

Introduction to Prayer

Core Activity

Prayer in Scripture

1. Post the following questions in a visible place:
 - How should we pray and for what might we pray?
 - Does God always hear our prayers?
 - What does God communicate to us in prayer?
 - What are the results of prayer?
2. Ask a student to read aloud Deut. 6:4–9. Make the following comments in your own words:
 - This prayer is the Shema, the most famous declaration of faith in the Old Testament. It plays a major role in the life of a devout Jew. Faithful Jews begin and end life, as well as each day, with the Shema. They say the prayer frequently during the day. The Shema says that faithfulness to God alone brings his blessings, whereas infidelity to God and loyalty to different gods or idols brings his wrath.
3. Ask the students to think about this question: “If people pray often, will it affect the way they live?” Explain that Scripture, both the Old and the New Testaments, is filled with stories of people who prayed and found the peace, joy, hope, healing, and love that God promised.
4. Divide the class into six groups. Provide each student with a Bible. Then assign each group one of the following Scripture passages:
 - Gen. 17:1–8, 15–22; 21:1–7 (God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah)
 - Exod. 3:1–15, 6:1–9 (God’s covenant with Moses)
 - 2 Sam., chap. 7 (God’s covenant with David)
 - Matt. 26:36–42 (Jesus’ prayers in Gethsemane)
 - Luke 11:5–13 (perseverance in prayer)
 - John 14:1–14 (Jesus, the way to the Father)
5. Ask the groups each to read their assigned Scripture verses and discuss the four questions you posted. Explain that the groups will not find answers to all the questions in their passages, but challenge them to answer as many as they can. Allow about 10–15 minutes for small-group conversations. It would be helpful to have one student from each group record the group’s answers.

6. Invite a student from each small group to come to the front of the class and provide a brief overview of the group's Scripture passage. Have those representatives also offer a summary of the insights they have gained.

7. Ask the students to reflect on the following question: "If you prayed more often, how would the way you live be affected?" Allow a few moments for the students to silently consider the question, or give them time to write a journal entry on the question.

8. Ask the students to get their Bibles once again and turn to the Shema, in Deut. 6:4–9. Invite them to say the prayer together, keeping in mind that it was at the very heart of the life of Jesus and his followers.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer manual*.)

Core Activity Extension

A Simple Way to Pray

Have your students read the Pray It! article "A Simple Way to Pray," on page 371 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition (CFH)*. Provide time in class for your students to pray in the manner described in the sidebar, or direct them to spend 10–15 minutes praying in that style as homework. Prepare a few Scripture suggestions for students who have difficulty finding one to pray with, or instruct the entire class to use the Gospel for the coming Sunday. Following the prayer encourage your students to share the Scripture passages they prayed with and the insights that were revealed to them while praying, or write a brief reflection to be turned in. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer manual*.)

Additional Activities

A Prayer Assessment

1. Explain the need to look seriously at our own beliefs and habits about prayer. Share with the students that this activity has three main goals:
 - to reveal the students' thoughts about and practices of prayer
 - to help the students identify their levels of satisfaction with their own practices of prayer
 - to provide an introductory entrance into prayer habits that can be expanded during subsequent classes



2. Distribute the handout “A Prayer Assessment” (Document #: TX003205) and provide enough time for the students to reflect on all the questions. It might be helpful to play some reflective music in the background. Convey to the students that for this activity to work, they need to give serious thought to the questions and to be honest with themselves in their responses. They are to think carefully about each question and are to circle the answer that most accurately reflects their beliefs and practices.

3. Once the students have completed the assessment, take time for discussion. While facilitating the class discussion, keep in mind the goals of this activity, which are expressed in step 1.

Telling Our Stories of Prayer

1. Invite the students to each take out a sheet of paper and a pen or a pencil. Let them know that you will give them sentences to complete. Remind them that the content of their writing must be appropriate for a school assignment. Once they begin writing, they are to continue writing until they are instructed to stop.

2. Provide the students with the following sentence to complete: “I remember . . .” Tell them to write about a meaningful or memorable experience in their lives. After 4 minutes ask the students to stop writing.

Repeat this exercise, this time asking the students to complete the following sentence: “I know that God was in this event because . . .”

3. Invite the students to share their stories in either the class or small groups. Be sure to note these ideas in your own words:

- God’s activity can be experienced in many ways.
- Some of your stories were simple. Others were moving. All should be respected as real encounters with God’s activity.
- Each story speaks of a person’s way of recognizing and being in touch with God. Our goal in prayer is to do just what you have all done in the stories you just shared—to invite God into the ordinary and the extraordinary moments of our lives.

Mary, a Model of Prayer

1. Display the following questions. Then read the questions one at a time. For the first question, invite the students to think of a response but not say anything. For the second question, ask the students to say their responses out loud, without naming the person they chose as their answer to the first question. List the responses on the board, on newsprint, or on an overhead as they are made.

- Name someone in your life whom you consider to be a good pray-er.
- What about that person indicates to you that he or she models prayer well?

2. Building on the qualities named by the young people, begin a presentation on Mary as the model of prayer for the Catholic Church.

3. Lead a discussion of the following questions:
 - Why, do you think, has the Church given Mary such a predominant place in its Tradition?
 - What are the benefits of praying with and through Mary?

4. Conclude by praying one of the Marian prayers from the Church's Tradition, such as the Hail Mary, the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55), or the *Memorare*. Those three prayers are in the "Catholic Prayers and Devotions" section of the *CFH*.

(This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer* manual.)

(The material labeled *Catechetical Sessions on Christian Prayer* or *TC: Prayer* is from *Total Catechesis: Catechetical Sessions on Christian Prayer*, by Mary Shrader and Laurie Delgatto, in the Total Catechesis series [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2004]. Copyright © 2004 by Saint Mary's Press. All rights reserved.)