

## Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving

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### Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord Jesus, as we spend this time reflecting on you, may you break into our lives and our hearts anew. We ask you to send your Holy Spirit down upon us, Lord, and to make us saints, help us to pray. Help us to fast. Help us to give alms. Mother Mary, pray for us during this time. Amen. Name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Saint Thérèse of Lisieux's Definition of Prayer

Hey everybody, thanks for joining me, and I appreciate you being a part of this, Pray More Novena retreat. I will say I've been with Pray More Novena now, giving a few talks for the, I'd say a few years. And, um, it's been amazing to see what, what they've done. This talk is aimed at Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. All right. And so I think before we even go into it, we got to define our terms. Alright? So first of all, what is prayer? I'm going to look no further than the saint Thérèse of Lisieux, because I can't define it better than her. All right?

And she says this, I have it pulled up here. She says, *"for me, prayer is a surge of the heart. It is a simple look, turn toward heaven. It is a cry of recognition and of love in embracing both trial and joy."* It's in the catechism. You can look it up. It's one of my favorite quotes of all time on prayer. And I think it gets right to the heart of what the Catholic Church means when she talks about prayer, intimacy with God. We'll come back to it in a second.

### Definition of Fasting and Almsgiving

I want define fasting. I'm going to do that in a little bit more in looser terms. I'm not going to quote a saint here, but I'm going to just kind of help us understand at a very bare minimum what fasting is, essentially, it's looking beyond. It's looking beyond the temporal and it's meditating, reflecting and taking into our heart the eternal. That's what fasting is. There can be big fasts, there can be small fasts. We'll talk more about that in a second as well. And finally, giving alms, what does it mean? It's just a gift of self when I give of myself.

Now you've heard time, talent, and treasure, of course, and those are very important, but ultimately it's a gift from the heart. And whatever that means, again, big or small, it's a gift from the heart.

### Prayer is Not an Option

I'm going to spend a little more time on prayer because I think this is the one that's the kicker today. And so many people, so many Catholics are in need of strengthening our prayer life, myself included. You know, prayer for me is not an option. Early on in my years as a Catholic, I remember reading the catechism of the Catholic Church. I remember reading a lot of books, a lot

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of good Philosophy, a lot of good Theology. But what was missing from all of that was prayer. See, I was a Catholic nerd. I loved to learn about God. I love to talk about God. But I realized a little bit later on when I went to seminary, I realized that it's not just about learning about God. That's good. It's very good. It's what we're doing here. We're talking about God. We're learning about God. But what prayer really is what makes it most important is knowing God. That's what, that's what it's all about.

Knowing about God can funnel us into a better relationship with God. There's no question about it. Really study the faith. But knowing God is what's most important, and that's what prayer is. It's coming to know God, heart to heart on a, on a level, a level in which He desires for us to climb. You know, I've oftentimes said, faith without prayer is a hobby. And I mean that faith without prayer is a hobby. Again, my early years, my faith was a hobby for me. And I realized later on it can't be so and it can't be. So for you, faith without prayer is a hobby. Intimacy with God is what He wants of us.

### How To Increase Your Prayer Life

So couple components of it. Number one, we got to make time. If we're going to increase our prayer life, we got to make time for God. That's how prayer is spelled. T I M E. If you look through your schedule, I'm going to see a lot of, I'm going to look through your schedule. I'm going to see a lot of really important things, just probably because they made your schedule right? , maybe soccer games, practices, , dates. I'm going to see, um, I'm going to see maybe meetings with your boss. We're going to see a lot of different things that are going to be important. We schedule what's important to us. Where on that schedule would your prayer be?

### Schedule Your Prayer Time

You know, one trick that I've really come to, to love is to schedule my prayer. And I try to do it on Sunday for the whole week. Sometimes it gets a little hectic and busy and I'm not able to do that. But I try my best to schedule my prayer as often as I can to reserve that time. I think when we don't do that and we don't really get intentional about reserving time for God, I think what happens is it becomes far too easy to give God the leftovers. And you know what the leftovers are, right? You're laying in bed, you're half asleep, and you think to yourself, I got to pray. Happens to me a lot. And I think to myself, I'm not giving God my best. Right? God wants our best.

And so what I really try to do in my own spiritual life is to give God the time of day that I'm most alive. Try it. Give God the time of day. minutes. If you're, a beginner, if you haven't, , or you don't have much of a prayer life right now, maybe or minutes, maybe if you're a little bit more advanced an hour, but give God the best time of your day. Schedule your prayer time when you are most alive, when you're most awake, you know, if all you did was talk to your spouse when you were half asleep, the relationship probably wouldn't go anywhere. And I think it's the same thing with God too.

Yeah, it's important to talk to God when we're half asleep. It's important to talk to God right away in the morning when we get up before our feet hit the floor. Yeah, of course. But to have

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that dedicated prayer time, it's the one thing that I really always saw of the saints, in reading the lives of the saints. It's the one thing that they consistently did. They gave God time of their day. Now, most of you that are, watching this, are not cloistered, monks and nun. So you're probably not going to give four or five hours a day. And I do not want you to neglect responsibilities for your prayer. Okay, "honey, I got to go pray. Can't do the dishes." It doesn't work. Alright? But we, especially laymen and women should be giving God a portion of our day and to do so at our best.

So what do you do next once you schedule it? What do I say? I have a lot of people that ask me that question. And you know what I always tell them? I don't know, but the Holy Spirit does because that's what prayer is. The Holy Spirit groaning within you, you know, showing up as you've heard before, as half the battle. I don't think that's the case with prayer. I think showing up is % of it, because prayer is God working within us. It's not just me rattling off a bunch of things. Jesus warns us against that. It's allowing the spirit to take over within our hearts.

### The Different Kinds of Prayer

It, it's amazing how it, it just happens. You may be thinking, oh, okay, maybe for Mother Theresa, oh, okay, maybe for St. Theresa John Paul II, but it can happen for you. It's happened for me. Allowing the Holy Spirit just to take over our hearts in the prayer showing up is % of it. There's also some great tools and resources to be able to help us in prayer. And of course, some great prayers that the Church gives us. One of my favorites, of course, is the Rosary. The Rosary really kind of encapsulates both foundations of prayer. You know, of course we've got meditation and contemplation.

Meditation not in the way the secular world describes it. The secular world kind of sees meditation as maybe a lurking inward of ourselves, maybe where meditation is just all about me. Meditation has to be about God. You heard what St Thérèse of Lisieux said. It's a raising of the mind and the heart. It's a plunging forward of God to God, kind of reaching to God. Contemplation then is God reaching back down to us. And the rosary kind of encapsulates both of those, right? We reach to God with our minds, our words, we meditate on those sacred mysteries, and then the fruits of those mysteries start to be born within us and start to come alive within us. I tell people all the time, if you're stuck in prayer, pick up a rosary and you don't have to pray the whole thing. And when you do, pray the rosary, pray it slowly, really meditate on it. Yeah,

I've been to some of those prayer, groups where, you know, Rosary groups, "Hail Mary full of grace the ...." whoa, I can't keep up, right? No. Maybe just pray a decade of the Rosary. I'll tell you what, if you don't pray the Rosary often pray a decade of the Rosary every day Monday through Friday. You've just prayed Rosaries in the year. And maybe that might be more Rosaries than what you've prayed before. There's countless novenas out there to be able to help and aid you in your prayer. We've got a miracle story through one of those novena, by the way, maybe that's for a later date.

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There's the Divine Mercy Chaplet, so many good resources and prayers to be able to help us grow in our faith. It's an amazing time to be alive, to be a Catholic today. I mean, just really at the click of our fingers, we can pull up prayers. I carry my phone with me, right? We'll say the Divine Office often, it's amazing the gift God has given us in this time. There's no excuses.

### Silence is the Language of God

Dr. Peter Kreeft, one of my heroes, says that "Food to the body is prayer to the soul." You know, you eat, we make time to eat. I like to eat, because I want to stay alive, right? That's the same thing with our souls in prayer. If we don't pray, our souls die. And we're sitting ducks for the devil. We have to make time for prayer. Remember how prayer is spelled? T I M E. And let me also say this.

St. John of the Cross said that "Silence is the language of God." Silence is God's first language. So when you go to pray, don't think again. You have to fill it with all these little words. I'll give you an example. I remember a, a number of years ago, my wife and I went out on a date and I was just on the road speaking, and I had come back and we went out to a nice dinner and we really didn't say much to each other. She really didn't say a lot. And I didn't really say a lot. I was kind of waiting for her. And I thought to myself, what'd I do? Right? And when we walked outside of the restaurant, I'll never forget, she grabbed my hand to hold my hand. And I thought, well, okay. It wasn't that bad, right? And then she looked at me and she said, how much of a good time that she had over the course of that night. And I said to her, I said, "Theresa, I said, we really didn't even talk that much." And she fired back really quick. "I know. Wasn't it great?" I was like, huh, thanks honey. Right? But that, that was a, a teaching moment for me because that's intimacy. That's intimacy.

When you go to God, you've heard the stories of St. John Vianney, and the man in his church when he would just go to pray to look at God and allow God to look back at him. Don't ever be intimidated by prayer.

### The Different Kinds of Fasting

Okay, fasting. I'm going to talk about this and I have a lot of credibility in this because I am horrible at it. All right? So you're going to definitely want to listen to me, okay? This is probably the thing in my faith that I struggle with the most, which is one of the reasons I wanted to talk about it. Because more than anyone else, I'm talking to me. All right? Now I do it, but I'm not the best at it. So I really do it in small fashions. All right? I'm talking like, I'll go to the salad bar and I'll skip onions. My wife appreciates that. I'll skip onions or I'll skip cheese or something like that. It's not that big of a deal, right? Wednesdays and Fridays, of course, during Lent, I'm going to up that fast and abstinence a little bit. I'm going to do what the Church requires. One big meal, really big meal, and then a couple small meals, right? But fasting is so important in the faith. It's one of the most important things. I mean, prayer and fasting, right?

I mean, Jesus says, this is how we drive away the demons. And one of the ways that I think about fasting is the way I defined it before. It's essentially fixating our eyes on the eternal. And though sometimes I begrudgingly do it, though, sometimes I'm a little grumpy. When I do it, I always

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come out of it better. I always come out of it, seen a little bit more clearly. And that's the, that's the beauty of fasting, is it just clarifies everything for us in the spiritual life. And it really kind of puts everything else in check where we can say what's really most important. You know, that food probably isn't the most important thing in my life because I'm going to be hungry again, right?

That phone that we have here, right? We've got these amazing phones, there's going to be a better one next year. See, the world we live in today promises us all these amazing things, kind of. "If only I could have that, or if only I could have that." But there's always more. There's always something more. St Teresa, Calcutta, excuse me, St. Teresa of Avila said to her sisters on a regular basis, three words. She got them from sacred scripture. "God is enough." Teresa Avila would repeat those words often to her sisters, "God is enough." And that's the thing that we have to be thinking about too. I got to be thinking about when it comes to fasting.

### A Gift of Self

And finally, almsgiving, giving alms a gift of self. You know, this is the, this is what Jesus commands of us to do, right? I mean, commands of us to take up our cross and follow him, to die to ourselves. I'm going to talk about that in another video. And in a way that's almsgiving. It's not looking inward at myself, it's looking outward for others. And to see God in others and to serve God in others. You know, probably the, the most notorious almsgiver, in the, in the modern world or the modern canon, if you will, of saints, is, no better than Mother Theresa.

St. Teresa of Calcutta is probably one of my top five saints. I think about her a lot. I ask her for her prayers a lot. She gave of herself on a regular basis. And it was messy. You know, it wasn't just kind of giving an extra dollar here. , it wasn't just maybe giving a little bit more time here. She'd made a gift of herself. And I think in a lot of ways, we as Catholics, we got to go all in.

You know, we look in the world today, and it's really easy to point out everything that's wrong in the world, right? Well, well, he's wrong with the world or she's wrong with the world, or the way these people think is what's wrong with the world. But you know, what's really wrong with the world? We got to look at ourselves. We got to look at ourselves and then say, as GK Chesterton once said, "I am", right. "I am." What could my family look like if I was to give of myself a little more of my time, a little more of my treasure, a little more love, what would my community look like? What would my parish look like?

See that kind of, of giving a gift of self-almsgiving, it's one of the most attractive things in the world, and it's one of the most contagious things there is in our faith. You know, you don't wake up in the morning. At least I don't. And say, I really hope I can surround myself with selfish people. Have you ever thought that? Probably not, because you don't want to be miserable. Neither do I. We wake up in the morning and we see people giving of themselves. We maybe see an inspiring story on TV. Maybe we look to some of the Saints and we see the lives of, of so many that have given themselves, and we say, "I want to do that." Now, selfishness, greed, and ego sometimes gets in the way, and we got to pray that away. But in a lot of ways, what God's calling us to is that radical gift of self.

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### The Takeaways

So here's the deal. I'm going to give you a few takeaways. I'm going to give you a, a few things to be able to try to enact, and we can start small. Number one, I want you to schedule a prayer time. I want you to do so today, a time for the next five days that you're going to give to minutes to God. And if you're already doing that, great up it to 10.

And then I want you to pick a devotion. I just want you to stick with it for a little bit. Allow the Holy Spirit to start to work in you. If you feel that the Spirit is moving you in a different direction, put it aside and allow the Spirit to work. He's in charge.

Number two, take up a fast every Friday, and I'm trying to do this myself every single Friday. Try to fast from something. You know, the Church doesn't require every Friday that we fast from meat. It could be a good practice though. Or maybe just something small. Just start small. Start there. Something that I can give every Friday in my life up for the Lord to be able to, again, clarify things and help me see the eternal a lot better.

And then finally, what's one way you can give of yourself this Lent in season? What's one way you can give of yourself after Lent? I want you to go out of your way. And here's the deal. Don't be afraid to get uncomfortable, because that's what love does. If you want the definition of love, look at the cross. Look at a crucifix, right? St. Maximilian Colby said, that's a school of love. And that was one of the most uncomfortable things in the world.

Prayer, Fasting Almsgiving, the pillars, the hallmarks of our Catholic faith. Let's pray and ask God for the grace to do it better.