

# LEADERSHIP FORMATION

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## Prayer, the new challenge for the third millennium

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### TEACHING OUTLINE

#### Introduction

1. What is prayer?
2. Difficulties
3. The great challenge of these times

### Introduction

**"A**s a deer yearns for running streams, so I yearn for you, my God. I thirst for God, the living God..." (Psalm 42).

This Word of God should really be our first desire when we get up every morning the Lord gives to us. How many times have we had this "great desire" only to find that it doesn't last? As we go about our day, things get in the way and the longing fades. And as if that were not enough we easily look for excuses so as to quieten our soul, but at heart we know we are failing, and that each day we do not speak with God it becomes more difficult to start. We are weighed down by our lack of will and laziness. We are always saying "I'll start tomorrow" - even though we know that when tomorrow comes, it remains "tomorrow".

Let us look for God's company today, not tomorrow! Let us look urgently for the giver of Life. Even now as you read this article, ask for the strength of the Holy Spirit and for the Gift of prayer, since it is one of the gifts of the Lord.

### 1. What is prayer?

Now then, let us see what prayer is. To do this we will turn to the authorities on this subject which will say: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition of love, embracing both trial and joy" (St. Therese of Lisieux).

"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God" (St John Damascene) (Catechism 2559).

"Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him". (St Augustine) (Catechism 2560).

These are some examples of the meaning of prayer.

With these quotations we feel encouraged to say that prayer is a **dialogue between two people**. Dialogue means that

there must necessarily be two people, one who speaks and another who listens, each in their turn, otherwise it will become a monologue.

For prayer we must look for a certain **place** and an established **time**. Many times I have heard people say: "I pray all the time, when I clean, when I iron, when I shop, when I drive and so on", that is very good, but we also need to find a spare moment and an intimate special place, if possible a fixed one, in order to be able to reach a certain depth and intensity of prayer, and thus experience its richer fruits.

It is a good idea to start little by little, five minutes a day for the first week (check the time with a watch), then increase to ten minutes a day in the second week, and so on gradually extending your prayer time until you are able to manage a whole hour a day, or more if you would like to. It is like training to be a long distance runner. The athlete cannot keep going for twenty miles straightaway. He must begin with short runs and increase the distance little by little.

To do this we need to make an effort, since "...prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God." (Catechism 2725)

### 2. Difficulties

"The habitual difficulty in prayer is distraction." (Catechism 2729). I think that it is really the main difficulty we all have, distraction, for our mind is always flying away and it is hard to stop and to concentrate all our attention on the Lord.

Another difficulty "... is dryness." (Catechism 2729). I think that this is the main difficulty we all suffer from. We shift and fidget feeling nothing and making no sense of anything. We begin to think that we *should feel* something; that we should at least have the urge to pray. But prayer has nothing to do with that. Even if I do not feel anything, nor have any urge to pray, I must still start and make the effort. As previously mentioned, "the spiritual battle" must be fought.

A "lack of time" is another common excuse for not praying, but if we organise our lives we can always *make* time to dedicate to the Lord.

At this point I would like to share something I read which may help us: "...the modern world is delighted with the great inventions of science. Like the child who has just ridden his bicycle for the first time instead of going to Sunday mass, people make idols of their new scientific "toys".

But when the boy has fallen off his bicycle a few times, he becomes aware that it is not actually a God after all. So he decides to start going to mass again, no doubt on his bicycle!



What use is it to man, said the student from Paris, to have many possessions or even to use science to solve the problem of hunger, if after all, we are bored to death?"

Without intimacy with God through prayer, everything becomes useless, empty and meaningless.

### 3. The great challenge of these times

Now we will try to go a bit further, to the great challenge of these times, for if we say we are Christians we have to imitate Christ, otherwise it will only be idle chatter. Our Lord withdrew to pray each time he had to do an important thing.

We must be aware that prayer is the fuel of the soul, the petrol which allows us to move spiritually. Without it we get stuck and sooner or later, we come to a halt.

Here are some examples of how Jesus always turned to prayer before doing anything important.

- "...Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God" (Lk 6,12). He chooses the Twelve apostles.

- "... he went up on the hills by himself to pray" (Mt. 14,23). He walks on the water.

- "... Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured: his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as dazzling as light" (Mk 17, 1-2). The Transfiguration.

- "They came to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples: "Sit here while I pray" (Mk 14, 32) He sweated blood.



In each of these events Jesus prayed and not only for a moment. We have just read that he was at prayer often and for long periods. How things would change if at each important event of our lives we asked the Lord: "how would you do this", "what would you answer in this circumstance". If each day we devoted some time to being alone with the Master, at his feet like Mary, who chose the best part, we would be sure that we have also done so. "Nothing is equal to prayer; for what is impossible it makes possible, what is difficult easy." (St. John Chrysostom). "Those who pray are certainly saved; those who do not pray are certainly damned" (St. Alphonsus Liguori).



This is the **great challenge**, to be praying men and women, "The Christian of the future will be a mystic, one that has experienced something, or he will be nothing" (Karl Rahner).

"Today the world needs more than ever a return to contemplation... The real prophet of the Church of the future will be the one who comes from the "desert" like Moses, Elijah, the Baptist, Paul and above all Jesus, laden with mysticism and with that special glow that only the men who are used to speaking face to face with God have" (A. Hortelano).

The Holy Father said to us: "...the world needs witnesses..." and those witnesses will only come from intimate contact with the Lord through prayer, where the boldness, the bravery and the courage to be prophets of the third millennium is to be found.

There are several commentaries on prayer, but now we have to put them in practice, otherwise it will only be a mere reflection we have shared. Let us ask the Holy Spirit giver of Life to fill us, as at Pentecost, with the strength and the Holy fire, let us say, Come Holy Spirit! Come and grant us the gift of prayer! Make us men and women who live praying!! Amen. 

## Questions for discussion

1. *What is prayer?*
2. *What elements should it have?*
3. *What difficulties do you have when praying?*
4. *What is the great challenge?*

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