



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

St. Paul says something startling in the second reading today: **"we do not know how to pray as we ought"** (Romans 8:26). Wait a minute! Jesus taught us the Our Father, and we have so many other prayers... don't we know how to pray? This statement of St. Paul allows to ask the question: What is prayer, really? Is it talking to God? Is it requests to the Almighty? Or is it something more?

I think you figured out that it is, indeed, something more. Here are some definitions of prayer from the Church:

"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" (St. Therese of Lisieux, qtd. in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 2558).

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

"The Fathers of the Church say that prayer, properly understood, is nothing other than becoming a longing for God" (*Mary: The Church and the Source*. Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar).

"Desire is your prayer; and if your desire is without ceasing, your prayer will also be without ceasing. The continuance of your longing is the continuance of your prayer" (St. Augustine, reflection on Psalm 37).

All of these quotes point to the truth that prayer is more than just asking for something from God. They speak of union with God. Because God is infinitely greater than humanity, we can never reach Him on our own. This, of course, is why Jesus came – He bridged the infinite gap between creation and the Creator. Now, He has poured out His Holy Spirit upon us so that we can enter that union with the Father and the Son.

Prayer, in its essence, is communion with God. It is a joint venture between God and humanity. In this partnership, guess who the junior partner is: you; me. This means that the Holy Spirit does all of the hard work of bridging the infinite gap between us.

This doesn't mean, though, that prayer is easy. The *Catechism* refers to "The Battle of Prayer" (which encompasses paragraph 2725-2745). Prayer can be very difficult – "we do not know how to pray as we ought." There are times when God seems distant, that it seems that our prayers are just "bouncing off the ceiling." There are times when it feels like we're wasting our time. Fr. Mike Schmitz says that for the saints, hours in prayer can seem like minutes, yet often for him, minutes can seem like hours. I know that feeling!

The truth is that despite our feelings, God hears each and every prayer. Every attempt to get close to Him is received by Him. In fact, any desire we have to get close to God comes from Him... He is the instigator, and we respond. So, we reach out to pray in the memorized prayers... that's God stirring us up. We are in desperation and we cry out to God – He is inviting us to look to Him. In our emptiness when we feel God is a billion miles away, that longing for Him *is* prayer, and comes from the Holy Spirit. And when we just don't have any words, and we simply groan a groan to heaven, we remember that "the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26).

As we make our way through our lives, striving to grow closer to God, let us ask the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray, so that as we pray our Our Fathers and Hail Marys, we may allow our hearts and minds to be lifted to God; that as we meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary, we may enter into the mysteries themselves; that as we pray at Mass, we may come in to true Communion with our God who has given Himself to us so that we can give ourselves to Him.