

As mentioned last week, this week's article will provide a summary on prayer, which could maybe be used for a quick review, or as a focal point, or reminder, or even a sort of "checklist" in the event that's helpful.

- Who cares about prayer? Why care? Deeply imbedded in every human being is a desire for happiness. It is the first and predominant desire, it is unshakable. Hell is the never-ending frustration of that desire. Union with God, is the *only* way that desire can be fulfilled, and that union won't be forged without prayer. As St Alphonsus Ligouri said: "Those who pray will be saved and those who do not will be damned." Period.
- What is prayer? What does it mean to pray? It's not just rattling off words. The essence of prayer is given by the "definitions" of prayer, first and foremost the one given by Aquinas: prayer is raising your mind to God. Prayer is also rightly described as: conversation with God.
- The Purpose of Prayer. Although this was brought out in the first bulletin point, it warrants special mention. The purpose of prayer is the same as the purpose of talking to those close to us – spouses, family members, and so on, namely: to build relation, in this case: relation with God. Do not treat God (and thus prayer) like a vending machine or a genie in the bottle – prayer is not just for me to get what I want. The true purpose of prayer also reminds us that there is no such thing as wasted prayer. Even if a petitionary prayer, for example, is not granted in the way or time that I want, the very act of asking still builds relation with God.
- They Have No Wine. Don't tell God what to do, just present your needs to Him and let Him handle them in His own good way and His own good time. He *does* know better than me how, when, and what to do.
- The Inner Room, (Interior) Silence. An immediate corollary of these descriptions of prayer is something our Lord said: when you pray, go to your inner room. He doesn't mean a physical place, He means "going down inside of yourself," interior silence, an interior "place" where it's just you and the Lord.
- Getting Started. If you don't really pray at all on a daily basis, start small and allow it to grow. An Our Father in the morning – prayed thoughtfully, with recollection – and a Hail Mary at night is enough to get started. *But*, really commit to it. Refuse to not do it.
- PERSEVERANCE: This one gets capital letters because there will be many temptations against prayer, all kinds of reasonable sounding things – I'm too busy, I don't really need it, does it really do anything, I'm tired, and on and on. I experience them as well. *Of course* there will be temptations against it because true prayer is a serious threat to the kingdom of hell. Don't be surprised by them or afraid of them. Say no, put them out of your mind, don't negotiate or compromise with them, don't listen to them – go and pray.
- Humility – Having the Right Mindset. Recall the example given by our Lord – the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee came and told God how great he is, the tax collector bowed his head and pleaded with God for His mercy. The tax collector, our Lord said, was heard and left justified, the Pharisee did not. We are absolutely dependent on Him, not vice versa. Be careful, also, not to pat yourself on the back for your prayers – it is not an uncommon trap and it robs the prayer of any merit.
- Forms of Prayer. Bearing in mind that the essence of prayer is raising your mind to God, there are many "ways" to do this. Two general categories are: "vocal" prayer and meditation. It will be helpful to use both.
- Vocal Prayer. This can be a confusing term because "vocal prayers" don't necessarily have to be said out loud; in fact, they may often be prayed silently. Almost all prayer involves the use of words ("vocalization"), whether silently in our own minds or spoken out loud. "Vocal prayer," then, refers to using the words of standard prayers like the Our Father, Hail Mary, or Act of Contrition. With vocal prayer, especially, though, remember that prayer is not just rattling off words.
- A Plethora of Vocal Prayers. There are many, many vocal prayers provided by our Lord through His Church. Don't try to do them all, pick a few and stick with them, and maybe change them up once in awhile. That little blue "The Catholic Devotional" booklet has quite a few, so does the Daily Roman Missal. Don't forget the basics like, for example, the meal prayer before every meal, in public or at home.

- Meditation. Meditation is more of “free-form” (if you will) prayer. It involves really pondering either some mystery of the faith (say the Incarnation or the Passion) or the Divine will. Many Catholics probably rely entirely on vocal prayer. Vocal prayer is good and is something to use our whole lives. But meditation should be included. Our Lord has repeatedly said to the mystics of the Church: meditate on My Passion.
- Mental Prayer. More generally we might speak of mental prayer. Mental prayer will often be using my own words as well – for example in asking our Lord for what we need.
- Contemplation. It would be remiss to not mention what the good teachers of the faith call contemplation. This is not something you can choose to do. It is something the Lord Himself does if a person progresses far enough in sincere prayer and union with God. It is sometimes called the prayer of quiet because in contemplation (the only exception to not using words in prayer) our Lord Himself takes over inside the person, communicating His own self to the person. You can’t force this, don’t try to do it, if it comes it comes, if not, ok too. Let the Lord work in His own good way and His own good time.
- Petitionary Prayer. Petitionary prayer – asking our Lord for our needs, especially spiritual needs, does need to constitute a routine part of everyone’s prayer. But all of the previous precautions (don’t treat Him like a genie in the bottle, He knows best as to when, where, and how – and also if – to carry out what we’re asking) need to be borne in mind. Remember also that petitionary prayer can’t form the entirety of prayer. Suppose the only time a child spoke with a parent, or vice versa, was when they wanted something. That wouldn’t be much of a relation. Thanksgiving, adoration, meditation – all of these need to be part of person’s prayer as well.
- Visits to the Blessed Sacrament. As often as this is repeated, it’s almost equally as often ignored. Why? In building relation with someone, there is no substitute for being in their actual presence. Why do you think our Lord resides in the Tabernacle? Because He has nothing better to do? Make a habit of stopping by and paying Him a visit. Parents, bring your kids if at all possible, at least once they are old enough to understand a little that Jesus is in the tabernacle. Bring them some good Catholic reading to help them pray.
- Pray Without Ceasing. There are 2 aspects to this. The first is tied back to perseverance. Pray regularly, every day. You can also say short little prayers throughout the day, something simple like: Lord, please help me. The second meaning, or 2nd “way” to pray without ceasing is to do everything, is to consciously and intentionally make everything I think, say, and do as a service to the Beloved, to truly live for Him. This is the fulfillment of the 1st commandment. This is not easy or automatic, it will take conscious effort to do.
- The Words of St James in Scripture: “You do not possess because you do not ask [i.e., pray]. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” St James says this in the context of talking about real vs fake (worldly) wisdom. It means that building *real* wisdom is also a necessary part of prayer. Although there is more to real wisdom than humility, humility (we could say) is both a part of real wisdom and is necessary to grow in wisdom. Figure out what wisdom means and build it within yourself.
- Liturgical Prayer. All of what has been said about prayer applies to both devotional prayer and liturgical prayer. Liturgical prayers are the “formal” (or “official”) prayers of the Church – the Mass is the most well known example. We will get little if anything out of the Mass, however, if we don’t use other liturgical (e.g., the Divine Office) or devotional prayers. One of the most important things about liturgical prayer is: do what the Church tells you to do, otherwise it is not prayer, it’s just me doing what I want.
- Dryness. Don’t seek good feelings in prayer. Perseverance during dryness is the greater act of love.
- God Speaks in Our Thoughts. There was a lot covered on this topic. For the summary, perhaps it is enough to just include this as a reminder so that we don’t dismiss His promptings.

Ladies and gentlemen, don’t waste your life. Don’t come to the end of your life, don’t go before the judgement of seat of our Lord, not having strived to come to know Him and be united with Him. This is a person’s only true fulfillment. It cannot be accomplished without sincere prayer. Be committed. Your prayer will strengthen me, and vice versa. This is the true meaning of brotherhood. God bless you, Fr Kuhn.