

# Prayer Resources

(Set 1)

**These resources – “Prayer Tools” – are a selection of some of those available from the diocese to help us in our praying.**

- To use them you need nothing except a **space to sit, stand or possibly walk** and perhaps a **Bible**.
- Some of the ideas you may find helpful, others not – each of us will have personal preferences and needs. The thing to do is give some of them – or maybe all of them – a try.
- **This booklet acts as a “catalogue” of what is there – please leave it in the file** for others to refer to. Feel free to remove the individual laminated sheets to use them. Please replace them after use – thank you!
- If you want to take one or two sheets home to try, please do, but **write down the one(s) you have taken and your name, with a phone number, address or e-mail, on the sheet at the front of the file** so that we can trace them – thank you! Please don't keep them for more than 2 weeks. If you want to keep them longer, or want a permanent copy of your own, please let us know and we will make you one!

## Be still and know that I am God: Prayerful Meditation

This way of prayer is a quiet, being present to God in which we put aside our thoughts and simply bring our desire to be more open to God in our life.

**Be comfortable:** Sit comfortably with your feet on the ground and your hands at rest in your lap or by your side. Close your eyes.

**Listen:** Listen to the sounds of this space: the hum of distant traffic, the creak of floorboards, your own breathing. Rather than thinking too much, give all your attention to what you can hear, and when you feel drawn away from this by your worries and concerns quietly go back to this relaxed listening.

**Breathe:** Now give your attention to your breathing; be aware of your drawing breath in and then releasing it out; feel the physical change happening in your body as you do so. You'll become aware of the underlying rhythm of your breathing. Thoughts will come into your head, but rather than dwelling on them or fighting them off, return to the awareness of breathing in, breathing out. After time and with practice, you will find yourself stilling down and relaxing.

**Use a prayer word:** Hold a prayer word or short phrase before you as you breathe in and out; for example, 'Jesus' or 'My life, my help' or 'Come, Lord Jesus'. This prayer word expresses your desire for God. The silent repetition of this prayer word in time with your breathing helps you be open to God who is always present to you.

**Stay with your prayer:** For a beginning give ten minutes to this way of prayer. If you are at home it may help to use a timer so you don't become preoccupied with how much time is left. As time goes on you may want to extend the time to 20 minutes or half an hour.

**Don't worry about 'results':** The aim of this prayer is not to have great thoughts or even to feel God's closeness. You may feel nothing or even feel bored! What matters though, is that you are expressing your desire to be open and present to God. Don't try too hard – relax, for prayer itself is not just something we do, but something God begins to do in us: everything is gift.

## When there's too much going on in our minds to pray...

When we try to be still and give our attention to seeking God it's likely that we'll be conscious of more not less noise going on in our heads. Our worries, fears, preoccupations, plans, and memories seem to take advantage of what we hoped might be quiet space. We can feel our attempt to listen to God defeated before we even started. One response, of course, is to turn our concerns into prayer: so we can put our worries about the meeting happening tomorrow, or our anxiety for our children into God's hands. This is a good thing to do, but if we are not careful our prayer might turn into an endless list of requests without much opportunity to listen to, or simply rest in, God.

The anonymous writer of '*the Cloud of Unknowing*', a medieval work on contemplative prayer, suggested some more practical strategies we might find useful:

**1]** The first is the use of a prayer word or 'mantra': the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* advises firstly that we remind ourselves that it is God we are seeking: 'him I seek, and nothing but him'. To sum up this desire and keep it before us in prayer he suggests:

'take a short word, preferably of one syllable...the shorter the word the better...a word like 'God' or 'Love'. Fix this word fast to your heart, so that it is always there, come what may'.

We might say this word slowly and rhythmically as we pray, as a way of stilling down and becoming more receptive to God.

**2]** Secondly *the Cloud of Unknowing* suggests that when anxious thoughts push in to our consciousness we...

'Try to look, as it were, over their shoulders, seeking something else – which is God'.

Our thoughts are with us, and they can seem so consuming that we lose our awareness of God. But God is there beneath and beyond all that fills our mind, and we can turn our attention, quietly, trustfully, towards that hidden but caring presence.

**3]** The third piece of advice seems counter-intuitive:

When you feel that you are completely powerless to put these thoughts away, cower down before them like some cringing captive overcome in battle, and reckon that it is ridiculous to fight against them any longer. In this way you surrender yourself to God while you are in the hands of your enemies.

Rather than fight our distractions, we own it is useless to fight and instead let go into God's hands. The focus shifts from us – from the strength of our willpower and our powers [or lack of them] of concentration - to God who in the Spirit prays within us. Too much effort can get in the way. Everything is gift. We place ourselves in the place of prayer, we turn our desire towards God, we make use of whatever helps still our minds – but the rest belongs to God. Even if our prayer seems fractured and unfocused, God is at work.

## A time for all seasons

There is a constant sense of movement in the garden: seeds sprout, then grow tall, flower, set seed and fade. As a gardener there are always tasks to be done in season – planting bulbs, pruning, feeding the soil, raking up leaves. There are times of rapid visible growth, and times of rest or dormancy. Gardening sensitises us to the passing of the seasons. In our life with God there will be seasons too – time to act, and time to rest, time to change direction or try new things, times to let go.



This prayer exercise helps explore what 'season' it is in your life at this time. It may help you discern how God is at work in your life and how can you co-operate with this. You may find it helps to physically turn in the directions suggested as you prayerfully reflect.

### **Autumn: face West [the setting sun]**

- Where in your life do you sense the need to let go?
- Where do you see a process of letting go already taking place in your life?
- Some things have always deserved to be let go, for they are lifeless and life-denying.
- Others have been valuable to you but now it is time to put them down and move on

### **Winter: face North [the sun at its lowest point]**

- Where in your life do you sense the need to 'let be' –for now is a time for waiting and resting?
- What in you is dormant, maybe feels stuck, but perhaps there are the first stirrings of life here?

### **Spring: face East [the rising sun]**

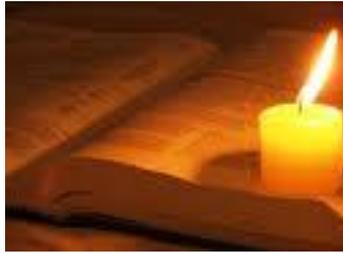
- What in you is springing to life or bubbling up from deep down inside?
- Where in your life do you sense energy - perhaps fleeting, faint and easy to miss?
- What new sense of direction do you begin to see taking shape within you?

### **Summer: face South [the sun at its highest point]**

- What in you feels alive, free, and fully formed within you?
- What within you do you long to share with others?
- Where do you see you are able to make a difference to others?

# Prayerful Reading

*Adapted from guidance given by Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. on the monastic tradition of 'lectio divina' or 'holy reading'*



This is an ancient method of prayerfully reading the bible. It rests on the understanding that the bible is 'God-breathed': that is, that though a human book, or better library of books, written by different people at different times, it is also a living word that can speak to our times and our personal circumstances.

Choose a bible passage that you wish to pray, for example one of the psalms. Make yourself comfortable and still yourself down. Some people find that focusing their attention on their breathing for a minute or two, or repeating a prayer word or prayer phrase helps bring about this inner stillness.

**Attentive Reading:** Then begin reading your passage slowly and gently. Savour each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the "still, small voice" of a word or phrase that somehow says, "I am for you today." It doesn't matter if you don't get to the end of the passage. Do not expect a dramatic revelation. Most of the time God does not reach out and grab us; rather, He softly, gently invites us ever more deeply into His presence.

**Reflecting:** If a word or phrase you read in some way connects with you, hold on to it. Slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories and ideas. Sometimes this process is likened to 'rumination' – or 'chewing things over'. What does this word or phrase mean for you? How does it connect with the place you are in today? How might God be speaking to you through this word?

**Expressing:** Give to God what you have found within your heart during your reflection. This might take the form of words you speak to God in prayer, whether of thanksgiving, or questioning. Share what you feel, naturally and honestly, and make space to listen to how God responds to you.

**Resting:** Finally rest in God's embrace and in whatever understanding or feeling you have received. This time is more about being present and open to God than being active with your mind.

Though this way of prayer is described in stages following on one from another you may find you flow backwards and forwards from one way of prayer to another, now thinking, now resting, and now speaking. It is the Spirit who leads us. This is not a way of prayer we have to 'get right'! This way of attentive reading can also be used with non-biblical material, whether poetry or prose, that helps us become connected with God.

## **Clenched fist, open hand**

A clenched fist can be useful:

It grasps hold tightly of things we are afraid to lose; it hides what we fear others will see; it becomes a weapon of our hatred or our need to defend ourselves against aggression.

But a clenched fist is also a hand disabled: A hand that cannot give or receive, or take another hand in friendship; it is unable to pick things up; such a hand will never sow seed in the ground, reassure a frightened child or prepare a meal for friends.



In the Kingdom of the clenched fist fear is the key: fear of the one who wants to challenge my world by being different; fear of those who might succeed at my expense; fear of the nothingness if I don't hold on to the scraps that I say are my meaning.

What will I choose...clenched fist or open hand? When I am unsure whether I am OK as I am, I want to curl my fingers back into a familiar tight hold; I am ready to strike the one who threatens me. I hold fast to what is mine. I hide who I am in case you reject who I am...but all the while my identity is hidden from me.

If my hand is open, won't you take everything away?

God reaches out not with a clenched fist, but an open hand...  
not to compel, but to invite, not to destroy but to wake what was dead into life.  
To God belongs the might of vulnerability, the otherness of intimacy.

**What will you choose...clenched fist or open hand?**

Clench your fists so that your fingers dig deeply into the palm of the hand; feel the tension and constriction. Look at your fingers tightly bound, the blood flow constricted in your knuckles. Here is your anxiety about the future, your ill-ease and discomfort, your holding fast of what does not satisfy, your fear of being who you are.

God comes to you with open hands: tender and compassionate hands, generous, welcoming hands, waiting, inviting hands.



Now slowly release the tension in you fingers; watch as they slowly unfurl, like fern fronds in response to the warmth of spring sunshine.

Let your fingers stretch and play, your palms open and relaxed before you. You are ready now to let go, ready now to receive, ready now to express who you are, ready to reach out your hand to another: not in violence but in love, not to ward away, but to invite.

Repeat the action:  
now clenching your fists  
now letting your hands relax and open

*God of the open hands  
I give you my clenched fists.  
Let me take the risk  
of allowing you to love me as I am.  
Let me dare to give myself  
so that I may receive myself  
as gift from you.*

## God in my Day

*This is an awareness exercise to be used on a daily basis as a way of becoming more aware of where we meet God within outward events and our inner thoughts and feelings. It will probably take 5 to 10 minutes. It can also be a way of prayerful way of letting our day go into God's hands so that we don't carry our anxieties and frustrations unobserved and unhealed into our sleep and into a new day.*



### 1. Events of today

Like watching a video, I replay the day, letting God prompt my memory, and remind me of significant things that happened in my day, or insights that I gained

### 2. Thanksgiving

I thank God for the gifts of the day that have gone – the kindnesses shown me, the things that lifted my spirits – no matter how small.

### 3. Feelings experienced

I become aware of what I felt today and ask God to show me why I felt as I did.

### 4. Your call to me

I ask God to show me in what ways he asked something of me today..

- in my dealings with people
- in the way I treated myself
- in anything I previously sensed I was called to do

I review how I responded

### 5. Forgiveness and healing

I bring to God anything that I need forgiveness for, trusting in God's readiness to forgive.  
I bring to God anything from my day I need healing for, trusting in God's love that casts out fear, and binds up wounds.

### 6. Trust in God for the day to come

I let go to God any anxieties I have about the day to come  
I ask God for the gift of what I most need for the day ahead.

## Imaginative Contemplation:

This is a way of prayer that uses the imagination to enter into a Gospel passage and allow it to interact with the place where we are.

It may take a little time to settle into this way of prayer. Take your time and relax – the fruit of this prayer is in God’s gift rather than dependent on the strength of your powers of imagination!



Choose a Gospel passage that describes an event in Jesus’ life.

- Make yourself at home in the presence of God. You may find it helps to spend a few minutes stilling yourself down, giving your attention to what you can hear around you, or becoming aware of the rhythm of your breathing.
- Bring to God what it is you are seeking today, for example a deeper awareness of his presence, guidance in a decision you are making, or greater freedom within you to be able to let go to God. Ask God to help you to pray with openness and generosity of spirit.
- Read the bible passage through a couple of times slowly and reflectively.
- Put the bible down, and in your imagination set the scene described in the passage. The setting might be similar to that described in the bible, or you may find the setting changes to

one that connects in some way with your past / present experience.

- Use all your senses – what can you see, hear, feel, taste, or smell?
- Now put yourself into the story. Who are you? A central character or someone observing from the sidelines?
- Let the scene unfold in its own way, even if it develops in a way that is different from that described. The story may stick closely to what you read in the gospel or seem to take on a life of its own; rather than fight this, trust that it’s OK, and that this is the story that it is important for you to attend to today.
- You may find yourself wanting to talk to Jesus as the story unfolds or to ask him a question; or that Jesus speaks to you. It may be that you engage with another person in the story.
- Be aware of your own feelings and responses as you pray through the passage.
- When you have finished, look back over the prayer. Remember how you reacted and felt at different points. What seems to you significant? Did anything surprise you? Ponder what this might be saying to you, asking God to help you see and understand.
- Spend some time in prayer with God sharing your thoughts, feelings and needs.

*You may find it helpful to repeat the prayer at another time, returning to those points where you were conscious of being moved in some way.*

## Praying with parables

Jesus looked at ordinary life and saw within it the pattern of God's working: – a woman making bread, or a merchant searching in the marketplace for the finest of pearls. Life itself is where the word of God is sown, and we can make space to receive this word in attentiveness.

Daily life presents its parables:

- Why did that incident make such an impression on me?
- There I was rushing for my train, and there was that man sitting on the bench looking out at the flowers. Why did I notice him?
- Why can't I get that dream out of my head?

When asked why he teaches in parables Jesus gave a puzzling reply, quoting the prophet Isaiah:

....This is why I speak to them in parables:  
"Though seeing, they do not perceive;  
though hearing, they do not listen or understand. <sup>14</sup> In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:  
*"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. <sup>15</sup> For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them."*  
<sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear [Matthew 13]

Considering Jesus' words positively a pattern of conversion of life emerges

- We are to see *and* perceive
- We are to listen *and* hear
- We are to understand with the heart
- This leads us to turn to Christ
- And to be healed [made whole as human beings]

A word is being generously sown – have we the space to receive it, to allow it to grow and to bear its fruit? It is in some sense a hidden word. It takes time and desire to not only see but to begin to perceive, not only to listen but to begin to hear and understand...to be moved to turn to God present in all we experience...and this turning is the path to our wholeness.



### A method for prayerfully considering the parable of everyday life

- I ask God for what I desire – for example, that I be open to understand the significance of my experience and to respond to any invitation from God I receive through it.
- I remember that hearing, perceiving and understanding are all God's gift to me.
- I see and hear the parable of what I saw or experienced – recalling it in my memory, pondering its meaning for me, attending to those moments that moved me in some way. I pay attention not just to the content of what I saw or what happened but my own internal responses to it – what did I feel? what did I think?
- I seek to understand the meaning of this experience. What was significant about what I saw, or what happened to me? Why was it significant? I ask God to guide me as I consider this: how does this event speak to the place where I am today?
- When I am ready I turn to Christ, expressing the prayer that arises from my heart from my reflection
- I rest quietly in the presence of Christ, open to receive what I need at this moment for my wholeness.

## Waiting on God

*I wait for the Lord; my soul waits,  
And in his word I hope...  
My soul waits for the Lord  
More than those who watch for the  
morning... [From Psalm 130]*

### What are you waiting for?

- For the next step on your path through life to become clear?
- For an answer to a question?
- To become free within?
- To find purpose or peace in your life?
- For the fruit to come of what you have sown and nurtured?

**We wait actively**...working, and searching, for life is in our hands.

It is the one who seeks who finds, and the one who asks who receives, and the one who knocks who will find the door opened.

**And yet we also wait passively** – for the right time to come, for growth to take its course, and to receive by gift what cannot be ours by effort alone.



### Waiting is at the heart of prayer

Wait now in the presence of the Lord...

Name before God what it is you are seeking...

Hold before God the desires of your heart - even those too deep to name.

Let go to God,  
not in resignation but in hope.  
Everything is gift,  
and God is generous in meeting our deepest needs.

Ask God what it is you can do to help bring an answer to your prayer  
But be content to wait...

Use the words from Psalm 130 above to express your waiting in hope. You may find it helpful to repeat them quietly as you wait before God, and to come back to them as your day continues

### Sometimes an external action helps to express our waiting on God:

- Sow seeds in a pot ready for the season to come, or clear a patch of ground in your garden ready for new planting.
- Clear out a cluttered space in your home – a drawer, a corner of a room. Leave it a little while before you decide how you will use it in future.

Take time out to go on 'pilgrimage – to take time to walk or travel to somewhere you don't normally go. Your outward pilgrimage is an expression of your inward searching

