



HOW SHOULD I PRAY AND WHY IS IT HARD?



GOSPEL



ANSWERS

WHEN YOU PRAY, GO TO YOUR INNER ROOM, CLOSE THE DOOR, AND PRAY TO YOUR FATHER IN SECRET. AND YOUR FATHER WHO SEES IN SECRET WILL REPAY YOU IN PRAYING, DO NOT BABBLE LIKE THE PAGANS, WHO THINK THAT THEY WILL BE HEARD BECAUSE OF THEIR MANY WORDS. DO NOT BE LIKE THEM. YOUR FATHER KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU ASK HIM. - MATTHEW 6:5-15

SAINTS & INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

ST MADELINE SOPHIE BARAT

Madeline Sophie Barat grew up during a time of religious persecution where practicing your faith was not always easy. Regardless, she learned to pray at a young age and followed God's calling to be a nun. Through the schools she started, she was able to help many young people learn to pray as well.



CARLOS ACUTIS

Carlos never missed his daily appointment with Jesus in Holy Mass and the Rosary, followed by a moment of Eucharistic adoration. With this intense spiritual life, Carlo fully and generously lived his fifteen years of life, leaving a profound impact on those who knew him.



TEAM DISCUSSION

After reading over the YOUCAT numbers on the following pages, how do you think the Youth Catechism answers the question of the week? Were there any words or ideas that you did not fully understand that you would like to understand better?

ANSWER IN YOUR OWN WORDS:



YOUCAT NUMBERS FOR THIS WEEK



#493 WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN

PRAYER? Christian prayer is prayer in the attitude of faith, hope, and charity. It is persevering and resigns itself to the will of God. Someone who prays as a Christian steps at that moment out of himself and enters into an attitude of trusting faith in the one God and Lord; at the same time he places all his hope in God—that HE will hear, understand, accept, and perfect him. St. John Bosco once said, “To know the will of God, three things are required: prayer, waiting, taking counsel.” Finally, Christian prayer is always an expression of love, which comes from Christ’s love and seeks the divine love.

#494 HOW CAN MY EVERYDAY ROUTINE BE A SCHOOL OF PRAYER?

Everything that happens, every encounter can become the occasion for a prayer. For the more deeply we live in union with God, the deeper we understand the world around us. Someone who already seeks union with Jesus in the morning can be a blessing to the people he meets, even his opponents and enemies. Over the course of the day he casts all his cares on the Lord. He has more peace within himself and radiates it. He makes his judgments and decisions by asking himself how Jesus would act at that moment. He overcomes fear by staying close to God. In desperate situations he is not without support. He carries the peace of heaven within him and thereby brings it into the world. He is full of gratitude and joy for the beautiful things, but also endures the difficult things that he encounters. This attentiveness to God is possible even at work.

#497 WHY DOES IT HELP TO TURN TO THE SAINTS WHEN WE PRAY?

Saints are people who are aflame with the Holy Spirit; they keep God’s fire burning in the Church. Even during their earthly life, the saints prayed ardently, in a way that was contagious. When we are close to them, it is easy to pray. Of course, we never worship saints; we are allowed, though, to call on them in heaven, so that they may present petitions for us at the throne of God. Around the great saints developed particular schools of spirituality, which like the colors of the spectrum all point to the pure light of God. They all start with a fundamental element of the faith, so as to lead—in each case by a different gate—to the center of the faith and devotion to God. Thus Franciscan spirituality starts with poverty of spirit, Benedictine spirituality with the praise of God, and Ignatian spirituality with discernment and vocation. A spirituality to which someone feels attracted, depending on his personal character, is always a school of prayer.

#499 WHEN SHOULD A PERSON PRAY?

From the earliest times Christians have prayed at least in the morning, at meals, and in the evening. Someone who does not pray regularly will soon not pray at all. Anyone who loves another person and all day long never gives that person a sign of his love does not really love him. So it is with God, too. Anyone who truly seeks him will keep sending him signals of his longing for his company and friendship. Get up in the morning and give the day to God, asking for his blessing and to “be there” in all your meetings and needs. Thank him, especially at mealtimes. At the end of the day, place everything into his hands, ask him for forgiveness, and pray for peace for yourself and others. A great day—full of signs of life that reach God.



CONQUEST WEEKLY ACTIVITY GUIDE

#500 ARE THERE VARIOUS WAYS TO PRAY? Yes, there is vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. All three ways of prayer presuppose recollecting one's mind and heart.



#501 WHAT IS VOCAL PRAYER? In the first place, prayer is lifting the heart to God. And yet Jesus himself taught his disciples to pray with words. With the Our Father he left us the perfect vocal prayer as his testament to show how we should pray. While praying we should not try to think pious thoughts. We should express what is in our hearts and offer it to God as complaint, petition, praise, and thanks. Often it is the great vocal prayers—the Psalms and hymns of Sacred Scripture, the Our Father, the Hail Mary—that direct us to the true substance of prayer and lead to a kind of free, interior prayer.

#503 WHAT IS INTERIOR OR "CONTEMPLATIVE" PRAYER? Contemplative prayer is love, silence, listening, and being in the presence of God. For interior prayer one needs time, resolve, and above all a pure heart. It is the humble, poor devotion of a creature that drops all masks, believes in love, and seeks God from the heart. Interior prayer is often called the prayer of the heart and contemplation.

#505 WHY IS PRAYER SOMETIMES A STRUGGLE? The spiritual masters of all times have described growth in faith and in love for God as a spiritual, life-and-death combat. The battlefield is man's interior life. The Christian's weapon is prayer. We can allow ourselves be defeated by our selfishness and lose ourselves over worthless things—or we can win God. Often someone who wants to pray must first conquer his lack of will power. Even the Desert Fathers were acquainted with spiritual sluggishness ("acedia"). Reluctance to seek God is a big problem in the spiritual life. The spirit of the times sees no point in praying, and our full calendars leave no room for it. Then there is the battle against the tempter, who will try anything to keep a person from devoting himself to God. If God did not want us to find our way to him in prayer, we would not win the battle.

#502 WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF MEDITATION? The essence of meditation is a prayerful seeking that starts with a sacred text or a sacred image and explores the will, the signs, and the presence of God. We cannot "read" sacred images and texts the way we read things in the newspaper that do not immediately concern us. Instead, we should meditate on them; in other words I should lift my heart to God and tell him that I am now quite open to what God wants to say to me through what I have read or seen. Besides Sacred Scripture, there are many texts that lead to God and are suitable for meditative prayer.

#504 WHAT CAN A CHRISTIAN ACCOMPLISH THROUGH MEDITATION? In meditation a Christian seeks silence so as to experience intimacy with God and to find peace in his presence. He hopes for the sensible experience of his presence, which is an undeserved gift of grace; he does not expect it, however, as the product of a particular technique of meditation. meditation can be an important aid to faith that strengthens and matures the human person. Nevertheless, techniques of meditation that promise to bring about an experience of God, or even the soul's union with God, are deceptive. On account of such false promises, many people believe that God has abandoned them just because they do not perceive him. But God cannot be compelled to show up by particular methods. He communicates himself to us whenever and however he wishes.



MEDITATION (FROM LATIN

MEDITOR = TO PRACTICE,

THINK OVER): Meditation is a spiritual exercise practiced in various religions and cultures in which man is supposed to find his way to himself (and to God). Christianity recognizes and treasures a variety of meditative practices, but rejects those practices that promise union with God or with the divine as the result of a particular technique of meditation.

#506 IS PRAYER NOT JUST A SORT OF CONVERSATION WITH YOURSELF?

The distinctive feature about prayer is precisely the fact that one goes from Me to You, from self-centeredness to radical openness. Someone who is really praying can experience the fact that God speaks—and that often he does not speak as we expect and would like. Those who are experienced in prayer report that a person very often comes out of a prayer session different from the way he went in. Sometimes expectations are met: you are sad and find consolation; you lack confidence and receive new strength. It can also happen, though, that you would like to forget pressures but are made even more uneasy; that you would like to be left in peace and instead receive an assignment. A real encounter with God—the kind that occurs again and again in prayer—can shatter our preconceptions about both God and prayer.

#507 WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU FIND THAT PRAYER DOES NOT HELP? Prayer does not seek superficial success but rather the will of God and intimacy with him. God's apparent silence is itself an invitation to take a step farther—in total devotion, boundless faith, endless expectation. Anyone who prays must allow God the complete freedom to speak whenever he wants, to grant whatever he wants, and to give himself however he wants. Often we say: I have prayed, but it did not help at all. Maybe we are not praying intensely enough. The saintly Curé of Ars once asked a brother priest who was complaining about his lack of success, "You have prayed, you have sighed . . . but have you fasted, too? Have you kept vigil?" It could also be that we are asking God for the wrong things. St. Teresa of Avila once said, "Do not pray for lighter burdens; pray for a stronger

#508 WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO NOT FEEL ANYTHING WHEN YOU PRAY OR EVEN EXPERIENCE RELUCTANCE TO PRAY?

Distractions during prayer, the feeling of interior emptiness and dryness, indeed, even an aversion to prayer are experienced by everyone who prays. Then to persevere faithfully is itself already a prayer. Even St. Thérèse of Lisieux for a long time could not sense God's love at all. Shortly before her death she was visited one night by her sister Celine. She noticed that Thérèse's hands were clasped together. "What are you doing? You should try to sleep", Celine said. "I cannot. I am suffering too much. But I am praying", Thérèse replied. "And what do you say to Jesus?" "I do not say anything to him. I love him."

#509 ISN'T PRAYING A FLIGHT FROM REALITY? Someone who prays does not flee from reality; rather, he opens his eyes for reality as a whole. From Almighty God himself he receives the strength to cope with reality. Prayer is like going to a gas station where we get free fuel for our long journeys and extreme challenges. Praying does not lead out of reality but, rather, deeper into it. Praying does not take time away from other things but, rather, doubles the remaining time and fills it with intrinsic meaning.

#510 IS IT POSSIBLE TO PRAY ALWAYS? Prayer is always possible. Prayer is vitally necessary. Prayer and life cannot be separated. You cannot keep God content with a few words in the morning or evening. Our life must become prayer, and our prayers must become life. Every Christian life story is also a story of prayer, one long attempt to achieve ever greater union with God. Because many Christians experience a heartfelt longing to be with God constantly, they turn to the so-called "Jesus prayer", which has been an age-old custom particularly in the Eastern Churches. The person who prays it tries to integrate a simple formula—the most well-known formula is "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"—into his daily routine in such a way that it becomes a constant prayer.