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What is prayer? Does God hear and answer us?

Jesus teaches us to build a relationship with God, our Father, in the New Testament. Throughout the centuries, countless people have prayed. But sometimes we are not sure how to address God, or whether He will listen to us.

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Summary

1. Can I talk and listen to God?

2. How can I pray? What is prayer?

3. How did Jesus pray?

4. Are there different kinds of prayer?

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1. Can I talk and listen to God?

Yes. In the Old Testament, Abraham, Moses and the prophets spoke with God and heard his voice. In the New Testament, Jesus teaches us how to relate to God, our Father. Throughout the centuries, thousands of people have lived experiences of prayer. The saints are evidence of God's search for men — for each one of us — in every age and circumstance, and that we can all respond too and converse with him.

"To listen to the Lord, we must learn to contemplate, feel his constant

presence in our lives, and we must stop and converse with him, give him space in prayer. Each of us, even you boys and girls, young people, so many of you here this morning, should ask yourselves: 'how much space do I give to the Lord? Do I stop to talk with him?' Ever since we were children, our parents have taught us to start and end the day with a prayer, to teach us to feel that the friendship and the love of God accompanies us. Let us remember the Lord more in our daily life!"
(Pope Francis, Audience, May 1, 2013)

2. How can I pray? What is prayer?

All people are called to communicate with God. In creation, God calls every being from nothingness to existence. Even after losing his likeness to God due to sin, man is an image of his Creator and retains his longing for the One who calls him into existence.

God tirelessly calls each person to the mysterious encounter that is prayer. He takes the initiative in prayer, placing in us the desire to see, speak to, and share our life with him. Prayer, listening and speaking to God, is a response to this divine initiative.

"Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

"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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2562-2563)

Prayer is not reduced to the spontaneous outbreak of an inner impulse: to pray it is necessary to want to pray and to learn to pray. We learn to speak to God through the Church: listening to the word of God, reading the Gospels and, above all, imitating the example of Jesus.

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- 'Minutes of silence'. Leave silence for those whose hearts are dry. We Catholics, children of God, speak with our Father

who is in heaven. (*The Way*, 115)

- Each day without fail we should devote some time specially to God, raising our minds to him, without any need for the words to come to our lips, for they are being sung in our heart. Before the Tabernacle, close to him who has remained there out of Love. If this is not possible, we can pray anywhere because our God is ineffably present in the heart of every soul in grace. (*Friends of God*, 249)
- Look at the set of senseless reasons the enemy gives you for abandoning your prayer. “I have no time” — when you are continually wasting it. “This is not for me.” “My heart is dry... Prayer is not a question of what you say or feel, but of love. And you love when you try hard to say something to the Lord, even

though you might not actually say anything. (*Furrow*, 464)

- Whenever we feel in our hearts a desire to improve, a desire to respond more generously to Our Lord, and we look for something to guide us, a north star to guide our lives as Christians, the Holy Spirit will remind us of the words of the Gospel that we 'ought to pray continually and never be discouraged'. Prayer is the foundation of any supernatural endeavor. With prayer we are all powerful; without it, if we were to neglect it, we would accomplish nothing. (*Friends of God*, 238)

3. How did Jesus pray?

In the New Testament, the perfect model of prayer is found in the filial prayer of Jesus. Often in solitude, in secret, Jesus' prayer entailed a loving

adherence to the Father's will, even to the cross, and an absolute trust in being heard.

Jesus testifies to us that he is in continual communication with his Father and invites us to imitate him. In his teaching, Jesus instructs his disciples to pray with a purified heart, a living and persevering faith, as children who speak with their Father.

The prayer of the Virgin Mary, in her Fiat and in her Magnificat, is characterized by the generous offering of her whole being in faith, therefore our Mother is also a model of prayer, of a person attentive to what God wants to tell her in order to respond.

"Three principal parables on prayer are transmitted to us by St. Luke:

- "the first, 'the importunate friend,' invites us to urgent

prayer: 'Knock, and it will be opened to you.' (Lk 11:9) To the one who prays like this, the heavenly Father will 'give whatever he needs,' and above all the Holy Spirit who contains all gifts.

- "the second, 'the importunate widow,' is centered on one of the qualities of prayer: it is necessary to pray always without ceasing and with the patience of faith. 'And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?' (Lk 18:8)
- "the third parable, 'the Pharisee and the tax collector,' concerns the humility of the heart that prays. 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' (Lk 18:13) The Church continues to make this prayer its own: *Kyrie eleison!*" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2613))

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- There are so many Gospel scenes where Jesus talks to his Father that we cannot stop to consider them all. But I do feel we must pause to consider the intense hours preceding his Passion and Death, when Christ prepares himself to carry out the Sacrifice that will bring us back once more to God's Love. In the intimacy of the Upper Room, the Heart of Jesus overflows with love; he turns to the Father in prayer, announces the coming of the Holy Spirit, and encourages his disciples to maintain the fervour of their charity and their faith. (*Friends of God*, 240)
- My advice is that, in your prayer, you actually take part in the different scenes of the Gospel, as one more among the people present. First of all,

imagine the scene or mystery you have chosen to help you recollect your thoughts and meditate. Next apply your mind, concentrating on the particular aspect of the Master's life you are considering — his merciful Heart, his humility, his purity, the way he fulfills his Father's Will. Then tell him what happens to you in these matters, how things are with you, what is going on in your soul. Be attentive, because he may want to point something out to you, and you will experience suggestions deep in your soul, realising certain things and feeling his gentle reprimands. (*Friends of God*, 253)

- It is Jesus who speaks: 'Amen I say to you: ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you.' Pray. In what human

venture could you have greater guarantees of success? (*The Way*, 96)

- How lovable is the scene of the Annunciation. How often we have meditated on this! Mary is recollected in prayer. She is using all her senses and her faculties to speak to God. It is in prayer that she comes to know the divine Will. And with prayer she makes it the life of her life. Do not forget the example of the Virgin Mary. (*Furrow*, 481)

4. Are there different kinds of prayer?

"The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition,

intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

"Because God blesses the human heart, it can in return bless him who is the source of every blessing. Forgiveness, the quest for the Kingdom, and every true need are objects of the prayer of petition. Prayer of intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. It knows no boundaries and extends to one's enemies. Every joy and suffering, every event and need can become the matter for thanksgiving which, sharing in that of Christ, should fill one's whole life: 'Give thanks in all circumstances' (1 Thess 5:18). 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" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2644-2649).

Meditate with St. Josemaría

- You write: 'To pray is to talk with God. But about what?' About what? About Him, about yourself: joys, sorrows, successes and failures, noble ambitions, daily worries, weaknesses! And acts of thanksgiving and petitions: and Love and reparation. In a word: to get to know him and to get to know yourself: 'to get acquainted!' (*The Way*, 91)
- "Pray for me," I said, as I always do. And he answered in amazement: "But is something the matter?" I had to explain that something is the matter or happens to us all the time; and I added that when prayer is lacking, "more and more weighty things are the matter." (*Furrow*, 479)
- Forgive me if I insist, but it is very important to note carefully

what the Messiah did, because he came to show us the path that leads to the Father. With Our Lord we will discover how to give a supernatural dimension to all our actions, even those that seem least important. We will learn to live every moment of our lives with a lively awareness of eternity, and we will understand more deeply man's need for periods of intimate conversation with his God, so as to get to know him, to invoke him, to praise him, to break out into acts of thanksgiving, to listen to him or, quite simply, to be with him. (*Friends of God*, 239)

- When we seek Our Lord in this way, our whole day becomes one intimate and trusting conversation with him. I have said and written this so many times, but I don't mind saying it again, because Our Lord has

shown us by his example that this is exactly what we have to do: we have to pray at all times, from morning to night and from night to morning. When everything goes well: 'Thank you, my God!' If we are having a hard time, 'Lord, do not abandon me!' Then this God of ours, who is 'meek and humble of heart' will not ignore our petitions or remain indifferent. For he himself has told us, 'Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened for you.' (*Friends of God*, 247)

- What a great source of confidence the Word of God should be for us! When, throughout my priestly ministry, I have time and again counseled people to pray, I have not been inventing anything. It's all there in Holy Scripture. That is where I learned to say,

'Lord, I don't know how to talk to you! Lord, teach us how to pray!' When we pray thus, we receive all the loving assistance of the Holy Spirit — that light, fire and driving wind which sets the flame alight and makes it capable of enkindling a great fire of love. (*Friends of God*, 244)

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