

Composing Catholic Prayers

Introduction

While we often think of prayer primarily as asking God for something, prayer, properly understood, is a conversation with God or with the saints. Just as we cannot hold a conversation with another person unless he or she can hear us, the very act of praying is an implicit recognition of the presence of God or the saints here with us. And in praying, we strengthen that recognition of the presence of God, which draws us closer to Him.

As Christians, we are encouraged to pray in our own words to God and to listen to the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts in Baptism (Romans 5:5) and who helps us to pray (see Romans 8:26). Certainly the Church's tradition of prayer – beginning with the Lord's Prayer itself – is already a common and normative expression of that prayer.

The Church's liturgical prayer is the best teacher for composing or formulating prayers for ourselves and for public occasions, while leaving room for personal expression and creativity.

Anyone who is called upon to compose, lead or teach prayer will incorporate the following:

- Forms of Christian Prayer
- Basic Guidelines from the Faith
- Recommended Sourcebooks for Prayer;
- Building Blocks of Christian Prayer

Definitions:

Forms of Christian Prayer

The descriptions of different forms of prayer are taken from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2626 – 2643. They are stylistic ways of framing our prayers to God but even more importantly, express various attitudes of the heart that move us to pray:

- a) **Adoration** is the first attitude of the human being acknowledging that he or she is a creature before their Creator (CCC 2628).
- b) **Petition** means to ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out (CCC 2629); we understand that every need can become the object of petition (CCC 2633). Asking for good things from God, including things like virtues, and forgiveness, is appropriate.
- c) **Intercession** is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did - on behalf of all people; it is praying specifically for others (see CCC 2634). The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: we pray for all people, for leaders, for persecutors, and for salvation of those who reject the Gospel (see CCC 2636).

- d) **Praise** lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what He does, but simply because HE IS (CCC 2639).

Basic Guidelines From the Faith

Prayers can be addressed to God, to a Person of the Trinity, or to the Saints:

- a) When addressing prayer to God, Catholic prayers are addressed to God who is a Trinity of Persons. In other words, the ordinary pattern of public Christian prayer or Liturgy is to address the prayer to the Father, through the Son, in (or in the unity of) the Holy Spirit. This reflects God's plan of salvation. The Father has sent his Son to redeem us and now he makes the Son's saving mystery present in some way today by sending the Holy Spirit.
- b) When addressing prayers to a Person of the Trinity other than the Father, the ending of the prayer must be adjusted to reflect this, as outlined in the examples below:

- Addressed to the Father

Beginning: Most Loving Father Almighty God

Ending: Through your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

- Addressed to the Son

Beginning: Lord Jesus O Lord Jesus Christ

Ending: You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

- Addressed to the Holy Spirit

Beginning: Holy Spirit Consoler Paraclete

Ending: You who live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

- c) When addressing prayer to the Saints, the prayers can be addressed privately or publicly to the Virgin Mary and any officially canonized Saint. A person who has been beatified is normally honoured publicly only in certain territories where they are known until they are canonized as a Saint. What we are doing is asking for the Saints to intercede or pray for us. It would be important in prayers to the Saints to refer to this



fact:

- Pray for us to your Son who is Lord forever and ever (Mary)
- We ask you to intercede for us with God (Saint)

Saints should be addressed directly and by name since we are talking directly to him or her – “Blessed Mother,” “Great St. Joseph,” while an indirect form is awkward - “I ask Mother Mary to pray ...”

Recommended Sourcebooks For Prayer

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Liturgical Year, 1163 – 1173 and Part IV: Christian Prayer, 2558 – 2865.
- *Daily Roman Missal*, Midwest Theological Forum, Seventh Edition, Chicago, IL 2012
- *Byzantine Book of Prayer*, Alleluia Press, Allendale, NJ 1976.
- *Manual of Prayers*, Midwest Theological Forum, Chicago, IL 1996.
- *New St. Joseph People’s Prayer Book*, Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York, NY 1980.

Building Blocks of Christian Prayer

How to Compose a Prayer for Public Use

STEP ONE: INVITATION

We invite other people to pray with us. Silent prayer is an essential part of Christian prayer in public and in private. It is important to include some silence regularly, even in our public prayer times.

Examples:

- Let us pray (pause)
- I invite you to pray silently for a few moments
- Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us to pray in the silence of our hearts

STEP TWO: INVOCATION

To begin our prayer, we remember to whom we are speaking.

Examples:

- Most Holy Trinity, One God
- Loving Father
- Creator
- Lord Jesus Christ
- Holy Spirit

STEP THREE: WHO IS PRAYING?

Normally in prayer with others, as in the Liturgy, prayer is offered on behalf of all present and so, even if one person is leading the prayer, it should be in the first person plural: we ask, we pray, we humbly

pray.

STEP FOUR: MEMORIAL

In our prayers we often remember God's wonderful and saving works of the past in biblical history and our personal history. This gives us hope that God can and will act now to save and help us.

Examples:

- Loving Father, you sent your Son into the world to redeem us by his Cross and Resurrection
- O Holy Spirit, you inspired many good people to contribute to the building up of our school, help us now to continue the marvellous work they have begun

STEP FIVE: CALLING DOWN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every blessing or gift is related to the mission of the Holy Spirit now and in his work.

Example:

- Loving God, every good gift comes from you, the Father of lights; **send your Spirit** upon us today to make us stewards of your gifts and witnesses of your Son, Jesus Christ, in our world

STEP SIX: SCRIPTURAL

The Church's liturgical prayers are often a patchwork of Scriptural quotes or allusions. Our prayer is a meditation and response to God's word. A prayer we compose may be drawn from our meditation on a particular text or passage from Scripture.

Examples:

- Matthew 7: 9-10 - Discernment to ask for the right things
- Matthew 14: 23 – The importance of praying alone
- Mark 1: 35 - Finding time to pray
- Mark 9: 29 – Keys to effective prayer
- Luke 1: 13 – How and when God answers

STEP SEVEN: THE LITURGICAL YEAR

We pray within the context of the Church's Liturgical Year. Our prayer is a way of entering the mystery of Christ as the mystery unfolds in its different dimensions through the course of the year: Advent, Christmas, Lent, the Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time. The themes of these seasons can be reflected in our prayers.

Examples:

- Advent - Come, long-expected Jesus. Excite in us the joy and love and peace
- Christmas - Lord, in this holy season of prayer and song and laughter, we praise you for the great wonders you have sent us
- Christmas - We praise you for the word made flesh in a little



child

- Lent - Almighty and Everlasting God, you have given Jesus Christ our Saviour as a model of humility. He fulfilled your will by becoming man and giving his life on the cross
- Lent - Help us to bear witness to you by following his example of suffering and make us worthy to share in his resurrection
- Easter – Christ is risen, alleluia
- Easter – Let us sing to God the Son, our Risen King.

STEP EIGHT: CHRIST IS OUR MEDIATOR

To conclude our prayers, we always pray through Jesus as members of his Body, the Church. He is our High Priest, God and Man. We have come to know God fully through Jesus Christ. He is our only Saviour.

Examples:

- We ask this through Christ our Lord
- Through our Lord Jesus, Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever
- We ask this in the Name of Jesus the Lord

STEP NINE: RESPONSE – THE AMEN

The others who are gathered with us in prayer signal their response and agreement to what we have been asking on their behalf.

Christians have always maintained the Aramaic word *Amen* as a response to their prayers as our ancestors did. It connects us to our Christian ancestors and to our Jewish ancestors, and teaches others the meaning of this word: So be it! Let it be! I believe! Yes!

