

Pray Without Ceasing



Christopher News Notes

MAKING TIME FOR PRAYER IN OUR BUSY LIVES IS NO EASY FEAT, so following St. Paul's suggestion to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) doesn't sound like an achievable goal. But maybe if we approach prayer a little differently, we'll find that we can grow in our relationship with God more than we thought possible. Yes, there will always be distractions, but steps can be taken to feed our spirits so that we can better connect with—and reflect—the divine.

Building a Spiritual Foundation

Most of us learn to pray in traditional ways, such as by reciting the Lord's Prayer, the rosary, or grace before meals. And whenever we gather for Mass or some other kind of church service, we are praying in community. These are all excellent and necessary ways in which to build a spiritual foundation.

The first half of the "Our Father," for instance, teaches us to praise God ("hallowed be Your name") and acknowledge His goodness ("Thy will be done"). The prayer's second half involves asking God for help ("give us this day our daily bread") so we can live our lives in the best way possible.

Humility is a key part of all these prayers. It can be easy to become full of ourselves when life is going well—or to despair when life is going poorly. These traditional prayers remind us that certain things are out of our control, but that God is on our side, loving us through good times and bad. When we become humble enough to accept this truth, we can then turn our thoughts outward and pray for the well-being of others.

Praying a 'Waiting Rosary'

At the beginning of 2023, when author Lisa Hendey should have been celebrating the publication of her latest children's book, *I Am Earth's Keeper*, she was met with troubling news.

After listening to her intuition that something wasn't right with her body, Lisa received a diagnosis of stage 3 breast cancer. The months that followed brought physically draining treatment and recovery, but they also included spiritual support from the people who loved her, as well as an enriching prayer routine.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Lisa recalled that the Paulist priests at her Los Angeles parish provided her with Anointing of the Sick, Confession, and prayers. She added, "One of the most beautiful spiritual moments following surgery was to have my husband [Greg]...[bring] the Eucharist home to me. He was commissioned as

Famous Chef's Conversations with God

The section of Italy in which acclaimed chef and Christopher Award-winning PBS host Lidia Bastianich was born was given to communist Yugoslavia after World War II. As such, she grew up in a country where the practice of the Catholic faith was outlawed. Nevertheless, her family provided her with a spiritual foundation. Lidia's grandmother taught her to appreciate God's gift of nature, and also taught her prayers to say before bed at night. And when the family escaped into Italy when Lidia was 10, her father carried a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his pocket as a simple prayer for safety.

While living in a refugee camp, Lidia began attending a school run by the Canossian Sisters, who taught her all about the gospels. Once her family arrived in the United States, both Catholic Charities and the Italian Catholic community in her Queens, New York neighborhood became role models to her for helping those in need.

Lidia's career as a chef and restaurateur thrived in the ensuing years, always guided by the idea of loving God and neighbor. Prayer, in various forms, also lies at the heart of her life. "I [say] my prayers," she explained on The Christophers' radio show, "whether it's at night or the rosary, but I talk to God. So, whenever I'm in a situation [that's] beautiful...I thank God for giving me this opportunity...I just talk to Him and thank Him like I would talk to you. And when in difficulties, I talk to Him: please get me through...and get me where You want me to be...So, I do a lot of talking to God."

an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. I cried big, fat, happy tears to have my husband bring me the body of Christ."

During the times when she was feeling terribly sick, Lisa could barely muster the strength to pray. But she said she felt the intercessory prayers of others giving her strength. And when she was able to pray herself, the rosary was the prayer she turned to the most.

Lisa said, "If you're undergoing the kind of radiation treatment that I had, which was five and a half weeks, every day you're in the same place surrounded by people who are very ill...I decided I'm not taking my phone in there...I'm going to use that time to be praying for my fellow patients. And so, I started praying what I would call a 'waiting rosary.' I would count 10 heads in the waiting room and intentionally try to look at the people that were in the room with me and pray in that moment for their intentions. Then, that waiting time went by so quickly."

This was a practice Lisa had begun a few years ear-

lier when she was waiting in long lines at the airport or in stores. "I felt like it transformed that time into a gift," she noted. Lisa now encourages others to pray a "waiting rosary" themselves, rather than simply scrolling through their phones to kill time.

Praying While Doing

We should always try to make time to say our traditional prayers. As we grow spiritually, however, finding ways to integrate prayer into our daily routines may also become a priority.

Leanna Capiello's prayer habit consisted mostly of quiet contemplation. She would often sit quietly at home or in the Adoration chapel, and try listening to what God was telling her. Once she began a job with the parish team at St. Basil's Church in Toronto, Canada, Capiello found herself busier than ever, so she would talk with God throughout the day about anything and everything.

"I quickly realized that if I didn't pray while doing, I wouldn't pray at all," she wrote at *Busted Halo*. "Suddenly, it was less about putting aside time for

God and more about inviting God into my daily tasks. This forced me to be even more open with Him, as I was aware of God's presence everywhere, not exclusively in the chapel."

Cappiello continued, "As time goes on, I'm more courageous in my tone. It's now a habit to offer things to God throughout my day—responsibilities, conversations, difficulties. If I'm having a good day, I thank God; and if it's a rotten day, He lets me vent. After a few minutes of smiling or pouting, I let Him have it ('It's yours now'), and I trust in God to journey with me. These prayers bring us closer, and they're making me more real with God."

Abiding in God

For some people, adopting the kind of prayer life that sees God in everything comes naturally. For others, it takes effort. Consider Michelle Eyre.

As a young adult, she wanted her prayer life to move beyond the simple petitions she was always bringing to God. Plus, she had trouble focusing because she was easily distracted.

Writing at the blog *Discovering Prayer*, Eyre observed, "I had an intuitive sense that, if God was asking us to commune with Him, there ought to be more to it than awkward silences, lists, and obligations. Shouldn't prayer be a natural and fulfilling part of our relationship with God?"

A resident of London, England, Eyre sought wisdom

from some nuns in the area and even went on to join an Anglican convent for a period of time. There, she learned prayer practices that still guide her, though she is no longer a nun.

Eyre wrote, "When I lived in the community of nuns at Wantage, they encouraged me to live the whole of my life prayerfully, aiming to follow the words of St Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5. The sisters used an old word, 'recollection,' to describe abiding in God's presence throughout the day. It means doing any activity in a way that is intentional and focused. It could mean anything—chopping a salad, completing a piece of writing, talking to a guest with a simple focus on that activity. The aim is to be fully present to God by being fully present in each moment."

"Recollection, as lived by the sisters," Eyre continued, "was not about being super-spiritual, or attaining heights of ecstasy, but in fact the complete opposite—acknowledging that God is with you in what you are doing, whether or not you 'feel' God's presence...So, although it might be difficult to live truly in the moment, it can be done with practice. I think it then provides us with a deeper experience of God in our lives."

Maybe you are a parent taking care of small children or ones with special needs. Perhaps you serve as a caregiver for an elderly parent. You might work as a teacher, a cashier, a taxi driver, a business person, or whatever else.

Wherever you are in life, you can offer your actions as a prayer to God, staying mindful of His presence and allowing Him to guide you in service to others. In this way, you too can learn to "pray without ceasing."


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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President: Mary Ellen Robinson
Editor-in-Chief: Tony Rossi

The Christophers

264 West 40th Street, Suite 603, New York, NY 10018
212-759-4050, ext. 241

mail@christophers.org • www.christophers.org

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"I [pray] like children who do not know how to read, I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me."

—St. Thérèse of Lisieux