

A Guide to prayer St Joseph's Primary school



WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God.

The faith of the Catholic Church. Ed Rt Rev D. Konstant.

At the heart of the Christian faith is the belief in a God who communicates with people. God calls every human person into a loving relationship in which all can find the help, support, encouragement and healing which will enable them to fulfil the purpose of their lives as individuals and as part of the community, "the Body of Christ" to which, through Baptism, they have been called.

As with every relationship, our relationship with God can only grow through communication. Prayer is the way in which we engage in communication with God. Prayer consists of:

Listening- being attentive to the voice of God in every moment of life.

Speaking- expressing the deepest longings and desires of our hearts to the one who knows and understands us better than we know our selves.

Reflecting- thinking about our relationship with God. Pondering on the actions of God in history and in our own lives.

Resting- simply being consciously in the presence of God, knowing that we are loved.

Christians believe that prayer is essential to human fulfilment for it is only on God that we can discover ourselves, our meaning and our purpose.

*You have made us for yourself,
O Lord,
And our hearts are restless
Until they rest in you.
St. Augustine*

PRAYER IN OUR SCHOOLS

As teachers in Catholic schools, every member of staff is expected to either:

- Actively engage with pupils in prayer

Or

- Ensure that there are opportunities for pupils to pray

Traditionally there are points in each day when prayer should take place:

- Morning
- Evening
- Night

In addition, it is also customary to pray:

- Before and after meals
- Before the beginning of any significant action

A rhythm of prayer should be established in the life of the school, so that it becomes the 'heartbeat' of the community.

In our Catholic schools it is expected that teachers will:

- Provide opportunities for pupils to pray
- Provide pupils with meaningful prayer experiences
- Assist pupils to develop the language of prayer
- Teach pupils the traditional prayers of the Church
- Help pupils to develop habits of prayer

In order that pupils will be able to:

- Contemplate something of the mystery of God
- Reflect on moral and spiritual issues
- Explore their own beliefs
- Respond to and celebrate life
- Experience a sense of belonging and develop community spirit
- Develop a common sense of ethos and shared values
- Enrich religious experience
- Learn prayers which are part of the Catholic tradition
- Reinforce positive attitudes
- Take time out 'to wonder at', 'come to terms with' and 'give worth to' God.

Enabling the statutory daily Collective Act of Worship and other prayer time to take place and to be meaningful and significant is one of the most important

responsibilities of the Class Teacher. While these times may be comparatively brief, they require:

- Careful Planning
- Confident Presentation
- Appropriate setting
- Good resourcing
- Imagination and creativity

The Class Teacher should keep records of planning and evaluation and there should be a whole school policy relating to prayer in the life of the school community which identifies:

- Provision for collective acts of worship
- Monitoring and evaluation responsibilities and processes
- Educational outcomes
- Resources
- Development Plan

Leading pupils into prayer is a vital and essential part of Catholic education. This handbook has been provided to help teachers to fulfil expectations which the Catholic community has of them in helping develop our schools as powerful and exciting schools of prayer.

*Our aim...
Is to put people
Not only in touch
But in communion
In intimacy with Jesus Christ:
Only he can lead us to the love of the Father
In the spirit
And make us share
In the life of the Holy Trinity.
Pope John Paul II*

PREPARING FOR PRAYER

If the prayer experience which are provided for pupils are to be enriching and rewarding, the following elements are essential:

- Adequate preparation
- Effective time management
- Calm gathering into the prayer

The prayer can be greatly assisted by:

- The provision of a focal point- a display which provides visual stimulus for prayer. The display can be quite simple consisting of perhaps a Bible, a candle, a crucifix, a cross, statue or icon and a drape in an appropriate liturgical colour. (The liturgical colours are: white/gold for the feasts of the Lord and the Saints-except Martyrs. The Easter Season; red for Pentecost and feasts of the Martyrs; purple for Lent. Violet for Advent and green for the ordinary times of the Church's year. Blue, though not an official liturgical colour, is associated with the feasts and times of devotion to Mary-who in the Catholic Church is commonly referred to as Our Lady.)
- Body Position- God is always present with us and in prayer we make ourselves conscious of that. This requires an alertness and openness to God's presence. This is assisted by the bodily position we take for prayer. While standing is the traditional posture, this can be a difficult position for people to hold without a distracting movement. Pupils can be helped by being encouraged to sit in an upright position, feet placed on the floor and with hands gently relaxed, palms upwards, resting on the upper leg. Closing the eyes can also be helpful. This position allows for relaxation at the same time as alertness. If time allows, relaxation and breathing exercises are very helpful.

WHY DO WE PRAY?

We pray in order to offer God our:

ADORATION

CONTRITION

THANKSGIVING

SUPPLICATION

We Pray in

ADORATION

Adoration and Praise are the ways in which we acknowledge our place before God.

We offer God adoration and praise simply because God is God.

Children can develop this kind of prayer through the use of litany formula, using responses such as:

Blessed be God forever

To God (you) be highest glory and praise forever more

We praise you, we bless you, we adore you

Glory to God in the highest

e.g.

L Loving God you created all things

All To you be highest glory and praise for ever more.

L For the beauty of your creation

All We praise you, we bless you, we adore you.

We pray in

CONTRITION

Through praying in contrition (sorrow) we recognise the reality of sin and we ask God's forgiveness for:

- Our personal sin:

It is important for everyone to acknowledge their failings. If this is not done it is all too easy to forget the damage that can be done to one's self and others. By acknowledging our sins we open ourselves up to:

*God's Mercy-which will reassure us that, even though we have failed, God still loves us and values our worth.

*God's Forgiveness- which will free us from the burden of guilt.

*God's Healing- which will repair the damage our sin has done to ourselves and to others.

*God's Help- which will lead us to change.

The prayers which we use to express contrition for personal sin are said in the first person. In them we express our personal responsibility. Before praying these prayers, time should be given to an *examination of conscience* in which we reflect on our need for forgiveness for the sins we have committed (sins of commission) and for the things we have failed to do which we ought to have done (sins of omission).

A short act of Contrition:

O My God, because you are so good, I am very sorry that I have sinned against you and, with the help of your grace I will not sin again. Amen.

A Scriptural Act of Contrition:

*Have mercy on me God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
And cleanse me from my sin (Psalm 50)*



- The sin of others:

Following the example of Jesus who prayed "Father, forgive them", we can pray for God's mercy for others

who have sinned and we can ask for the grace of God to lead others to conversion and repentance.

○ The sins of the World:

There is sin in the world over which we have little or no personal control over, but which, in some ways, we share, because we are part of the community which sins. (E.g. sins as violence expressed through warfare and terrorism; discrimination through racism, sexism and other forms of oppression and inequality; consumerism; injustice in the distribution of the world's resources etc.) By acknowledging the sin we ask for:

*God's mercy and forgiveness for that sin

*We ask to be purified personally for the ways in which that sin has affected us

*We strengthen our own resistance to the false values and wrong attitudes which lead us to such sin

*We witness, in the face of false values and wrong attitudes, the truth and values of God.

Prayers used to express sorrow for the sins of the world are usually expressed in a communitarian way.

There are many ways to structure prayers which ask for forgiveness for the sins of the world. One useful way is through the litany style of prayer.

e.g.

1. *L For the ways in which we have taken more than our fair share of the world's resources. Lord, have mercy.*
All Lord, have mercy.
2. *L For the time we have ignored the needs of the hungry we pray:*
All God, forgive us.

We pray in

THANKSGIVING



All things come from God and by thanking God we:

- Recognise our dependence on God
- We acknowledge God's goodness to us
- We make ourselves more aware of God's blessing
- We develop an appreciation of and a respect for the gifts of God in our lives.

The highest expression of thanksgiving is the Mass (the word 'Eucharist' comes from a Greek word meaning thanksgiving).

Graces before and after meals are helpful in developing an attitude of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving should be part of prayer at the end of the day.

e.g.

L For all we have learned today:

All We give you thanks

As pupils grow, they should be invited to reflect on the need for thanksgiving for things which are not immediately obvious:

e.g.

L For the things we struggled with today:

All We give you thanks

L Because we got on with people we don't always find it easy to like:

All We give you thanks.

We pray in

SUPPLICATION

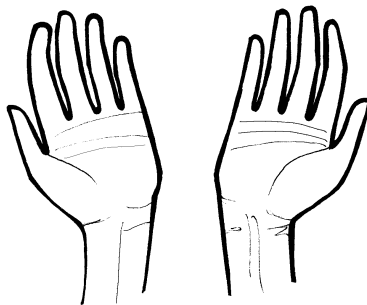
In the prayer of supplication we ask God for:

- Our own needs
- The needs of others
- The needs of the Church
- The needs of the World

By praying this way we:

- Recognise that all good things come from God
- Make ourselves more aware of the needs of others
- Remind ourselves of the ways in which we must co-operate in order that God may act
- Open ourselves to accept the will of God

We need to be careful in the way in which we explain the prayer of supplication. While we believe that God always hears our prayers, they are not always answered in the way we might, at first, desire. It is, therefore, important to lead pupils to understand that, while our prayers are heard, God may not grant them if they are not ultimately for our good, or the good of those for whom they pray.



There are two main forms of prayer of supplication:

Prayers of Intercession - these are addressed to God.

Bidding Prayers - these are first addressed to the people and are followed by an intercession addressed to God.

Bidding Prayers:

- *invite the people to pray for an intention
- *followed by a brief silence in which personal prayers can be made
- *ask for God's action and, often our cooperation with God
- *conclude with an intercession formula

e.g.

L Lord Hear us

All Lord Graciously hear us

Or

L Lord, in your Mercy

All Hear our prayer



TYPES OF PRAYER

LITURGICAL PRAYER

ORAL PRAYER

MEDITATION

CONTEMPLATION

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Liturgy is the public worship of the community in which we celebrate in word and with symbol the presence of *Christ* at work in the *Church* and the world.

Liturgy is not the same as a time of prayer or worship. What makes liturgy is the use of symbol.

There are two forms of liturgical prayer:

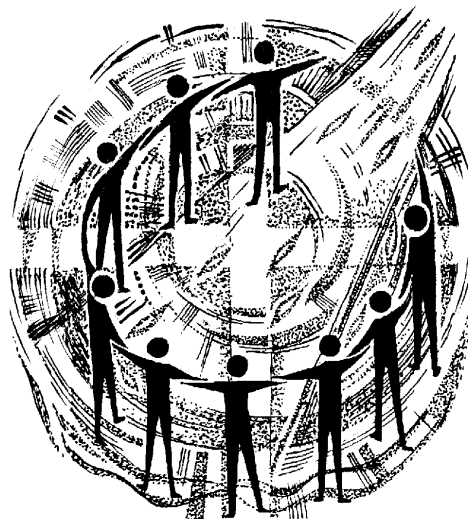
1. The Liturgy of the Church

These are the official rites of the Church:

- The Mass
- The Sacramental Rites
- Other rites and officially approved devotions

2. Other Liturgies

There are other ways of celebrating liturgy though, if they are not the official rites of the church, they are sometimes called Para-liturgies.



ORAL PRAYER

Prayer using words which may be said aloud or in silence. In oral prayer we can use:

*Meditation is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion and will.
Its aim is to make our own, in faith, the subject considered, by deepening and
comparing it with the reality of our own life.*

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In meditation we reflect on such things as:

- Scripture stories
- Passages from Scripture
- Music
- Prayers
- Poetry
- Pictures
- Events which have taken place in the World
- Events in our own lives



And ask ourselves what God:

- Wants us to understand
- Wants us to do

in response.

**SPEAK, LORD,
YOUR SERVENT IS
LISTENING.**

An important part of the prayer growth of young people is to introduce and develop their capacity for meditation. The key to doing this is to develop the young people's ability to:

- Be physically still
- Be silent

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it enables us to share in his mystery.

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This is the most important prayer of all. It is a prayer of which children and young people are capable. It is a prayer in which one is filled with:

- Wonder
- Awe
- Love

for God.

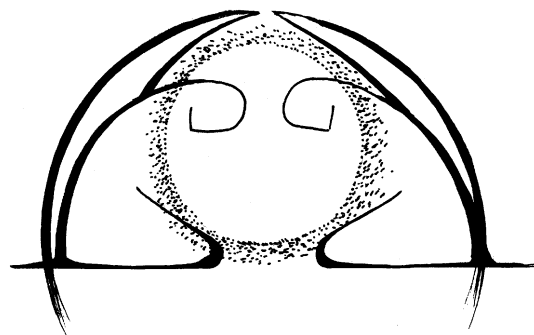
Contemplation grows out of:

- Stillness
- Silence

To help pupils to enter into this prayer, they can be taught:

- Relaxing techniques
- Breathing techniques
- Body posture techniques

They can also be assisted by the provision of stimuli which lead to a sense of awe and wonder which, in their turn, lead to love.



Prayer is the encounter of God's thirst
with ours, God thirsts that we may
thirst for him.

(CCC 2560)



Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a
simple look turned toward Heaven, it is
a cry of recognition and of love,
embracing both trial and joy.

Therese of Lisieux

STRUCTURING

PRAYER

- GATHERING TOGETHER
- Greeting
- THE WORD OF GOD
- ACTION/RESPONSE TO THE WORD
- MISSION/GOING FORTH
- A Blessing & Dismissal

GATHERING TOGETHER

When praying with children and young people, it is helpful to give a sign that the prayer is about to begin. This can be done in a variety of ways:

- The playing of music
- Lighting a candle
- Inviting pupils to an area of the room
- Asking pupils to take up a position (standing or sitting)

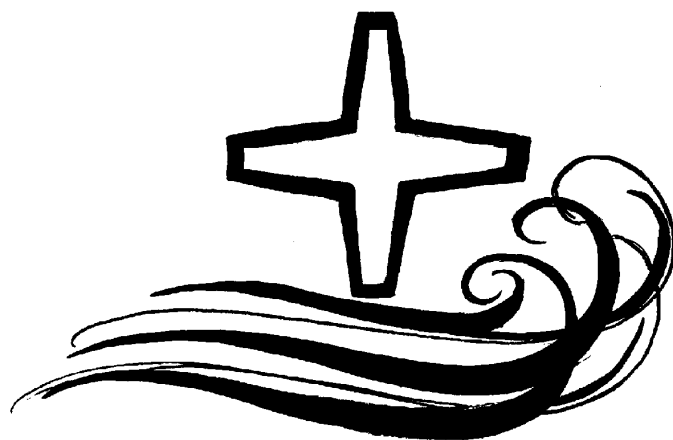
With younger pupils, starting with an appropriate song assists in the preparation.

We usually, though not always, begin with the Sign of the Cross. This is an important prayer because:

- It reminds us of our Baptism
- It reminds us that all we say and do is done in the name of God, the Blessed Trinity.

The sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Greeting

Just as there are ways of greeting people when we meet, so there are ways of greeting each other as we gather for liturgy and prayer. The formal greetings are normally said by ordained ministers but it is appropriate for teachers or leaders of classroom worship to use them. In this way, pupils can be familiarised with the Church's way of greeting.

Some examples of formal greeting:

L O God come to our aid
All O Lord make haste to help us

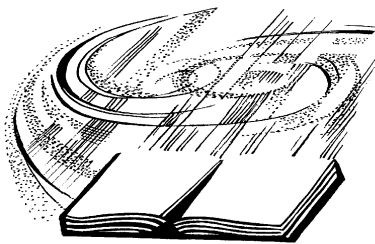
L

Alternately, other greetings can be used.

L God the Father be with us
All to guide and to guard us

L God the Son be with us
All to guide and to guard us

L God the Holy Spirit be with us
All to guide and to guard us



THE WORD

Prayer times should regularly include the Word of God.

As the Scriptures are at the heart of the Christian tradition they should, therefore, be a regular and important part of worship.

When Scripture is used, the following points should be borne in mind:

- In more formal worship settings (e.g. A school Mass) a procession of the Word (the Bible) helps to convey the dignity and importance of the Scriptures. The procession should include:
 - *Accompanying the Bible with lighted candles
 - *Placing the Bible on a lectern
 - *Singing an 'Alleluia' (if a text from one of the Gospels is to be read)
 - *The signing of the forehead, lips and heart when the Gospel is announced.
- Readings can be announced and concluded using formulae used in the liturgy.

Before reading from the Gospels:

L Lift up your hearts
All We lift them up to the Lord or

L O Lord open our lips
All And our mouths shall proclaim your praise

L A reading from St 's Gospel
All Glory to you O Lord

At the end:

L The Gospel of the lord
All Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ

Before other scriptural readings:

L A reading from...

At the end:

L The Word of the Lord
All Thanks be to God.



ACTION/RESPONSE TO THE WORD

- Reflection

- *This can be in silence

- *Personal reflection led by the person leading the prayer time

- *Shared reflection

- Prayer expressing

- *Adoration and praise

- *Contrition

- *Thanksgiving

- *Supplication

Using:

- *Liturgical formula

- *Oral prayer-traditional, other written prayers and Spontaneous prayers

- *Meditation

- *Contemplation

- Silence

- Symbolic action

- e.g. *Signing with water

- *Placing a private written prayer on display

MISSION/GOING FORTH

Our prayer and worship is not an end in itself. It is meant to inspire and strengthen us to live out the beliefs and values which are celebrated. Acts of worship, then, should always end with prayer which has a sense of 'mission' - of 'being sent out'. This can be done in a variety of ways.

A simple prayer

e.g. *Let us pray*

May all we have thought about help us this day to...(mention some practical action which may follow from the theme of the act of worship).

...We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



A Blessing and Dismissal

We all have the power and duty of blessing others even though we usually think of blessings as being given by ordained ministers. Teachers, especially, have a right to bless the children and young people in their care.

It is possible to use one of the common liturgical forms of blessing and dismissal.

L May Almighty God bless us, The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit
All Amen

L Go in peace or
L Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord or
L Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life

All Thanks be to God.

Alternatively, other blessings from the Roman missal can be used. (Many anthologies of prayers contain good selections of Blessing prayers.)



PRAYING FOR THE DEAD

Praying for the dead is an important of the Roman Catholic tradition of prayer. Every Mass which is celebrated is offered for the living and the dead.

We pray for the dead that they may be healed of any damages which sin has done to them during their life on Earth and so be purified so that they may be able to move into the joy of Heaven. Healing and purification are needed because the Bible teaches that nothing impure can enter into the sight of God.

The Catholic Church believes that, because death does not end our relationships with each other, our prayer can reach out and affect those who have died. Our prayers for the dead assist in their healing and in bringing them to wholeness.

Some prayers for the dead:

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine on them. May they rest in peace. Amen.

May the Souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

Psalm 129 and 120 are also often used as prayers for the dead.

PRAYING TO THE SAINTS

The Catholic Church believes that the Church is a 'communion of Saints'. It believes that the Church on Earth is linked with the Saints in Heaven and with those who have died and who are undergoing purification before entering the fullness of Heaven.

Catholics pray to the Saints, especially to Mary the mother of Jesus. They do not worship Mary nor any of the Saints since God alone is to be worshipped. They pray to the Saints asking them to pray with and for the members of the Church who are on their journey towards Heaven.

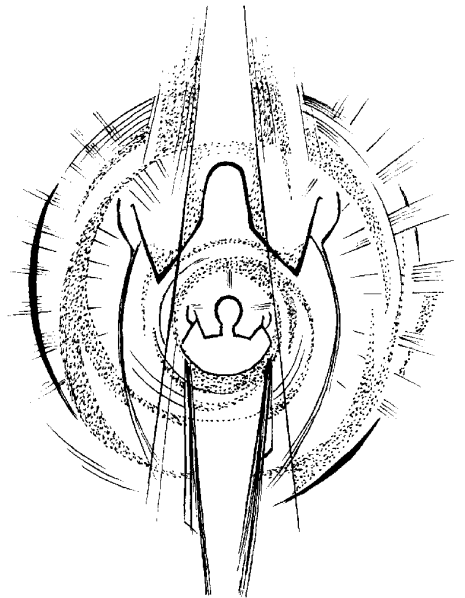
Two prayers in honour of Our Lady:

*Hail Mary,
Full of Grace,
The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of death.*

Amen.

*Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope.
To Thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To Thee do we send up our sighs mourning
and weeping in this valley of tears.
Turn then, most gracious Advocate,
Thine Eyes of Mercy toward us,
and after this our exile show us the
Blessed Fruit of thy Womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.*

*Pray for us O Holy Mother of God
That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.*



HIGH DAYS AND HOLY DAYS

Like every community, the Catholic Church has special times and days in which we focus on:

- Celebration
- Preparation
- Self-denial and fasting

In England and Wales there are seven Holy Days of Obligation (days on which we are expected to take part in the celebration of Mass). These Holy Days are:

Christmas Day	25 th December
Epiphany	This used to be on 6 th January but since Advent 2006 in England & Wales it is transferred to the nearest Sunday
Ascension of Our Lord	This used to be 40 days after Easter and always on a Thursday but since Advent 2006 in England & Wales it is transferred to the nearest Sunday
Corpus Christi	This used to be 2 nd Thursday after Pentecost but since Advent 2006 in England & Wales it is transferred to the nearest Sunday.
Sts Peter and Paul	29 th June
Assumption of Our Lady	15 th August
All Saint's Day	1 st November

There are two days of fasting and abstinence:

- Ash Wednesday-the day that marks the beginning of Lent
- Good Friday-the commemoration of the Passion and Death of Jesus.

In addition to the two days prescribed by the law of the Church, we are encouraged to exercise self-denial on Fridays in honour of the death of Jesus.

Fasting involves eating only one full meal and two light meals or taking only enough which is safe for health but which allows one to feel the edge of hunger. This law of the Church binds people between the ages of 18-65.

Abstinence means that we refrain from meat and meat products. This law applies to all members of the Church.

THE CHURCH'S YEAR

The Christian Year does not follow the calendar year. It begins on the First Sunday of Advent which begins the period for the Feast of the Nativity (Christmas).

The Church's year is structured in this way:

Advent - there are four Sundays in the Advent period.

Christmas Season - begins with the Feast of the Nativity and end with the Feast of the Epiphany.

Ordinary Time - a period of weeks which is variable, depending on the date of Easter.

Lent - a six week period which begins on Ash Wednesday. There are six Sundays in the Lenten period.

The Triduum - the three day period; Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter Day (Holy Saturday) in which we celebrate the Passion and the Death of Jesus.

The Easter Season - the time from Easter to the Feast of the Ascension in which we celebrate the central belief of the Christian Church- the Resurrection of Jesus- and reflect on the 40 days during which Jesus appeared to his followers and prepared them to continue his work on Earth.

Pentecost - which celebrates the day on which the Holy Spirit came to the early Christians and filled them with confidence and power to begin to preach the Christian message. Pentecost is sometimes called the 'birthday of the Church'.

Ordinary Time - the period from Trinity Sunday (the Sunday after Pentecost) to the Feast of Christ the King which is the last Sunday of the Church's year.