

JESUS TEACHES US TO PRAY: “JESUS IS OUR PRAYER.”

“Now once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, ‘Lord teach us how to pray’” (Luke 11:1). The disciples witness, Jesus, who is the Son of God, one with the Father enfleshed in our humanity, praying to the Father. Now prayer can be defined as **‘a personal response to the presence of God.** From that we can conclude that Jesus is only human being **totally present to**, and open to his Father’s presence. Therefore, Jesus alone can truly teach us how to pray. **In fact, by his very being, he is “living prayer,” a personal response to the Father’s presence.**

In answer to the request, *“Teach us how to pray.”* Jesus teaches us to first focus on God’s presence, and his relationship to us as his children and to address him personally, *“Our Father, may your name be held in reverence.”* He then directs us to be concerned with our Father’s concerns and his plan for us. *“May your Kingdom come. May your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven.”* After being concerned with the Father’s presence and concerns, Jesus then instructs us to address our personal needs and desires: *“Give us daily sustenance... Forgive us... Lead us not..... Deliver us...”*

Yes indeed, Jesus, as a man, is so totally open to his Father that his life, his very being, is a complete surrender to his Father. Jesus spent many nights alone in prayer. His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemani is well described by the Evangelists. Jesus is taken up in praise and service of the Father’s glory. In his obedience to his Father he desires to save us, his sisters and brothers, from sin and death. But his prayer is more than words. We see this in his love for us as he is raised up on the Cross, and then when he is raised up by his Father in his Resurrection. Therefore, in a very real sense we can say that **“Jesus is prayer.”** He, in his very being, is lifted up as a total self-giving response to his Father’s presence and will. Christ is only ‘yes’ to his Father (II Cor 2:19-20). Moreover, by sending us his Spirit Jesus infuses us with the energy and the power of his life and unites us with himself for the service and praise of his Father. **We become members of ‘his Body’ in baptism. He desires that we are taken up into his self-offering on the Cross. And through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit we are infused with the power of his risen life.** This is expressed in the following scripture passages—a few among many others:

At the Last Supper, Jesus opens his heart and says, “Because I live, you will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you” (John 14:19-21).

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship....so in Christ we who are many, form one body” (Romans 12:1 & 5).

⁴*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ*

Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6-7).

“It is Christ in you, the hope for glory. It is he whom we proclaim admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me” (Col 1:27-190).

As we reflect more deeply on the truth that “Jesus is our prayer” we discover more truths and more beauty and intimacy that attract us and draw us into God’s presence. Each time we enter into prayer let us be conscious and present ourselves in faith and reflect on these following realities:

1) Jesus prays WITH US. We are never alone in our prayer.

When Jesus teaches us to pray he says, “Our Father.” He joins us in addressing the Father. We read in the Letter to the Hebrews: “For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses **with us**, but we have One who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin. Let us be confident then, in approaching the throne of grace, that we shall have mercy from him and find grace when we are in need of help” (Hebrews 4:15). Moreover, Jesus desires that we join **with him** in prayer. “He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping; he said to Peter, ‘So you had not the strength to keep awake **with me** one hour? (Matt 26:40)? “together in my name, there I am **with them**” (Matt 18:20). And we repeat his words at every celebration of the Eucharist that express his desire to dwell and be with us: “Do this in memory of me.”

2) Jesus prayed FOR US, and he continues to pray FOR US now.

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, “Father, as you sent me into the world; I have sent them into the world. For their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth. I pray not only for these [present around the Last Supper table] **but for those also who through their words will believe in me**” (John 17:17-20). Yes, Jesus not only prayed for us at the Last Supper and on the Cross, but he continues to pray **for us** at this very moment. In Hebrews 7:8:24 we read, “Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because **he always lives to intercede for them.**” We also read in Romans 8:34: “Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also **interceding for us.**” We may ask ourselves what Jesus is praying for us individually and personally at this very moment. When I settle down to pray, it may do me good to strive to listen to his prayer for me at that very moment. Yes, Jesus is praying with me and for me.

3) Jesus prays WITHIN US.

It is the Spirit of Jesus who prays deep within us. Paul tells us, “The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who cries, ‘Abba, Father.’ And it is this that makes you a son” (Galatians 4:6). “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for

us with groans that words cannot express. And he [the Father] who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with the will of God” (Romans 6:26-27).

Thus, Jesus himself IS our prayer

From all the above we can affirm that Christ Jesus truly prays within us in a reality that is rooted in our union with him as a human and united with him in his Spirit. When we remember who we are in Christ before the Father, and when we open our hearts in faith, hope and love to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, we then truly pray. This is expressed eloquently in all of the Eucharistic prayers. The Liturgy is the living presence of Christ’s thankful and self-sacrificial gift of himself to the Father, as he draws us up into his personal response to the presence of his loving Father. We enter with Christ into the mystery of the Father’s transforming power as we are lifted up with Christ who draws us into himself as one with this Body, the Church.

*Eucharistic Prayer III beautifully unites us with Christ
within the full meaning of what is expressed in “Jesus IS our prayer.”*

***“Father, look with favor on your Church’s offering, and see the Victim [Jesus Christ]
whose death has reconciled us to yourself.***

***“Grant that we, who are nourished by his Body and Blood,
may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ.***

***“May he make us an everlasting gift to you [Father] and enable us
to share in the inheritance of your saints, with Mary, the virgin Mother of God;
with the apostles, the martyrs and all your saints
on whose constant intercession we rely for help.”***

Also expressed in the words of the doxology that concludes all the Eucharistic Prayers and in the action of the priest as he lifts to the Father the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Jesus:

***“Through [Christ,] with him and in him, in the unity
of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours,
Almighty Father, for ever and ever.
AMEN.”***