

## Little School of Prayer

Make the decision.



God willed and created us to be free human beings. Many times a day we deliberate, set priorities, make decisions. Without decisions, nothing gets done. If you want to, make the decision to become a praying person and to shape your relationship to God. Decide deliberately ahead of time: I will pray at such and such a time. In the evening, make the decision to pray morning prayer, and in the morning to pray evening prayer.

Be faithful in little things.



Many begin to pray with great resolutions. After a while, they fail and think they cannot pray at all. Begin with definite, short prayer times. And keep doing it faithfully. Then your longing and your prayer, too, can grow, as it is appropriate for you, your time, and the circumstances.

Take time to pray.



Praying means being alert to the fact that God is interested in me. With him, you do not have to schedule appointments. There are three criteria for the time of your prayer that can be helpful. Choose set times (habit helps), quiet times (this is often early morning and in the evening), and valuable time that you like but are willing to give away as a gift (no “spare moments”).

Prepare a place.



The place where you pray has its effect on your praying. Therefore, look for a place where you can pray well. For many people, this will be at the bedside or the desk. Others find it helpful when they have a specially prepared place that reminds and invites them: a place that has a stool or a chair with a kneeler, a carpet, an icon or picture, a candle, the Bible, a prayer book.

Rituals give structure to your prayer life.



Having to make yourself settle down to prayer every time can be a great expense of energy. Give your prayer a fixed order (a ritual). This is not supposed to restrict you but is meant, rather, to help you, so that you do not have to deliberate every day whether and how you want to pray. Before prayer, place yourself consciously in the presence of God; after prayer, take another moment to thank God for his blessings and to place yourself under his protection.

Let the whole person pray.



Praying is accomplished not only in thoughts and words. In prayer, the whole person can be united with God: your body, your internal and external perception, your memory, your will, your thoughts and feelings, or the dream from last night. Even distractions often give you important information about what really concerns and motivates you and what you can intentionally bring into God's presence and leave with him. When things you need to do and don't want to forget occur to you while you're praying, you can write them down and then go back to praying.

## Pray in a variety of ways.



Discover and practice the many ways of praying, which can vary depending on the time, one's frame of mind, and the present situation: a prayer composed by someone else with which I join in; personal prayer about my own concerns; praying with a passage from Sacred Scripture (for example, the readings for the day); the prayer of the heart (or "Jesus Prayer"), in which a short prayer formula or simply the name "Jesus" is repeated with each breath; interior prayer, in which the whole person is silent and listens internally and externally.

## Use the opportunities.



You can also make use of the opportunities that arise to pray at in-between times (for example, short, fervent prayers, a petition, a prayer of thanksgiving or praise): while waiting, while riding on a bus, a train, or in a car (instead of turning the music on right away), during free time, while visiting a chapel or church along your daily walk. Let the opportunities you have to pray become invitations to unite yourself again and again with God.

## Let God speak.



Praying also means listening to God's voice. God speaks most explicitly in the words of Sacred Scripture, which the Church reads day after day. He speaks through the Tradition of the Church and the witness of the saints. But he also speaks—often in a hidden way—in the heart of every man, for instance in the judgment of your conscience or through an interior joy. God's Word in Scripture makes it possible to hear the Word of God in the heart and lends a voice to it. Give God a chance to speak in your prayer. Become familiar with him, so that you can learn to tell his voice apart from the many other voices and come to know his will.

## Pray with the Church on earth and in heaven

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Anyone who prays—whether alone or with others—enters into the great community of those who pray. It extends from earth to heaven and includes those who are alive today and also the angels, the saints, and the unknown multitude of those who live with God. Praying also means praying for each other. Therefore, it is good to pray not only by yourself but also, when possible, with others: with your family, with friends, with your congregation—and with the saints. You can ask them for their prayers. For in God's sight the community of those who pray does not cease with death.



Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

 → Psalm 1

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and his anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us."

 → Psalm 2

O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of me, there is no help for him in God. But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.

 → Psalm 3

Answer me when I call, O God of my right! You have given me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer. O sons of men, how long will you be dull of heart? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?

 → Psalm 4

## Prayers

In school, **David** feels excluded. The other boys are constantly picking on him and making fun of him. David is the one who gets the blame for everything. Lena has been aware of this for some time and feels sorry for David. So she prays, "Jesus, please make them not treat David so badly."

**Alex** is determined to get himself a new computer game. So he takes some money from the drawer in his father's writing desk and buys the game. That night he prays, "Dear God, help me, and make Dad not notice it!"

**Mrs. Brewer** is eighty-four and has suffered for years from a painful illness. Often she is in severe pain all day long. She constantly prays, "O Jesus, give me back my health, or at least take away this pain. But not my will, but your will be done."

**Evelyn** can't stand math in school. She regularly copies her homework from her friend. When an exam looms, she decides to try praying: "God, help me to get a B." So when she gets an F, she quickly decides: "Prayer doesn't work."

**Jack** once saw a program on TV about the street children in Brazil. Ever since then, he has prayed every day that people will help these children.

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## Some suggestions for our own prayers

- Prayer naturally always begins with some form of address. You can choose this according to your personal relationship with God. In fact, there are no obligatory forms. But you should never be disrespectful, of course. After all, you are speaking to God himself. Typical forms of address are: "Dear God", "Jesus", or "Lord".
- It is good to begin your prayer with a brief word of praise or thanksgiving.
- Tell God quite simply about your life, about your joys, your fears, or your worries.
- Entrust your intentions and petitions to him.
- Is there anyone you know, or know of, who is in any kind of need or suffering? Think of him, too, in your prayer.
- No doubt there are many things in your life for which you can and would like to give thanks. There is room in your prayer for gratitude, also.
- Maybe not everything you did in recent days was as good as it should have been. Prayer is also an opportunity to ask God's forgiveness for whatever you've done wrong.
- We normally conclude our prayers with the word "Amen". It means something like, "Yes, may it be that way."