

Personal Prayer

Core Activity

An Exercise in Prayer

This activity provides opportunities for your students to experience a deep, sustained time for personal prayer. You will probably find that the classroom is the best setting for introducing this activity. However, the classroom might not be the best setting for conducting the prayer exercise itself. If your school has a chapel, it would be beneficial to use it.

1. Tell the students it is possible to pray anywhere at anytime about virtually anything. However, it is important for Christians to establish a daily routine of more sustained, personal prayer. After that introduction, conduct a presentation on the three major expressions of personal prayer—vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer—with comments taken from pages 384–388 of *The Catholic Faith Handbook for Youth, Third Edition (CFH)*.

2. Explain that you want to teach a technique for experiencing the deeper forms of prayer called meditation and contemplation. If you have chosen an alternative space for prayer, such as a chapel, ask your class to proceed there, taking only a notebook and something to write with. Instruct them each to sit a good distance from other members of the class.

3. Once the students have found appropriate spaces and have settled, explain that the first step in preparing for prayer is to relax and to dismiss things that can distract us. Note that a variety of postures can help us adopt a prayerful disposition. Explain the prayer postures in the following list, allowing time for the students to try each one:

- kneeling in an upright manner
- kneeling with your buttocks resting on your feet
- standing
- sitting in an upright manner
- sitting with your legs in front of you
- sitting with your legs crossed

Conclude this explanation by conveying the following points:

- The best posture for prayer allows you to stay alert but comfortable.
- Wear comfortable clothes when you pray.
- Distractions will come during prayer; be aware of them and stay focused on God.



4. Ask the students to position themselves in the posture in which they feel most prayerful. Then guide them through the meditation on the handout “Sharing with God” (Document #: TX003207).

Allow several minutes of silence for the students to imagine themselves sharing with God. Then ask them to write a journal entry about their experience, addressing questions such as these:

- What did you say to God?
- What did you imagine God saying back to you?
- Would this be a manner of prayer that you use regularly? Why or why not?

5. Bring the students back to the classroom, ask some of them to describe their experience, and lead a class discussion on the exercise. Be sure the discussion includes the points on meditation and contemplation found on pages 386–388 of the *CFH*.

6. Conclude with the following comments in your own words:

- Today’s experience was a sampling of meditative and contemplative prayer. Other exercises might be more comfortable for you or more suitable for your particular personal style of prayer. However, as you continue to grow spiritually, you are encouraged and challenged to look at ways to deepen and expand your individual prayer life.

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

Core Activity Extension

Saintly Prayer Habits

Instruct your students each to research the prayer habits or experiences of a favorite saint or of an assigned saint. Ask them to do the research as homework and to present on their saints the next day, or over the course of several days as you cover the topic of prayer. Some suggested saints are Simeon Metaphrastes, Monica, Francis de Sales, Thomas More, and Thérèse of Lisieux. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer manual*.)

Additional Activities

Daily Prayer Practices

1. Present the following information to the class in your own words:
 - Prayer is like a form of art. Each person has a unique personality, preferred forms of expression, and distinctive life situations. Like any art, prayer demands that we learn basic techniques and be open to the teachings of the great masters. But most importantly, we must be committed to devoting time.
 - Through the centuries spiritual masters have found key elements for a satisfying personal prayer life. Among them are these:
 - *Consistency.* developing one or two routine and reliable habits that become a part of one's life
 - *Time and place.* setting aside the time of day and the environment that best serve one's prayer
 - *Posture.* using different postures at different times, to stay alert, focused, and prepared to commune with God
 - *Preferred methods.* learning the methods of prayer that work particularly well: for example, meditation, and reflecting on Scripture or the Rosary



2. Distribute the handout "From Morning to Night" (Document #: TX003208) and explain that throughout the next week, the students are to try different forms of prayer in the morning, at various times and places during the day, and in the evening. After seven days of experimenting with different practices, they are to complete their sheets and return them to you. Make brief comments such as these about the points on the handout:

- Some people truly are morning people; others are not. Regardless, it is important to begin each day with prayer. Many spiritual masters begin with meditation and encourage everyone to do so. But it might be helpful to instead memorize a short prayer or post one on your mirror, and begin each day by saying that.
- An anytime, anywhere prayer can help to remind you of God's presence throughout the day. Such a prayer might be your own words or the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, or the Glory Be.
- Regular evening or night prayer is equally as important as regular morning prayer. You should conclude each day by looking back on it, learning its lessons, and thanking God for it. A guide for doing that is the TRAP way of prayer:
 - *Thank.* Thank God for the good things from the day, and be specific.
 - *Review.* Reflect on your attitude and actions during the day. Try to be honest and remember both the good and the bad things you did or said or thought.
 - *Ask.* Ask God to forgive you and help you make amends. Or ask God to help you face difficult decisions or challenges.
 - *Promise to change.* Make a commitment, with the grace of God, to do better tomorrow.

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

A Prayer List

Instruct the students to write a list of all the people they know of who are in need of prayer. Ask them to keep a running list of people who have asked for prayer and people that others have asked them to keep in their prayers. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer* manual.)

A Prayer Board

Post a prayer board in the room. Take time during a class to create a place for the students to write the names of those in need of prayer or to write their own needs. Ask them to add to the board before each class and to remember the intentions on the board during your daily prayer with them. (This activity is adapted from the *TC: Prayer* manual.)

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