# Prayer

"PRAY CONSTANTLY"
– 1 THES 5:17



# Review

- The Trinity – the central mystery of the Christian faith
- Three Persons in one nature
  - Nature – "what" a thing is; that by which one acts
  - Person – "who"; an intelligent subject of action
- The Father *generates* the Son or the Word by way of knowledge (intellect)
- The Father and Son *spirate* the Holy Spirit by way of love (will)
- All three Persons fully possess the one divine nature; each Person is identical with the divine nature
- The Persons are distinct from each other because of their relations of origin
- We attribute titles to each Person to help us understand their distinction
- All three Persons are present in the souls of those in a state of grace

# Prayer

- See CCC 2559
- Our prayer is always a response to God's invitation
- Prayer should come "from the heart"
  - "If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain" – CCC 2563
- "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." – CCC 2564
- "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." – CCC 2565



# The Psalms

- "The masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament" – CCC 2585
- See CCC 2586-2587
- "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" – CCC 2588

# The Prayer of Christ

- See CCC 2598
- The prayer of Christ is the unique prayer of the only-begotten Son to the Father
- The Gospels record Christ's prayer at various times throughout His ministry and His ultimate prayer on the Cross
- The teaching of Jesus emphasizes certain dispositions for prayer:
  - Hiddenness, forgiveness, prayer from the heart, prayer for enemies (Mt 5,6)
  - Faith (Mk 11:24)
  - Watchfulness (Mk 13)

# Parables on Prayer

- St. Luke records three parables on prayer from Jesus:
  - The importunate friend (Luke 11)
  - The widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18)
  - The pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18)
- Christ also tells us to pray in His name (John 16:24)
- We also pray *to* Christ, as already evident in the Gospels
- The Jesus Prayer – "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner"

# Forms of Prayer

- When we pray, our prayer usually takes one of four forms:
  - Adoration – praising God for who He is; acknowledging that He is the Lord and Creator and without Him we would not exist
    - "My Lord and my God!" – John 20:28
  - Petition – asking God for things, either spiritual or temporal
    - "Ask, and it will be given you…" – Mt 7:7
  - Thanksgiving – thanking God for the good things He has done for us
    - "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." – 1 Thes 5:18
  - Reparation – making up to God for offenses against Him
    - "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" – Col 1:24

# Types or Expressions of Prayer

- In addition to these forms, there are also different *ways* of praying, or expressions of prayer:
  - Vocal prayer – prayer with words, either out loud or mentally
    - "Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life." – CCC 2701
  - Meditation – reflecting on the mysteries of our faith; can be with or without words
    - "Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, desire…in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen the will to follow Christ." – CCC 2708
  - Contemplation – infused loving knowledge of God; no words
    - "Contemplative prayer is the simplest expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gift, a grace; it can be accepted only in humility and poverty. Contemplative prayer is a covenant relationship established by God within our hearts. Contemplative prayer is a communion in which the Holy Trinity conforms man, the image of God, "to his likeness." – CCC 2713

# Mental Prayer

- Mental prayer is an umbrella term that can include any of the types of prayer just mentioned, but it specifically concerns spending time in silence with God
- In mental prayer, we try to lift our minds and hearts to God and seek union with Him
- The whole goal of prayer is union with God, which requires the assistance of grace
- There are different "levels" of mental prayer in which we ascend higher in the spiritual life, or rather in which God draws closer to us and unites us more with Himself
- We advance through these levels or degrees the more faithful we are to our prayer life, but ultimately it is God who elevates us to a higher union with Him

# St. Paul on Contemplation

- “For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” – Eph 3:14-19

# Practical Guidelines for Mental Prayer

- Even though higher prayer is a grace from God, we can dispose ourselves to receive it from Him by doing the following:
  1. Pray!
     1. *At least* 15 minutes a day in an appropriate place (church, sacred space at home, etc.)
  2. Foster an attitude of humility, faith, and charity
  3. Consider God's goodness, omnipotence, wisdom, love, etc.
  4. Don't be discouraged by distractions, difficulties, or dryness
  5. Be consistent - pray everyday
- If we are faithful to daily prayer, God will continue to form us over time, increase His grace and charity within us, and draw us into deeper union with Him

# Saints on Prayer

- “Prayer is the place of refuge for every worry, a foundation for cheerfulness, a source of constant happiness, a protection against sadness.” – St. John Chrysostom
- “It is simply impossible to lead, without the aid of prayer, a virtuous life.” – St. John Chrysostom
- “Prayer is nothing else than union with God.” – St. John Vianney
- “If you pray, you will be saved. If you do not pray, you will be damned.” – St. Alphonsus Ligouri
- “Pray, hope, and don’t worry.” – St. Pio of Pietrelcina