

PRAYER LIFE WITH ST. FRANCIS

Have on hand: O.F.S. Rule and Catechism

Today we will spend time reviewing some of our understanding of prayer in the life of St. Francis, and hopefully in our own lives. (Also covering from the *Rule* – Article #8.)



Our Opening Prayer:

The Prayer before the Crucifix

**“Most High,
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me
true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge,
Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.”¹**

Bernard of Quintavalle testified that Francis could spend much of a night praying:
“My God and my all.”²

Here is another prayer authored by St. Francis:

The Praises of God

“You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.

You are strong. You are great. You are the most high. You are the almighty king.

You holy Father, King of heaven and earth.

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods; You are the good, all good, the highest good,
Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility, You are patience, You are beauty,
You are meekness, You are security, You are rest, You are gladness and joy, You are our hope,
You are justice, You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness, You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment, You are our hope, You are our faith, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:

Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.”³

His opening prayer for praying the Office are these words:

The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours

“Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, Who is, and Who was, and Who is to come: And let us praise and glorify Him forever. O Lord our God, You are worthy to receive praise, glory and honor and blessing. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. The Lamb Who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit: And let us praise and glorify Him forever. Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord. And let us praise and glorify

Him forever. Sing praise to our God, all you His servants and you who fear God, the small and the great. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. Let heaven and earth praise Him Who is glorious. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. Every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth; and in the sea and those which are in it. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. And let us praise and glorify Him forever. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. And let us praise and glorify Him forever.”⁴

Q1. What attitudes do these prayers create in me?

Q2. How do I identify with these prayers? What is my approach to prayer?

Q3. In what ways is my prayer-life similar to that of Christ and of St. Francis?

Q4. What is the difference between “reciting prayers” and “praying prayers”?



Giotto di Bondone: Ecstasy of St. Francis, ca. 1297-1300

Remember Christ’s advice on prayer (*Matthew 6:5-9*): “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 ...”

As stated in our *Rule*, Article #8a: “**As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.**” Notice that the *Rule* says Prayer “AND” Contemplation, not either/or. We know we need to capture this spirit of prayer as we imitate St. Francis. (... and imitating Mary’s life of prayer, *Rule*, Article #9)

Besides §2699 in the *Catechism*, we find in §2708 these challenging words: [after speaking of meditation] “Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *lectio divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him” [which is contemplation].

Q5. How have I taken this O.F.S. challenge seriously? What forms of prayer do I actually use?

Q6. Like St. Francis, when do I use structured prayers, meditation, and contemplation?

Q7. What are the forms of recommended structured prayers for “our O.F.S. office” (see the *Ritual*)? Which liturgical prayers do I pray?

Q8. Have I read the explanations about contemplative prayer in the *Catechism*, §2709 – §2719? How could this help my understanding?

Q9. How many pages in the *Catechism* are devoted to instructing us about prayer? Have I read and reflected upon them? What can I learn from them? Why do we think the Church has devoted this space to publish this section on prayer?

Q10. How do my prayers express or capture the same exuberance we find in St. Francis’ prayers?

Other prayers of St. Francis can be found in the *Ritual*.

¹ FA:ED, *The Prayer before the Crucifix*, 1205/06, Vol. I, p. 40

² *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, R. Brown, 1958, p. 43

³ FA:ED, *The Praises of God*, 1224, Vol. I, p. 109

⁴ FA:ED, *The Undated Writings, The Praises To Be Said at All the Hours*, Vol. I, p. 161