

THE AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE AND THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS PRESENT

The Heart of Prayer

A Study with
Bishop Andrew Cozzens

*Jesus the Teacher, Anonymous
Renata Sedmakova/Shutterstock*

FOUNDATIONS FOR PRAYER

SESSION 3

Opening Prayer

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy. Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy. Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy. Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy. Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

— *Attributed to St. Augustine*

Study Goals

All spirituality is based on truths that are revealed by God. Knowing and understanding these truths allows us to enter a relationship with him. The five “theological presuppositions” explored in this session are vital in understanding prayer:

1. God desires a personal relationship with us and actively pursues us.
2. Our prayer is always a response to God.
3. The spiritual life is a work of continual conversion and turning away from sin.
4. Discipleship is submitting our lives to the lordship of Jesus Christ and seeking to do his will in our lives.
5. Any personal experiences in prayer are always governed by the objective spiritual authority of the Church’s living Tradition through the Magisterium.

On this foundation we can then build four dispositions necessary for prayer:

1. We must believe God wants a relationship with us.
2. We must have a clear conscience.
3. We must seek total surrender to God’s will.
4. We must desire holiness.

These truths pave the way for deeper intimacy with God as we grow in our understanding of prayer and the disposition necessary for a divine encounter.

Scripture

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”



Mosaic found in Chiesa di Santa Croce, Bari, Italy /
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Discuss

1. Review the five presuppositions. Which of these resonates with you the most? Which is an area you need to grow in? Why?
2. One of the necessary dispositions for prayer is “total surrender to God’s will.” What does this mean for you? Where do you find surrender to God’s will to be difficult?
3. In the beginning of the Gospel of John, Jesus asks two of the first disciples what they are seeking. How would you answer this question if Jesus asked you?

Memory Verse

“Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock.”

—Matthew 7:24

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, you never grow tired of pursuing us and inviting us to know you more intimately. Send the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray and give us a deeper desire for your Son, Jesus Christ. In your mercy, grant us the grace necessary to detach from anything in this world that holds us back from knowing you, loving you, and surrendering our lives completely to you that we might find freedom in this life and an eternal reward with you. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.



*Madonna and Child with Two Donors, Lorenzo Lotto /
Getty Museum Open Art Program*

Challenge

This week, there is a twofold challenge:

First, as we reflect on our relationship with the Lord, we have an opportunity to examine our conscience and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. Make an appointment to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation this week. Then, choose one of the following two options for your prayer time:

Option 1: Mark 10:46–52

In your imagination, put yourself in the place of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. As Jesus calls you, what do you feel? Tell Jesus your deepest desire in this moment.

Complete these sentences:

- I thought . . .
- I felt . . .
- I desired . . .

What struck you about the passage? What do you feel called to do?

At the end of your time of prayer, speak to God the Father, Jesus Christ, or Mary about what happened and what you desire, based on your prayerful meditation on these questions.

Option 2: Isaiah 43:1–7

Imagine God the Father addressing this passage to you. What do you feel? What strikes you? Respond directly to him in prayer from your heart.

Journal about your experience of this meditation and hearing God the Father speak these words to you.

Notes

Handwriting practice lines with a large, faint watermark of a stylized flame or heart shape in the center.