

PRAYER

78. Prayer is one way we express in our everyday lives our relationship with our Father in heaven (*Matthew 7:7-11*). It is an expression of communion with God, traditionally described as 'the raising of the mind and heart to God'. Prayer is a mutual activity in which God gives himself to people and they give themselves to God. In some ways it is like the mutual self-giving of friends. Prayer may be a shared conversation of asking, thanking and praising or simply talking; it may occur through the activity of meaningful gestures, music and ritual; or it may be a silent communion - wordless, expressionless and depending only on conscious presence.

79. The Judaeo-Christian tradition bears witness that prayer is both a personal and a communal activity. The worship of the community is an important aspect of prayer. As John Donne wrote, 'no man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main'. We belong to a society, and it is in society, beginning with the family, that moral growth takes place, that conscience is formed and that spiritual well-being is fostered. For the Christian the local Church community is a focus of support and guidance, in particular through its public celebration of prayer.

80. The Catholic Church enshrines this important human value in her requirement that Catholics participate in Mass on Sunday and certain other major days. Those who have been baptised become members of the body of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:12-27*) which is the Church. Catholics express this common identity, witness to their faith, and strengthen themselves and one another by sharing in the communal celebration of the Sunday Eucharist, in the cycle of daily prayers, and in the annual cycle of days of special prayer, vigils, fasts and feasts.

81. Prayer and the way we live go hand in hand because, for believers, God is as real as the air we breathe. There is no aspect of living from which God can be excluded. Whatever our choices are, whether for good or ill, God cannot be excluded. If our choices are for good they deepen our relationship with God; if they are for ill they compromise that relationship.

QUESTIONS

Is there a difference between 'praying' and saying prayers? Discuss

Delia Smith says in her book that 'prayer is a journey into love'. Discuss

Fr Paddy says that prayer should mean that God's will for us and our will should over time become one. Discuss

The Mass is our most important prayer. What do you think we should alter about the mass on Sunday in order to help people to pray better?