

Christian Prayer VIII

Prayers for the month

The priority is prayer, not prayers

This resource has been designed to assist those with responsibility of leading others into prayer, and everything up to now has been focussed on methods and types of prayer - stillness and centring exercises; imaginative contemplation; liturgical prayer and so on.

The focus has been on praying, rather than 'saying prayers'.

We perhaps have all had experience of saying prayers but not really paying much attention to what we say or what it means.

We can say a lot of prayers without 'really' praying.

But prayers do have a place

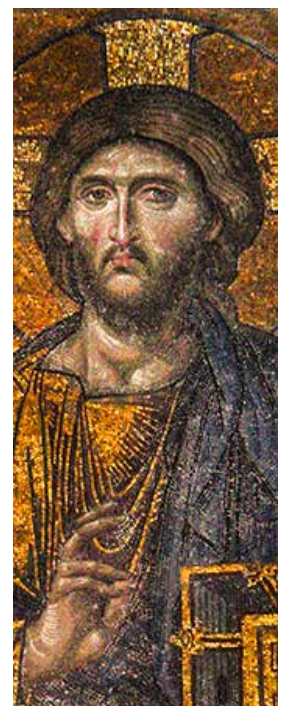
Sometimes a prayer composed by others puts into words something we believe and long for, but might never have been able to put into words.

- There are prayers that Catholic Christians will fairly regularly say together - not only the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary and 'Glory be..' but, for example, the *Salve Regina* or the Prayers for the Dead.
- All these and more are good reason for learning some of the Church's traditional prayers by heart, so that they are there for us to use when the occasion arises - when we want to *pray* the *prayers*.

A number of traditional prayers are given on the following pages, together with some notes about their origin and use.

Each has been allocated to a particular month, for one reason or another. You are free to use any of them any time, but if you need something last minute for a prayer time and nothing else has been prepared, you can safely use the 'Prayer of the Month' knowing that it has some relevance to the month/season.

January	Prayer for Christian Unity
February	<i>Magnificat</i>
March	Psalm 50
April	The Memorial Acclamations
May	Come Holy Spirit
June	<i>Anima Christi</i>
July	<i>Suscipe</i>
August	Make me a channel of your peace
September	Grace before meals
October	<i>Salve Regina</i>
November	Prayers for the Dead
December	<i>Maranatha</i>



Christian Prayer: January

Prayer for Christian Unity

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity has been kept by Christians of different denominations since 1908.

The week begins on the 18 January (formerly the feast of the Confession of Saint Peter) and ends on 25 January (the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul).

Resources are prepared for the Church around the world each year by Christians of different denominations from a particular country. These resources are available to download from www.ctbi.org.uk. Usually they will include a scripture passage, reflection and prayer for each day of the week.

Gospel: John 17:20-26

Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said:

‘Holy Father, I pray not only for these,
but for those also who through their words will believe in me.
May they all be one.

Father, may they be one in us,
as you are in me and I am in you,
so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.
I have given them the glory you gave to me,
that they may be one as we are one.

With me in them and you in me,
may they be so completely one
that the world will realise that it was you who sent me
and that I have loved them as much as you loved me.
Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am,
so that they may always see the glory you have given me
because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
Father, Righteous One, the world has not known you,
but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me.
I have made your name known to them
and will continue to make it known,
so that the love with which you loved me may be in them,
and so that I may be in them.’

The following prayer is prayed daily by the ecumenical community Chemin Neuf (New Way) that is part of the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Lord Jesus, who prayed that we might all be one,
we pray to you for the unity of Christians,
according to your will,
according to your means.
May your Spirit enable us
to experience the suffering caused by division,
to see our sin
and to hope beyond all hope. Amen.



Christian Prayer: February

Magnificat

The Magnificat is the song of Mary sung after the Annunciation, when she visited her cousin Elizabeth. The story is told in Luke's Gospel.

The version of the Magnificat given below in the scripture passage is the translation sung or said in the Church's Evening Prayer each day of the week.

The song is often popular with reform and renewal movements for the way it is a forthright proclamation of God's desire for justice for those who are oppressed or poor.

Gospel: *Luke 1:39-56*

Mary set out and went as quickly as she could to a town in the hill country of Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

She gave a loud cry and said, 'Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honoured with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled.'

And Mary said:

My soul glorifies the Lord,
My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
He looks on his servant in her lowliness;
Henceforth all generations will call me blessed.
The Almighty works marvels for me.
Holy his name!
His mercy is from age to age,
on those who fear him.
He puts forth his arm in strength
And scatters the proud hearted.
He casts the mighty from their thrones
And raises the lowly.
He fills the starving with good things,
Sends the rich away empty.
He protects Israel, his servant,
remembering his mercy,
the mercy promised to our fathers,
to Abraham and his sons for ever.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now,
and ever shall be, world without end.
Amen.



Christian Prayer: March

Psalm 50

Since the seventh century a group of psalms have been designated the penitential psalms. These are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143 (in the Hebrew numbering used in most modern scripture translations)

Especially during Lent these psalms are prayed to help us to recognize our sinfulness, express our sorrow and ask for God's forgiveness.

Psalm 51, given below, (as its superscription suggests) has been associated with King David (traditional author of many of the Bible's Psalms).

It is understood to be his prayer of repentance when confronted with his sin in committing adultery with Bathsheba and plotting the death of her husband Uriah. The story is told in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.

Psalm 51 (50)

- 1 *For the Choirmaster. A Psalm of David*
- 2 *when the prophet Nathan came to him*
after he had gone to Bathsheba.
- 3 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your merciful love;
according to your great compassion,
blot out my transgressions.
- 4 Wash me completely from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- 5 My transgressions, truly I know them;
my sin is always before me.
- 6 Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
what is evil in your sight I have done.
So you are just in your sentence,
without reproach in your judgment.



- 7 O see, in guilt I was born,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- 8 Yes, you delight in sincerity of heart;
in secret you teach me wisdom.
- 9 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be pure;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 10 Let me hear rejoicing and gladness,
that the bones you have crushed may exult.
- 11 Turn away your face from my sins,
and blot out all my guilt.
- 12 Create a pure heart for me, O God;
renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- 13 Do not cast me away from your presence;
take not your holy spirit from me.
- 14 Restore in me the joy of your salvation;
sustain in me a willing spirit.
- 15 I will teach transgressors your ways,
that sinners may return to you.
- 16 Rescue me from bloodshed, O God,
God of my salvation,
and then my tongue shall ring out your justice.
- 17 O Lord, open my lips
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.
- 18 For in sacrifice you take no delight;
burnt offering from me would not please you.
- 19 My sacrifice to God, a broken spirit:
a broken and humbled heart,
O God, you will not spurn.
- 20 In your good pleasure, show favor to Sion;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
- 21 Then you will delight in right sacrifice,
burnt offerings wholly consumed.
Then you will be offered young bulls on your altar.

Christian Prayer: April

The Memorial Acclamations

The Memorial Acclamation is one of the three acclamations that belong to the congregation during the Eucharistic Prayer.

The first acclamation is the Sanctus (the Holy) which concludes the Prayer's Preface.

The third is the Great Amen which concludes the Prayer as a whole.

The congregation's singing or saying of these responses is the audible, visible sign of our being joined together in the offering of the Sacrament of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, offered by him on the Cross of Calvary, and re-presented at the altars of the Church.

These particular acclamations provide very concise and memorable summaries of that saving Sacrifice and the Paschal Mystery of which it is part. And yet in the Mass we may get little time to linger on them and consider their proclamation of faith.

In April every year we approach the great feast of Easter as we keep the last weeks of Lent and Holy Week - and we begin to live the Easter feast, as we keep the first days of Eastertide. Whichever season we find ourselves in, these little texts have much to say to us.

You might encourage students to meditate on one or other of the texts while using either the Breathing and Relaxing the Body prayer exercises included in this resource as Christian Prayer 1a and 1b.

Priest: The mystery of faith.

And the people continue, acclaiming:

All: We proclaim your Death, O Lord,
and profess your Resurrection
until you come again.

Or:

When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup,
we proclaim your Death, O Lord,
until you come again.

Or:

Save us, Saviour of the world,
for by your Cross and Resurrection
you have set us free.



Christian Prayer: May

Come Holy Spirit

Pentecost is often celebrated during May but, if Easter is late, it may be celebrated as late as June 13th.

So if you use this prayer, during May you may be praying it in anticipation of the feast of Pentecost which is the last day of Easter, or in the wake of that great feast.

Either way it is good for us to pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit and on us, on the Church and the whole world.

Often when this prayer is prayed in a group, the leader speaks all of the prayer apart from 'And you shall renew the face of the earth,' and the final Amen, which are spoken by the rest of the group.

In a classroom setting half the class might say the first verse, the other half the second and all - or alternatively a single reader - the final prayer. In other words, there are other ways of doing it than what is usual elsewhere!

Come, Holy Spirit,
fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit
and they shall be created.
And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God,
to whom every heart is open
and from whom no secrets are hidden;
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the help of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
faithfully serve you,
and worthily praise your Holy name.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Christian Prayer: June

Anima Christi

The Anima Christi is a prayer that appears at the front of St Ignatius Loyola's 'Spiritual Exercises'.

It has sometimes been attributed to him, but in fact it dates back at least to the 14th Century. It may have been written by Pope John XXII, but in truth no-one knows its author.

It is perhaps best known, in English, in the first translation below, but the second translation, the work of St John Henry Newman, is maybe more vivid and engaging.

During June many of the students may have siblings making their first Holy Communion. It is also likely to be the anniversary month of your students' first Communion. Remember to pray for them all, for a deeper love for Christ and for the Eucharist.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within Thy wounds hide me
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee
From the malignant enemy defend me
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come unto Thee
That with Thy Saints I may praise Thee
Forever and ever. Amen.

Unknown translator

Soul of Christ, be my sanctification,
Body of Christ, be my salvation,
Blood of Christ, fill my veins
Water from the side of Christ, wash out my stains.
May Christ's Passion strengthen me,
O good Jesus, hear me.
In thy wounds I fain would hide,
Never to be parted from thy side.
Guard me when my foes assail me,
Call me when my life shall fail me.
Command me then to come to thee.
That I for all eternity
With thy saints may praise thee. Amen.

Translated by St. John Henry Newman



Christian Prayer: July

Suscipe

The Suscipe, as in the first text below, is a prayer popularised by St Ignatius of Loyola. It is a prayer in which we make an offering of ourselves to God who first gives us the gift of ourselves.

The two alternative Suscipes below come from other Christians of great influence. The second was composed by Romano Guardini, an influential spiritual writer of the early and middle years of the 20th Century.

The third was composed by Catherine McAuley, the founder - in 1831- of the religious congregation, Sisters of Mercy.

Each version of the prayer comes from a generous heart, looking for perfection in a life lived for love of God and neighbour. We may not always have the same generosity in our hearts - but it is good to pray for it!

Receive, Lord, my entire freedom.
Accept the whole of my memory,
my intellect and my will.
Whatever I have or possess, it was you who gave it to me;
I restore it to you in full,
and I surrender it completely to the guidance of your will.
Give me only your love together with your grace,
and I am rich enough,
nor do I ask for anything more.

St Ignatius of Loyola

Unceasingly, I receive myself from your hands.
This is my truth and my joy.
Unceasingly, your eye rests upon me,
and I live by your gaze,
O my Creator and my Salvation.
Teach me, in the silence of your presence,
to understand the mystery that I am.
And the fact that I am
through you and before you and for you. Amen.

Romano Guardini

My God, I am yours for time and eternity.
Teach me to cast myself entirely
into the arms of your loving Providence
with a lively, unlimited confidence
in your compassionate, tender pity.
Grant, O most merciful Redeemer,
that whatever you ordain or permit
may be acceptable to me.
Take from my heart all painful anxiety;
let nothing sadden me but sin,
nothing delight me but the hope
of coming to the possession of You,
my God and my all,
in your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Catherine McAuley



Christian Prayer: August

Make me a channel of your peace

Prayers are often attributed to great spiritual teachers. But as we have seen elsewhere in this resource, the attributions are often erroneous. The same is the case with the prayer here, that is commonly attributed to St Francis. However it actually seems to have been composed in the early years of the 20th Century, almost 800 years after St Francis. However it is a beautiful prayer for peace, reconciliation and renewal. It is especially appropriate to pray during holidays and in this month which sees the anniversary of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offence, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

We do have a number of prayers that have their origin with St Francis.

*One is the following, which Francis prayed in 1205/6
in front of the Crucifix of San Damiano,
during the early days of his spiritual conversion.*

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me
true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.



Christian Prayer: September

Grace before meals

Grace before meals can be a mere formality. Grace can be the sort of prayer that gets prayer a bad name.

But when we come to a meal hungry or appreciative of what it is, and that (often) it has been prepared by others for our benefit and that (ultimately) it is a blessing (a grace) from God how proper it is that we should want to give thanks for the meal, for the giver and for those who have prepared it.

Food can be seen as just a traded commodity. But that it is to rob it of its most precious meanings and reduce it to just a thing. Food comes to us bearing the significance of all sorts of relationships and all sorts of meanings. Pausing for a moment of prayer before we eat – whether this is something we do as individuals or as a community – alerts us to this and helps our eating and drinking to be a more fully human action.

There are many graces that are commonly said before meals. Perhaps the most common is the following.

Bless us, O Lord,
and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty.
Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(NB Sometimes people substitute 'goodness' for 'bounty')

However sometimes prayers we commonly use need looking at to see whether they do give best expression to our faith. And sometimes they don't.

In this case, for example, we know God has already blessed us, not least through the food we have been given. And in recent years there has been a move to return to an older sense of 'blessing prayers' such that we do not pray asking God for further blessings on us or things, but rather - grateful for these blessings which we already have and enjoy - we bless God for the blessing that he has already given us.

The following prayer is more in-line with this revived (and ancient) understanding.

Blessed are you, almighty Father,
who give us our daily bread.
Blessed is your only begotten Son
who continually feeds us
with the Word of Life.
Blessed is the Holy Spirit
who blesses this table.
Blessed be God now and forever.
Amen.



Christian Prayer: October

Salve Regina

Many of the more ancient prayers from the Church's tradition were originally composed in Latin.

These days, mostly, they are prayed in the vernacular - in this country usually English.

One that is still regularly prayed in Latin is a hymn to Our Lady, the Salve Regina.

When it is prayed in Latin, it is generally sung to the traditional plainsong setting.

This can be found on YouTube, for example <https://bit.ly/2C7HG5f>

When the English text is used, it is generally concluded with the responsory printed below.

Salve, Regina, Mater misericordiæ,
vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevæ,
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia, ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos
misericordes oculos ad nos converte;
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria.

The standard English translation is

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.
To thee do we cry,
Poor banished children of Eve;
To thee do we send up our sighs,
Mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, most gracious advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy toward us;
And after this our exile,
Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving,
O sweet Virgin Mary.
Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,
that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.



Christian Prayer: November

Praying for those who have died

November is the month when the Church celebrates two great feasts.

The first is on November 1st (unless in a particular year it is transferred to another day). This is the feast, the Solemnity, of All Saints. This is a day when we give thanks to God for the saints – all of those in whom the grace of God has borne the most visible fruits of holiness and love, and whose example we seek to follow. This day is also a Holy Day of Obligation, when Catholics attend Mass.

The second, normally celebrated the following day, November 2nd is the feast of All Souls (when we pray for all the faithful of God who have died).

These days are a special focus for our prayer and they introduce the month of November, a month in which we especially pray for the dead.

There are many customs associated with the month, for example visits to the graves of family members, offering Mass for them, and praying for them in other ways.

There is a short responsory that is used in the funeral Liturgy which is also often prayed by Catholics when we learn that someone has died. It is a responsory that it is good to have learnt by heart, so that on those occasions we can take the fullest part when prayers are offered.

Eternal rest grant unto him/her, O Lord.

And let perpetual light shine upon him/ her.

May he/she rest in peace. *Amen.*

May his/her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. *Amen.*

*(Generally when the responsory is used the Leader says the parts in standard type,
and the rest of those gathered say the words in italics.)*

Where a number of people who have died are being prayed for the words are as follows:-

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord.

And let perpetual light shine upon them.

May they rest in peace. *Amen.*

May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. *Amen.*



Christian Prayer: December

Maranatha

The season of Advent runs from the 4th Sunday before Christmas until Christmas Eve. Advent is a season of preparation for Christmas - which does not begin until December 24th.

If we start to celebrate Christmas during Advent, both seasons lose something of what is particular to each. We miss out on something of the spiritual help we are offered by the one, and something of the particular joy of a Christmas for which we have carefully prepared.

Advent itself has a twofold character: first, as a time to prepare for the solemnity of Christmas when the Son of God's first coming to us, in the flesh, is remembered; and secondly as a season when we recall that Christ will come again at the end of time, a time of judgement – as well as mercy. The season is a time for an examination of conscience and fresh commitment to conversion and spiritual renewal as we try to prepare ourselves for both events.

Advent is not simply a preparation to commemorate the historical event of Christmas nor is it primarily an expectation of the end times. Indeed it is even more than both of those things. It is best understood as an anticipation or a beginning of the celebration of the integral mystery of the incarnation, the advent and the epiphany of the Son of God in flesh and in majesty. In this season the Christian community reminds itself that it lives in an "interim" time between two historical events: the coming of Christ in the flesh and his coming in glory at the end of time. The Church is called to be strong in faith "as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

Commonly during Advent Catholics will celebrate the sacrament of Confession as one of the ways in which they resource themselves for living more faithfully during these interim times.

The Church has from the earliest times prayed the word 'Maranatha' during these days – a word which appears at the end of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

The word Paul quotes is in Aramaic (the everyday language of Jesus). אתאנרמ

Transliterated into Greek (which is the language of the New Testament) it becomes Μαράνα θά. And when it is transliterated into Latin it becomes Maran-Atha.

There is an ambiguity in the word in Aramaic and Greek. The one word is made up of two words which mean Lord and Come. If it is read as Marana-tha, then in Aramaic it means 'Come Lord. However it is read as Maran-atha it means 'The Lord has come'! There is no conclusive evidence which Paul meant, and who knows maybe he enjoyed the ambiguity!

The word is well suited to be used as a mantra in Advent, perhaps as part of a breathing exercise, to feed a time of quiet prayer.

Maranatha.

