFY** the wounds and roots of your sins as best you are able. This is different than reliving the gory details of the sin. Sin is garbage. Don't relive its story with the garbageman: just toss it!
- **FURTHER HELP.** Let the priest know if you need further conversation, direction, or counseling, and he may recommend meeting with you or directing you to someone who can help.
- **SACRAMENTAL GRACE.** Confession doesn't solve all the problems that are due to sin. It does provide the sacramental grace to deal with them after you leave confession.

AFTER CONFESSION

- **PENANCE.** It's not punishment, but an act to patch up wounds and move us to deeper conversion.
- **BUILD** new habits based on your prayer and the priest's counsel to move you from sin to salvation.
- **FORGIVE YOURSELF.** You put yourself above God if you call yourself guilty when he calls you clean.
- **FORGIVE TRESPASSORS.** Forgiveness is a process for us. Continue daily to forgive your wrongdoers.
- **EUCHARIST.** Receive the Eucharist with new love, new fervor. You are reconciled to Christ & Church!
- **SHARE** your experience of the Sacrament of Confession. Like sharing your experience of Mass, you share the Holy Spirit's grace you have received. Obviously, you do not share your sins, but the gift of mercy and how it has impacted you.

The end of the mission is really its beginning. Now you are equipped to pray, worship, and confess with new energy, so...

- ...continue sharing your thoughts, feelings, and desires with God in **prayer** using ARRR.
- ...continue worshipping faithfully and growing in holiness every week at **Mass**.
- ...continue examining the roots and wounds of your sins, and **confess** them.