

# October GIFT

## God calls us through prayer

### Make Up Session

Family Discussion:

Do you pray? When do you pray? Do you have a favorite prayer? Do you think God hears our prayers? Do you think you hear God through your prayer?

Welcome to October GIFT!

For the past year or so, our parish has been involved in a project called C3. This project involves people from across the country, from all different faiths, learning and thinking about how God calls each one of us.

We often call God – we call God when we are sick or scared or in trouble, or when we need something. But, do we ever recognize that God is calling us too?

One way we can hear how God is calling us in our lives is through conversation with God. We call that conversation prayer. When we pray, we talk to God and we listen to Him.

To get started which of the following can you answer, “yes”?

- Have you ever prayed the rosary?
- Have you made up your own prayer and prayed it out loud in front of your family?
- Have you ever done lectio divina? (If you don't know what it is, you probably haven't done it!) No worries, we are going to do that at a future GIFT session!
- Have you ever sat in total silence for more than ten minutes, just listening to what God is saying?
- Have you sung religious songs by yourself?
- Have you ever prayed a novena? Again, if you don't know what it is, you probably have not done one.
- Have you prayed the Psalms or other prayers in the Bible?
- Do you have a holy water font in your home?
- Do you say a prayer of thanks at the end of each day, right before going to bed?
- Do you ask God's blessings whenever you sit down for a meal?
- Have you ever experienced a guided meditation?
- Do you ask God's forgiveness when you mess up?

- Do you pray for members of your family who are sick or hurting?
- Do you pray for our world and for people in need around the world?

Obviously there are many ways to pray, many places and times to pray, and many people for whom and with whom we can pray. So....let's start our session in prayer!

## Opening Prayer

To prepare ourselves for prayer, let's follow the suggestion of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. She once wrote:

The fruit of SILENCE is Prayer.  
The fruit of PRAYER is Faith.  
The fruit of FAITH is Love.  
The fruit of LOVE is Service.  
The fruit of SERVICE is Peace.

To get ready for a conversation with Jesus, let's quiet ourselves and let God's Spirit speak to us in sacred silence.

*Pause for silence.*

Now let's begin our opening prayer: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Let us pray.**

Loving God, we know you are already present in our lives and in our community today. We ask for the openness we need to hear your voice in the midst of all the other voices which bombard our lives. Help us to listen with faith and courage and love. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

### **A Reading from the Gospel of Luke**

One time Jesus was praying. When he finished, one of his followers said to him, "John taught his followers how to pray. Lord, please teach us how to pray, too."

Jesus said to them, "When you pray, say:  
'Father, we pray that your name will always be kept holy.  
We pray that your kingdom will come.  
Give us the food we need for each day.

Forgive us the sins we have done,  
because we forgive every person who has done wrong to us.  
And do not cause us to be tested.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Suppose one of you went to your friend’s house at midnight and said to him, ‘A friend of mine has come into town to visit me. But I have nothing for him to eat. Please loan me three loaves of bread.’ Your friend inside the house answers, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked. My children and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you the bread now.’ I tell you, maybe friendship is not enough to make him get up to give you the bread. But he will surely get up to give you what you need if you continue to ask.

So I tell you, continue to ask, and God will give to you. Continue to search, and you will find. Continue to knock, and the door will open for you. Yes, if a person continues asking, he will receive. If he continues searching, he will find. And if he continues knocking, the door will open for him. What would you fathers do if your son asks you for a fish? Would any of you give him a snake? Or, if your son asks for an egg, would you give him a scorpion? Even though you are bad, you know how to give good things to your children. So surely your heavenly Father knows how to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

With your family, please share which phrase in the Our Father you particularly need to pray today and why. For example: Perhaps you are angry with someone who hurt you and you need to ask God for a generous and forgiving heart. For you, the phrase “...as we forgive those who trespass against us...” would be important. Take a minute to pray the prayer in your head, and think about which phrase you need today.

Pray the Our Father together, slowly and thoughtfully.

## **Opening**

In the opening prayer, Jesus prayed every day to his heavenly Father. And when his followers—the apostles—asked him how they should pray, he gave them a prayer which we continue to pray today, the Our Father. Our Church loves this prayer because it includes several different prayers. We honor and adore God when we say, “Hallowed be thy name.” We pray for God’s kingdom—a kingdom of love and justice and peace—to be realized in our world. We petition God when we ask for daily bread—whatever we need both physically and spiritually to live faithfully this day. We ask God to forgive us—but

only as much as we are willing to forgive others. That's a challenging one! And we ask for God's help so that we aren't tempted to sin and turn away from him. It's a perfect prayer!

### **Opening Activity:**

Our opening activity is meant to be a serious activity. If you are praying, you are probably very, very serious.

In an open space, place an empty chair in the center of the group. The empty chair is for "God."

- Anyone in each group can pretend to be "God" by sitting in the designated chair anytime during the exercise. "God" will speak in response to group participants. Adults in the group leader need to monitor so that one person does not dominate the role of "God" that all have a chance should they so desire. Also, monitor that all have an opportunity to talk to "God".
- To begin, everyone should spend a minute or two thinking about questions you would like to ask God. These should be serious questions, not silly questions. All are invited to take this activity seriously and prayerfully.
- Exercise begins with "God's" chair **empty**. It should not be filled until someone in the group speaks to "God." Then whoever feels inclined to respond moves to "God's" place and responds in the manner they think God would respond to the person. Everyone in the group should remember, that you do not answer as a kid would answer or as a parent would answer. When you sit in the God Chair, you try to answer as you think God would answer. After "God's" response, someone else may speak and "God" returns to the group.

Afterwards discuss:

- What was it like to play God?
- Did you listen differently than you would have otherwise?
- Did those of you who spoke to God feel like God heard what you said?
- Did God respond the way you would have expected?

As we explore and experience various ways we as Catholics pray, let's keep in mind what prayer is—a conversation with God—and why we pray—to deepen our relationship with God.

Our Catholic faith is so rich in prayer! All of us won't like every type of prayer, and that is OK because there are other types which we do love. It's great to try different forms of prayer every once in a while so we can discover new ways of talking to God and keeping our relationship with God alive and healthy. We're going to try a couple of different prayers which come from Saints—from holy men and women who had a really close relationship with God. It's undoubtedly true that what made the saints so good, so courageous, so faithful was their active prayer lives. Saints were able to hear how God was calling them through their prayer. Let's try to pray the way one of the saints prayed.

**St. Benedict loved to pray the Psalms.** Praying the Psalms has been part of every Benedictine community around the world since the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Psalms are prayers of petition; others show repentance for sin; and still others are songs of gratitude and praise. The Psalm we will pray together is good psalm to pray when you are having a bad day or are in a bad mood because it reminds us that we are beautiful in God's eyes—and we are God's masterpiece.

Look at Psalm 8 and pray it together.

First, let's have men and boys pray the bolded text and the women and girls pray the other verses. (or parents and children, or just read it together)

# Psalm 8

**O LORD, our Lord,**

**how awesome is your name through all the earth!**

I will sing of your majesty above the heavens

with the mouths of babes and infants.

**You have established a bulwark against your foes,**

**to silence enemy and avenger.**

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and stars that you set in place—

**What is man that you are mindful of him,**

**and a son of man that you care for him?**

Yet you have made him little less than a god,

crowned him with glory and honor.

**You have given him rule over the works of your hands,**

**put all things at his feet:**

All sheep and oxen,

even the beasts of the field,

**The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,**

**and whatever swims the paths of the seas.**

O Lord, our Lord,

how awesome is your name through all the earth!

You just prayed a Psalm! Praying the psalms helps us remember that God is so great, so awesome, and so very good to us. You can find the psalms in your bibles and just choose one to pray. Now let's do our first activity.

# Activity 1

## What is Prayer?

As a family, read what some people have said about prayer, then discuss the questions together.

**St. John Damascene:** “Prayer is the raising one’s mind and heart to God.”

***Catechism of the Catholic Church:*** Through prayer the Christian experiences a communion with God through Christ in the Church.”

**St. Teresa of Avila:** “Prayer is a sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much. Love is desire to please God in everything.”

**Oblates of St. Benedict:** “Prayer is to talk, a conversation with God. Conversing with someone, not only do we speak but we also listen. Prayer, therefore, is also listening. Listening to hear the call...”

**Scott P. Richert:** “While we often think of prayer as asking God for something, prayer is a conversation with God. In praying, we strengthen our recognition of the presence of God, which draws us closer to Him. That is why the Church recommends that we pray often and make prayer an important part of our everyday lives.”

**(PRINT THIS PAGE AND HAND IN THE ANSWERS)**

### Sharing

1. Which of the above descriptions of prayer touches your heart and makes the most sense to you? Why?
2. What is your own personal definition of prayer?
3. What is the hardest thing for you about praying?
4. What do you love most about praying?
5. What does prayer do to help you in your life?

God wants to have a really close relationship with Him, and the only way we can do that is by talking to him often—just like we do with our families and friends with whom we want a close relationship. We just need to pray.

**Now let's try a way of praying which a Franciscan sister**—who is also a Native American—once taught. She explained that she hates to pray alone, but often finds herself alone when it is time to pray. So she invites ancestors of faith to come and pray with her. With which of your ancestors would you like to pray? It might be someone like a grandparent or great-grandparent who is now in heaven. It might be your patron saint or saints. It might be the patron saint of a particular group for whom you want to pray. For example, if someone in your family is struggling with cancer, you might ask St. Peregrine, the patron saint of those with cancer, to come and pray with you. If you are praying for a struggle in school, then St. Thomas Aquinas, the patron saint of students, is your man!

Next, everyone should close their eyes, and think of the people with whom you wish to pray. Imagine a “prayer circle” and invite your chosen ancestors of faith to come and sit with you. Then pray silently with your personal communion of saints!

Allow time for prayer.

Now, share with each other who you prayed with and what your experience was like.

# Activity 2

## God Calls us through Prayer

### PART 1: Read together and reflect

#### Gospel of Mark 12: 28-34 - The Greatest Commandment

One of the teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’”

The man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

#### PRINT AND HAND IN

Discuss:

- What happened in this reading? What question did the person ask Jesus?
- What did Jesus say are the two most important commandments?
- As disciples of Jesus, who are we called to love?
- Who is our neighbor? Is Jesus talking just about the people who live next door?
- Is it harder to love God, or to love other people?
- Can you think of examples of how people sometimes hurt each other, instead of love each other? What are ways that you show other people you love them?
- Does loving people help us to love God better? Why?
- Does loving God help us love people better?
- Do you think God is calling us to in some way through this reading?
- How can we listen for ways that we can love our neighbor?
- As a family, commit to one way that you will show love to each other this month. Maybe it will be a random act of kindness that each of you will commit to each day for a month for someone in your family. Or, maybe you will commit to praying together at some times during the month.
- As a family, commit to one way that you will show your love to your neighbors this month. Maybe you will commit to making hygiene bags for TASK, visiting a nursing home together and visiting with people there. Decide what you will do, and do it!

## **PART 2: Make prayer jars. (AVAILABLE IN THE RELIGIOUS FORMATION OFFICE, OR USE YOUR OWN JAR)**

1. Each child may make one prayer jar. Decorate it with a few stickers.
2. Make a label your jar. If you want, write “PRAY” on a label and put it on your jar.
3. Add prayer sticks to your jar. Each person should take 5 prayer sticks. (At home, you can purchase more sticks and add them to your jar!)

On your prayer stick you can write something specific prayers, or someone or something that you would like to pray for. Or, cut out a bible verse from the sheet and paste it to your stick.

4. Place the craft sticks in the Prayer Jars. Each day, pull a prayer stick out of the jar and follow what it says.

**TAKE A PICTURE OF YOUR PRAYER JAR AND SHARE IT WITH US!**

## **Bible Versus you might put on your prayer stick:**

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” (Romans 12:12)

“Be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” (Ephesians 6:18)

“The LORD is near to all who call on him” (Psalm 145:18)

“Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.” (Luke 18:1)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

“Give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

“Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”  
(Proverbs 3:5-6)

“May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:13)

If prayer is a conversation with God, and there are different ways to pray, that might mean that we can hear how God is calling to us through different ways of praying.

Let's try one more type of prayer together.

**Let's pray with St. Ignatius of Loyola.** This is a three-step prayer which you can do every night before falling asleep.

Think of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Spirit – for this prayer.

1. First, thank God the Father for all the good things which happened to you so far today. (*Pause and allow time for prayer*)
2. Second, ask Jesus for forgiveness for the things you did today which were less than loving and kind. (*pause and allow time for prayer*)
3. Third, pray to the Holy Spirit for the things you will need tomorrow to live as good and faithful disciples. (*pause and allow time for prayer*)

Today, we learned about praying with a psalm, praying with scripture, praying with our imagination, and there are formal prayers like the Our Father and informal prayer where we just use our own words. We can pray in community, such as when we all come together for Mass, and we can pray individually, which some of us might do before we go to sleep at night.

We will close with one more type of prayer. Any form of prayer helps us to be closer to God and to hear how God is calling each of us.

So, in addition to the commitments your family made in our last activity, I also encourage you to pray often, maybe using a form of prayer that you don't normally use. And, if you can, try to be very quiet to see if God might have something to say to you!

## Closing Prayer

Prayer Leader:

We are going to take a journey with Jesus. You can use your imaginations to get the most out of this prayer journey.

*pause to let them imagine each sequence*

Let's begin by closing your eyes and concentrating on your breathing. Breathe in and breathe out. Try to screen out all distractions...just focus on your breathing. Breathe in....breathe out....breathe in God's love...breathe out your worries. Breathe in God's peace...breathe out any anger.

Now picture yourself walking on a beach by the ocean. Listen to the waves crashing against the shore and the seagulls crying above. See the sunlight glinting on the water. Watch the whitecaps out in the ocean. Notice the different shades of blue in the water—darker out where the water is deeper, lighter closer to shore. Feel the wet, warm sand beneath your bare feet. Smell the sea grass and the saltwater.

You notice someone off in the distance walking toward you. You realize that it is a man approaching. As he gets closer, you recognize that it is Jesus who is walking along the shore. As he gets closer, see his face as he makes eye contact with you. Imagine Jesus' expression—one of complete love for you, and utter joy in coming upon you.

Now imagine Jesus inviting you to sit down with him on the beach. Picture the two of you sitting on the beach, facing out to the ocean. Jesus starts talking to you...What is he saying? What does he want you to hear? What do you want to say to Jesus? Have a conversation with him.

*Pause here so participants can imagine their conversation with Jesus. Then continue:*

Now imagine you and Jesus standing up. He gives you a hug, tells you he loves you, smiles, and then turns and walks away. How do you feel? What do you want to remember most about your conversation? Is there something Jesus wants you to do?

Now walk back the way you came. Feel the ocean breeze, see the beauty of the water, and enjoy God's creation. Rest in God's love for a moment, and then open your eyes.

Now we are going to pray together. We call this popcorn style. I will say the first part and anyone in the room can respond. I will say, we are thankful for  
After that, I will say we pray for

We thank you God for being with us, for loving us and caring for us. Help us to continue to notice you in our midst throughout out days this week and help us show your love to each other.

We close our prayer tonight in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.