

A School of Prayer

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SpT 201 – Prayer: Introduction to Methods and Sources

Fall 2012

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## Overview

This program will be presented in four sessions. Each session will open with the readings for the upcoming Sunday's liturgy to begin to help the participants enter more fully into the Mass from the very first day. The sessions will close with an extended prayer from the Christian Tradition with a focus on Liturgical Prayer as desired by John Paul II in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 34.<sup>1</sup> The body of each session will be a presentation on the topic for the week and time for questions and discussions.

A Note on the Format: The principal sessions will be interactive lectures. The participants will be invited to talk and respond, but I will be moving us through the material and topics to try to cover an amount of material far too great to truly be done justice in such a short time.

Four sessions for Parish School of Prayer:

- I. The Call to Holiness
  - a. Why would you want to do this?
  - b. The Lord's Prayer as the guide to prayer
- II. The Mass – Approaching the Celebration and Sacrifice in a Spirit of Prayer
  - a. Source and Summit of our Faith
  - b. End by introducing and praying Liturgy of the Hours
- III. Prayer in and with Scripture
  - a. CCC Prayer in Scripture
  - b. Lectio Divina
    - i. Guigo's four movements
- IV. The Tradition of Prayer in the Church
  - a. Spiritual Masters
  - b. Exposition

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*," [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html) (accessed September 22, 2012).

## Session 1 – The Call to Holiness

The purpose of this session is to identify to the people the whole purpose of this enterprise. Is it not enough that we go to Mass on Sunday? A few of us come and pray the rosary before Mass. Several of us volunteer in the office. Most of us work very hard to support ourselves and keep the parish financially solvent. So what more do you want from us? What more does God want from us?

Father Nathan Cromley, a priest of the Community of Saint John, once proposed God's reply to these questions: "I can do all this without you. The one thing that I don't have that I *want* is you."<sup>2</sup> It is imperative that, between and within all the business and busy-ness of the parish and the world, we remember that God's greatest call to us is to a life of holiness. In this first session we will talk about that call with the goal in mind of awakening that desire that lies in each of us to overcome our restlessness and rest in God as Saint Augustine said.

The presentation for the opening session will be a reflection on what holiness means in the modern world and to the people of the parish. It is important to remember that, although each of us is called to contemplation in prayer, we are not all called to the contemplative life, and, all too often, it happens that laypeople are scared away from the idea of a life of holiness by a perception that it is available only to the monastic. John Paul II summed up the challenge like this:

It would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of

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<sup>2</sup> Cromley, Father Nathan, CSJ, "Eagle Eye Young Adult Silent Retreat 2009" (lecture, Priory of St. John, Princeville, IL).

the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions.<sup>3</sup>

We will also discuss The Lord's Prayer as a guide for all prayer. The source for this presentation and discussion will be the reflections on the Lord's Prayer from the Catechism Numbers 2777-2865.

The first session will end with the Our Father at a speed to allow some meditation on each line as we go through the prayer. This will require several minutes to pray through that prayer.

**Session 1 Timing:**

10 min: Introduction to Format

20 min: Readings and reflection

15 min: The School of Prayer

20 min: The Lord's Prayer

10 min: Slow Lord's Prayer Closing

**Session 2 – The Mass: The Source and Summit of our Faith**

The Second Vatican Council said in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 10, "Nevertheless the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows."<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, when he called us to make our parishes into "Schools of Prayer" reiterated this. It is,

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, "Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*," [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html) (accessed September 22, 2012). Paragraph 34.

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Church. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1965.

therefore, clear that any attempt to teach prayer and grow in our faith and relationship with God that is rooted in the Mass and directed to the Mass is, at best, misguided, and, at worst, doomed to drive people further from the center point of the Catholic faith. With that in mind, this second session will discuss the Mass as the perfect prayer and sacrifice offered to the Father. This session will serve as both a refresher course on the actions and movements of the Mass and as a deeper dive into the meaning of many of these actions. We will run through the Mass step by step to talk about what's happening and bring the people of the parish to a deeper understanding of the gift and opportunity that is present to them in the Mass.

This session will conclude with a brief introduction to another of the liturgical prayers of the Church in the Liturgy of the Hours. The concluding prayer will be the appropriate hour for the time of day at which the class is offered. It would be best to schedule the class either in the morning or the evening so one of the hinge hours may be used.

**Session 2 Timing:**

10 min: Readings and reflection

40 min: The Mass Teaching

10 min: Introduction to Liturgy of the Hours

15 min: Divine Office

**Session 3 – Prayer in and with Scripture**

The third session's goals are twofold: to introduce the faithful to the tradition of prayer found in both the Old and New Testaments and to give them the tools to spend some time regularly praying with the scriptures through *lectio divina*. There

will be a minor change to the regular plan of the session in that this session will end with *lectio divina* on the Gospel for the next Sunday Liturgy. The opening will be the first and second reading and the Psalm from the upcoming Sunday.

The first half of the session will center on the prayer examples given through scripture that the Catechism covers in paragraphs 2568 through 2625. These will include the examples and meaning of prayer found in creation, Moses, David, Elijah, and the Psalms in the Old Testament. We will then discuss the example of prayer that Jesus himself gave us, not only in the Lord's prayer as we discussed in our first session, but in his actual life and action. This will follow Catechism paragraphs 2598 through 2616. Finally, before we leave the examples of prayer in scripture, we will spend a few minutes to look at Mary as an intercessor for us and as a perfect of human prayer.

Next, we will turn our attention to *lectio divina*. We will provide two approaches to *lectio divina*. First, we will discuss the four movements of the prayer given by Saint Guigo II: *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*. We will also provide an outline of an alternate group approach to *lectio divina* that will be used as our closing for this session.

**Session 3 Timing:**

10 min: Readings and reflection

15 min: Old Testament Prayer

15 min: New Testament Prayer and the Prayer of Jesus

15 min: Introduction to Lectio Divina

15 min: Group Lectio Divina

**Session 4 – The Tradition of Prayer in the Church**

This session will focus on bringing together what has already been offered as well as introducing the community to a few more prayer traditions in the Church.

First, we will review the kinds of prayer and the wide world of prayer since, hopefully, a thirst for ever deeper prayer and holiness has been introduced. The Catechism talks about the types of prayer in paragraphs 2626 through 2643. We will discuss and share some ideas and insights for each of the types of prayer listed in the Catechism: adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

In this final session, we will also introduce the students in this school of prayer to some further reading as they grow after our meager effort to distill two thousand years of the Church's traditions of prayer into five hours. Since it would be impossible to provide all that a person would need to live a life of prayer in this short time, we will, instead, look to whet their appetites and introduce them to the spiritual masters of the Catholic tradition. There are too many to list, here, but a few to introduce might be Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Saint Augustine, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Thomas A Kempis, Saint Francis de Sales, and Saint Ignatius of Loyola.

The final session will end with Eucharistic Exposition with benediction. During the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, we can begin our deeper encounter with prayer as a community.

**Session 4 Timing:**

10 min: Readings and reflection

20 min: Types of prayer

20 min: The Christian Masters

30 min: Eucharistic Exposition

5 min: Benediction

## **Afterword**

It seems obvious that, in order to foster a growth in prayer and holiness, the parish will need to invest in some texts to provide some spiritual reading to the people. Many Christians, even after we list people in our sessions, will not know where to look for spiritual reading or to deepen their prayer lives. It is up to us, as their shepherds, to make sure these materials are available and make sure that we are familiar enough with them to advise the people on which would have the most value to fit and feed their own spirituality.



## Bibliography

Catholic Church. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1965.

Cromley, Father Nathan, CSJ. "Eagle Eye Young Adult Silent Retreat 2009." Lecture, Priory of St. John, Princeville, IL.

John Paul II. "Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*." [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html).  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_en.html) (accessed September 22, 2012).