

Jesus: Our Exemplar in Prayer

*In these days he went out to the mountain to pray;
- He continued all night in prayer to God. (Luke 6:12)*

- The Apostles spent a great amount of time in the presence of Jesus. On many occasions, they witnessed Jesus praying (see Lk. 3:21; 4:1; 9:28; 10:21; 11:1; 22:32; Jn. 17:1-26; Heb. 5:7).
- They once asked him, “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk. 11:1). He gave us the essential prayer, the “Our Father” (see Mt. 6:9-13; see also Lk. 11:2-4).
- The apostles had ample opportunities to observe Jesus at prayer.
- They noted that he often withdrew from the crowds, oftentimes even from them, in order to pray (see Mt. 14:23; Lk. 5:16).
- They must have seen that Jesus was refreshed and ready for another teaching mission after having spent time in prayer.
- They also knew that Jesus prayed before important acts and decisions (see Mk. 1:35-38; 14:35; Lk. 6:12) and before he worked miracles (see Jn. 11:41-42). They saw that prayer was a constant background in Jesus’ life.
- Jesus showed his followers that prayer can be drawn from the great treasury of Scriptural prayer, or can be simple prayers in our own words. He prayed the Psalms at the Last Supper (see Mt. 26:30). Hanging on the cross, he used the Psalms to express his anguish of spirit—“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:45, citing Ps. 22:1)—and his trust in his Father—“into thy hands I commit my spirit” (Lk. 23:46, citing Ps. 31:5).
- He offered prayer in simple language, using “Abba” to address his Father (Mk. 14:36) and to conform his human will to his Father’s will: “remove this cup from me; nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk. 22:42).
- He commended the prayer of the humble tax-collector who prayed simply, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13).
- Jesus’ closest followers could not have failed to realize that his prayer and his whole life were centred on his Father.
- So many times, in the hearing of his apostles, Jesus prayed to and in praise of his Father (see Lk. 10:21; Jn. 11:41-42; 12:27-28; 17:4).
- Jesus’ love for his Father, his glory, his will, his every desire was the core of his life.

- During his life on earth, Jesus also emphasized **the importance of faith in prayer**.
- Again and again, the apostles heard that faith is the condition for answers to our prayers. Faith can move mountains, Jesus tells us, if that faith is even as small as a mustard seed (see Mt. 17:20).
- But it must be actively present if we expect prayer to have results. “All things are possible,” says Jesus on one occasion, “to him who believes” (Mk. 9:23). “And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith” (Mt. 21:22), he says on another.
- In reading the Gospels, we become aware of Jesus’ requirement of faith in those who requested favours of him, even miracles.
- He was pleased with those who had faith, and rewarded it: the Roman centurion (see Mt. 8:8-10), the woman with the haemorrhage (see Mt. 9:21-22), the pagan Canaanite woman who drew from Jesus the joyful exclamation, “O woman, great is your faith!” (Mt. 15:28), the blind Bartimaeus (see Mk. 10:51-52).
- He was dismayed by evidence of lack of faith. The Evangelist Mark tells us that “he could do no mighty work there” and “he marvelled because of their unbelief” (Mk. 6:5-6).
- And he rebuked the apostles when, fearing they would die, they awakened him while he slept in their boat

through a storm on the Sea of Galilee: “Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?” (Mt. 8:26).

- Jesus insists on **conversion of heart**: reconciliation with one’s brother before presenting an offering on the altar, love of enemies, and prayer for persecutors.
- He also stressed prayer to the Father in secret, not heaping up empty phrases, prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart, purity of heart, and seeking the Kingdom before all else.⁶
- So when we pray, we must imitate Jesus. Like him, we must lift up our hearts and minds to God (see CCC 2559), hallow his name, submit ourselves and our requests to his will, and ask that his Kingdom may come on earth as it is in Heaven. Having touched first the heart of our Father, we can then ask, seek, and knock on that heart for our own needs and, with faith — as firm a faith as possible — await his response. To each of us, our Exemplar says: “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Lk. 11:9).
- (CCC 520, 612, 2559, 2598-2607, 2609-2611, 2746-2751, 2759-2761)