



PRAYER & DEVOTIONS

Faith Formation Session on Prayer and Devotions: LEADER'S GUIDE

8 on the Archdiocese of Dubuque's Top Ten Gifts of the Catholic Faith!

Faith Formation Leaders: Please review all materials and select those most effective for your presentation. You may copy and distribute any of the materials.

Introduction:

Do you pray the rosary or say a novena? Do you wear a scapular? Dip your hands into the baptismal font and bless yourself? Do you say grace before meals? Do you spend time in silent adoration? Do you receive ashes on Ash Wednesday? Pray the Stations of the Cross? We could go on and on describing our Catholic prayer and devotions. As Catholics, we cherish these spiritual practices that lead us closer to God.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, send your Spirit to open our hearts to Jesus.
Guide us to a deeper conversion.
Grant us a greater appreciation of the beauty of our Catholic faith.
Give us the courage and confidence to joyfully share our faith with others.
May your Church be a beacon of light for all who seek your loving presence.
Be with us now as we explore our prayers and devotions.
Mary, faithful Mother of God, intercede for us.
We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Scripture:

Matthew 6:5-15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one. If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ.

Opening Song: (or choose your own)

Sacred Silence by Tom Booth and Jenny Pixler: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LNZ62clakqQ>

Section I: Prayer

Video # 1: Members of the Archdiocese of Dubuque
<https://youtu.be/PfSn3LdISWY>

To be a Christian is to be in relationship with Jesus Christ. Prayer is our relationship with Jesus and our prayer determines our relationship with Jesus. If our prayer is superficial, so is our relationship with Jesus. If our prayer is rote or sporadic, our relationship with Jesus will be surface.

But when our prayer is deep and intimate, there is a relationship where we seek to be in the company of Jesus— to talk, to listen, to laugh, to cry, to be silent, and to rest in Him. As we grow in intimacy through prayer, we grow in our desire to be with Jesus and to be more like Jesus. As we grow in prayer, so grows our discipleship. Prayer is critical for deepening our discipleship.

The great saints were great pray-ers, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, just to name a few. Mother Theresa of Calcutta, known for her strenuous work with the poor, identified the source of her strength as prayer: “Without prayer, charity cannot exist. And do you think if I didn’t pray I would be able to love the poor? It’s Jesus that puts love in my heart when I pray.” She wrote to the sisters in her order of their need for prayer: “To be able to give life like that, our lives are centred on the Eucharist and prayer.” Prayer is necessary for each Christian to complete the journey of faith.

Though there are many different types and forms of prayer, all Christian prayer is directed toward the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “There is no other way of Christian prayer than Christ. Whether our prayer is communal or personal, vocal or interior, it has access to the Father only if we pray ‘in the name’ of Jesus. The sacred humanity of Jesus is therefore the way by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray to God our Father” (CCC, #2664).

All Christian prayer falls into “three major expressions of the life of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. They have in common the recollection of the heart. Vocal prayer, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ’s example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples. Meditation is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make our own in faith the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life. Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery (CCC, # 2721-2724).

Members of the Archdiocese of Dubuque give witness to the different expressions of prayer—each a part of the rich prayer life of the Catholic tradition. Some value the charismatic prayer of the Holy Spirit, some have gone deeper with Jesus through contemplative prayer, while others appreciate the sung chant of Taize prayer. No matter how we choose to pray, prayer need not be complicated. As Therese of Lisieux wrote: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” To be a Christian is to be a person of prayer. According to the Catechism, “It is always possible to pray. It is even a vital necessity. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable” (CCC, # 2757). All these expressions of prayer praise God and bring us closer to the love of Christ. As **St. Augustine** wrote, “True prayer is nothing but love.”

Please break into small groups after watching the video to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- Which prayer form has been most meaningful to you?
- When has prayer been most important in your life?
- Have you ever felt like you’ve failed at prayer?
- What type of prayer would you like to try or to grow in?

Section II: Devotions

Video #2: Members of the Archdiocese of Dubuque

<http://youtu.be/nOV08YZyqA>

Do you remember praying the Stations of the Cross each Lent or having a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus hanging in your home? Members of the Archdiocese of Dubuque give witness to a few of the many forms of popular devotions. If you are not a Catholic, some may seem strange, but as you listen to the witness you will hear the deeper meaning of these devotions. Though Catholic devotions are not central to our faith, “but rather ‘external practices of piety’ which are not part of the official liturgy of the Catholic Church,” many Catholic devotions are widely practiced and go back centuries.

According to Saint John Paul II, “Genuine forms of popular piety, expressed in a multitude of different ways, derives from the faith and, therefore, must be valued and promoted. Such authentic expressions of popular piety are not at odds with the centrality of the Sacred Liturgy. Rather, in promoting the faith of the people, who regard popular piety as a natural religious expression, they predispose the people for the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries.”

Catholic devotions are centered on the life of Jesus, his Blessed Mother, Mary, angels, saints, and the Eucharist. For instance, the devotion of praying the Stations of the Cross leads us through Christ’s suffering and death, and dates back to a time when those who could no longer travel to Jerusalem would participate in the *Via Dolorosa* by following the footsteps of Christ in the local parish or even one’s home.

Marian devotions have been with us since the early Church. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us: “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.” The devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus dates back to the 12th century, but became more popular in the 17th century when St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, of France, had visions of the Jesus’ Sacred Heart burning for love of mankind. “In art the Sacred Heart is pierced, surmounted by a cross, and encircled with thorns. Light radiates from it to show that it is a burning furnace of love. The Heart of Christ summarizes the paschal mystery—the death and resurrection of Jesus that were prompted by divine love.”

These are just a few of the devotions cherished by members in the Archdiocese of Dubuque. Though faithful Catholics need not practice any of them, devotions continue to be popular and viewed as a way of drawing men and women closer to Christ. Pope Francis affirmed the value of devotions in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*: “Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on. Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the Council. In the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gave a decisive impulse in this area. There he stated that popular piety ‘manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know’ and that ‘it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief’. Closer to our own time, *Benedict XVI*, speaking about Latin America, pointed out that popular piety is ‘a precious treasure of the Catholic Church’, in which ‘we see the soul of the Latin American peoples’” (123).

Please break into small groups after watching the video to discuss the following questions.

Discussion Questions:

- Which devotion do you remember most fondly from childhood (if you were raised Catholic)?
- Which devotion do you find most intriguing? Which devotion seems strange to you (especially if you are not Catholic nor raised Catholic)?
- Which devotion would you like to start in your home?
- Pope Francis acknowledges the importance of devotions to the life of the faithful; have you experienced a special devotion from another culture? Please share your experience.

Conclusion:

Please be sure to make time for large group discussion:

What did you learn about Prayer and Devotions?

What did you like best about the session?

What is one thing you will share with someone at home or in your sphere of influence?

*** What difference does it make in one's life to pray and to participate in Catholic devotions?

Finish the session by playing the song (or choose one of your own) and by saying the following prayer together:

Closing Song (Choose one or choose your own):

Take me, Take me, As I am (Taize Prayer): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OI420tZzzA>

Closing Prayer in Thanksgiving for the Gift of our Prayer and Devotions:

Loving God, you have called each of us to be formed in your image.

Thank you for the gift of your living presence.

Grant us a deep desire to be in a living relationship with you through daily prayer.

Help us to be men and women who bring your presence to others.

Give us the strength and courage to live as the Body of Christ.

Make us into people of thanksgiving.

Mary, Blessed Mother of the Word Incarnate, intercede for us.

We make this prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit.

One God, forever and ever. Amen.

Additional Resources:

To find additional resources (including books, DVDs, online resources, and more) on Prayers and Devotions, please contact the Education Resource Center (ERC) of the Archdiocese of Dubuque at 563-556-2580, ext. 214 or dbqcm1@dbqarch.org.