

Prayer: Whose Initiative?

God calls man first. Man may forget his Creator or hide far from his face; he may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned him; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2567*

Praying Like a Christian

“If you knew the gift of God!” (John 4:10) The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.

-*Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2560*

Active Receptivity

So, if God initiates prayer, our most important act is... listening!

Or, more broadly, *receiving*—our posture in prayer should be one of **active receptivity**.



So, how do I do it?

Preparation:

A step or two before the place where I have to contemplate or meditate, I will put myself standing for the space of an Our Father, my intellect raised on high, **considering how God our Lord is looking at me**, etc.; and will make an act of reverence or humility.

-*St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises, Additions for the First Week, no. 3*

The importance of silence (exterior and interior)

Exterior: finding the right place and time

Interior: stopping the hamster wheel. Quieting exercises, use of a repeated word or phrase

What about distractions?

Example: a fly buzzing around the room. Dismiss it and keep the conversation going! Unless the fly lands on your face.... Sometimes the “distraction” is really what I need to pray about.

Relational Prayer—a way to come to God as I am and actively receive

A-R-R-R (handout)

More resources:

A very helpful website with lots of articles on prayer:

<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-what-how-why-of-prayer/>

Section IV of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (where both quotes are taken from) is beautiful.

Peter Kreeft, *Prayer for Beginners* (Ignatius Press)

Jacques Philippe, *Time for God* (Scepter Press)

The *Discerning Hearts* app—tons of great podcasts on prayer and spirituality, devotions, and more.

A-R-R-R Prayer

St. Teresa of Avila said, “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.” The A-R-R-R Prayer is a simple method of coming to the Lord as you are. It can be used almost any time of the day and in just about any circumstance. It can also be used within any other method of prayer, such as Lectio Divina or Ignatian Contemplation, as a way of conversing with the Lord. The “A-R-R-R” stands for different movements within the prayer: Acknowledge, Relate, Receive, Respond.

Acknowledge – Openly and honestly, without prejudice, acknowledge how you are before God. What you are experiencing? What is moving in your heart?

Marian Example: At the Annunciation Mary was “troubled” and pondered what the words of the Angel meant.

Relate – Bring yourself as you are into relationship with God by relating your experience to Him. Speak to him from your heart.

Marian Example: At the Annunciation Mary asked, “How can this be?”

Receive – Listen to what God is doing with the movements of your heart. Receive his presence and the constancy of his love

Marian Example: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”

Respond – What we receive impels us to respond in gratitude and with renewed heart.

Marian Example: Mary’s fiat, “May it be done unto me...”

