

# INTRODUCTION

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

—Romans 8:26–27

Cultivating a life of prayer is the aspiration for every believer and the secret behind every saint because it keeps us rooted in the dynamic, life-giving love of God. Whether you have chosen to use this journal as a means to keep track of the people and situations for which you've promised to pray, or as a way to record your own thoughts and prayers as you are inspired, it will create a permanent record of your own spiritual journey, of your ongoing dialogue with God.

We may not know how to pray as we ought, as St. Paul writes, but if we set out with intentionality in our prayer, the Spirit will fill in the rest. According to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, prayer is simply “the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.” As people of faith, interceding for others is an important way to love them and share their concerns. This journal can help you organize the way you recall their needs—as well as your own—and invite God into your lives. By lifting our thoughts and concerns to God, we participate in an important way in God’s plan of redemption for the whole world.

The first half of this journal contains prompts to jumpstart your prayer; the second half contains open pages for you to journal. Throughout, you will notice space to record how you have seen God respond to your prayers. Whether you return to these journal entries a day later or a year later, your faith will be strengthened as you recall God’s creativity and faithfulness.

# Four Types of Prayer

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* identifies several fundamental forms of prayer that are important for our spiritual development (see CCC 2626–43):

- *Adoration*: Prayers of blessing and adoration place us in the presence of the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—to acknowledge the greatness of the One who made us, the power of the One who sets us free from evil, and the blessing of the One who makes us holy.
- *Contrition*: In prayers of contrition we acknowledge our own weaknesses and limitations, and this enables us to approach God without shame or worry. These prayers deepen our trust in God’s mercy, which acts like a spiritual shield to protect us against the “flaming darts of the Evil One” (Ephesians 6:16). While we embrace the graces of sacramental Confession for serious sin, prayers of contrition help us to be aware even of lesser faults that might distract or deter us from speaking with God heart-to-heart.
- *Thanksgiving*: Prayers of praise and thanksgiving express an awareness of God’s many blessings, both those already received and those anticipated. Many of the saints, including Bl. Solanus Casey and St. Pio of Pietrelcina, urged those who came to them for prayer to thank God ahead of time for answered prayers. These prayers of thanksgiving, then, are a kind of catalyst of faith and trust that welcome the Holy Spirit into specific situations.
- *Supplication*: Prayers of supplication (also known as petition or intercession) are ways to invite God into our lives by asking for what we need. We might bring our own concerns forward, or concerns of people we love as well as those unknown to us, from the most immediate to the farthest reaching. These prayers might be for physical needs, such as financial or medical concerns, or they might be spiritual or relational in nature. The most powerful prayer of this type directly invites the Holy Spirit to come and accomplish God’s will in that particular situation.

Adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, supplication—these fundamental types of Catholic prayer are easy to remember with the simple acronym “ACTS of faith.” As we pray, we enter into a holy dialogue with God to better understand both the mystery of who he is and the reality of who we are in relation to him.

# How Should I Pray?

Are you finding it difficult to find the right words to say or to write down? The prayers that have been handed down to us in our tradition can be a useful resource because we know generations of faithful people also found them helpful. You can find collections of prayers from our tradition in many sources—you can find some favorites in *The Ave Treasury of Catholic Prayers*. This inspirational resource can be used side-by-side with this journal, which gives you space to record your personal response to these timeless invocations.

However you choose to approach God—on your own or with the help of the saints—God hears us and has promised to answer. As we read in the Bible: “And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him” (1 John 5:14–15).

How can we know if our petitions are “according to his will”? Here are some practical questions to ask yourself to help with this discernment.

- *Is any area of my life not fully surrendered to God?* Does your conscience point out areas of your life that are not aligned with God’s plan as revealed in the scriptures? Ask God for the strength and humility to make things right.
- *Am I striving to get my own way in a particular situation?* Is there any situation in your life right now that you find difficult to entrust to God? God gave us the gift of free will, and he won’t override our own stubbornness in order to accomplish his purposes. But when we ask him to take control of a situation and work all things for the ultimate good (see Romans 8:28), God can be trusted to answer those prayers—and transform us in the process.
- *Do I struggle with anxiety, fear, worry, or anger?* When these emotions take over our lives, it can be a sign that a kind of spiritual infection has taken root in the soul. But when we acknowledge them and offer them to God—and keep offering them each time they resurface—God will lighten our emotional load and give us “the peace of God, which passes all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

# Does God Really Listen to My Prayers?

When you think about God, what words come to mind most readily? As you consider suffering in the world—natural disasters, personal tragedies, and systemic injustices—are you sometimes tempted to think of God as impersonal, powerless, or capricious? Do you wonder what good your prayers might do? How can asking God for help accomplish anything at all?

The most persuasive answers to these questions are found in the person of Jesus, who teaches his followers throughout the gospels to regard God as Father. While this word can trouble those wounded by shortcomings in their own fathers, Jesus reveals God as the true Father who tenderly cares for his children. He offers this challenge in the Gospel of Matthew:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" (Matthew 7:7–11)

This journal is an open invitation for you to rediscover the fatherly nature of God—One who can be trusted and who listens, heals, forgives, restores, and provides. Over time, as you make note of all the blessings and graces God gives to you—including things you may not have thought to ask him for—these answered prayers will produce a harvest of rich spiritual fruit. As you return to him again and again with your ACTS of faith, you will be strengthened and assured of God's desire to hear and answer your prayers and to provide like any good Father for the things you need (see also Luke 11:13).

## How to Use This Journal

This journal is arranged in seven parts. The first four parts are dedicated to the fundamental movements of prayer—the ACTS of faith. Each of these

parts hold ten reflections with quotes and journal prompts to guide your prayer time.

Are you overwhelmed? Remind yourself of the greatness and mercy of God by turning to “Part One: My Prayers of Adoration and Blessing”—the Bible passages referenced there will call to mind the ways God accompanies each of us on our life’s journey. Want to unburden something from your heart? Turn to “Part Two: My Prayers of Contrition.” Are you grateful to God for his many blessings to you? Head over to “Part Three: My Prayers of Thanksgiving and Praise.” Ready to storm heaven on behalf of a friend or loved one? Go to “Part Four: My Prayers of Supplication.”

Part five of this journal will help you remember the faithful departed and pray for God to bring them to fullness of life in heaven. Part six offers room for you to record and write everyday prayers. Part seven gives you more room to write, journal, and record your dialogue with God alongside inspiring quotes from saints who have walked this way of faithfulness ahead of us.

Each time you take up this journal, take a moment to settle yourself in a quiet space and ask the Lord to speak to your heart. If distractions arise, simply release them and return to focusing on what God is saying in this moment. If a name or situation persists in your mind, make a brief note so you can come back to it later.

Next, decide what type of prayer you would like to focus on in that moment. Turn to a page in that section, and then reflect upon the journal prompts you find there in order to write your own prayerful exchange with the Lord. If you are finding it difficult to find the words you want to pray and would like a little inspiration, flip through the inspiring quotes and prayers in Part Seven, the traditional prayers of *The Ave Treasury of Catholic Prayers*, or turn in your Bible to the book of Psalms or the daily readings and meditate on the words you find there that spark something inside you, paying close attention to any specific phrases that resonate. Feel free to record meaningful passages such as these in this journal—both to help you commit the words to memory and so you can find them easily when you want to read them again.

When you are ready to begin writing your own prayer, don’t worry about the quality of your writing or details like spelling and punctuation. (If it helps, you could consider jotting down some initial thoughts on a piece of scrap paper, then transferring the finished version into the journal as a place of permanent record.)

This is a safe place for you to reveal your innermost thoughts to God. As the Holy Spirit stirs up your thoughts in the coming days and weeks, feel free to return to what you've written to record any further insights or developments that may occur. This is just between you and God, so don't worry about finding the "right words" and know that you can express doubts or fears about what is happening. God knows it all—and loves you. Just tell him honestly about where you are right now. He's waiting to meet you, right where you are.

Above all, make this journal yours. There is no right or wrong way to use it—and if you fill it up, just write the beginning and ending dates in the front of your journal and start over with another one! Each volume represents a chapter in the book of your life, a precious record of your journey with Christ. Keep this journal handy as you read the Bible (or hear it proclaimed at Mass). Use the spaces provided to write down your own favorite quotes or insights and to reflect upon what God is saying to you through these words.

May the Lord bless you as you set out to cultivate a deeper life of prayer by joining the Spirit's work to "intercede for the saints according to the will of God" (Romans 8:27).

PART ONE

# MY PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND BLESSING

I will extol you, my God and King,  
and bless your name for ever and ever.

Every day I will bless you,  
and praise your name for ever and ever.

Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,  
and his greatness is unsearchable.

One generation shall laud your works to another,  
and shall declare your mighty acts.

On the glorious splendor of your majesty,  
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

—Psalm 145:1–5

We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you,  
Because by your holy Cross you have redeemed the world.

This short verse, which is traditionally associated with the Stations of the Cross, evokes a great mystery of our faith: God saves us through his Son, Jesus Christ, who joined our humanity, even to the point of sharing our suffering and death. Through the Cross, he conquered death and raises us to new life. Such love is difficult to understand—yet Jesus waits for us to open our hearts to him. What do you want to say to him?

*Lord Jesus, I adore you for . . .*

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***For Pondering***

How have I experienced God’s redeeming love? How can I express my love for God today?

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*Lord, today I bless your name . . . O God who saves.*

A large grid of 20 columns and 20 rows of small dots, intended for writing a prayer or blessing.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

—John 3:16–17

Be still, and know that I am God.  
I am exalted among the nations.  
I am exalted in the earth!  
—Psalm 46:10

This verse from the Psalms speaks of God as the One who defends his people from evil and who causes wars to cease. In times of strife and conflict, we can place ourselves in God’s presence and gain perspective. He sees and knows all that may be known, and he is actively working for our good. What do you want to say to him?

*God, show me your greatness . . .*

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***For Pondering***

Where do I see God’s greatness in the world today?

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*Lord, today I bless your name . . . Almighty God.*

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You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,  
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.  
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,  
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;  
but you shall be called My delight is in her,  
and your land Married;  
for the LORD delights in you.

—Isaiah 62:3–4

O come, let us worship and bow down,  
 let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
 For he is God,  
 and we are the people of his pasture,  
 and the sheep of his hand.  
 —Psalm 95:6–7

The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11–18) who cares for his sheep—seeking out those who have scattered and protecting those within the fold—evokes a powerful sense of the never-ending protection and care God has for us. How have you experienced this divine provision?

*God, keep me close to you . . .*

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*For Pondering*

Where do I see God shepherding his people?

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