



THE WAYS to pray are endless, but no matter which prayers or prayer forms you make your own, remember to “ground” your prayer in desire and surrender.

## A user's guide on the ways to pray

*From formal to informal to spoken to silent, the Catholic faith offers a wealth of prayers and ways to pray.*

**W**E NEED to pray; we want to pray. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* emphasizes this need by saying that “prayer and Christian life are inseparable” and that “prayer is a vital necessity.”

But how shall we pray? Fortunately Catholic tradition as well as contemporary sources are rich in forms of prayer to make our own. You will see many of these prayer forms presented on the next pages. They range from the five basic forms of prayer to the classic prayer traditions and practices given to us by illustrious teachers of the faith such as Saint Benedict, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius Loyola, the Carmelites, and the Dominicans. There are prayers both communal and private. Spoken and silent. Spontaneous and memorized. Formal and informal. Word-filled and wordless.

The ways to pray are endless. But no matter which prayers or prayer forms you make your own, remember to “ground” your prayer in desire and surrender. These are the real essentials for genuine prayer, says writer and Trappist monk Father Thomas Merton. Here now is a user's guide on some ways to pray.

By LINUS MUNDY, director of publications at Abbey Press and the founder of two of their popular booklets series, CareNotes and PrayerNotes; author of numerous articles for the religious press as well as books on the Desert Elders, Saint Benedict, and the art of slowing down and keeping life simple.

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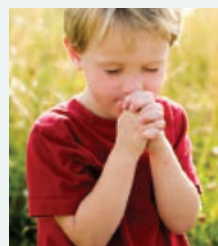
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# A USER'S GUIDE ON

## FIVE BASIC TYPES OF PRAYER

**BLESSING AND ADORATION**, like the Gloria at Mass. We acknowledge God's greatness and power—and mercy—in saving us from evil.



**PRAYERS OF PETITION.** Prayer for any need we have (especially forgiveness) but also praying that God's kingdom come and God's will (not necessarily ours) be done.

**INTERCESSION.** Asking on behalf of another or oneself that God will show mercy and favor.

**THANKSGIVING.** Words/thoughts of gratitude for all things or anything—in the spirit of joy that Christ has set creation free.

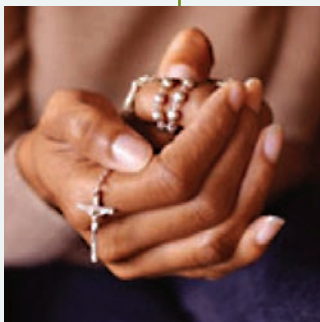
**PRaise.** Giving glory to God, recognizing God is God, testifying we are God's children.

## FORMAL, FAMILIAR, AND OFTEN MEMORIZED

**SIGN OF THE CROSS.** A mini-prayer acknowledging the Triune God; often an introduction or conclusion to prayer.

**THE ROSARY.** Using a string of beads, a form of devotion to Mary consisting of Hail Marys, Our Fathers, and a doxology, all repeated as a meditation.

**OUR FATHER.** The Lord's Prayer—"the prayer Jesus taught us."



**ACT OF CONTRITION.** Formal or spontaneous prayer seeking forgiveness of sins.

**MEAL PRAYERS.** "Grace" before and after meals. Giving thanks. May be formal or informal.

**ASPIRATIONS.** Words/phrases used spontaneously throughout the day to invoke God's help or proclaim God's glory: "Lord, help me"; "God be praised"; "My Jesus, mercy"; and others.

## LITURGICAL, "OFFICIAL" PRAYERS AND PRACTICES

**LITURGY OF THE HOURS.** "The official prayer of the church" consists of five parts and is prayed throughout the day: Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, made up of psalms, canticles, readings; Midday Prayer; Night Prayer; and the Office of Readings complete the Liturgy of the Hours.

**THE MASS.** The "source and summit" of Catholic faith and practice. Also known as the Eucharist; the sacrament commemorating the Last Supper. The Liturgy of the Word is rich in prayers and readily promotes meditation.

**PRAYERS AT/FROM THE MASS.** Occasions and moments during worship at Mass when formal and informal prayer may rise from the heart; also the common recitation of

the Gloria, the Our Father, and other prayers at Mass.

**BENEDICTION.** Dating to the 13th century, the practice of singing hymns and praises before the Blessed Sacrament.

**PRAYERS OF ADORATION.** Somewhat of a more private and less formalized devotion; kneeling in meditation and worship before the Body of Christ exposed in the form of a consecrated host.

**HYMNS.** Any of an innumerable list of religious songs, usually sung in communion with others, giving glory to God.



## CLASSIC, MONASTIC APPROACHES

**BENEDICTINE.** Daily prayer based on liturgical prayer: psalms, hymns, scripture, and short readings. A specific Benedictine prayer model is *lectio divina*: a practical and sometimes mystical way of praying scripture that moves from reading to studying to listening and

finally to praying.

**FRANCIS OF ASSISI.** It is said that Saint Francis "became prayer." He lived his prayer. His Canticle of the Sun is an example of prayer drawing on nature: All the wonders of creation are our brothers and sisters in God.

**SAINT IGNATIUS LOYOLA.** "Intellectual" prayer, assists us in knowing God. Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, developed his Spiritual Exercises where one names a desire and meditates for discernment.

**CARMELITE.** Primary prayer forms are solitude and meditation leading to an interior journey of transformation.

**DOMINICAN.** Spirituality rooted in the

# THE WAYS TO PRAY

Good News of our salvation. Principles include study of scriptural truth and using the whole body in prayer.

## POPULAR, MUCH-LOVED DEVOTIONS

**NOVENAS.** A nine-day private or public devotion to obtain special graces. Frequently a devotion to a particular saint for a particular need.

**LITANIES.** A sequence or list of petitions followed by responses praying for God's aid. Its repetitive nature emphasizes one's earnestness.

**THE ANGELUS.** Name taken from the words *Angelus Domini* (the "Angel of the Lord"). A short practice of devotion (notably the Hail Mary) repeated three times each day—morning, noon, and evening—at the sound of a bell.

**MORNING OFFERING.** A prayer for personal holiness, meant to be said upon rising. One offers up everything—one's "prayers, works, joys, and sufferings" of the day ahead for the glory of God.

**STATIONS OF THE CROSS.** A series of prayers or meditations at 14 pictures or sculptures depicting the chief scenes of Christ's suffering and death. An ideal Lenten devotion.

## SCRIPTURE-BASED PRAYER

**GOD'S WORD AND YOUR PRAYER.** Selecting specific readings that speak to individual needs, e.g., healing, wisdom, or peace. Read aloud or in silence, listen-

ing and meditating on what is read (see also "*Lectio Divina*").

**THE OLD TESTAMENT.** Hebrew scripture, the "prayer book" Jesus and most New Testament writers used, is filled with citations remembering God's covenant with God's people. A wealth of inspiring prayer topics as well as actual prayers.

**THE PSALMS.** The complete range of human emotion and need are found in the 150 Psalms of Hebrew scripture. A rich source of "conversation" with God.

**LECTIO DIVINA** (see also the "Benedictine" method). A sequence of: 1. Bible reading; 2. Silence; 3. Meditation on a word or image; 4. Prayer or song rejoicing in God's Word.

**CANTICLES.** Songs of prayer. The Magnificat of Mary, in Luke 1; the *Benedictus*, also in Luke 1; and the *Nunc Dimittis*, in Luke 2 are inspiring

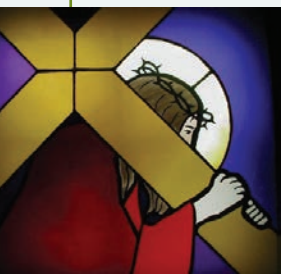
examples.

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

**MEDITATION.** Taking time to be alone with the One who loves us. An inner prayer that focuses us on the Lord. A "gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus," a "silent love" (Catechism of the Catholic Church).

**CENTERING PRAYER.** With emphasis on interior silence, one chooses a sacred word to sustain one's intention to be in God's presence, returning to it as the mind wanders.

**WALKING MEDITATION.** "Prayer-walking" as one consciously, mindfully repeats a word or phrase, putting footsteps and breathing into the same rhythm.



**THE JESUS PRAYER (PRAYER OF THE HEART).** From the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition but widely adopted elsewhere. One repeats: "Lord Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

**CHRISTIAN MEDITATION.** Using a "mantra" (usually *ma-ra-na-tha*—a New Testament word for "Come, Lord Jesus") spoken not only to be attentive but to empty oneself to let in God's Spirit. †

## PRAYER RESOURCES

### BOOKS

*The Tradition of Catholic Prayer* by the Monks of Saint Meinrad Archabbey (Liturgical Press, 2007)

*Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life* by Father Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O. (Continuum, 2002)

*Paths to Prayer: A Field Guide to Ten Catholic Traditions* by Patricia D. Fosarelli (Ave Maria, 2010)

*Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007)

*Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours* (Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1976)

*The Doubleday Prayer Collection* by Mary Batchelor (Doubleday, 1997)

*Prayer-Walking* by Linus Mundy (Abbey Press, 1994)

### BOOKLETS

*PrayerNotes* series published by Abbey Press, St. Meinrad, IN 47577, [abbeypress.com](http://abbeypress.com)

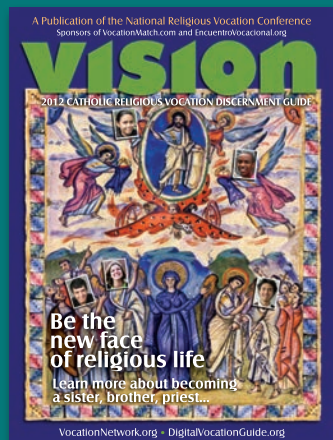
### ONLINE

[www.ourcatholicprayers.com](http://www.ourcatholicprayers.com)  
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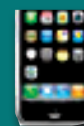
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