

# Chrtc 292 Class Slides and Notes by Paul Flaman

## Module 6: Topics 11 and 12

### Topic 11: Christian Prayer



Please watch “Bishop Barron on the Lord’s Prayer”(8 min., 33 sec.):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mmPI-SYBE>

#### Slide 29: Christian Prayer (CCC, Part 4, Ch. 1)

The related required reading for this topic (11) and the next topic (12) is from Part 4, Chapters 1-3, of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] (1997)—we introduced this Catechism at the beginning of Topic 2, Module 1, above. [As an aside, the Protestant Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin each wrote a Catechism with a similar purpose as Catholic Catechisms, that is, to provide a good overview of the Christian faith and life.] The last part of Part 4 (Chapter 4) is a detailed explanation of the Our Father / Lord’s Prayer and is not part of the required reading although certainly worthwhile reading when you have time.

- **We do not know how to pray as we ought—humility is the foundation of prayer, a gift of God.**

We are not able to pray well by our own efforts alone without God’s help/grace. “God resists the proud and exalts those who humble themselves”—this is a repeated theme in the Bible. With prayer, which is a gift of God, God always takes the initiative.

- **The whole person prays. The heart, our hidden center, is the place of truth, encounter ...**

Although one's heart (in a symbolic sense, not the organ that pumps our blood) is the core of one's "being" according to the Bible and the place of encounter with God, today neuroscientists such as Andrew Newberg and Mario Beauregard have studied the brains of people while they pray since we now know that in general our subjective experiences have corresponding brain states. In my Chrtc 390 course on Neuroscience, the Person and Christian Theology we spend two weeks of classes on religious experiences as understood from the perspectives of neuroscience and Christian theology. Briefly, there is no one "God spot" in the brain. Rather, religious experiences typically involve emotions, choices, sounds, images and certain actions and the parts of our brains involved with these in other areas of our lives are also involved with religious experiences. Newberg and Beauregard think our brains are "wired" for God. Compare a radio or television receiver. As embodied persons, a person's encounter with God in prayer involves words and understanding but is also beyond words and one's intellect.

- **Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between the children of God and the Triune God.**

One of my colleagues Denis Lamoureux, our Science and Religion Professor, is an evangelical Christian. He was used to praying "in the name of Jesus." In a conversation Fr. Timothy Scott, a biblical scholar, pointed out to him that Catholics (and Orthodox) Christians often make the Sign of the Cross, praying "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," that is, not only in the name of Jesus but also in the names of the other two divine Persons of the Trinity, the Triune God. Dr. Lamoureux was impressed by this and now also prays in the name of the three Persons of the Trinity. Regarding the Sign of the Cross, some theologians have explained that the Cross symbolizes both our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with others. When one makes the Sign of the Cross, one first moves one's hand from one's forehead to one's heart which symbolizes God entering into our human condition in the Incarnation. Roman Catholics then move their hand from their left shoulder to their right shoulder symbolizing God saving us from evil (compare the Parable of the Last Judgment in Mt 25 where those who go to eternal punishment are on the "left" and those who go to eternal life are on the "right." [It should be understood that left and right are not intrinsically evil or good, but since Jesus used this symbolism so can we in appropriate ways.] Orthodox and Eastern Rite Catholic Christians move their hand from their right shoulder to their left which for them symbolizes Jesus (the Good, the Light) coming into our sinful condition to enlighten us and make us good.

The Triune God thirsts for our love and we thirst for their love. St. Augustine of Hippo in his *Confessions*, related to his own experience, shares that our human hearts are restless until they rest in God. God has created us to need infinite Truth, Love, Goodness and Beauty to be completely fulfilled and we can only find these in God, not in other finite things or persons by themselves.

- **Old Testament: prayer is bound up with human history. Consider, e.g., Noah's walking with God, Abraham's test of faith, Jacob's perseverance, Moses speaking to God as a friend, David's praise, repentance and submission to God; the Psalms are personal and communal prayers; the prophets' call people to conversion and they intercede for the people.**

The Jewish Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) provides a rich resource for human prayer. God is our Creator and he seeks to save humans from sin, to reconcile us to himself, each other

and the rest of his Creation. Just as God is not aloof from the drama of human life and history, human prayer is related to human experiences and history. The Catechism I think makes an interesting point by comparing Noah with righteous people of all nations and religions. It also points out how other people of God in the Bible including Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David can be models of prayer for us in certain ways. Among the many rich prayers in the Bible, the 150 Psalms have continued to be regularly prayed by many Jews including Jesus and by many Christians (the Liturgy of the Hours includes the Psalms in a 4 week cycle).

- **Jesus, as truly human and truly divine, fully reveals the drama of prayer.**

### **Slide 30: Christian Prayer (CCC, Part 4, Ch. 1 continued)**

- **Jesus' prayer—filial trust in Father—is the perfect model of prayer for us.**

The Gospels report Jesus as often going to be alone to pray to his Father, and as a practicing Orthodox Jew attending the Jewish prayer services and biblical readings in Synagogues, praying the Psalms with his close disciples, and celebrating Jewish religious feasts such as the Passover.

- **Jesus taught his disciples to pray: conversion of heart, reconciliation with others, lively persevering faith, vigilance, ask in his name, keep his word and abide with him in the Father with the Spirit of truth.**

With regard to the “Our Father” or Lord’s Prayer, in the Gospel according to Matthew (6:9ff) Jesus starts by saying, “Pray then in this way: Our Father...” In the Gospel according to Luke (11:2ff) Jesus says, “When you pray, say: Father...” This implies that Christians should both pray with the words that Jesus taught us (which are not exactly the same in Mt and Lk regarding the Lord’s Prayer) as well as to pray like him, according to his example. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* begins its lengthy commentary on the words and phrases of the Lord’s Prayer in section 2779 by saying: “Abba-Father”:

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." 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....

In the popular book, *The Shack*, since the main character had an abusive father and had problems relating to God as a “Father,” interestingly God first “appears” to him as a Black Woman with whom he can more easily relate.

The related required reading treats the other points in the bullet above which we find in the teaching and example of Jesus on prayer (see CCC, nn. 2599-2616). Here I will only comment briefly on the point that we should “ask in his name,” that is, the name of Jesus. This should not be understood as a magical formula such as “abracadabra” which we add at the end of our petition and then “presto” it happens. Rather, in the Bible the name of a person represents the person. The name, “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves.” “Yahweh” is the name God reveals to Moses. To pray “in the name of Jesus” means to pray in line with God’s saving will or plan as Jesus’ representative.

- **Mary’s *Fiat*, *Magnificat*, and intercession (a model)**

*Fiat* in Latin means “Let it be done,” that is, according to the word of the angel Gabriel who announced to her that she would become the mother of the “Son of God.”(see Lk 1:26-38).

*Magnificat* in Latin means “magnifies,” that is, when Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth who moved by the Holy Spirit says, “Blessed are you among women . . .,” Mary responds with her song of praise beginning with “My soul ‘magnifies’ the Lord . . .” (see Lk 1:39-56). At the wedding of Cana Mary intercedes for the wedding guests who had run out of wine to Jesus who answers her request (see Jn 2:1-12). The Catholic and Orthodox Churches and many other Christians continue to turn to Mary in Heaven to intercede to God/Jesus for us. Mary is a model of humility, openness to God’s plan, of praise and of interceding or praying to God for others.

■ **Holy Spirit: forms and inspires the Church in prayer**

Shortly after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the first Christians on the Feast of Pentecost, the Acts of the Apostles says, “They devoted themselves to . . . the prayers.”(Ac 2:42) The Holy Spirit continues to inspire Christians and Christian communities (i.e., the Church) in prayer.

■ **Forms of prayer revealed in scripture are normative:**

- **Blessing: God blesses, therefore, we can bless God**
- **Adoration: exalting the greatness of God as Creator and Savior**
- **Petition: asking forgiveness, that the Kingdom come, for every human need; pray always**
- **Intercession: asking in behalf of another, for everyone**
- **Thanksgiving: in all circumstances (cf. the Eucharist)**
- **Praise: giving glory to God for his own sake**

If you have not already done so please read the related required reading from the Catechism for Topic 11 including sections 2626-43 which describe the above prayer forms. Note that the word “Eucharist” means “thanksgiving.”

## **Some Discussion Questions with regard to Christian Prayer**

1. How is Christian prayer the same and/or different than the prayer of other religions (or some other practices of meditation) such as Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Transcendental or Yoga meditation, North American aboriginal spirituality? Can the prayer of “righteous” people in all religions be compared to Noah’s walking with God (cf. Catechism, n. 2569)?
2. What does it mean to pray “in the name of Jesus”? How does this differ from a magical formula or a pagan ritual? Catholics and some other Christians (Orthodox ...) may begin or end prayer with the “Sign of the Cross,” saying “In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Can this be an empty habit or a meaningful practice?
3. Is it possible to live the Christian life well (or to live it at all) without prayer? Explain.
4. Some neuroscientists (e.g., Newberg, Beauregard, Persinger) have studied the human brain with regard to religion, Christian prayer, Buddhist meditation, visions, etc. Do you think such scientific studies undermine or complement Christian faith?
5. The Bible (and the Catholic Catechism) reveal a number of forms of prayer including blessing, adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise. In your own prayer (i.e., if you pray) do you tend to favour one or more of these forms over others? Do you think one should regularly pray in all of these ways?

**Related to the Reading Responses (see Course Outline, p. 3) please respond to at least one of the above questions under Module 6 on the E-Class.**

## Topic 12: The Life of Prayer

Please watch on the “Evolution of Prayer Life” (2 min., 25 sec) by Fr. Ron Rolheiser: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQyQ5ujLcOs>; and Mark Mallett’s putting the Apostle’s Creed to music (2 min., 39 sec.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUo5AYb3X70>

### Slide 31: Christian Prayer (CCC, Part 4, Ch. 2)

The related required reading for Topic 12 is a continuation in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] from our last topic on prayer (topic 11). The rest of the Catechism following this reading is a fairly detailed commentary on the Our Father, the prayer which Jesus taught his disciples.

#### ■ **The Tradition (Christian) of Prayer:**

From Topic 2 (see Slide 7), Module 1, recall the meaning of “Tradition”—what is passed on—regarding the Christian Tradition this means the whole Good News of Jesus Christ. Also recall that the understanding and articulation of Jesus and his Good News develops with the Holy Spirit who leads the disciples into the complete Truth (see Jn 16).

- **Prayer is not only spontaneous; one must have the will to pray and learn how to pray**

We do not always feel like praying just we do not always feel like caring and loving others including our close friends or if you are married your spouse. Just as spouses should share and communicate every day to keep their love for each other growing, so too we should share with our Beloved Spouse God in prayer every day, also when we do not feel like it. Sometimes we need to choose to love a spouse, a good friend and/or God but this commitment helps our love to grow deeper.

- **We know Jesus Christ by frequent reading of Scripture accompanied by prayer—dialogue between God and man**

St. Jerome, an early Church biblical scholar, taught that ignorance of the Scripture is ignorance of Jesus Christ. Another early Church father, St. John Chrysostom taught that it is even more important for lay people (Christians who are not clergy or religious brothers and sisters) to read the Bible than monks since they live in the world and face many temptations. We should read the Bible not simply to accomplish a human project but as a means of building our relationship with God accompanied by prayer.

- **Prayer helps one to internalize and assimilate the liturgy**

The liturgy, the public prayer of the Church, is more formal than personal prayer. It integrates many themes from the Scripture and Christian Tradition and can help inform our personal prayer which helps us develop a personal relationship with God which in turn helps us to benefit more from participating in the liturgy.

- **Faith, hope and love are basic to Christian prayer**

As the Apostle Paul teaches: faith, hope and love abide (see 1 Cor 13). These are known as the “theological virtues” since they are the heart of our relationship with God (Greek *theos*). Prayer is not really Christian if not animated by these. Christian faith, believing in the true God, is the virtuous “mean” between unbelief / skepticism and credulity (gullibly believing everything one hears). Christian hope, entrusting our future to God’s providence and salvation, is the virtuous “mean” between despairing that one will be saved or being presumptuous that one will be saved even if one lives a life of sin. Christian *agape* love has no limits since we are called to always grow in love of God, others and oneself.

- **We encounter God today—bring prayer into every situation**

Neither Christianity nor Christian prayer is an escape but they help us to live well, to do God's will, in every situation and area of our lives.

- **Each church has its language (history, culture) of prayer**

In the various Christian traditions of prayer including Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant traditions we should appreciate whatever is good, true and beautiful, whatever reflects God who is infinitely Good, True and Beautiful. With regard to the complementarity of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches Saint Pope John Paul II compared each to a lung—we breathe fully with both lungs.

- **Note the respective tasks of the Magisterium, pastors and catechists**

The role of the Magisterium, the living teaching authority of the pope and bishops in union with the pope, is certainly not to quash genuine prayer but rather to discern true forms from mistaken forms—see, e.g., the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's document, "Some Aspects of Christian Meditation,"(1989) which compares authentic Christian meditation with some mistaken forms. Christian pastors and catechists in union with Jesus have a role to encourage and teach prayer to others.

- **Christian prayer is to the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit: in Lk 11:13 Jesus suggests we ask our Father for the Holy Spirit**

Since each of the three divine Persons is God, it is appropriate to praise and adore all three and to pray directly to all three (CCC, nn. 2665-72 explain this well).

- **Mary, a model of prayer, is also our spiritual mother: the traditional "Hail Mary" is based in the Bible**

Related to Jesus dying on the Cross entrusting his mother Mary to be the mother of the beloved disciple John and for him to be her son, the Church understands that Jesus entrusts all of us disciples to his mother as our mother. CCC, nn. 2676-77, explains how the traditional "Hail Mary" prayer is grounded in the New Testament.

- **The Church values the example, teaching and intercession of the saints; as well as schools of spirituality, family, clergy, religious, prayer groups, spiritual direction, the Blessed Sacrament, Liturgy of the Hours, favorable places...**

The Catechism briefly addresses all of these and much more can be said and has been said about these. With regard to the intercession of the saints in heaven, the Catholic Church today normally only canonizes a deceased person as a "saint" if there have been two miracles related to their intercession after they have died. Related to this, e.g., [please watch](#) "Floribeth Mora Diaz: John Paul II's Second Miracle" (2 min., 32 sec.):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eaRAKYM5XWU&t=2s>. With regard to the Blessed Sacrament both chapels in St. Joseph's College (in the older main building as well as in the newer Women's Residence) in their tabernacles keep the Blessed Sacrament reserved, which Catholics believe continues Jesus' real presence in the Eucharist. Pope Francis after his daily Mass spends about 10 minutes in prayer before the exposed Blessed Sacrament. I personally have experienced a deep peace whenever I spend more than a few minutes in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Catholic religious men and women and deacons and priests have an obligation to pray at least the morning and evening prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Although this is not obligatory for lay people it is a form of prayer also recommended for them. The Christian family should be a "school" of prayer for all of its members. With regard to favorable places consider, e.g., a pilgrimage to the places in Israel (the Holy Land) where Jesus was born, grew up, lived, died and rose from the dead. I have been fortunate to have spent 4 weeks in the Holy Land. One of my

other favorite places is the House of the Holy Family (according to tradition) in Loreto, Italy. I have visited that a few times and each time when in that house felt like I was almost in heaven.

### **Slide 32: Christian Prayer (CCC, Part 4, Ch. 3)**

- **We are called to pray “at all times” and at specific times: the Church proposes daily prayer, Sundays, the cycle of the liturgical year and feasts**

The New Testament exhortation to pray “at all times” does not mean that we should spend 24 hours every day on our knees. We can try to pray at all times by offering God everything we do and trying to live God’s will in each present moment whether we are taking a specific time to pray and meditate or working or eating or playing or resting. Related to praying at specific times many spiritual writers recommend beginning one’s day by offering it to God and asking him for his grace to live it well and ending one’s day with an examination of conscience—honestly considering before God how one’s day went and asking God’s forgiveness for whenever we failed to love properly and thanking God for the various blessings we experienced. Participating in Mass (or for other Christians a Christian prayer / worship service) can be part of how one keeps holy the Sabbath Day (the third of the Ten Commandments). The liturgical year and great Christian feasts including Advent, Christmas, Lent and the Easter Season, and the feast days of certain saints such as the Conversion of the Apostle Paul on Jan. 25<sup>th</sup>, can help us to enter into the great mysteries of the Christian faith more deeply.

There have been hundreds of scientific studies, according to Dr. Harold Koenig, which show:

... clear evidence that religious practices like prayer, and attendance at worship services are clearly related to such benefits as: faster recovery from depression; a lower incidence of suicide; faster recovery from cardiac surgery; marital satisfaction and stability; and a life span that, on average, is seven years longer among believers. The most powerful predictor of mental and physical health is whether you go to church. It works whatever your faith is.

However, Dr. Koenig points out that “it is not enough to attend worship services just in hopes of improving your health. If you did, you would just get more anxious. You have to do it for the right reasons. The health effect is a natural consequence of following the religious life for religious reasons.” (“Prayer, worship have health benefits, psychiatrist says,” *Edmonton Journal*, 3 Dec. 2002, A11)

- **Although there are many and various personal ways of prayer, there are three main expressions:**

- **Vocal Prayer: with words, e.g., the Our Father**

Vocal prayer can be out loud or only in one’s mind, by oneself or together with others who believe in God. Vocal prayer should not be empty words but also engage one’s heart and mind well. Certain physical postures such as kneeling or sitting or raising one’s arms can foster appropriate inner dispositions such as humility or sitting quietly in God’s presence or praise since we are embodied persons.

- **Meditation: on Scriptures, books, life, engaging our mind, emotions, imagination ... to deepen our understanding, faith, conversion, commitment, love**

Besides what the Catechism says about these, certain saints such as St. Francis de Sales, St. Ignatius of Loyola, and St. Teresa of Avila have written well about prayer and meditation and their writings have become Christian classics which have inspired many.

- **Contemplative Prayer: close sharing, recollection, surrender, a grace, communion, conforms us to God’s likeness, gaze of faith, silent love, union with Christ**

The Catechism, nn. 2700-2719, I think, explains these three expressions including Contemplation well. St. Teresa of Avila has also explained well common stages in growing in the life of prayer. In some ways, this can be compared to a man and a woman falling in love, courting, getting married, remaining committed throughout the years to each other in good times and bad times, and ultimately being deeply in love—a love often expressed in a silent gaze, looking deeply into each other’s eyes, beyond words (consider some elderly married couples who are more deeply in love than when they first got married).

■ **Prayer, a gift, presupposes effort on one’s part:**

- **One faces erroneous conceptions, difficulties such as distractions, dryness, discouragement, temptations, *acedia*... One needs humility, filial trust, vigilance, perseverance, deeper conversion ...**

A few erroneous conceptions of prayer are treated in CCC, nn. 2726-27. Can you think of any others? With regard to “distractions,” which I often experience in prayer, we can turn these into meaningful prayer. For example, if I am worrying about someone I can entrust that person to God in prayer or if I am thinking judgmentally about someone, I can ask God to help me appreciate how much God loves that person and if that person has done something wrong then entrust that person to God’s merciful love. Concerning the battle against our sinful selves and the devil which the Catechism speaks of consider St. John of the Cross pointing out (following Scripture) that our real enemies: the world (not everything created good by God—see Gen 1—but what is sinful in our environment and which would tempt us to sin), the flesh—not our bodies which are part of God’s good creation but what would incline us to sin arising within our human nature wounded by sin) and the devil (we see in the Gospels that Satan and other fallen angels or demons are real—they seek to lead us into sin and turn us from God). These are our real enemies because they are the three sources of temptation to sin in our lives and committing sin is the worst thing in our lives—worse than getting very sick, suffering and the death of one’s body. With God’s help we can grow every day in converting from sin to God. In the Gospels Jesus often warned his disciples to be vigilant, to watch and to pray.

If you have not yet done so, please read the related required reading for Topic 12.

### **Some Discussion Questions with regard to the Life of Prayer**

1. What do you think of the Father of the Church, St. Jerome’s saying that “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ”? Do you agree with the Eastern Father of the Church, St. John Chrysostom (both lived about 400 A.D.), that reading the Scriptures is even more necessary for lay people living in the world than for monks?
2. Regarding the theological virtues do you find it helpful to understand faith as the virtuous mean between the vices of scepticism and credulity (gullibility), and hope as the virtuous mean between presumption and despair?
3. In what sense is it possible to “pray always”? Why is it important to take specific times to pray on a regular basis?
4. Why do you think prayer and worship (for the right reasons) in general have health and relationship benefits (e.g., marital satisfaction and stability, and a longer life on average) as found by many scientific studies?
5. The Catechism, nn. 2726-7, speaks of some erroneous conceptions of prayer. What is your response to these? How should we respond to difficulties in prayer such as distractions, dryness, discouragement, temptations ...?



6. Although Christian prayer first of all involves communication and communion with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), can you relate to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a model of prayer and/or as a spiritual mother (cf. Jn 19:26-27)? Related to this and the “communion of saints” (cf. the Apostle’s Creed said by many Christians), do you see a place in genuine Christian prayer for asking Mary and other saints in heaven to intercede to God for us?
7. Do you find the traditional Christian distinctions concerning vocal prayer, meditation and contemplation helpful? Was there anything else in the reading you found particularly helpful? If you have done other reading on prayer (i.e., other than the readings for this course) or heard talks on prayer, are there any other things you have read or heard that you find particularly helpful? If you wish, you may also share your own experience regarding prayer.
8. Do you have any other questions or thoughts about the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on prayer (the two Topics for Module 6 of the Course) and the related Class Slides and notes?

**Regarding the Reading Responses (see Course Outline, p. 3), please respond to at least one of the above 8 questions. Your third response for Module 6 can be related to an additional question above from either Topics 11 or 12. Also, please respond to the responses of at least one other student. You can also respond to more questions and/or more students to improve your mark in this area. Thank you.**