

PART FOUR: CHRISTIAN PRAYER

SECTION ONE: PRAYER IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

2558 "Great is the mystery of the faith!"

The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (**Part One**) and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (**Part Two**), so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (**Part Three**).

This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

For me, 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.¹

Prayer as God's gift

2559 "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."²

But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart?³

He who humbles himself will be exalted;⁴ humility is the foundation of prayer, Only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought,"⁵ are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "Man is a beggar before God."⁶

2560 "If you knew the gift of God!"⁷

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.⁸

2561 "You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."⁹

Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God:

"They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!"¹⁰

Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.¹¹

Prayer as covenant

2562 Where does prayer come from?

Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays.

But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times).

According to Scripture, it is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

2563 The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw."

The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully.

The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives.

It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death.

It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation:

it is the place of covenant.

2564 Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ.

It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.

Prayer as communion

2565 In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit.

The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity . . . with the whole human spirit."¹²

Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him.

This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ.¹³

Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body.

Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.¹⁴

CHAPTER ONE

THE REVELATION OF PRAYER - THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO PRAYER

2566 Man is in search of God. In the act of creation, God calls every being from nothingness into existence. "Crowned with glory and honor," man is, after the angels, capable of acknowledging "how majestic is the name of the Lord in all the earth."¹ Even after losing through his sin his likeness to God, man remains an image of his Creator, and retains the desire for the one who calls him into existence. All religions bear witness to men's essential search for God.²

2567 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. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.

Article 1 IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

2568 In the Old Testament, the revelation of prayer comes between the fall and the restoration of man, that is, between God's sorrowful call to his first children: "Where are you? . . . What is this that you have done?"³ and the response of God's only Son on coming into the world: "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God."⁴ Prayer is bound up with human history, for it is the relationship with God in historical events.

Creation - source of prayer

2569 Prayer is lived in the first place beginning with the realities of creation. The first nine chapters of Genesis describe this relationship with God as an offering of the first-born of Abel's flock, as the invocation of the divine name at the time of Enosh, and as "walking with God."⁵ Noah's offering is pleasing to God, who blesses him and through him all creation, because his heart was upright and undivided; Noah, like Enoch before him, "walks with God."⁶ This kind of prayer is lived by many righteous people in all religions.

In his indefectible covenant with every living creature,⁷ God has always called people to prayer. But it is above all beginning with our father Abraham that prayer is revealed in the Old Testament.

God's promise and the prayer of Faith

2570 When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him";⁸ Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys. Such attentiveness of the heart, whose decisions are made according to God's will, is essential to prayer, while the words used count only in relation to it. Abraham's prayer is expressed first by deeds: a man of silence, he constructs an altar to the Lord at each stage of his journey. Only later does Abraham's first prayer in words appear: a veiled complaint reminding God of his promises which seem unfulfilled.⁹ Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God.

2571 Because Abraham believed in God and walked in his presence and in covenant with him,¹⁰ The patriarch is ready to welcome a mysterious Guest into his tent. Abraham's remarkable hospitality at Mamre foreshadows the annunciation of the true Son of the promise.¹¹ After that, once God had confided his plan, Abraham's heart is attuned to his Lord's compassion for men and he dares to intercede for them with bold confidence.¹²

2572 As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, "who had received the promises,"¹³ is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. Abraham's faith does not weaken ("God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering."), for he "considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead."¹⁴ and so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all.¹⁵ Prayer restores man to God's likeness and enables him to share in the power of God's love that saves the multitude.¹⁶

2573 God renews his promise to Jacob, the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel.¹⁷ Before confronting his elder brother Esau, Jacob wrestles all night with a mysterious figure who refuses to reveal his name, but he blesses him before leaving him at dawn. From this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance.¹⁸

Moses and the prayer of the mediator

2574 Once the promise begins to be fulfilled (Passover, the Exodus, the gift of the Law, and the ratification of the covenant), the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in "the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."¹⁹

2575 Here again the initiative is God's. From the midst of the burning bush he calls Moses.²⁰ This event will remain one of the primordial images of prayer in the spiritual tradition of Jews and Christians alike. When "the God of Abraham, of

Isaac, and of Jacob" calls Moses to be his servant, it is because he is the living God who wants men to live. God reveals himself in order to save them, though he does not do this alone or despite them: he calls Moses to be his messenger, an associate in his compassion, his work of salvation. There is something of a divine plea in this mission, and only after long debate does Moses attune his own will to that of the Savior God. But in the dialogue in which God confides in him, Moses also learns how to pray: he balks, makes excuses, above all questions: and it is in response to his question that the Lord confides his ineffable name, which will be revealed through his mighty deeds.

2576 "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend."²¹ Moses' prayer is characteristic of contemplative prayer by which God's servant remains faithful to his mission. Moses converses with God often and at length, climbing the mountain to hear and entreat him and coming down to the people to repeat the words of his God for their guidance. Moses "is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly, not in riddles," for "Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth."²²

2577 From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,²³ Moses drew strength and determination for his intercession. He does not pray for himself but for the people whom God made his own. Moses already intercedes for them during the battle with the Amalekites and prays to obtain healing for Miriam.²⁴ But it is chiefly after their apostasy that Moses "stands in the breach" before God in order to save the people.²⁵ The arguments of his prayer - for intercession is also a mysterious battle - will inspire the boldness of the great intercessors among the Jewish people and in the Church: God is love; he is therefore righteous and faithful; he cannot contradict himself; he must remember his marvellous deeds, since his glory is at stake, and he cannot forsake this people that bears his name.

David and the prayer of the king

2578 The prayer of the People of God flourishes in the shadow of God's dwelling place, first the ark of the covenant and later the Temple. At first the leaders of the people - the shepherds and the prophets - teach them to pray. the infant Samuel must have learned from his mother Hannah how "to stand before the LORD" and from the priest Eli how to listen to his word: "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."²⁶ Later, he will also know the cost and consequence of intercession: "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way."²⁷

2579 David is par excellence the king "after God's own heart," the shepherd who prays for his people and prays in their name. His submission to the will of God, his praise, and his repentance, will be a model for the prayer of the people. His prayer, the prayer of God's Anointed, is a faithful adherence to the divine promise and expresses a loving and joyful trust in God, the only King and Lord.²⁸ In the Psalms David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the first prophet of Jewish and Christian prayer. the prayer of Christ, the true Messiah and Son of David, will reveal and fulfill the meaning of this prayer.

2580 The Temple of Jerusalem, the house of prayer that David wanted to build, will be the work of his son, Solomon. the prayer at the dedication of the Temple relies on God's promise and covenant, on the active presence of his name among his People, recalling his mighty deeds at the Exodus.²⁹ The king lifts his hands toward heaven and begs the Lord, on his own behalf, on behalf of the entire people, and of the generations yet to come, for the forgiveness of their sins and for their daily needs, so that the nations may know that He is the only God and that the heart of his people may belong wholly and entirely to him.

Elijah, the prophets and conversion of heart

2581 For the People of God, the Temple was to be the place of their education in prayer: pilgrimages, feasts and sacrifices, the evening offering, the incense, and the bread of the Presence ("shewbread") - all these signs of the holiness and glory of God Most High and Most Near were appeals to and ways of prayer. But ritualism often encouraged an excessively external worship. the people needed education in faith and conversion of heart; this was the mission of the prophets, both before and after the Exile.

2582 Elijah is the "father" of the prophets, "the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob."³⁰ Elijah's name, "The Lord is my God," foretells the people's cry in response to his prayer on Mount Carmel.³¹ St. James refers to Elijah in order to encourage us to pray: "The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."³²

2583 After Elijah had learned mercy during his retreat at the Wadi Cherith, he teaches the widow of Zarephath to believe in the Word of God and confirms her faith by his urgent prayer: God brings the widow's child back to life.³³ The sacrifice on Mount Carmel is a decisive test for the faith of the People of God. In response to Elijah's plea, "Answer me, O LORD, answer me," the Lord's fire consumes the holocaust, at the time of the evening oblation. the Eastern liturgies repeat Elijah's plea in the Eucharistic epiclesis.

Finally, taking the desert road that leads to the place where the living and true God reveals himself to his people, Elijah, like Moses before him, hides "in a cleft of the rock" until the mysterious presence of God has passed by.³⁴ But only on the mountain of the Transfiguration will Moses and Elijah behold the unveiled face of him whom they sought; "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God [shines] in the face of Christ," crucified and risen.³⁵

2584 In their "one to one" encounters with God, the prophets draw light and strength for their mission. Their prayer is not flight from this

unfaithful world, but rather attentiveness to the Word of God. At times their prayer is an argument or a complaint, but it is always an intercession that awaits and prepares for the intervention of the Savior God, the Lord of history.³⁶

The Psalms, the prayer of the assembly

2585 From the time of David to the coming of the Messiah texts appearing in these sacred books show a deepening in prayer for oneself and in prayer for others.³⁷ Thus the psalms were gradually collected into the five books of the Psalter (or "Praises"), the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament.

2586 The Psalms both nourished and expressed the prayer of the People of God gathered during the great feasts at Jerusalem and each Sabbath in the synagogues. Their prayer is inseparably personal and communal; it concerns both those who are praying and all men. The Psalms arose from the communities of the Holy Land and the Diaspora, but embrace all creation. Their prayer recalls the saving events of the past, yet extends into the future, even to the end of history; it commemorates the promises God has already kept, and awaits the Messiah who will fulfill them definitively. Prayed by Christ and fulfilled in him, the Psalms remain essential to the prayer of the Church.³⁸

2587 The Psalter is the book in which the Word of God becomes man's prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, "the words proclaim [God's] works and bring to light the mystery they contain."³⁹ The words of the Psalmist, sung for God, both express and acclaim the Lord's saving works; the same Spirit inspires both God's work and man's response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray.

2588 The Psalter's many forms of prayer take shape both in the liturgy of the Temple and in the human heart. Whether hymns or prayers of lamentation or thanksgiving, whether individual or communal, whether royal chants, songs of pilgrimage or wisdom meditations, the Psalms

are a mirror of God's marvelous deeds in the history of his people, as well as reflections of the human experiences of the Psalmist. Though a given psalm may reflect an event of the past, it still possesses such direct simplicity that it can be prayed in truth by men of all times and conditions.

2589 Certain constant characteristics appear throughout the Psalms: simplicity and spontaneity of prayer; the desire for God himself through and with all that is good in his creation; the distraught situation of the believer who, in his preferential love for the Lord, is exposed to a host of enemies and temptations, but who waits upon what the faithful God will do, in the certitude of his love and in submission to his will. The prayer of the psalms is always sustained by praise; that is why the title of this collection as handed down to us is so fitting: "The Praises." Collected for the assembly's worship, the Psalter both sounds the call to prayer and sings the response to that call: Hallelu-Yah! ("Alleluia"), "Praise the Lord!"

What is more pleasing than a psalm? David expresses it well: "Praise the Lord, for a psalm is good: let there be praise of our God with gladness and grace!" Yes, a psalm is a blessing on the lips of the people, praise of God, the assembly's homage, a general acclamation, a word that speaks for all, the voice of the Church, a confession of faith in song.⁴⁰

IN BRIEF

2590 "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (St. John Damascene, *Defide orth.* 3, 24: PG 94, 1089C).

2591 God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.

2592 The prayer of Abraham and Jacob is presented as a battle of faith marked by trust in God's faithfulness and by certitude in the victory promised to perseverance.

2593 The prayer of Moses responds to the living God's initiative for the salvation of his people. It foreshadows the prayer of intercession of the unique mediator, Christ Jesus.

2594 The prayer of the People of God flourished in the shadow of the dwelling place of God's presence on earth, the ark of the covenant and the Temple, under the guidance of their shepherds, especially King David, and of the prophets.

2595 The prophets summoned the people to conversion of heart and, while zealously seeking the face of God, like Elijah, they interceded for the people.

2596 The Psalms constitute the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament. They present two inseparable qualities: the personal, and the communal. They extend to all dimensions of history, recalling God's promises already fulfilled and looking for the coming of the Messiah.

2597 Prayed and fulfilled in Christ, the Psalms are an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church. They are suitable for men of every condition and time.

ARTICLE 2 IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME

2598 The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us. To seek to understand his prayer through what his witnesses proclaim to us in the Gospel is to approach the holy Lord Jesus as Moses approached the burning bush: first to contemplate him in prayer, then to hear how he teaches us to pray, in order to know how he hears our prayer.

Jesus prays

2599 The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin also learned to pray according to his human heart. He learns the formulas of prayer from his mother, who kept in her heart and meditated upon all the "great things" done by the Almighty.⁴¹ He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. But his prayer springs from an otherwise secret source, as he intimates at the age of twelve: "I must be in my Father's house."⁴² Here the newness of prayer in the fullness of time begins to be revealed: his *filial prayer*, which the Father awaits from his children, is finally going to be lived out by the only Son in his humanity, with and for men.

2600 The Gospel according to St. Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ's ministry. Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his mission: before his Father's witness to him during his baptism and Transfiguration, and before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion.⁴³ He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of his apostles: at his election and call of the Twelve, before Peter's confession of him as "the Christ of God," and again that the faith of the chief of the Apostles may not fail when tempted.⁴⁴ Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfill is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father.

2601 "He was praying in a certain place and when he had ceased, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'⁴⁵ In seeing the Master at prayer the disciple of Christ also wants to pray. By *contemplating* and hearing the Son, the master of prayer, the children learn to pray to the Father.

2602 Jesus often draws apart to pray *in solitude*, on a mountain, preferably at night.⁴⁶ He *includes all men* in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the

Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that "his brethren" experience; he sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them.⁴⁷ It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret.

2603 The evangelists have preserved two more explicit prayers offered by Christ during his public ministry. Each begins with thanksgiving. In the first, Jesus confesses the Father, acknowledges, and blesses him because he has hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from those who think themselves learned and has revealed them to infants, the poor of the Beatitudes.⁴⁸ His exclamation, "Yes, Father!" expresses the depth of his heart, his adherence to the Father's "good pleasure," echoing his mother's *Fiat* at the time of his conception and prefiguring what he will say to the Father in his agony. The whole prayer of Jesus is contained in this loving adherence of his human heart to the mystery of the will of the Father.⁴⁹

2604 The second prayer, before the raising of Lazarus, is recorded by St. John.⁵⁰ Thanksgiving precedes the event: "Father, I thank you for having heard me," which implies that the Father always hears his petitions. Jesus immediately adds: "I know that you always hear me," which implies that Jesus, on his part, *constantly made such petitions*. Jesus' prayer, characterized by thanksgiving, reveals to us how to ask: *before* the gift is given, Jesus commits himself to the One who in giving gives himself. The Giver is more precious than the gift; he is the "treasure"; in him abides his Son's heart; the gift is given "as well."⁵¹

The priestly prayer of Jesus holds a unique place in the economy of salvation.⁵² A meditation on it will conclude Section One. It reveals the ever present prayer of our High Priest and, at the same time, contains what he teaches us about our prayer to our Father, which will be developed in Section Two.

2605 When the hour had come for him to fulfill the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up ("*Abba . . . not my will, but yours.*"),⁵³ but even in *his last words* on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do";⁵⁴ "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise", "Woman, behold your son" - "Behold your mother";⁵⁶ "I thirst.";⁵⁷ "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?";⁵⁸ "It is finished";⁵⁹ "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"⁶⁰ until the "loud cry" as he expires, giving up his spirit.⁶¹

2606 All the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. Thus is fulfilled and brought to completion the drama of prayer in the economy of creation and salvation. The Psalter gives us the key to prayer in Christ. In the "today" of the Resurrection the Father says: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."⁶²

The Letter to the Hebrews expresses in dramatic terms how the prayer of Jesus accomplished the victory of salvation: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him."⁶³

Jesus teaches us how to pray

2607 When Jesus prays he is already teaching us how to pray. His prayer to his Father is the theological path (the path of faith, hope, and charity) of our prayer to God. But the Gospel

also gives us Jesus' explicit teaching on prayer. Like a wise teacher he takes hold of us where we are and leads us progressively toward the Father. Addressing the crowds following him, Jesus builds on what they already know of prayer from the Old Covenant and opens to them the newness of the coming Kingdom. Then he reveals this newness to them in parables. Finally, he will speak openly of the Father and the Holy Spirit to his disciples who will be the teachers of prayer in his Church.

2608 From the *Sermon on the Mount* onwards, Jesus insists on *conversion of heart*: reconciliation with one's brother before presenting an offering on the altar, love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors, prayer to the Father in secret, not heaping up empty phrases, prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart, purity of heart, and seeking the Kingdom before all else.⁶⁴ This filial conversion is entirely directed to the Father.

2609 Once committed to conversion, the heart learns to pray in *faith*. Faith is a filial adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand. It is possible because the beloved Son gives us access to the Father. He can ask us to "seek" and to "knock," since he himself is the door and the way.⁶⁵

2610 Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gifts, so he teaches us *filial boldness*: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will."⁶⁶ Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt: "all things are possible to him who believes."⁶⁷ Jesus is as saddened by the "lack of faith" of his own neighbors and the "little faith" of his own disciples⁶⁸ as he is struck with admiration at the great faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman.⁶⁹

2611 The prayer of faith consists not only in saying "Lord, Lord," but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father.⁷⁰ Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan.⁷¹

2612 In Jesus "the Kingdom of God is at hand."⁷² He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to *watchfulness*. In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory.⁷³ In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation.⁷⁴

2613 Three principal parables on prayer are transmitted to us by St. Luke:

- The first, "the importunate friend,"⁷⁵ invites us to urgent prayer: "Knock, and it will be opened to you." To the one who prays like this, the heavenly Father will "give whatever he needs," and above all the Holy Spirit who contains all gifts.

- The second, "the importunate widow,"⁷⁶ is centered on one of the qualities of prayer: it is necessary to pray always without ceasing and with the patience of faith. "And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

- The third parable, "the Pharisee and the tax collector,"⁷⁷ concerns the humility of the heart that prays. "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" The Church continues to make this prayer its own: *Kyrie eleison!*

2614 When Jesus openly entrusts to his disciples the mystery of prayer to the Father, he reveals to them what their prayer and ours must be, once he has returned to the Father in his glorified humanity. What is new is to "ask *in his name*."⁷⁸ Faith in the Son introduces the disciples into the knowledge of the Father, because Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life."⁷⁹ Faith bears its fruit in love: it means keeping the word and the commandments of Jesus, it means abiding with him in the Father who, in him, so loves us that he abides with us. In this new covenant the certitude that our petitions will be heard is founded on the prayer of Jesus.⁸⁰

2615 Even more, what the Father gives us when our prayer is united with that of Jesus is "another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth."⁸¹ This new dimension of prayer and of its circumstances is displayed throughout the farewell discourse.⁸² In the Holy Spirit, Christian prayer is a communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also *in him*: "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."⁸³

Jesus hears our prayer

2616 Prayer to Jesus is answered by him already during his ministry, through signs that anticipate the power of his death and Resurrection: Jesus hears the prayer of faith, expressed in words (the leper, Jairus, the Canaanite woman, the good thief)⁸⁴ or in silence (the bearers of the paralytic, the woman with a hemorrhage who touches his clothes, the tears and ointment of the sinful woman).⁸⁵ The urgent request of the blind men, "Have mercy on us, Son of David" or "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" has been renewed in the traditional prayer to Jesus known as the *Jesus Prayer*: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"⁸⁶ Healing infirmities or forgiving sins, Jesus always responds to a prayer offered in faith: "Your faith has made you well; go in peace."

St. Augustine wonderfully summarizes the three dimensions of Jesus' prayer: "He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us."⁸⁷

The prayer of the Virgin Mary

2617 Mary's prayer is revealed to us at the dawning of the fullness of time. Before the incarnation of the Son of God, and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness: at the Annunciation, for Christ's conception; at Pentecost, for the formation of the Church, his Body.⁸⁸ In the faith of his humble handmaid, the Gift of God found

the acceptance he had awaited from the beginning of time. She whom the Almighty made "full of grace" responds by offering her whole being: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word." "*Fiat*": this is Christian prayer: to be wholly God's, because he is wholly ours.

2618 The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith. At Cana,⁸⁹ the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; this is the sign of another feast - that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride. It is at the hour of the New Covenant, at the foot of the cross,⁹⁰ that Mary is heard as the Woman, the new Eve, the true "Mother of all the living."

2619 That is why the Cantic of Mary,⁹¹ the *Magnificat* (Latin) or *Megalynei* (Byzantine) is the song both of the Mother of God and of the Church; the song of the Daughter of Zion and of the new People of God; the song of thanksgiving for the fullness of graces poured out in the economy of salvation and the song of the "poor" whose hope is met by the fulfillment of the promises made to our ancestors, "to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

IN BRIEF

2620 Jesus' filial prayer is the perfect model of prayer in the New Testament. Often done in solitude and in secret, the prayer of Jesus involves a loving adherence to the will of the Father even to the Cross and an absolute confidence in being heard.

2621 In his teaching, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with a purified heart, with lively and persevering faith, with filial boldness. He calls them to vigilance and invites them to present their petitions to God in his name. Jesus Christ himself answers prayers addressed to him.

2622 The prayers of the Virgin Mary, in her *Fiat* and *Magnificat*, are characterized by the generous offering of her whole being in faith.

ARTICLE 3 IN THE AGE OF THE CHURCH

2623 On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of the Promise was poured out on the disciples, gathered "together in one place."⁹² While awaiting the Spirit, "all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer."⁹³ The Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls for her everything that Jesus said⁹⁴ was also to form her in the life of prayer.

2624 In the first community of Jerusalem, believers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and the prayers."⁹⁵ This sequence is characteristic of the Church's prayer: founded on the apostolic faith; authenticated by charity; nourished in the Eucharist.

2625 In the first place these are prayers that the faithful hear and read in the Scriptures, but also that they make their own - especially those of the Psalms, in view of their fulfillment in Christ.⁹⁶ The Holy Spirit, who thus keeps the memory of Christ alive in his Church at prayer, also leads her toward the fullness of truth and inspires new formulations expressing the unfathomable mystery of Christ at work in his Church's life, sacraments, and mission. These formulations are developed in the great liturgical and spiritual traditions. The *forms of prayer* revealed in the apostolic and canonical Scriptures remain normative for Christian prayer.

I. BLESSING AND ADORATION

2626 *Blessing* expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer: it is an encounter between God and man. In blessing, God's gift and man's acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other. The prayer of blessing is man's response to God's gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing.

2627 Two fundamental forms express this movement: our prayer *ascends* in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father - we bless him for

having blessed us;⁹⁷ it implores the grace of the Holy Spirit that *descends* through Christ from the Father - he blesses us.⁹⁸

2628 *Adoration* is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us⁹⁹ and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory,"¹⁰⁰ respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God.¹⁰¹ Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications.

II. PRAYER OF PETITION

2629 The vocabulary of supplication in the New Testament is rich in shades of meaning: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, cry out, even "struggle in prayer."¹⁰² Its most usual form, because the most spontaneous, is petition: by prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end. We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to him.

2630 The New Testament contains scarcely any prayers of lamentation, so frequent in the Old Testament. In the risen Christ the Church's petition is buoyed by hope, even if we still wait in a state of expectation and must be converted anew every day. Christian petition, what St. Paul calls {"groaning," arises from another depth, that of creation "in labor pains" and that of ourselves "as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."¹⁰³ In the end, however, "with sighs too deep for words" the Holy Spirit "helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."¹⁰⁴

2631 The first movement of the prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness*, like the tax collector in the parable: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!"¹⁰⁵ It is a prerequisite for righteous and

pure prayer. A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and with one another, so that "we receive from him whatever we ask."¹⁰⁶ Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer.

2632 Christian petition is centered on the desire and *search for the Kingdom to come*, in keeping with the teaching of Christ.¹⁰⁷ There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the Kingdom, then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming. This collaboration with the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit, which is now that of the Church, is the object of the prayer of the apostolic community.¹⁰⁸ It is the prayer of Paul, the apostle par excellence, which reveals to us how the divine solicitude for all the churches ought to inspire Christian prayer.¹⁰⁹ By prayer every baptized person works for the coming of the Kingdom.

2633 When we share in God's saving love, we understand that *every need* can become the object of petition. Christ, who assumed all things in order to redeem all things, is glorified by what we ask the Father in his name.¹¹⁰ It is with this confidence that St. James and St. Paul exhort us to pray *at all times*.¹¹¹

III. PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

2634 Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners.¹¹² He is "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."¹¹³ The Holy Spirit "himself intercedes for us . . . and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."¹¹⁴

2635 Since Abraham, intercession - asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks "not

only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm.¹¹⁵

2636 The first Christian communities lived this form of fellowship intensely.¹¹⁶ Thus the Apostle Paul gives them a share in his ministry of preaching the Gospel¹¹⁷ but also intercedes for them.¹¹⁸ The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions," for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel.¹¹⁹

IV. PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

2637 Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for his glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their Head.

2638 As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. The letters of St. Paul often begin and end with thanksgiving, and the Lord Jesus is always present in it: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"; "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."¹²⁰

V. PRAYER OF PRAISE

2639 Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God,¹²¹ testifying to the only Son in whom we are adopted and by whom we glorify the Father. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward him who is its

source and goal: the "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist."¹²²

2640 St. Luke in his gospel often expresses wonder and praise at the marvels of Christ and in his *Acts of the Apostles* stresses them as actions of the Holy Spirit: the community of Jerusalem, the invalid healed by Peter and John, the crowd that gives glory to God for that, and the pagans of Pisidia who "were glad and glorified the word of God."¹²³

2641 "[Address] one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart."¹²⁴ Like the inspired writers of the New Testament, the first Christian communities read the Book of Psalms in a new way, singing in it the mystery of Christ. In the newness of the Spirit, they also composed hymns and canticles in the light of the unheard-of event that God accomplished in his Son: his Incarnation, his death which conquered death, his Resurrection, and Ascension to the right hand of the Father.¹²⁵ Doxology, the praise of God, arises from this "marvelous work" of the whole economy of salvation.¹²⁶

2642 The *Revelation* of "what must soon take place," the *Apocalypse*, is borne along by the songs of the heavenly liturgy¹²⁷ but also by the intercession of the "witnesses" (martyrs).¹²⁸ The prophets and the saints, all those who were slain on earth for their witness to Jesus, the vast throng of those who, having come through the great tribulation, have gone before us into the Kingdom, all sing the praise and glory of him who sits on the throne, and of the Lamb.¹²⁹ In communion with them, the Church on earth also sings these songs with faith in the midst of trial. By means of petition and intercession, faith hopes against all hope and gives thanks to the "Father of lights," from whom "every perfect gift" comes down.¹³⁰ Thus faith is pure praise.

2643 The Eucharist contains and expresses all forms of prayer: it is "the pure offering" of the whole Body of Christ to the glory of God's name¹³¹ and, according to the traditions of East and West, it is *the* "sacrifice of praise."

IN BRIEF

2644 The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

2645 Because God blesses the human heart, it can in return bless him who is the source of every blessing.

2646 Forgiveness, the quest for the Kingdom, and every true need are objects of the prayer of petition.

2647 Prayer of intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. It knows no boundaries and extends to one's enemies.

2648 Every joy and suffering, every event and need can become the matter for thanksgiving which, sharing in that of Christ, should fill one's whole life: "Give thanks in all circumstances" (*1 Thess* 5:18).

2649 Prayer of praise is entirely disinterested and rises to God, lauds him, and gives him glory for his own sake, quite beyond what he has done, but simply because HE IS.