

PRAYING DAILY

A Practical Guide

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Preface

Changing your Attitude toward Prayer

I want to convince you to pray daily. I want to convince you that it can be done easily and well within the context of a busy schedule. I also want you to understand why it is important to pray and how prayer works.

*Prayer is a way to sanity,
as much as it is a way to God!*

The first thing to understand is that prayer is about sanity. This might surprise you. You may have the notion that prayer is about being “holy” or “religious.” The problem with this is that being holy or religious is something everyone wishes they were. And praying is something that most people like to think they would do – if they had the time. In other words praying, in most peoples’ minds, is a notion that can easily be dismissed. Here is the first obstacle to prayer: motivation! Before you do anything else, you need to fundamentally change your attitude about prayer. You need to replace the notion that prayer is about being holy and religious, with the truth that prayer is about sanity – and you need to be thoroughly convinced of it. Think of it this way: When I pray, I behave like a thoughtful, compassionate human being; when I don’t, I am easily irritated, find myself becoming insensitive to people, and more and more reacting rather than responding in situations I am confronted with.

Life each day is a mixture of good and bad, positive and negative, the life-giving and the life-defeating. Happiness is not in the hands of Fate and what it happens to throw at you each day. The key to happiness is in your hands. It lies in what you *choose* to lay hold of and what you refuse to. The problem is that most people don’t *choose*. The *idea that they have a choice* doesn’t even enter their consciousness. They wake up to be pushed through the day, driven by their list of things to do. The longer the list, the more pushed around and beat up they feel. Their first inclination becomes to grab on to the bad and the negative, and connect with the life-defeating in each person and situation they engage. They carry these with them from one moment to another.

*Prayer enables you to make CHOICES
about the way you are.*

Prayer is directly connected to being able to respond rather than react to the things that happen to you; to being able to identify your feelings and make real choices about what you say and what you do; and to truly connect in a personal way to God, the people and the elements of creation you encounter. Prayer does even more. All of this adds up to an integrated sense of self and peace with yourself – a felt confidence that you have shared your true and best self and experienced the best each moment had to offer. Even under the most trying of circumstances, most days will yield you a significant surplus of the good and the positive, and a genuine joy in being alive.

***“If only you recognized God’s gift...
He would have given you living water.”***

*The hour was about noon... A Samaritan woman came to draw water.
Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” The Samaritan woman said to him,
“How can you ask me, a Samaritan and a woman, for a drink?”
Jesus replied: “If only you recognized God’s gift, and who it is that is
asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he
would have given you living water.”* *John 4:7-10*

The woman who meets Jesus at the well is much more than she appears to be on the surface. She was a real woman of long ago who encountered Jesus at Jacob’s well in the region of Samaria in modern Israel. She is also a representation of her people – the People of Israel, who sought a life of meaning, purpose and fulfillment, often in all the wrong places. The Old Testament calls her *Virgin Daughter Zion* (Jeremiah 14:17, 31:3-4). For those who believe, she is the soul of every woman and man thirsty for healing, wholeness and connection with God, others and world around them. The well is that place where we come to lower the bucket of our heart in search of the water of a life connected and fulfilled. It is the place of prayer.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

**The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where
we come seeking water: there Christ comes to meet every
Human being.** (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2560)

Jesus is there for us. It is not part of God’s plan that we move through our days dispirited and joyless, or that we move through life as a victim. The solution is to connect. But where and how? The answer is to connect with God first, and then allow Him to connect you in a life-giving way to the people and events around you. Doing this is not as difficult nor does it require as much time as you might think. Come and see!

Prayer is a state of human being.

*...they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden
at the breezy time of the day...* *Genesis 3:8*

This verse from the second chapter of Genesis speaks of the proximate, personal presence of God to Adam and Eve, and the easy intimacy that existed between God and them. This is an insight of breathtaking beauty into the original and intended relationship between God and the creature God fashioned in His image and after His likeness. In the beginning, before the fall, woman and man walked with God through the garden world God had fashioned for them. They were fully conscious of His presence. They communicated back and forth, Mind to mind and heart to Heart, as they walked along – pausing frequently to contemplate with delight the beauty and goodness in each of the elements of creation they passed. The proximate presence of God walking at man’s side, as it is portrayed here in the Scriptures, was a gift of the “Creating.” It is an Original Gift.

Prayer is an open receptivity of mind and heart to God and a constant stream of thoughts and impressions flowing between God and us. We are designed for prayer, and it is essential to our being human. Prayer is living contact with the Source of Our Being, and actuates the full range of our human potential in body, soul and spirit. Prayer is not adding something to your day. Prayer is remaining human throughout your day.

I

THE BASIC OUTLINE AND DIRECTIONS FOR PRAYER DURING THE DAY

Drawing on the wisdom of the Church and drawing from the incredibly rich treasure chest of her prayer and piety, I believe the following pattern of daily prayer to contain the most essential elements for a strong spiritual life as a Catholic Christian.

At the Very Beginning of the Day

Time Required: 1 Minute

To make this easier to remember, I suggest that it be done after brushing your teeth. Set your toothbrush down. Think about yesterday. Where did you fall short of being the man or woman God called you to be? Close your eyes and pray:

Jesus, I choose to begin this day with you.
I want to set my course now, before the day begins.
I want to get through this day _____.
Walk with me and let's do it together.

You need to fill in the blank. What you say here may be different each day or it may be the same.

What you say should be based upon your attitude, words or actions the day before, specifically, what was out of order in you yesterday. Here are some examples to help you get the idea.

If your language was getting out of hand, you might say:

“without using crude language.”

If you were angry and abrasive with people you might say:

“without my anger getting the best of me.”

If you bickered or fought with your siblings, you might say:

“without fighting with my brother, Joe.”

If you gossiped about others you might say:

“without saying a negative thing about anyone.”

If you were impatient or abrupt with someone, you might say:

“with more patience with my colleague __ (name) __.”

If you were lazy and neglected your work you might say:

“staying on task with what I am committed to do.”

If you had a problem with lust in thought or act, you might say:

“with a clean mind and heart.”
or “without giving into that temptation.”

What you say could also be based upon larger goals you have set for your spiritual growth. For example:

“more mindful of you, Jesus.”

or **“with more heart-felt concern about others
and less about myself.”**

or **“more grateful for what I have.”**

or **“listening more carefully before I react.”**

The idea is to identify and explicitly tell Jesus one or two objectives for the day. What you are doing is setting your spiritual and moral compass for the day. You file a flight plan with the God, just like a pilot does before he takes off on a flight. If you know where you want to go, and form a focused desire to get there by saying it in this brief mental prayer, Jesus can prove himself a Savior and get you there. If you don't know where you want to go or refuse to summon the ambition to get there, then there is not much Jesus can do for you.

This needs to be done at the beginning of the day. Once you get on a roll answering your voice mails, emails, and diving into your planner, you are already being driven forward and will invariably fall into the same habits of attitude, speech and reaction you did the day before. No moral change or spiritual growth will take place in you. Doing this kind of examination at the end of the day, does little good because the day is over. All you can do at the end of the day is have regrets and feel guilty. Your religion is not about regrets and feeling guilty. This prayer transforms moral fault and failure (past) into moral goals (present and pointing forward). Christ and your Catholic Faith is about you becoming the man or woman God made you to be for those he has given you to love and serve.

Some people, with very busy days and countless pressing “voices” talking at them find that they need to “reset their compass” with this prayer exercise a couple of times throughout the day.

Before Everything You Do During the Day

Time Required: 10 Seconds

Before everything you do, and each time you transition from one situation to another, STOP! In your heart, pronounce the name: **“Jesus.”** Then in your mind pray:

**You are in this moment with me.
Help me to listen deeply before I speak or act.
Show me what is really going on.
Move me to say or do what needs to be done
for the good of all.**

When leaving the moment pray: **Jesus, it's yours!** Consciously release everything that happened in that moment from your mind and heart. Let it pass into the hands of Jesus, who will carry forward what you have contributed according to God's will and purpose.

Saying Jesus' name makes you aware that you that you are not alone in the situation. He is there with you. It connects you in a personal way to His presence. You will be amazed at the difference you experience in your sense of self and in the quality of your interaction with others in the situation. This flows from the simple fact that you are in conscious "*communion*" with him!

Releasing the situation is essential. If you fail to release the moment once it has passed, if you hang on to it with your expectations of how people should have responded to you or how things were suppose to proceed or turn out, you will find your heart heavy and your clarity of mind darkened. Your heart will begin to accumulate anger and resentment. This will deaden your awareness of the presence of God with you, and blind you to the goodness and beauty in the people and things around you. You will be withdrawn and unavailable to embrace the next moment with full receptivity to its possibilities.

God is present to all things and to every human heart. This does not, however, mean that every heart is 'present' to God. We know that we can be open or closed to the presence of people, even those near and dear to us. We can even be completely oblivious to the presence of some people. Just think of the checkout clerk at the grocery store. This can happen because we are preoccupied or overwhelmed with other things. The human heart can all too easily begin to close in on itself – becoming self absorbed and self consumed. To remain personally 'present' to another requires focused effort. Our moods change quickly and our attention is easily drawn in other directions. To make a relationship contingent on being in the right mood or having nothing at the moment competing for our attention invites disaster. This is as true of our relationship with God as it is with our relationship to others. This prayer exercise "breaks you through" to the presence of God in Jesus in each moment and situation.

*After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning,
Mary Magdalene came with the other Mary to inspect the tomb.
Suddenly there was a mighty earthquake, as the angel of the Lord descended...
The angel spoke, addressing the women: "Do not be frightened.
I know that you are looking for Jesus the Crucified, but he is not here...
Go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has been raised from the dead
and now goes ahead of you...'"* *Matthew 28:1-11*

Here is one of the most potentially life-changing truths of Catholic faith: Jesus is risen *and goes ahead of you*. You must take the meaning of this personally. Jesus has "gone ahead" to every time and situation in the day ahead of you, especially those that will be the most trying – those where you will confront the greatest hardship, which will bring you face to face with your most feared inadequacies, that will bring the strongest temptation, and in which you will be the most anxious and afraid. When you arrive at these moments, *he will already be there* waiting for you.

If you *acknowledge* his presence, you will *experience* his presence and his power transforming both you and the situation in which you find yourself. Aware and connected to his presence, you will speak and act differently – breaking through fear and anxiety, resisting temptation, experiencing a peace and confidence you never

knew before. Aware and connected to His presence, you will see, hear and understand things in the situation that you would otherwise have completely missed. He is present that you may be fully alive in every moment of your life.

At a Set Time in the Morning, Afternoon or Evening

Time Required: 10 Minutes (or more if you are able)

You need to nourish the image of the Christian man or woman you are called to be if you are to remain spiritually healthy and grow in stature as a son or daughter of God. This is no different than saying that you need to nourish yourself and exercise daily if you want to successfully compete as an athlete. This happens in a *structured prayer time*. You will need to *make the time* for it, and you will need to *do it daily*. Consistency is the key. Only then does it become powerful. This point cannot be stressed enough. A regular time for structured prayer each day becomes an Oasis of Peace in the constantly changing, sometimes turbulent atmosphere of your day. Set aside a regular time when you can best focus your mind and heart with loving attention on God. Find a place where you can be alone and at peace. Silence everything that can distract you.

The First Minute:

Listen to the silence! Drink it in. Absorb it.

You just shut down all the commotion of life. You just silenced a billion dollar industry devoted to telling you what you ought to think, how you ought to act, how you should dress, where you should go, and what you should have. You just silenced all the voices telling you who you are and what you have to be. You have the power to shut it all down and turn it off. Allow this realization to soak into you. Let its meaning speak to you. It demonstrates to you that you are not a victim of life. You are not a cog in a gigantic machine. You are not a rag tossed about in someone else's dryer. You are an actor in the world. *The world* does not drive you. *You* engage it – as a person, as a human being.

The Next Two Minutes:

**Go deep within you,
to the deepest part of your consciousness.
Ask God this question: “Who am I?”
“Who is the person You made me to be?”**

Although a thousand voices in your life and around you each day try to answer this question for you, none of them can. They can't for the simple reason that they are not you. Only the Origin of Your Being can reveal to you the answer to this question. You were created a unique human being – unlike any other. God created you to express His life-giving love into the world as He can through no one else. Life is not about being someone else, it is about being the person God created you to be. As you pray this prayer day after day, God will give you greater and greater insight into your true self. When they come to you, write them down. Have a notebook at hand and write just a word or two to describe that aspect of your best self that you are coming to see more clearly in this moment of prayer.

**The Next Two Minutes:
Ask God: “Show me the gift You have given me
that I may give life to others.”**

This gift is already within you. It is part of God’s making you uniquely who you are. It is not only something that you can do or give, but the unique way only you can do it and give it. It is important for you to understand that it is given to you so that you can give life to others. Jesus said: “The gift you have received, give as a gift.” (Matthew 10:8) You will only find joy and fulfillment in it when you do so. God reveals it to you progressively, with greater and greater clarity as you persist in asking and listening. As you pray this prayer day after day you will gain clearer and clearer understanding of the gift, what you need to do to develop it, and a stronger and stronger desire to give it. Write down in your notebook what you come to see.

The business of life is not to be a cog in someone else’s machine, nor is it about building your own machine in which everyone else is a cog. Life is about knowing and being confident in who you are. It is about knowing and becoming confident in the gift that was placed in you to give life to others. Too often people around you want you to be who they need you to be – and they all want something different. What gets lost is loving you for who you are. You can sense it. To genuinely love you, someone has to be able to see who you are, not just what they want you to be. More than that, they have to see *that you know who you are*, that you are striving to be your best self and that you are confident in your striving. God knows who He made you to be, and the gift He has given you to give. That is why God draws near to you here each day in this prayer. You, however, have to want to see and strive to be that man or woman. Jesus asked the blind man: “What do you want me to do for you.” He answered: “Lord, I want to see.” (Luke 18:41) God loves your becoming who you were created to be. You must come to love others in the same way. Jesus said: “This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.” (John 15:12)

A living relationship with God enables you to live your life “from the inside, out.” It frees you from being manipulated by the people and forces around you, and affords you the opportunity to be a creative actor in your world. It lays you open to being loved and to being able to love others. It makes it possible for you to enter communion with the people and things around you, to share their life and to leave them stronger.

**The Next Five Minutes (or more if you have time):
Read -- Nourish you mind.**

If you have only five minutes, read the Bible.

*Indeed, God's word is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword.
It penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges
the reflections and thoughts of the heart.* *Hebrews 4:12*

It is vital for your spiritual life that you open the Scriptures (the Bible) regularly. Reading the Bible daily is best done in this way: Choose a book of the Bible, for instance one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). Read for five minutes. Go back over what you read and ask yourself: What particularly strikes me about this

passage? What draws my attention? Why am I drawn to it? What is the Holy Spirit trying to say to me in these verses? Write down in your notebook anything that draws your attention in the passage you are reading, any thoughts or insights that come to you.

If you have more than five minutes to spare, you can read from another spiritual source – perhaps from the writings of one of the Saints or a Christian author or poet.

Conclude by Praying the ‘Our Father’

Pray the words slowly and with focused attention. Be mindful of Who you are speaking to and what you are saying.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed by Thy name.
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
Amen.**

Immediately Before Retiring to Bed

Time Required: 3 Minutes

Sit quietly and let your mind go over the day. Spend a minute identifying any person you met that struck you as being in difficulty and need of help. Mention them by name to Jesus in your heart. Spend another minute identifying at least three things in your life that day for which you are grateful. Mention them by name to Jesus. You can also mention blessings that God brought to others during the day and give thanks for them. Let this be the last thing you do before you go to sleep. Gratitude releases the mind and opens the heart to a peaceful night’s rest.

II

A GUIDE TO DEEPER PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION

Time Required: 20 to 30 Minutes

He said to them, "Come by yourselves to an out-of-the-way place and rest a little" ...So Jesus and the apostles went off by themselves. Mark 6:31-32

During the course of the day, we operate primarily on the level of our emotions (by emotional reaction to events), or on the level of thought (through planned activity and logical responses to problems). God, however, is best perceived with the intellect quieted and the emotions calmed – in the stillness of an open heart. A time set aside for deep contemplative prayer “tunes us in” to that level of our being where God is best perceived, and trains us in deep intimacy with God. There may or may not be time for this to happen every day, but it should be engaged often. Time for it on Sunday afternoon or evening makes sense, as it will flow from your worship at Mass. It can, however, take place at any time.

Preparation:

Allow *at least* twenty minutes for this kind of prayer. It should be at a time when you have the least number of distractions around you. You may want to inform your family that you need to be left alone for this period of time. Take the time to explain to them the reason why you need the time alone. Find a comfortable place to pray. It should be a pleasant place somewhere within your home or garden. It is most beautiful in a Church before the Blessed Sacrament.

Step #1. Invoke the Holy Spirit

The Spirit too helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech. Romans 8:26

Directions: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you focus your attention. Ask the Holy Spirit to protect you in this time when your mind and heart will be open and vulnerable. Ask the Holy Spirit to pray with you and within you – giving strength and power to your prayer. You can use these or similar words:

Come, Holy Spirit, I need you!
Come, Holy Spirit, I pray.
Come with Your strength and Your power;
Come in Your own gentle way.

Step #2: Make the Sign of the Cross

*May I boast of nothing but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!
 Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.
 Galatians 6:14*

Directions: Trace the Sign of the Cross over yourself slowly. Be mindful that by Jesus' cross your life was redeemed and the power of sin over your life was broken (Romans 6:6 and Colossians 2:12-14). As you do so, invoke the name of God with these familiar words:

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

You may add the following verse from the Bible:

**I have been crucified with Christ,
and the life I live now is not my own;
Christ is living in me.
I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith
in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.**
Colossians 2:19b-20

Step #3: Clear Your Mind and Heart

*Dismiss all anxiety from your mind. Present your needs
to God in every form of prayer and in petitions of gratitude.* Philippians 4:6

Directions: Center your attention within yourself. Many thoughts, concerns, and anxieties crowd your mind. Identify them and set them aside. Create a stillness in your mind and a clear place in your heart. If a persistent thought breaks in, simply move it aside. Picture yourself taking the distracting thought in your hands and walking to the side of your consciousness. Set it down there and come back to the center of your awareness. As soon as your mind is reasonably quiet, move on to the next step.

Step #4: Call on the Name of Jesus

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Romans 10:13

Directions: Deep within yourself say: “**Jesus.**” You can add these words from the Bible if you wish:

**Come, Lord Jesus! The Holy Spirit within me
and the bride of your Church say, 'Come!'**
Revelation 22:17, 20

Step #5: Welcome the Presence of Jesus

Venerate the Lord, that is Christ in your hearts. 1 Peter 3:15

Directions: Picture Jesus standing before you – love fills His eyes and His hands are extended toward you. This is not just an exercise of imagination, Jesus really is present with you. He is true to his promise: *Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!* (Matthew 28:20) Spend some time focusing your awareness on his presence using the following litany (recited slowly):

**Jesus, Word of Creation,
Jesus, Light of the World,
Jesus, Bread of Life,**

**Jesus, True Vine,
Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life,
Jesus, Resurrection to a new life,**

**Jesus, Lamb of God,
Jesus Gate to Transfigured Glory,
Jesus, Shepherd and Guardian of My Soul,**

**Jesus, lift me up,
Jesus, deliver me from my terrible bondage to self.
Jesus, cleanse me of sin.
Jesus, free me from the unhappy prison
 where sin holds me captive.
Jesus release me from the misery of my self-made aloneness.
Jesus, give me the courage to love.**

**Jesus, You are my Redeemer,
Jesus, You are my Savior,
Jesus, You are my Lord!**

**Jesus, You are my Teacher,
Jesus, You are my Physician,
Jesus, You are my Friend!**

**Jesus, You are my Way,
Jesus, You are my Light,
Jesus, You are my Love!**

**You are all-Powerful, yet You are most Compassionate.
You are all-Just, yet You are most Merciful.
You are all-Knowing, yet You are most Forgiving.
You are all-Holy, yet You are most Patient!**

Jesus, my Lord, my God, my All!

You may prefer something more simple, that you can repeat without needing to read it. Here is an invocation from the prayers of the Eastern Catholic Church. Repeat it slowly for a minute or so.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!

Step #6: Speak – Opening Your Heart to Jesus

*God is our refuge! Trust in Him at all times, O my people!
Pour out your hearts before Him... Psalm 62:9*

Directions: Pour out all that you need Jesus to see and hear: the sin you need to conquer, the pain that needs relief, the heartache that needs consoling, the emptiness in you that needs to be filled, the love you long to give, the attitudes you need to change, the forgiveness you need to find for someone, the strength you need for your work,

the concern you hold for friends in trouble or for those in danger and need. Talk to him. Don't say to yourself, "If God knows everything anyway, why do I need to tell him." Prayer is not about what God knows, it is about what you entrust to God. It's about faith and its power. If you find that words are of no use, simply pour out your feelings: weep for the wounds that you carry within you or for the pain that you have brought to others; cry for the plight of the destitute and the oppressed; shed tears of grief if you have suffered loss; rejoice if you are full of gratitude; sing if your heart is full of joy.

Step #7: Entering your Interior Spirit

Lord...in my inmost being teach me wisdom. Psalm 51:8

Jesus meets you in your *heart*, the "place" within you where everything you are as a person comes to a center, to a "meeting" point with one another: your mind with its thoughts and memories; your body with its senses, drives and needs; and your emotions and feelings. It is here that you open the contents of your heart to Jesus and speak with Him.

Now it is time to enter your *interior spirit*. People often sense this as a place of vast emptiness within them. They seldom go there because they think of this part of themselves as a place of great emptiness. In fact, this space within you opens out onto the eternal. It is the throne room of the Presence of God within you. While it appears empty to your mind and bodily senses, it is not empty at all. God's Presence cannot be grasped with the human mind or the body's senses. In the Presence of God, our mind and bodily senses "draw a blank". Do not let this deter you. You have senses in your interior spirit that will assist you.

Saint Paul speaks of a human person being composed of body, soul and spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23). The interior spirit is that place at the center of a person's consciousness which opens out onto the eternal. Here the presence of the Divine is immediate but veiled from our mortal vision. This is because God is radically "other" than us. Bound in all too many addictive ways to the earthly, we have little resource of either experience or clarity of perception to "see" the Divine. But God makes Himself known by His own action and movement within us. The sanctuary of the interior spirit is designed for intimate encounter with God. It is meant to be visited often, in silence and with a listening heart. It is the "entrance of the cave" where the "still small voice" of the God can be heard and the promptings of the Holy Spirit received. (see 1 Kings 19:11-13) You do not enter your interior spirit alone. Jesus, to whom you have been praying, moves beside you to lead you and enters with you. Jesus said:

The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth...God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."

John 4:23-24

Directions: Enter your *interior spirit* by focusing on one thing only: an intense desire for God. Let your mind do no thinking at all. Simply Desire God! Want to love God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (Deuteronomy 6:5).

It is your *desire* for God and your *wanting* to love Him that will let you sense the Presence of God in your interior spirit. Be quiet and still. If your attention wanders, choose one word and say it slowly, over and over again:

"Holy" or "Father" or "Lord"

You have not come here to “know,” you have come here to love and to be loved. Let yourself feel the warmth of God's Love fill your entire being. Sense a wave of love descending on you, beginning at the top of your head and passing slowly through you to the bottom of your feet. Let this Love touch every wound within you. Let it surround any knots of sin and frustration. They will begin to dissolve away. Rest in God's love for you. Nothing has more power to heal and reintegrate you, and restore your joy in life. Linger in this state as long as you wish. When you are ready to withdraw from your interior spirit, begin to say slowly, over and over again for about a minute:

I have come to know and to believe in the love God has for me. John 4:16

III LEADING A RECOLLECTED LIFE

Time Required: 2-3 Minutes

*In all your ways be mindful of the Lord,
and He will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:6*

Given the demands and expectations of modern life, it can become the case that one part of the day – with its tasks, dramas and tensions – repeatedly “spills over” into the next part of the day, where it “takes over” and prevents you from focusing on and giving your full attention to those you encounter, and doing the good you want to do. Still wrapped in a moody cloud of impatience, frustration, anger, etc., or preoccupied with what happened before, you render yourself incapable of being fully who and what you want to be for those you are with now. This exercise causes you to reflect on where you have been and where you are now, to ask question about how you were and how you might now want to be. It sets you up *to make choices* about being your best self in what lies ahead of you.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta says, “Silence is the friend of God.” I agree and would add: Reflection is the friend of our humanity. When you fail to stop and think, and ask questions about where you have been and what you have done, you end up being less than you can be in what lies ahead of you. Even if your activities are the most noble in the world, if you do not leaven them with a moment a reflection, you will not rise to the full potential of your humanity. On the other hand, every time you stop to think and ask questions about what you have done, you significantly enhance who and what you can be in what you are about to do.

For a Christian, this exercise creates a moment of reflection which effectively integrates one’s best self as a human being present to others and acting in the world. It is my conviction that a person’s life could be turned around 180 degrees if he or she would perform this simple exercise three to five times a day for a week.

At the Beginning of the Work Day

(If you travel to work, before you get out of the car and go in to work.)

Sit quietly a moment, and answer these questions to yourself:

**What part of my home life am I carrying
with me into my day? How much do I want to?
How do I want to greet and engage the people
with whom I am about to work?**

Pray this or something similar:

**Jesus, I want to give my full attention and my
best self to my work and to the people with whom
I work. Bring me into balance to do it.**

After Lunch

Stop what you are doing. Sit quietly a moment and answer these questions to yourself:

What did I do this morning?
How do I feel about what I have done?
What would I have liked to have done differently?
What am I going to do next?
How do I want to do it?

Pray:

Jesus, Give me the freedom to do it!

At the End of the Work Day

(If you travel home from work, in your driveway before you get out of the car and go into the house.)

Sit quietly a moment, and answer these questions to yourself:

What am I carrying in my head from the day?
How much of this do I want to bring into the house
with me (take into this evening with me)?
Who do I want to share it with, and when?

Who is waiting for me inside the house?
 (Who am I planning to be with this evening?)
How do I want to greet and engage them?

Pray:

Jesus, those I love deserve my full attention and my best self. Bring me into balance to do it.

Some people find that they need to do this more than three times a day.

In this case simply also use the prayer/reflection indicated for **After Lunch** sometime **Mid-Morning (about 10:00 AM)** and again sometime in the **Mid-Afternoon**.

This exercise is designed to deliberately break up the press of activity in your day. In order to be effective, it needs to do just that. Don't make the excuse that you are too busy to do this, or shortly it will be more than clear to everyone around you that you are too busy to be a human being.

IV PRAYER FOR THE ACTIVE PERSON

For in Him we live and move and have our being. Acts 17:28

For some people, an extended amount of time in quiet is hard to sustain. Some time, however, is absolutely necessary. The first chapter sets out how to organize your day in prayer with a “doable” amount of time in quiet prayer and reading. Those who know that they “are best” when they are “on the move” will be pleased to discover that prayer can be integrated into physical activity during the day.

While Walking, Swimming, Biking or Running:

Pray the Rosary or Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Pause sometime during or after to contemplate or think of something beautiful in the world around you. Pray this verse from Scripture. You will find your spirit as well as your body refreshed.

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the firmament proclaims the works of your hands.
Day unto day pours forth speech;
night unto night whispers knowledge. Psalm 19:2-3*

While Working Out, Doing Stretches or Aerobic Exercise:

I set out the following verses for a friend to pray while he is doing his daily workout. He repeats these verses with each exercise.

Stretches:

*Do not fear: I am with you; do not be anxious: I am your God.
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Isaiah 41:10*

Cardio:

*Affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character,
and proven character, hope,
and hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5*

Lifting:

*They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar on eagles' wings;
They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint. Isaiah 40:31*

Band:

*Console my heart, and strengthen me for every good word and work.
2 Thessalonians 2:17*

Core:

*You have been told, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you:
only to do the right, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8*

NOTES

A. Keeping a Prayer Journal

This is an excellent idea! In it you should record the fruit of your daily prayer times. If God made an impression upon you, write down what you felt. If you sensed God saying something to you, write it down as well. When you open the Scriptures, whether in your prayer time or at another time during the day, write down the citation of the verses you read (e.g., John 1:1-24). What drew your attention in the passage? What do you think the Holy Spirit was personally trying to say to you in the whole text or in the part of the passage that drew your attention the most? Write all this down in your journal. Every week or so read back over your Prayer Journal. Is there anything in your entries consistently being said to you or drawn to your attention by the Holy Spirit? Make a special note of it.

B. Getting Outdoors and Contemplating Beauty

Physical activity, especially outdoors, is particularly important to a healthy spiritual life. God created the natural world in colors of many shade and hue and varied forms and shapes to draw man and woman out of themselves, where they have such a habit of getting stuck and absorbed. The world of nature, if we give it attention, throws wide our perspective of the size of life and our place in it. It makes clear to us that we are a part of a living whole and were created to be in communion with its beauty and its life. We are not and never were intended to be a world unto ourselves. We stand no chance for happiness in it. In the spiritual life, a person draws strength from his encounter with God *within*, but finds her life and fulfillment moving *outward*. Nothing can better help maintain the right order of body, soul and spirit within you than a daily walk, run, or bike ride through your neighborhood or along a natural path or roadway. Pause at least once along the way to pay close attention to something beautiful. Spend a moment “drinking it in.” You will find yourself noticing more and more of the good and beautiful in yourself, in others and in your life. God was wise when he designed our world for us.

C. Your Favorite Daily Devotions

People often ask if they have to give up their favorite prayer devotions like the Rosary, Novena Prayers, or Devotions to Mary and the Saints. Absolutely not! They can either be done at your daily prayer times or at another time during the day. If you want to offer these prayers and devotions as part of one of your daily prayer times, they should be done *either before or after* you follow the prayer format.

D. The Power of the Names of Jesus

*Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

*and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
Philippians 2:9-11*

When you want to say the name of God, what name do you use? What name do you use in conversation or discussion with others. What name do you use in mental and vocal prayer. Do you find that most often you use the name, “God” or “Lord?” These are perfectly accurate and acceptable names, but they evoke a Divine Being who is remote, distant and vague. After all, we are talking about the Origin and Sustainer of the universe, which has no known boundary and whose patterns and energies are intricate beyond imagining, a field of endless discovery. God is transcendent, totally “other” than ourselves, immensely larger than what we are, mysterious and unfathomable in his ways. God grasps things about reality that we cannot yet see or imagine.

In one way of thinking, there are distinct advantages to a Divine Being who is distant and vague. If the Divine Being remains remote in our conception, we can relax in the conclusion that we cannot really know Him or His will. We can say that something that seems specific, like the Commandments, are uncertain: “Did God really reveal that?” and “What does it really mean?” We can also conclude that the Divine Being is too distant to notice what we hold in our minds, what comes out of our mouths, what we do and how we do it. The Divine remains a nice, comfortable distance away. There are also disadvantages to this. I have to settle for the fact that when I pray, my prayers have to travel a good distance to reach the Divine. They can get lost and overlooked in the vast scheme of things. This is disappointing to me when I decide to get specific enough about God to want something I can’t get on my own. Then I get irritated that God is distant and seemingly indifferent. I might even stamp my feet and get rebellious against the “idea of God.” Sadly, for all too many people this is not too big a price to pay for keeping the Divine from minding too closely their anger, greed, jealous, lust, cruelty, laziness, meanness, vulgarity, abuse of things and manipulation of others.

In Jesus, God becomes specific, personal and proximate. If Jesus is “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God,” as we profess every week at Mass, then God is no longer distant, remote, and inaccessible. God is near, present “in person” to me and to everything I think, say and do. In Jesus, God is “at hand” in my weakness and need, and attentive in my prayer. In Jesus, God is no longer uncertain, vague, and comfortably ambiguous. God has a “face”: specific aspects of personality, a defined character, specific things He says and asks. In Jesus, what God has to say to man and woman becomes concrete and clear.

The more sophisticated intellectually, professionally and materially a person becomes, the less they use the name Jesus. In our sophistication we like the “ideal of God” more than we like God. We like the “ideal of God” vague and uncertain, distant and ambiguous, because then we feel free to “fill in the picture” of who God is, and God usually ends up looking more and more like us. We can also tell God “what He means” when He says something in the Scriptures, and it usually ends up meaning what we

want it to mean—even to the point of being the complete opposite of what His word specifically says. There is, however, a dark “fall out” to playing this game with the Divine: our life becomes more and more unstable, complex and burdensome. Faith becomes fantasy.

Train yourself to use the name “Jesus” when you are addressing God during the day.¹ At first you may find it uncomfortable and embarrassing. This is because you are pressing against something you have built up within yourself as a barrier to God. When you use the name of Jesus, God will at first feel too close, too personal, too noticing, too specifically “Someone,” and too clear about what he says and asks. If you push through the discomfort and embarrassment, you will very soon rediscover that God is a Person present to you in love, supporting you in your weakness, strengthening you in your striving, clarifying of what is truly of enduring value in your life, freeing you to be the man or woman you were created to be. When you read the Gospels during your prayer time, you will no longer feel like you are reading about someone who lived two thousand years ago. You will be exhilarated to discover that you are getting to know the One who walks with you through your day, the One who sees your weaknesses and faults but holds open a door for you to become a different man or woman, the One who never leaves you to face any trial or difficulty alone but walks through them with you to see you emerge a man or woman larger in soul. There is power in the name of Jesus! It breaks you through to the personal presence of the Divine.

E. A Prayer to the Holy Spirit

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will.

Romans 8:26-27

If it is helpful, you may want to say this prayer after “Setting Your Compass” first thing in the morning (see page 6). Tape it to the mirror in your bathroom.

O Lord and Giver of Life,
I seek and ask fellowship with You.
I need Your help in the day ahead.

Soften the hardness of my heart.
Keep my heart open to Jesus
and to the people and events around me today.
Keep my eyes focused on Jesus
so that I may learn from Him.
Let some small part of His powerful, healing love
come alive in my attitude, words and actions today.

¹ Step #7 of Deeper Prayer and Contemplation (Chapter II above) is an exception. Here Jesus leads you before the immensity of God.

Act on my behalf!
By the powerful grace Jesus won for me
in His death and resurrection,
defeat the terrible hold that my sin,
my addictions, my fears and my compulsions
have on my life.

Holy Spirit of God, be the Counselor
of my every thought, word and deed.
Amen.

*A person needs to pray
because the human soul needs to regain
an integral sense of itself,
and an awareness of the presence of God
and communion with God.*