

SOME REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER

The three main types: ***praise, petition*** and ***thanksgiving*** comprise much of our prayer life. We praise and thank our God who gives us all that we have and are. We turn to God in petition for all our needs and for those of others.

Notes on some forms of prayer

A ***morning offering*** renders a whole day an act of prayer. All our actions and joys become acts of charity and praise. The sufferings of our hearts, mind and bodies become a kind of existential prayer, united with the pain of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross, offered by Him to the Father. As we come to know our limitations and crosses, we gain deeper appreciation for how God provides for, carries and strengthens us in times of need. The experience of God's saving and providential grace gives the act of thanksgiving rich meaning, so that it becomes an integral part of our prayer life.

The prayer of Jesus, then, is the prayer we strive to make our own, each in our own unique way.

In *the Church's prayer* or ***Liturgy*** we join our prayers of praise, petition and thanksgiving to the constant prayer of Jesus to the Father on our behalf.

The prayer of Jesus to the Father that culminates with the offering up of his life for our redemption is rendered present for us in the ***Eucharist***, source and summit of the Church's prayer life. In the Eucharist, all that we have and are is united to the sacrifice of Jesus and re-presented to the Father by the priest on the community's behalf. The nourishment of Christ's Word, together with his own Body and Blood strengthens us so that we can become more Christ-like in all that we do, and the prayer of Jesus can become our own.

Prayer and children

Mother Teresa once said: "prayer builds faith, faith builds love, and love builds action." Being a person of prayer enables us to live by faith, which is exercised in charity. As educators, our life of prayer is going to have an impact on the way we treat those entrusted to our care and those around us.

Prayer is a humbling experience - one in which we declare our dependence on God for *everything*. Children, by nature, are dependent people, and so, their hearts are often more open to accepting prayer as part of life. Childlike openness to God in prayer and in life is not always easy. Human pride all-too-often fools us into believing that we are the ones in control. Children know

better. They can tell if we live by prayer, (and consequently by faith). When we are open to life the way children are, our prayer is given valuable witness.

Children will believe in prayer if its fruits are evident in our actions and demeanor. True prayer brings peace and joy to the heart. It nurtures the gifts of the Holy Spirit imparted to us at Baptism and Confirmation. It challenges us to forgive, to let go of hard-heartedness, and to be open to life itself. When we pray with childlike openness to God, we can identify with children's needs and help them bring those needs to God in prayer, and grow in faith and charity. God forbid that we should ever prescribe the recitation of prayers as a punishment.

What kinds of things do kids pray about?

- the safety and well-being of their parents, grandparents, siblings and friends
- recovery of the sick they see and hear about
- peace, and end to war, violence and killing
- thanksgiving to God for blessings, health, etc.
- their most heartfelt needs, struggles, hopes and desires

We could learn much about prayer from children. By encouraging children to pray at a young age, we are preparing them for a lifelong friendship with God. The seeds we plant by word and by example will find no limit in their possibilities for growth. If prayer nurtures our life, then our example will lead others to pray, so that they too can exclaim with the psalmist: "taste and see that the Lord is good."

"Unless you become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of God"
(Mt 18, 2-3)