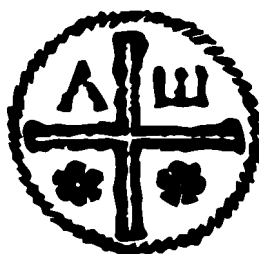


Centering Prayer
And
The Catechism of the Catholic Church

Compiled by Fr. Carl J. Arico
for
Contemplative Outreach Ltd.
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CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CENTERING PRAYER

I have found Part IV "Christian Prayer of the Catholic Catechism" to be a powerful support to the concepts and background of the practice of Centering Prayer. One of the more beautiful examples is the following:

#2711 Entering into contemplative prayer is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we "gather up" the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us. We let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed.

In this paper, I have taken the main concepts of the Introduction to Centering Prayer Workshop and identified sections of the Catholic Catechism which support and give new insights to the depth of the prayer. The Introduction to Centering Prayer Workshop has four main conferences:

1. Prayer as Relationship
2. The Method of Centering Prayer
3. Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word
4. Deepening our Relationship with God

For more background and details about Centering Prayer, see [the Centering Prayer brochure](#) on the [Contemplative Outreach website](#).

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CONFERENCE ONE – PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP

PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP

#2558 "Great is the mystery of the faith!" The Church professes this mystery in the Apostle's Creed (Part One) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (Part Three). This mystery, then requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.

#2564 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.

#2565 In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity...with the whole human spirit." . (St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio, 16, 9 PG 35,945)

Lectio Divina lays the foundation for the four movements of prayer, the last being contemplation – a resting in the presence of God. Centering Prayer is a preparation for this gift.

LECTIO DIVINA

#1177 The hymns and litanies of the Liturgy of the Hours integrate the prayer of the psalms into the age of the Church, expressing the symbolism of the time of day, the liturgical season, or the feast being celebrated. Moreover, the reading from the Word of God at each hour (with subsequent responses or troparia) and readings from the Fathers and spiritual masters at certain Hours, reveal more deeply the meaning of the mystery being celebrated, assist in understanding the psalms, and prepare for silent prayer. The lectio divina, where the Word of God is so read and meditated that it becomes prayer, is thus rooted in the liturgical celebration.

#2654 The spiritual writers, paraphrasing Matthew 7:7, summarize in this way the dispositions of the heart nourished by the word of God in prayer "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation. Guido the Carthusian, *Scala Paradisi*:PL 40, 998

#2699 The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer. However, Christian Tradition has retained three major expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative. They have one basic trait in common: composure of heart. This vigilance in keeping the Word and dwelling in the presence of God makes these three expressions intense times in the life of prayer.

#2708 Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotions, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our conviction of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in lectio divina or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.

#2721 The Christian tradition comprises three major expressions of the life of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. They have in common the recollection of the heart.

THE INITIATIVE OF GOD

#2591 God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.

HOW JESUS CHRIST PRAYED

#2620 Jesus' filial prayer is the perfect model of prayer in the New Testament. Often done in solitude and in secret, the prayer of Jesus involves a loving adherence to the will of the Father even to the Cross and an absolute confidence in being heard.

#2599 The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin learned to pray in his human heart. He learns to pray from his mother, who kept all the great things the Almighty had done and treasured them in her heart. He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the

synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. But his prayer springs from an otherwise secret source, as he intimates at the age of twelve: “I must be in my Father’s house.” Here the newness of prayer in the fullness of time begins to be revealed: his filial prayer, which the Father awaits from his children, is finally going to be lived out by the only Son in his humanity, with and for men. (Lk 1:49,2:19,2:51. Lk 2:49)

#2602 Jesus often draws apart to pray in solitude, on a mountain, preferably at night. He includes all men in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that “his brethren” experience; he sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them. It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret

PRAYER OF PURE FAITH

#2609 Once committed to conversion, the heart learns to pray in faith. Faith is a filial adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand. It is possible because the beloved Son gives us access to the Father. He can ask us to “seek” and to “knock,” since he himself is the door and the way. (Mt 7:7-11,13,14)

#2611 The prayer of Faith consists not only in saying “Lord, Lord,” but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan. (Mt 9:38;Lk 10:2;JN 4:34)

#2732 The most common yet most hidden temptation is our lack of faith. It expresses itself less by declared incredulity than by our actual preferences. When we begin to pray, a thousand labors or cares thought to be urgent vie for priority; once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love? Sometimes we turn to the Lord as a last resort, but do we really believe he is? Sometimes we enlist the Lord as an ally, but our heart remains presumptuous. In each case our lack of faith reveals that we do not yet share in the disposing of a humble heart: “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” (Jn15:5)

SOURCE OF PRAYER (HOLY SPIRIT)

#2672 The Holy Spirit, whose anointing permeates our whole being, is the interior Master of Christian prayer. He is the artisan of the living tradition of prayer. To be sure, there are as many paths of prayers as there are persons who pray, but it is the same Spirit acting in all and with all. It is in the communion of the Holy Spirit that Christian prayer is prayer in the Church.

#2681 “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). The Church invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit as the interior teacher of Christian prayer.

CONFERENCE TWO – METHOD OF CENTERING PRAYER

The catechism speaks of Contemplative Prayer. Centering Prayer is not infused contemplation, however it can be looked upon as acquired contemplation, where the believer strives with the help

of grace. Infused contemplation is a pure and unmerited gift. Centering Prayer prepares one for the gift of contemplation as the Spirit grants it.

#2709 What is contemplative prayer? St. Teresa answers: "Contemplative prayer [oracion mental] in my opinion is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us."(6) Contemplative prayer seeks him "whom my soul loves."(7) It is Jesus, and in him, the Father. We seek him, because to desire him is always the beginning of love, and we seek him in that pure faith which causes us to be born of him and to live in him. In this inner prayer we can still meditate, but our attention is fixed on the Lord himself.

#2710 The choice of the time and duration of the prayer arises from a determined will, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into inner prayer, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. The heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith.

#2711 Entering into contemplative prayer is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we "gather up" the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us. We let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed.

#2712 Contemplative prayer is the prayer of the child of God, of the forgiven sinner who agrees to welcome the love by which he is loved and who wants to respond to it by loving even more.[8] But he knows that the love he is returning is poured out by the Spirit in his heart, for everything is grace from God. Contemplative prayer is the poor and humble surrender to the loving will of the Father in ever deeper union with his beloved Son.

#2713 Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty. Contemplative prayer is a covenant relationship established by God within our hearts.[9] Contemplative prayer is a communion in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, "to his likeness."

#2714 Contemplative prayer is also the pre-eminently intense time of prayer. In it the Father strengthens our inner being with power through his Spirit "that Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith" and we may be "grounded in love."(10)

#2715 Contemplation is a gaze of faith, fixed on Jesus. "I look at him and he looks at me": this is what a certain peasant of Ars used to say to his holy cure about his prayer before the tabernacle. This focus on Jesus is a renunciation of self. His gaze purifies our heart; the light of the countenance of Jesus illumines the eyes of our heart and teaches us to see everything in the light of his truth and his compassion for all men. Contemplation also turns its gaze on the mysteries of the life of Christ. Thus it learns the "interior knowledge of our Lord," the more to love him and follow him.[11]

#2716 Contemplative prayer is hearing the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving

commitment of a child. It participates in the "Yes" of the Son become servant and the Fiat of God's lowly handmaid.

#2717 Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come"[12] or "silent love." [13] Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus.

#2718 Contemplative prayer is a union with the prayer of Christ insofar as it makes us participate in his mystery. The mystery of Christ is celebrated by the Church in the Eucharist, and the Holy Spirit makes it come alive in contemplative prayer so that our charity will manifest it in **our** acts.

#2719 Contemplative prayer is a communion of love bearing Life for the multitude, to the extent that it consents to abide in the night of faith. The Paschal night of the Resurrection passes through the night of the agony and the tomb - the three intense moments of the Hour of Jesus which his Spirit (and not "the flesh [which] is weak") brings to life in prayer. We must be willing to "keep watch with [him] one hour." [14]

6 St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Book of Her Life*, 8, 5 in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), I, 67

7 Song 1:7; cf. 3:14.

8 . Lk 7:36-50; 19:1-10.

9 . Jer 31:33.

10 Eph 3:16-17.

11. St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 104

12 St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Tract. myst.* 66

13 St. John of the Cross, *Maxims and Counsels*, 53 in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, tr. K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1979), 678.

14 Mt 26:40.

A METHOD AND A GIFT

#2707 There are as many and varied methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters. Christians owe it to themselves to develop the desire to meditate regularly, lest they come to resemble the three first kinds of soil in the parable of the sower. (5) But a method is only a guide; the important thing is to advance, with the Holy Spirit, along the one way of prayer: Christ Jesus.

#2713 Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty. Contemplative prayer is a covenant relationship established by God within our hearts, Contemplative prayer is a communion in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, "to his likeness." (9)

#2724 Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.

5 Cf. Mk 4:4-7, 15-19

9 Cf. Jer 31:33.

THE ROLE OF INTENTION IN CENTERING PRAYER

#2711 Entering into contemplative prayer is like entering into the Eucharistic liturgy: we "gather up" the heart, recollect our whole being under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, abide in the dwelling place of the Lord which we are, awaken our faith in order to enter into the presence of him who awaits us. We let our masks fall and turn our hearts back to the Lord who loves us, so as to hand ourselves over to him as an offering to be purified and transformed.

VESTIBULE: CHOOSE A PLACE

#2691 The church, the house of God, is the proper place for the liturgical prayer of the parish community. It is also the privileged place for adoration of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The choice of a favorable place is not a matter of indifference for true prayer.
- For personal prayer, this can be a "prayer corner" with the Sacred Scriptures and icons, in order to be there, in secret, before our Father.[48] In a Christian family, this kind of little oratory fosters prayer in common.....

48 Cf. Mt 6:6.

Having covered the topics of Prayer as Relationship, Lectio Divina, The method of Centering Prayer and the choosing of a place, let us explore the four guidelines of Centering Prayer.

GUIDELINE #1: CHOOSE A SACRED WORD AS THE SYMBOL OF YOUR INTENTION TO CONSENT TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTION WITHIN.

#2668 The invocation of the holy name of Jesus is the simplest way of praying always. When the holy name is repeated often by a humbly attentive heart, the prayer is not lost by heaping up empty phrases,[19] but holds fast to the word and "brings forth fruit with patience." [20] This prayer is possible "at all times" because it is not one occupation among others but the only occupation: that of loving God, which animates and transfigures every action in Christ Jesus.

19 Cf. Mt 6:7.

20 Cf. Lk 8:15.

PRAYER OF INTENTIONALITY

#2563 The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully.

The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives.
 It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death.
 It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation:
 it is the place of covenant.

BLESSED MOTHER CONSENTING

#2617 Mary's prayer is revealed to us at the dawning of the fullness of time. Before the incarnation of the Son of God, and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness: at the Annunciation, for Christ's conception; at Pentecost, for the formation of the Church, his Body. In the faith of his humble handmaid, the Gift of God found the acceptance he had awaited from the beginning of time. She whom the Almighty made "full of grace" responds by offering her whole being: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word." "*Fiat*": this is Christian prayer: to be wholly God's, because he is wholly ours

#2622 The prayers of the Virgin Mary, in her *Fiat* and *Magnificat*, are characterized by the generous offering of her whole being in faith.

ROLE OF CONSENTING

#2716 Contemplative prayer is hearing the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving commitment of a child. It participates in the "Yes" of the Son become servant and the *Fiat* of God's lowly handmaid.

PRESENCE OF CHRIST

#2565 Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ.[13]

Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.[14]

13 Cf. Rom 6:5.

14 Cf. Eph 3:18-21.

GUIDELINE #2: SITTING COMFORTABLY AND WITH EYES CLOSED, SETTLE BRIEFLY AND SILENTLY INTRODUCE THE SACRED WORD AS THE SYMBOL OF YOUR CONSENT TO GOD'S PRESENCE AND ACTION WITHIN.

DISCIPLINE IN PRAYER

#2650 Prayer cannot be reduced to the spontaneous outpouring of interior impulse: in order to pray, one must have the will to pray. Nor is it enough to know what the Scriptures reveal about prayer: one must also learn how to pray. Through a living transmission (Sacred Tradition) within "the believing and praying Church,"[1] the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God how to pray.

#2710 The choice of the time and duration of the prayer arises from a determined will, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into inner prayer, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. The heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith.

REST IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD

#2628 Adoration is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us^[99] and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory,"^[100] respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God.^[101] Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications

99 Cf. Ps 95:1-6

100 Ps 24, 9-10

101 Cf. St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 62,16: PL 36, 757-758

IN PRAISE OF GOD

#2639 Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God,^[121] testifying to the only Son in whom we are adopted and by whom we glorify the Father. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward him who is its source and goal: the "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist."^[122]

121 Cf. Rom 8:16.

122 1 Cor 8:6.

#2649 Prayer of praise is entirely disinterested and rises to God, lauds him, and gives him glory for his own sake, quite beyond what he has done, but simply because HE IS.

CONFERENCE THREE: THOUGHTS AND USE OF THE SACRED WORD

GUIDELINE #3: WHEN ENGAGED WITH YOUR THOUGHTS, RETURN EVER SO GENTLY TO THE SACRED WORD.

DEALING WITH THOUGHTS DURING THE PRAYER

#2729 The habitual difficulty in prayer is distraction. It can affect words and their meaning in vocal prayer; it can concern, more profoundly, him to whom we are praying, in vocal prayer (liturgical or personal), meditation, and contemplative prayer. To set about hunting down

distractions would be to fall into their trap, when all that is necessary is to turn back to our heart: for a distraction reveals to us what we are attached to, and this humble awareness before the Lord should awaken our preferential love for him and lead us resolutely to offer him our heart to be purified. Therein lies the battle, the choice of which master to serve.[16]

DRYNESS IN PRAYER

#2731 Another difficulty, especially for those who sincerely want to pray, is dryness. Dryness belongs to contemplative Prayer when the heart is separated from God, with no taste for thoughts, memories, and feelings, even spiritual ones. This is the moment of sheer faith clinging faithfully to Jesus in his agony and in his tomb. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." If dryness is due to the lack of roots, because the work has fallen on rocky soil, the battle requires conversion. (Jn 12:24 Lk 8:6, 13)

HOW CULTURAL CONDITIONING AND THE FALSE (HOMEMADE) SELF AFFECT OUR PRAYER LIFE

#2726 In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us erroneous notions of prayer. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: they "don't have the time." Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone.

#2727 We must also face the fact that certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of "this present world" can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant. For example, some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives. Others overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless. Still others exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful; whereas prayer, the "love of beauty" (philokalia), is caught up in the glory of the living and true God. Finally, some see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.

#2728 Finally, our battle has to confront what we experience as failure in prayer: discouragement during periods of dryness; sadness that, because we have "great possessions,"[15] we have not given all to the Lord; disappointment over not being heard according to our own will; wounded pride, stiffened by the indignity that is ours as sinners; our resistance to the idea that prayer is a free and unmerited gift; and so forth. The conclusion is always the same: what good does it do to pray? To overcome these obstacles, we must battle to gain humility, trust, and perseverance

#2753 In the battle of prayer we must confront erroneous conceptions of prayer, various currents of thought, and our own experience of failure. We must respond with humility, trust, and perseverance to these temptations which cast doubt on the usefulness or even the possibility of prayer.

15 Cf. Mk 10:22

16 Cf. Mt 6:21, 24

NEED FOR PURIFICATION

#2779 Before we make our own this first exclamation of the Lord's Prayer, we must humbly cleanse our hearts of certain false images drawn "from this world." *Humility* makes us recognize that "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," that is, "to little children."³⁰ The *purification* of our hearts has to do with paternal or maternal images, stemming from our personal and cultural history, and influencing our relationship with God. God our Father transcends the categories of the created world. To impose our own ideas in this area "upon him" would be to fabricate idols to adore or pull down. To pray to the Father is to enter into his mystery as he is and as the Son has revealed him to us.

The expression God the Father had never been revealed to anyone. When Moses himself asked God who he was, he heard another name. The Father's name has been revealed to us in the Son, for the name "Son" implies the new name "Father."³¹ Tertullian De ort. 3: PL 1,1155

#2732 The most common yet most hidden temptation is our lack of faith. It expresses itself less by declared incredulity than by our actual preferences. When we begin to pray, a thousand labors or cares thought to be urgent vie for priority; once again, it is the moment of truth for the heart: what is its real love? Sometimes we turn to the Lord as a last resort, but do we really believe he is? Sometimes we enlist the Lord as an ally, but our heart remains presumptuous. In each case our lack of faith reveals that we do not yet share in the disposing of a humble heart: "Apart from me, you can do nothing." (Jn15:5)

GUIDELINE #4: AT THE END OF THE PRAYER PERIOD, REMAIN IN SILENCE WITH EYES CLOSED FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES.

THE ROLE OF SILENCE

#2717 Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come"[12] or "silent love." [13] Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus

AFTER CENTERING PRAYER, WHY DO WE SOMETIMES END WITH THE "OUR FATHER" PRAYER?

#2763 All the Scriptures—the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms—are fulfilled in Christ.¹⁰ The Gospel is this "Good News." Its first proclamation is summarized by St. Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount;¹¹ the prayer to our Father is at the center of this proclamation. It is in this context that each petition bequeathed to us by the Lord is illuminated. Lk 24:44

The Lord's Prayer is the most perfect of prayers. . . . In it we ask, not only for all the things we can rightly desire, but also in the sequence that they should be desired. This prayer not only teaches us to ask for things, but also in what order we should desire them.¹²

#2774 "The Lord's Prayer is truly the summary of the whole gospel,"²⁴ the "most perfect of prayers."²⁵ It is at the center of the Scriptures.

10 Cf. Lk 24:44

11 Cf. Mt 5-7

12 St. Thomas Aquinas, STh II-II, 83, 9

24 Tertullian, De orat. 1 PL 1, 1251-1255

25 St. Thomas Aquinas, STh II-II, 83, 9

#2599 The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin learned to pray in his human heart. He learns to pray from his mother, who kept all the great things the Almighty had done and treasured them in her heart. He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. But his prayer springs from an otherwise secret source, as he intimates at the age of twelve: "I must be in my Father's house." Here the newness of prayer in the fullness of time begins to be revealed: his filial prayer, which the Father awaits from his children, is finally going to be lived out by the only Son in his humanity, with and for men.(Lk 1:49,2:19,2:51. Lk 2:49)

CONFERENCE FOUR – DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

GUIDELINE#4: AT THE END OF THE PRAYER PERIOD, REMAIN IN SILENCE WITH EYES CLOSED FOR A COUPLE OF MINUTES.

The reason for remaining a few more minutes in the consenting silence is to allow that silence to impact on our being, so that we will truly be instruments of God's grace as we go about the business of each day living out our unique role.

MOSES AS PARADIGM OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

#2576 "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." [21] Moses' prayer is characteristic of contemplative prayer by which God's servant remains faithful to his mission. Moses converses with God often and at length, climbing the mountain to hear and entreat him and coming down to the people to repeat the words of his God for their guidance. Moses "is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly, not in riddles," for "Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth." [22]

21 Ex 33:11

22 Num 12:3,7-8

#2577 From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, Moses drew strength and determination for his intercession. He does not pray for himself but for the people whom God made his own. Moses already intercedes for them during the battle with the Amalekites and prays to obtain healing for Miriam. But it is chiefly after their apostasy that Moses

"stands in the breach" before God in order to save the people. The arguments of his prayer - for intercession is also a mysterious battle - will inspire the boldness of the great intercessors among the Jewish people and in the Church: God is love; he is therefore righteous and faithful; he cannot contradict himself; he must remember his marvelous deeds, since his glory is at stake, and he cannot forsake this people that bears his name.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

#2659 We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his Paschal mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times, in the events of each day, to make prayer spring up from us. Jesus' teaching about praying to our Father is in the same vein as his teaching about providence:[12] time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter him, not yesterday nor tomorrow, but today: "O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts." [13]

12 Mt 6:11
13 Ps 95:7-8

ON ACTIVE PRAYER, AS A REMINDER THAT WE ARE CONSENTING "TO WALK IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING." (PS. 119)

#2667 This simple invocation of faith developed in the tradition of prayer under many forms in East and West. The most usual formulation, transmitted by the spiritual writers of the Sinai, Syria, and Mt. Athos, is the invocation, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners." It combines the Christological hymn of Philippians 2:6-11 with the cry of the publican and the blind men begging for light.[18] By it the heart is opened to human wretchedness and the Savior's mercy.

18. Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:13

ALL ARE INCLUDED IN OUR PRAYER

#2602 Jesus often draws apart to pray in solitude, on a mountain, preferably at night.[46] He includes all men in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that "his brethren" experience; he sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them.[47] It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret.

46 Cf. Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16
47 Cf. Heb 2:12, 15; 4:15.

ROLE OF FORGIVENESS

#2844 Christian prayer extends to the *forgiveness of enemies*,¹⁴⁴ transfiguring the disciple by configuring him to his Master. Forgiveness is a high-point of Christian prayer; only hearts attuned to God's compassion can receive the gift of prayer. Forgiveness also bears witness that, in our world, love is stronger than sin. The martyrs of yesterday and today bear this witness to Jesus. Forgiveness

is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another.¹⁴⁵

144 *Mt* 5:43-44

145 *2 Cor* 5:18-21; John Paul II, *DM* 14