



PART ONE

AN INVITATION TO PRAY





What does it mean to pray our lives? We know what it means to pray prayers (texts given us by our parents or teachers or the Church, perhaps memorized in our younger years). We know what it means to answer in unison the responses at the liturgy. We even sing our prayer at times—for example, the responsorial psalm after the first reading on Sunday.

But how do we pray our life experiences? Actually, we often do this instinctively—getting the good news that the biopsy was benign evokes a spontaneous “Thanks be to God.” Like the woman in the parable who found her lost coin, we sigh a prayer of relief when we discover the misplaced envelope with the money set aside for a friend’s birthday gift. We may even want to tell someone about our good fortune of finding something that was lost!

There are other life experiences, ones beyond the everyday and familiar, that also lead us into prayer, or that become our prayer. Oftentimes, as we develop habits of prayer, we find ourselves absorbed by a particular prayerful experience that continues to engage our minds and our hearts even after the time of formal prayer is done. In these moments of intense experience, we become swept up by the pulsing energy—whether that energy is joyful, or fearful, or grateful, or one of loss—and our heart desires to stay there. We wish to stay because, like catching something marvelous out of the corner of our eye, we want to know more. We want to probe God’s presence in this experience. God promises to meet us

in prayer, and sometimes, in our experience, it seems to be happening. God is with us.

This is the same God who spoke to Moses in the burning bush, the One who answered Moses' question, "Who are you?" with the cryptic "I am who I am." Or as some scholars explained: "As who I am I will be with you." The Judeo-Christian God is the One who will always be *with-us*, *Emmanuel*. In this light, all that we live in every sorrow, joy, hope, dream, every fear and failure, every relationship, every labor, pain, and frustration, the insecurity and—even the seeming insanity—all, *all* is inseparable from this holy Presence, this mystery we name God.

In praying one's life experiences, we are standing with our companion God in the experience, and feeling it in our body, mind, and heart. We seek to read God's presence there, to learn what gifts are given, what unnamed or unexpected blessing is offered, even in experiences of pain and loss.

The prayers and reflections offered here serve as a starting point, a path to lead to your own inner depths, there to encounter the sacred Presence, the holy Mystery we name God. You will find a wide range of prayer texts. Choose one that speaks to you in your present experience. These prayers will invite you to address God, to pray your concerns, and pray amidst your sufferings and struggles.

Listen to Your Life . . .

Frederick Buechner, novelist, preacher, and highly regarded professor of homiletics, looking back on his life wrote:

If I were called upon to state in a few words the essence of everything I was trying to say both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this: Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.¹

... and Prayerfully Reflect

In solitary prayer, we become present to the graced life that we live—graced in its happiness and its hardships, its fears and foibles, its struggles and successes. We cherish the ordinary while we celebrate the marvelous. As we tune in to what is real, awareness deepens. We begin to experience our interconnectedness with the whole human family. Anne Morrow Lindbergh saw it this way:

Certain springs are tapped only when we are alone. The artist knows he must be alone to create; the writer, to work out his thoughts; the musician, to compose; the saint, to pray. But women need solitude in order to find again the true essence of themselves: that firm strand which will be the indispensable center of a whole web of human relations. She must find that inner stillness.²

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CHAPTER ONE



Addressing God

Prayers of Praise and Thanks

The prayers in this section invite conversation with God, the Holy One, whose presence at the core of my being sustains me and calls me to fuller and fuller life. The silent God within awaits my attention, my response. How has the Spirit prayed within me? How is the Spirit praying within me now?

The texts that follow include psalms, prayers of holy women from the treasury of tradition, as well as prayers from contemporaries. Choose one that speaks to your heart; then,

let your heart speak. The God who has loved you from your mother's womb awaits.

Psalm 104:1–4, 24, 35
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As you consider the bounty of God manifest in all creation, what stirs in you? What images from nature come to mind? What do you feel? Consider the enormous generosity of God in your own personal life—the vast sweep of God's goodness to you over the years. You may want to focus on a specific period in your life. For what are you especially grateful, especially in the past few weeks? How has God's love touched you?

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honor and majesty,
wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent,
you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,
you make the clouds your chariot,
you ride on the wings of the wind,
you make the winds your messengers,
fire and flame your ministers.

O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.

Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

Psalm 146:1-2, 5-8, 10

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I pray this psalm with a grateful heart for the ways that God has fed my spirit, all through my days. What desires of mine has God satisfied? What do I desire now? Speak to God the deepest desires of your heart.

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them;
who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down;
the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!