

GRADE EIGHT

PRAYER



Prayer is an expression of our awareness of and response to God's presence, love, goodness, and saving power.

OBJECTIVES

- To assist the young adolescent to grow in a desire for and appreciation of prayer as essential to the Catholic Christian life.
- To help the young adolescent, through the presentation and experience of a variety of prayer forms, to develop the ability to pray.

I. RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

A. The Nature of Friendship

Friendship is a gift from God. It is one of the most beautiful and challenging ways of relating to another person. [733, 2010, 2347]

Friendship needs time and patience and requires communication which consists of listening, responding and sharing concerns. [1971, 1939, 2469]

Friends need to be “in touch” and to share the joys and sorrows of life. Friends are open to each other when they allow the other person to be himself or herself and desire the very best for the other. [1789, 1803, 1905]

Friends are loyal, faithful and forgiving. [1823, 1829]

B. Friendship with God

God wants to be our friend. In our relationship with God, we are invited not only to do what God asks of us, but also to experience God as the one who loves us beyond any human experience of love. God chooses to love each one at every moment. [277, 374, 396]

God wants our friendship in return. God is always faithful in friendship, and so the challenge is for us, in turn, to be faithful to God. As in all friendships, this relationship develops over a lifetime. It calls for patience and perseverance, and demands communication, which we call prayer. [2558, 2725, 2742]

All people are called to prayer. Deep within the human person is hidden a yearning to communicate with God. This yearning or desire is placed there by our Creator, who wants to be in communion with us. [2506, 2560, 2565]

Yet we are sometimes not aware of our own deep longing to encounter God. We must discover what we really want. We must discover the longing for God, which dwells within us and calls us to prayer. [2560, 2567-68]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Recount to the young people some of the ways in which Jesus was a friend to those around him. For example:

- He calmed the sea when his disciples were afraid; when we are afraid, we pray and ask for help (Matthew 8:23-26);
- He fed the hungry people (Matthew 14:13-21);
- He appeared to two discouraged disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32);
- He rejoiced at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1-11);
- He wept when his friend Lazarus died; we, too, mourn when we suffer a loss (John 11:32-35);
- He shared a meal with his disciples (John 21:1-13).

Then read the following passage:

“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

Invite the young people to write a prayer, thanking Jesus for being a friend in good times and in difficult times.

II. NATURE OF PRAYER

Prayer is a loving, honest conversation with God which is prompted and made possible by the Holy Spirit within us (cf. Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:26). We respond to the mystery of God’s love by praying often, not just when we have a special need. [683, 742, 2697]

There are many ways of praying to God. Our prayer can be personal, that is, an interior communication with God not shared with others, or it can be communal, that is, a communication with God experienced together with others. [2655, 2664]

At times of prayer, we open ourselves to God. We listen to God, and God listens to us. We deliberately choose to spend time in prayer so as to know God more intimately. This knowledge leads us to love, and love in turn leads us to service of God and others. [1695, 2745]

Sometimes prayer is spontaneous: we speak from the heart without planning or preparation. “Pray at every opportunity in the Spirit.” (Ephesians 6:18) [2659-60, 2697, 2742-43]

Just as we make time for our friends, we make time for God. In order to grow in our relationship with God, it is important to set aside time each day for prayer. [2697-98]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE – COMMUNAL PRAYER

Help the young people to enter into a prayerful atmosphere by listening to a recording of instrumental music, lighting a LED candle, or viewing a picture or image. Pray aloud that the Holy Spirit will guide each member of the group.

Read aloud one of the following passages of Scripture:

Isaiah 43:1

Isaiah 49:13-16

Matthew 6:9-13

Matthew 18:19-20

Luke 11:11-13

John 15:9-11

After a period of silence and time for reflection, encourage each young person, if he or she wishes, to share a personal thought or reflection they have on the passage with the group.

Conclude by reading Ephesians 3:20-21:

*Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine,
by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

III. BASIC ELEMENTS OF PRAYER

Prayer is a necessary means for growth in our intimate relationship with God. There are several basic elements of prayer, which are given various expressions in different places and times [2644]. These basic elements are listed below along with examples, most of which are from the mass prayers as found in the Third Edition of the Roman Missal:

- *Adoration*: an attitude of humility and awe before the wonder and greatness of God; [2626-28]
 - *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.*
 - *Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*
- *Thanksgiving*: an expression of gratitude for the generosity and graciousness of God; [2637-38]
 - Any one of the Eucharistic Prayers recited at Mass.
- *Contrition*: an expression of sorrow for the sinful, hurtful and selfish acts we have committed; [2631]
 - *Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.* [Matthew 8:8]
 - *I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault,*

through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

- *Petition: asking for the help and support of God, for myself; [2629-33]*
 - *Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.*
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: grant us peace.
 - *The Lord's Prayer (Our Father, who art in heaven...)*
- *Intercession: asking for God's help on behalf of another; [2634-36]*
 - *Prayer of the Faithful*
- *Praise: giving glory to God joyfully, just because of who God is. [2639-42]*
 - *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will.*
We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory,
Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.
Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us;
you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

IV. WAYS OF PRAYING

All prayer involves our heart, mind and soul. It is the whole person who prays. Scripture emphasizes that the source of prayer is the heart, because the heart is the center of the whole person. If prayer is not an expression of the heart, its words and gestures are meaningless. [2562-63]

Frequently, prayer involves our body as well, through posture, gesture and the use of our voice. In some kinds of prayer we pray aloud; in others, we pray silently. [2590, 2702-03, 2717]

The *Liturgy* is the official prayer of the People of God, the Church, publicly worshiping God in the celebration of:

- The Sacraments
- The Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass)
- The Liturgy of the Hours

In the Liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal. [1073, 1113, 1174, 2698]

The Eucharistic liturgy is the central act of worship and prayer of our faith. To be a faithful Catholic obliges one to participate at Mass every Sunday and holy day of obligation.

Devotional prayer helps us to personalize the mysteries of faith. [1178, 1674-75, 2678]

Some examples of devotional prayer are:

- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- The Stations of the Cross
- The Rosary
- Novenas
- Pilgrimages
- Veneration of Relics

Prayer Groups are intentional gatherings for shared prayer, which may include hymns, readings from Sacred Scripture and other Christian sources, personal reflections, and silence. [2689]

Hymns are religious songs or scriptural verses set to music. [1156-58]

All Christian prayer, which is always personal, includes one or more of the following: [2699]

- *Vocal prayer* puts into words, whether silently or aloud, the prayer of our heart. [2700-04]
- *Meditation* is a prayerful reflection on a passage of Sacred Scripture, another inspirational text, an event, or the wonders of creation. God speaks to us through whatever we are meditating on, and we listen. [2705-08]
- *Contemplation* is the silent awareness of the presence of Jesus, our loving friend. It is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. [2709-19]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE – MEDITATIVE PRAYER

To assist the young people in developing a better appreciation of the practice of regular prayer, review the simple steps for personal prayer:

- Select a passage from Sacred Scripture (some examples are Deuteronomy 7:9; John 15:9-17; Ephesians 2:4-5)
- Create a calm environment and situate oneself in a quiet place
- Reflect on the presence of God with us
- Read the selected Scripture passage
- Meditate on the passage, asking oneself, “What is the Lord saying to me?”
- Express thanksgiving to Jesus and conclude with the Lord’s Prayer

After explaining the above steps, lead the youth through the prayer experience.

V. QUALITIES OF PRAYER

Prayer, in any form, is relational. As a good relationship between trusting friends has particular qualities, so does genuine prayer. [2560, 2565]

Genuine prayer is characterized by the following qualities:

- *Attention*: concentration on the presence of God and attentive listening to God speaking to us. [2612]
- *Confidence*: turning to God with an abiding trust that God loves us, listens to us and will give us what is best for us. [2606-10]
- *Perseverance*: faithfulness to prayer even when we do not feel like praying, when we feel we are too busy or when it is difficult to pray. [2742]
- *Devotion*: a deliberate choice to spend time with God in prayer because God is our Creator and Redeemer and we are God's people, who need God at every moment. [2650]

Prayer affects our relationships with others as well as our relationship with God. True prayer arises from and leads to a life of justice, mercy and love. [2745, 2764, 2818, 1831]

PRAYER EXPERIENCE – JESUS SPEAKS TO US THROUGH SACRED SCRIPTURE

Create a calm environment and ask the young people to think about God's presence within each one of them. Choose one or more of the following Scripture passages to proclaim to the group:

- Luke 11:5-10 (Further teachings on prayer)
- John 14:12-13 (Last Supper Discourses)
- John 15:5-7 (The Vine and the Branches)

As they listen to Scripture, ask them to think about Jesus speaking these words to them in their lives. After proclaiming the Scripture, invite anyone who wishes to do so to share what God might be saying to him or her. Conclude by giving thanks to Jesus and praying the Lord's Prayer as a group.

VI. DISTRACTIONS IN PRAYER

We are often distracted in prayer, even when we are in a prayerful atmosphere and have the best intentions. Distractions are thoughts or feelings that draw our attention away from God. [2729-30]

Sometimes our distractions have a message for us, reminding us of some need or desire of our heart that we can place before God in humility. At other times, distractions call for self-discipline, asking God to help us refocus on our prayer. By making an effort to set aside the distraction, we recommit ourselves to concentrating on God. [2729, 2732]

VII. PEOPLE WHO SHOW US HOW TO PRAY

Many people of the Old Testament, such as Abraham, Moses, Miriam, David, Esther, Elijah, Hannah and the writers of the psalms, show us how to pray. The psalms are prayers of the community of faith. [2570-89]

Jesus offers us the perfect model of how to relate to God, our loving Father. Sacred Scripture reveals what Jesus said about prayer and shows us the way he prayed. Jesus was always aware of the presence of God, his Father. He prayed in times of joy, sorrow, pain, and fear. He asked for strength, gave thanks and rejoiced in the love of his Father. [2599-2605, 2620, 2765]

Jesus teaches his followers to pray with:

- Faith: Matthew 21:22
- Persistence: Luke 11:5-8
- Simplicity: Luke 11:11-13
- Directness: Matthew 6:7-8
- Forgiveness: Mark: 11:25 [2607-15]

Jesus teaches us the fundamental prayer of the Church, the “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4), which is a summary of the whole Gospel. [2759, 2761, 2764, 2766]

Jesus teaches us to pray with others as well as alone:

“If two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”
(Matthew 18:19-20). [1373, 2623]

The Church teaches us there is no other way of Christian prayer than Christ. Regardless of the type of prayer (communal or personal, vocal or interior) it has access to the Father only if we pray in Jesus’ name. The sacred humanity of Jesus is the way by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to God our Father. [2664]

We can invoke God as “Father” because he is revealed to us by his Son become man and because his Spirit makes him known to us. [2780]

Mary offers an outstanding example of how to pray. In the face of many challenges, she offered her whole self to God in faith (see Luke 1:46-55). [2617-19, 2673-74, 26790] We are encouraged to pray in communion with Mary, entrusting to her our needs and the needs of others to her intercession.

The Blessed Virgin Mary was given the great privilege of being the mother of God. Over the centuries she has been given various titles to honor her and throughout the world many cultures recognize the help Mary offers to them. Some of the titles that we may use when speaking of or praying to the Blessed Mother are:

Our Lady of Good Counsel
Our Lady of Good Help
Our Lady of Guadalupe
Our Lady of Lourdes

Our Lady of Fatima
The Immaculate Conception

[Note to the Catechist/Teacher: A project to consider would be to research some of the many titles of the Blessed Mother, particularly those that have a cultural relevance for the young people in your group.]

Today, in our own parishes, neighborhoods and families, there are many people of prayer who can be models for us. They might also be sources of help and support to us as we grow in our life of prayer. [2685-90]

Our Catholic tradition provides us with some significant witnesses who point the way to prayer [2683-84]; the saints presented below are examples of young people for whom prayer was very important:

- **St. Francis Xavier (16th century):** The great courage and zeal that Francis Xavier brought to his work as a Jesuit missionary priest came from a life of prayer. Born in Spain, he preached in India, Malaya, the Moluccas, and was the first missionary to enter Japan. He died while seeking admittance to China to spread the Gospel there. [428-29, 852, 2611]
- **St. Martin Deporres (17th century):** A Peruvian lay brother of the Dominican order, Martin spent many hours in meditation after a long day of caring for the sick and the poor. His prayer strengthened him as he reached out to those in need. [2447-49, 2705-08, 2745]
- **St. Maria Goretti (20th century):** As a young teenager, Maria was busy taking care of her brothers and sisters, because her mother had to work. Even so, she prayed often and taught her brothers and sisters to pray. [2204-05, 2685, 2745]
- **Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, TOSD (20th century):** Pier Giorgio was born into a prominent family in Turin, Italy. His life was cut short by polio when he was only 24, but his deep love for the Lord, developed through prayer and the reception of Christ in the Eucharist, brought him to great holiness in a short time. As a student, he was active in Catholic youth groups working for charitable causes and social reform. He was a member of the Third Order of St. Dominic and of the Apostleship of Prayer, which helped him to grow in his life of prayer and discipleship to Jesus. His athletic prowess, especially as a hiker and mountain climber, were greatly admired but when polio caused the loss of these activities which he so enjoyed, his faith-filled acceptance of this suffering brought even greater admiration. Pier Giorgio was outstanding in his love for the poor and from his childhood he never ceased helping them. In fact, after his death it was the poor of the city who petitioned the Archbishop of Turin to begin the cause for his canonization.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE – IMAGINATIVE

- Create a prayerful setting and atmosphere.
- Pray aloud to the Holy Spirit asking for guidance that each young person may hear the Lord speaking to them.
- Read one of the following scripture narratives:
 - Emmaus event: Luke 24:13-35
 - Jesus and Zacchaeus: Luke 19:1-10
 - Call of the first disciples: Luke 5:1-11
 - Recognizing Jesus: Matthew 16:13-17

Then ask the young people to imagine themselves in the story and reflect on:

- The setting, the people, the conversation, and the details of the story
- Its meaning and how it touches their lives today
- Have the young people thank Jesus for these insights and the experience of his presence during prayer
- Conclude with the Lord's Prayer