

THE AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE AND THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS PRESENT

The Heart of Prayer

A Study with
Bishop Andrew Cozzens

The Evening Prayer, Pierre Edouard Frère /
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

INTRODUCTION

SESSION

1

Opening Prayer

Holy Spirit, teach us how to pray. Give us eyes to see ourselves as you see us and to see our world as you see it. Clear away the noise of our lives so that we might be fully attentive to your voice in the interior room of our hearts. Give us the grace necessary to respond to your call to a deeper relationship of prayer with you. Amen.

Study Goals

Prayer is essential to the Christian life. It is the most profound expression of a relationship with God that is both vital and personal (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2558). Prayer is not one-sided. God desires a relationship with us; he initiates this relationship, and when we pray, we respond to him. God doesn't merely want to engage with us at certain times, but at all times. For this reason, Saint Paul says we should "pray constantly" (1 Thess 5:17). This exhortation doesn't mean that we should be constantly reciting memorized prayers. Instead, we should strive to develop our interior life with God. In our modern age, many people lack an interior life and struggle to hear God's voice. This difficulty may be due to a misunderstanding of the dynamic nature of prayer. Saint John Paul II pointed out that prayer is multifaceted. Prayer is "thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening, and ardent devotion," he wrote, and each facet draws us close to God (*Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 33).

Every person, regardless of his or her state in life, is called to pray. We must ask ourselves whether we believe that God is personal and desires a relationship with us. Do we believe that God desires to encounter us in prayer and that God thirsts for us? Many people are familiar with liturgical prayer (like Mass) or devotional prayer (like the Rosary) but are unfamiliar with mental prayer, the kind of prayer that helps us develop a deep interior life. During this course, we will explore this dynamic prayer as we respond to God's loving call for a relationship with him.

Scripture

[Jesus] was praying in a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation.’ And I tell you, Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”



The Lord's Prayer, James Tissot / Brooklyn Museum

Discuss

1. Reflect on your current prayer life. How do you listen to God?
2. What are some of your preferred ways of praying? When you speak to God, how do you do it? What do you say?
3. We are constantly formed by the voices around us. What voices are currently forming you? How do you allow God's voice to form you? Are other voices in your life in harmony or dissonance with God's voice?

Memory Verse

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”

—Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est*, no. 1

Closing Prayer

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

—St. Ignatius of Loyola



Detail from *Saint Ignatius of Loyola's Vision of Christ and God the Father at La Storta*, Domenichino Zampieri / Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Challenge

This week, use the six steps St. Ignatius recommends for prayer. If you can take a full hour on these steps, preferably before the Blessed Sacrament, that would be great. If that seems daunting, scale the steps for the time you do have for prayer.

Use the steps found on the additional handout for this time of prayer.

Notes