



## Pastoral Letter for Lent 2019: On Prayer

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

I was asked recently to make a presentation to "Truth Poured Out," a group of young adults in the Diocese of Lake Charles. The topic was to be my choice. So I decided to share some thoughts on "What Really Matters." Why? Because every day the challenges of life and society, the growing disaffection, the violence, the fragmentation, the abuse, and the futile measures to address these issues remind me that we place too much confidence in human efforts. No new procedures, policies, government programs, laws, and "think tank" conferences—however well intended and necessary—will permanently "solve" anything. They may give us some false satisfaction that "now we're finally doing something about it," but they are truly bankrupt if we pursue these solutions without faith in God. Hence, I ask myself the question, "What really matters?" And the answer continually comes back, "God."

I am writing to you to address the topic of prayer. Prayer is simply our conversation with God, and we desperately need to have a vibrant prayer life. Let us first briefly mention what prayer is not. When we make a decision to pray, we often turn to a technique. This is not the best approach. As a matter of fact, it has never been the approach of our finest Catholic spiritual writers. The great Catholic masters of the spiritual life would have denied emphatically that their teachings or writings on prayer could be reduced to a technique. Prayer is not a program for human development, a self-help approach to make us better human beings, or simply a good way to start our day. Prayer is life, a relationship, and an intimacy with God that no one can interrupt or deprive us of, except we who stubbornly maintain a self-willed independence in the face of our Creator.

So, where do we begin? With God, of course. The Master Himself begins here when He teaches His disciples to pray: "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). They must be the first words in our mind, on our lips, and in our hearts. God is a Father. His name is holy, and we should keep it so. We want His kingdom to come and His will to be done "on earth as in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10).

I wish to delve into that petition of the Our Father—"thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." What I am about to say is based on a personal experience from many, many years ago. So often when we go to prayer, it is because we are having a difficulty that seems insurmountable. Some of us face these challenges more often than others, but they confront all of us regardless of our feeble human efforts. Here is where "thy will be done" made a profound impression upon me. When we say those words to God the Father, in effect we are saying, "Here is a problem I cannot solve. As a matter of fact, I can never solve any of my problems. Submitting to Your Will is a supreme act of freedom. In pro-

fessing faith in Your Will to be done on earth and in heaven, I am saying, "You know what is best and what happens must be and will be Your Will." I must simply submit, something that we resist in this modern with its obsession over egotistical independence, but this submission is to a God who loves us and is love itself. In being selfless this submission resists the ego. In this lies the essential difference. God is and should be everything for the Christian.

In this simple realization about God's Will being done, I find a great deal of freedom. In embracing this trust in God's loving Will, we are freed to act as we should, as we must. I am reminded of the insight of St. Thomas Aquinas, quoting another great Catholic saint, St. Gregory the Great: "We pray not that we may change the divine disposition, but that we may impetrate [obtain by asking] that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers, in other words, 'that by asking, man may deserve what Almighty God from eternity has disposed to give'" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa, II, IIae*, q. 83, a. 2, quoting the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great). That quote is so rich in meaning and significance that it requires we dwell on it a while. It deserves more than just one meditation.

As "Our Father in heaven," God has charted a course which is moving towards a final consummation in Him. Our imperative, what we must do, is join ourselves to that course which leads to that good. The Sacred Scriptures speak abundantly about this, but one passage from St. Paul, a favorite of mine, stands out: "We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). That conclusion of St. Paul is the same as that of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Gregory the Great. It should be ours also.

Why do we act contrary to this Divine Will? We all know the answer to this question. St. James explains it this way: "Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (James 4:1-3). The human will that is consumed with its passions, that covets what it cannot possess, seeks happiness in the wrong places and fulfillment in empty pursuits, can find satisfaction in nothing and finally ends by rejecting the Divine Will.

The "Our Father" introduces a world and an approach that is transforming because it frees us. Prayer is the entry point to this world. For this reason, Christians down through the centuries have acknowledged the Lord's Prayer as the most perfect prayer. The "Our Father" is our blueprint for prayer, as our Lord Jesus Christ intended.

What really matters? The answer is simple—God.

Prayer is important because it is our conversation with our Father, our Creator, the Origin of everything that is. He is even the Origin of our interior life. Pope Francis made a Christmas gift to his cardinals of a long-neglected classic, *The Spiritual Life* by Adolphe Tanquerey. Inspired by his gesture, I revisited this powerful work and came across the following quotation: "Gathering all that is found here and there in the Scriptures, we can say that God through grace is present within us as a father, as a friend, as a helper, as a sanctifier, and that in this way He is truly the very source of our interior life, its efficient and exemplary cause" (Tanquerey, Chapter 2, no. 92). This is quite a profound observation.

If God is "the very source of our interior life," then we discover Him by navigating the interior life by means of prayer. He helps us, just as certainly as the life by means of prayer of a mighty river awaits the explorer who travels its waters. Take the plunge. Discover the source.

Do not allow your sins to get in the way. Confess them and be reconciled. For this reason Jesus Christ gave us the Sacrament of Penance. Then, turn off the computer, the radio and television, stop the electronic communications, omit Facebook, and seek the silence of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and, in its absence, the quiet place which can serve as your refuge. Begin with the "Our Father." What does it say? What are you refusing to hear? And most importantly, what is it saying to you?

When I issued my message on the First Sunday of Advent last year, I had the Blessed Sacrament on my mind, as we all should. I insisted on Adoration weekly in our parishes. I wanted Eucharistic processions. These are not ends in themselves. The Church gives them to us for a reason. They are means to the end of enriching our experience of Christ in His Eucharistic Presence and the celebration of Holy Mass. Is Christ not the "daily bread" for which we pray in the Our Father?

I will return to you on this topic of prayer in the future. As I said in the letter that accompanied my Advent decree, there is more to come, and I am pleased to share it with you.

With prayers for a holy Lent and extending my blessings to you for the pursuit of "what really matters," I remain

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

✠Glen John Provost  
Bishop of Lake Charles

## Lenten giving program highlighted, capital campaign progress told

(Special to the Catholic Calendar)

In the spirit of the Lenten emphasis on Prayers, Fasting, Almsgiving, and Evangelizing, the Diocese of Lake Charles has initiated a small charitable giving challenge to support some of the diocesan endeavors that best mirror these pillars of faith.

Entitled the #IGiveCatholic \$20 Lenten Challenge, parishioners are simply asked to make a small one-time donation in special envelopes at a weekend Mass of the pastor's choosing during the season of Lent, selecting Catholic Charities, Seminarian Education, Communication or all three as recipients of their generosity. For those who prefer electronic giving, visit <http://www.lcdioocese.org/resources/support-the-diocese> and select the #IGiveCatholic \$20 Lenten Challenge.

In the true spirit of Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana's annual Jazz Brunch fundraiser will be Sunday, April 28, amidst the sound of music and the beautiful lake view backdrop of the Lake Charles Country Club.

The doors will open at 10:30 a.m. for hors d'oeuvres and silent auction viewing and bidding, with The Most Reverend Glen John Provost, Bishop of Lake Charles, offering the Blessing Before Meal at 11:30 a.m. A lovely southern brunch will follow.

Sister Miriam MacLean, RSM, Director of Catholic Charities, will talk on the past year of agency services and introduce honorees that have made a significant difference in the lives of others. Funds raised from this event support the many works of mercy of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana.

To purchase a table, tickets or make a donation, as well as offer a silent auction item, call the Catholic Charities office at (337) 439-7436. An electronic option is also available at <http://www.lcdioocese.org/resources/event-registration> by selecting "Catholic Charities 2019 Jazz Brunch."

As stunning progress continues on the restoration of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the seminarians returned to their studies after a short holiday break, retired priests continue serving the Lord and God's people in a multitude of ways, progress continues on Camp Karol that will serve the spiritual needs of our youth in a very unique way, and Catholic Charities meets the varied and growing needs of our brothers and sisters, the latest Return to the Parish Share to the parishes of the Diocese of Lake Charles has reached \$2,663,127.79 in total payments.

The fifth payment, issued in February, totaled \$576,048.61, and covered payments on pledges made from January 1 through June 30 of 2018. Four parishes, specifically Our Lady of the Lake, St. Mary of the Lake, Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception and St. Pius X have payments that have exceeded



**Monsignor James Gaddy, Pastor of St. Mary of the Lake Catholic Church, presents the final payment on his personal pledge to the Diocese of Lake Charles' Return to the Lord Capital Campaign to Stephanie Rodrigue, Director of Development whose office manages the Campaign. St. Mary of the Lake is one of parishes that have payments that have exceeded their goal and are now receiving 80 percent of all payments made by their parishioners.**

their parish goals during this time span, so their payments are now at 80 percent. Other parishes will meet the 80 percent criteria with the next Parish Share payments in July of 2019 that will cover the June 30 through December 31, 2018 timeframe.

"By all accounts, the 80% return to the parishes concept is virtually unheard of in other dioceses and is a testament to the diligence of the Priests' Advisory Council and the approval of Bishop Provost in making these payments a reality", according to Stephanie Rodrigue, Director of the Office of Development for the Diocese of Lake Charles.

## Lenten REGULATIONS

Every Catholic, to enter more deeply into the life of Christ, is to participate in some way in the spiritual and penitential disciplines of Lent. The regulations for the Catholic Church in the United States are as follows: Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. The other Fridays of Lent are days of abstinence from meat.

The obligation to abstain from meat binds Catholics 14 years of age and older. The obligation to fast, limiting oneself to one full meal and two lighter meals during the day, binds Catholics from the age of 18 to 59. Those younger or older are encouraged to voluntarily embrace these disciplines in so far as they are able.

Divine and Natural Law holds that all the faithful are morally bound to do penance.

The Fourth Precept of the Church obliges Catholics to observe the discipline of fasting and abstinence for Lent.

Fridays outside of Lent are also days of penance and spiritual discipline. Abstaining from meat is the traditional way of observing these days of penance. The Bishops of the United States have granted permission for abstinence from meat on Fridays outside of Lent to be replaced with some other self-denial or personal penance. However, Friday remains a day of some penitential practice. As Bishop Provost stated in a recent pastoral letter: "The idea of sacrificing something is countercultural to the 'throwaway' mentality that plagues us today and of which Pope Francis has time and again warned us" (September 3, 2015).

Fasting should never endanger one's health. Avoiding some form of permissible entertainment or performing sacrificial acts of charity, for example, could replace the fasting when health is a consideration.

Finally, with any penitential discipline, both the letter and the spirit are to be maintained. For example, replacing meat with a gourmet seafood meal is not in keeping with penitential practice. Also, the increasingly popular practice of hosting "crawfish boils" and entertainments on Good Friday is highly inappropriate. Good Friday remains an extraordinary and solemn day on which we recall the suffering and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Good Friday should remain a day of fasting, abstinence, prayer, penance, and interior and exterior quiet.