

Souls of prayer

Jesus often withdrew to speak to his Father God alone, and we too need some time every day dedicated to dialogue with God. Our friendship with Jesus Christ unfolds and grows in these moments of quiet, through simple conversations in which we open our souls wide to Him.

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We all carry a series of indelible memories deep within us. Even as time passes and we stop looking

inward, they remain, surfacing at the most unexpected moments.

We might be fortunate enough to find among those memories moments of closeness with a mother, brother, or grandmother, in which they shared part of their personal treasure with us. Perhaps we first spoke to God in one of those conversations, with words they lent us. Or perhaps it happened years later, when a friend or a chance circumstance, opened the door to an intimate dialogue with God.

Whenever it took place, were we not surprised when, for the first time, we realized that we could talk to God personally? (And even more... hear Him answer?!) We very likely thought that personal, close relationships with God were reserved for VIPs, *special* people in the Church, even if we'd been told

otherwise... Perhaps we still think that way.

But the opportunity to be close to God drew us in, because there can be no friendship like his. He is even more invested than we are in maintaining that relationship, and only He can fill the longing for fulfillment in our hearts.

The Gospel tells us that the apostles, struck by the way their master prayed, once asked Jesus: “Teach us to pray.”^[1] We can imagine them hearing the Our Father for the first time and being filled with hope at the idea that they could speak to God, their Father, with such trust. Previously, they considered themselves unworthy to say his name because of the profound reverence pious Jews had for God.

Sharing life with Christ

Centuries later, at the beginning of the Work, St. Josemaría also broke the molds around him by recalling the Gospel's call to contemplation through ordinary life. In this way, he opened horizons for those who approached his apostolate, filling the first young men and women in the St. Raphael work with enthusiasm and inviting them to be souls of prayer: "When I made you a present of that Life of Jesus, I wrote as an inscription. May you seek Christ: may you find Christ: may you love Christ. Three perfectly clear stages. Have you tried, at least, to live the first?"^[2] Many followed that invitation, walking the path of Christian life in the middle of the world, striving to remain in dialogue with the Lord.

Since that time, many people have drawn close to the spirit of the Work,

attracted by this message, wanting to give every moment of our lives its fullest meaning, living it with God... People from all walks of life, with a deep desire to live a full, authentic life, many since their youth,^[3] turn to the resources for Christian formation offered by the Work, seeking guidance and nourishment for their inner life.

“By making good use of the means offered in the Saint Raphael work, they receive a solid doctrinal formation, they learn to be souls of prayer, to live in the presence of God in the midst of their everyday duties, to give their work (whether intellectual or manual) a Christian meaning, and to have a spirit of sacrifice.”^[4] —

Throughout the day, we strive to share what lies ahead of us with God; all our responsibilities, projects, and concerns. We offer Him what we

have, asking *that our actions may begin with his inspiration and continue with his assistance*,^[5] so that we may also be witnesses of Christ's light for those around us.

We try to be aware that God is always attentive to us and to respond to his Love by giving thanks many times a day, asking for forgiveness when we have forgotten Him or who we are to Him, thus cultivating the presence of God.

Authentic dialogue

Just as Jesus often withdrew to be alone to speak with his Father God, we too need “some moments that are dedicated exclusively to our conversation with God, moments of silent dialogue, before the tabernacle if possible, in order to thank our Lord for having waited for us — so often alone — for twenty centuries.”^[6]

Our friendship with Jesus Christ unfolds and grows in these moments of quiet, through simple, fearless conversations in which we open our souls wide to Him, knowing that He loves us most and best, and He is already within us to give encouragement, light, and grace.

In prayer, we experience Jesus' closeness and we discover that He seeks to fill our hearts more and more, pouring all his love into them, expanding them, and including many people within them.

But it is not always easy to pray, and whether we are at the beginning of our journey or have traveled a certain distance, we always want to learn how to pray. It may help to pause and reflect on how we pray, or on how we would like those conversations of friendship with Him to be.

A good starting point might be thinking of a topic that occupies our hearts *now*. Then we can talk about our lives: what excites us, what worries us, what we have at hand. At times, perhaps, there is something gnawing at us within, and yet we talk to Him about “birds and flowers,” perhaps because we don’t trust that God truly cares about everything that matters to us, or because we are afraid to face the complexities of our lives.

We may not know how to talk to God about certain topics. It can help us to consider that God is always on our side and that He always cares about what we care about. For this reason, with simplicity, we can tell Him: “Lord, this is what worries me... What can we do? Where are You here?” We can also tell Him about our experiences, the little difficulties we’ve met with and how we dealt with them, asking what He has to say

about it or about what lies ahead, trying to see everything from God's perspective.

The Lord speaks to us through Sacred Scripture, the teachings of the pastors of the Church and the saints, and the events of the day. Therefore, in every moment of prayer, it is important to be attentive, open to listening to God and understanding his action in our lives, willing to "complicate" our lives by thinking about how to face reality in a more Christian way, in accordance with our identity as children of God.

In the Gospel, the Lord invites us to be bold and courageous, and prayer is a good place to begin this transformation of mind and senses. This is referred to as the "battle of prayer" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2726) because in those moments, with God's grace, we dare to listen, discover, and enter more

deeply into God's heart. There we will find his hopes *for* us and *with* us, not in a theoretical or abstract way, but in a real one. With Him, we commit to to struggle in a specific area in which we know we need to change: something small He wants us to hand over, or something we know will do us or people close to us good. He is our Father, and He accompanies us, gives us strength, and looks at us with understanding and affection.

It may help to consider our Mother Mary's example. The Gospel tells us that "she kept all these things, pondering them in her heart,"^[7] meaning that she was accustomed to considering what the things that happened to her meant, how they could bring her closer to God, and what He was asking of her through the circumstances she found herself in. She can teach us to cultivate the habit of being ready to listen, to

discover the meaning of things and the way to collaborate in God's plans. This requires active listening and a deep desire to seize every opportunity to love, to say yes to God with confidence.

Time to listen to God

At times it is easy to perceive the presence of God; for instance, in overwhelmingly happy moments or in times of meditation. At other times, however, it may be difficult for us to hear God. What should we do then? A first question to ask ourselves is why we find it hard to listen to Him in those moments. Perhaps, for a variety of reasons (busyness, a long to-do list, neglect...) we are not really ready to engage with God.

This inner state can even find expression in our relationships with others, making it more difficult to

listen to them. We might ask how we usually listen to others, and whether we are trying to hear God's voice when we have blocked our ears to other people.

Pope Leo XIV advises us: "I think it is important for all of us to learn how to listen more, to enter into dialogue. First and foremost, with the Lord: always listen to the Word of God. Then also listen to others, to know how to build bridges, to know how to listen without judging, not closing the doors thinking that we have all the truth and no-one else can tell us anything."^[8]

That is one way to train our ears to listen: to fight against becoming wrapped up in ourselves and our own ideas, not to yield to the excessive noise of media saturation (constant music, games, social media...) or our hyperactive lives.

If we aspire to have a life of prayer, we need to educate and train our external and internal senses to awaken them and lead us to union with God. We can do so by cultivating inner silence with good readings (both spiritual and literary), contemplating nature, discovering beauty in small things, and not trying to fill all our time with activity.

The Holy Spirit dwells within us, and we need to find ways to ensure that we can receive his inspirations and hear the voice of God in the inner space of our souls.

Let's assume that we are already putting those means into practice... Now how can we listen to what God wants to tell us? God speaks how and when He wants to, but we can always turn to an essential resource: the Word of God! Scripture is a privileged path to knowing God's will. The Church has always

recommended turning to to the testament He left us through the evangelists. “What is Sacred Scripture but a letter from the omnipotent God to his creature?”^[9]

There is no better guide for prayer and for our own lives than Jesus’ life. “When you open the Holy Gospel,” St. Josemaría advised, “think that what is written there (...) is something that you should not only know, but live. Everything, every point that is told there, has been gathered, detail by detail, for you to make it come alive in the individual circumstances of your life. (...) In that holy Writing you will find the Life of Jesus, but you should also find your own life.”^[10] If we go to prayer desiring to grow in friendship with Jesus Christ, nothing can better than reading and meditation on the Gospel for helping know and relate to Him.

Naturally, depending on the state of our soul, it can help to vary our way of praying if it becomes difficult or monotonous, when we struggle to use our imagination or to convert our inner noise into prayer.

Sometimes it helps us to remain in an attitude of adoration, thank Him for different things, read an article or book on spirituality about a topic that interests us, savor a vocal prayer like the Our Father, ask Him for intentions that concern us, or simply “be alone with the One we know loves us,”^[11] looking at the Tabernacle. Remaining with Him shows Him how much we love Him, and that we do not abandon Him at the first difficulty. However we pray, God encourages us not to stagnate or settle, because He wants to deepen our intimacy with Him. Prayer is meant to be something alive.

In the Saint Raphael work, we have a means meant to teach us to be souls of prayer: meditations. These weekly moments of prayer guided a priest's preaching, can inspire our personal prayer, open horizons for us, teach us to immerse ourselves in the scenes of the Gospel, etc., although they will never replace the effort we must put in ourselves, because prayer ultimately is a one-on-one encounter in the silence of our souls.

Prayer, a vital necessity

Among the means of formation available in the Work, personal prayer is the key for everything we receive to take root in our souls. In prayer, we pause to speak with the Lord about what we have heard in the circle and apply it to our lives; there we prepare our conversations of spiritual accompaniment and return to make the advice we have been given our own. Our desire to

respond to the Lord by being more generous through collections and giving our time in visits to the poor or catechesis arises from prayer; there our desire to bring others closer to Him is ignited.

Little by little, prayer becomes a vital necessity, expressing our friendship with Jesus Christ, to the point that we notice that when we abandon it, everything else falters, because the mission God entrusted us is renewed in prayer. Prayer is the engine of our lives.

When we allow ourselves to be guided by Him, He helps us “grow and we become ‘a letter of Christ’ (2 Cor 3:3) for one another,” as Pope Leo said. “The more we let ourselves be convinced and transformed by the Gospel — allowing the power of the Spirit to purify our heart, to make our words straightforward, our desires honest and clear, and our

actions generous — the more capable we are of proclaiming its message.”^[12]

^[1] Lk 11:1.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 382.

^[3] Cf. Pope Francis, General audience, 13-VI-2018.

^[4] St. Josemaría, *Collected Letters II*, Letter no. 7, no. 5.

^[5] Traditional prayer included in the opening prayer of the Mass on the Thursday after Ash Wednesday; St. Josemaría incorporated it into the *preces* of the Work.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 119.

^[7] Lk 2:19.

^[8] Pope Leo XIV, Homily, 11-V-2025.

^[9] St. Gregory the Great, *Letter to Theodore, Physician to the Emperor*, Ep. V, 46 (CCL 140, 339).

^[10] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 754.

^[11] St. Teresa of Jesus.

^[12] Pope Leo XIV, Homily, 25-V-2025.

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