

Praying ~ Hope Expectations for Junior Classes

By the end of grade 6, it is our hope that students will be individuals who:

- ❖ Seek intimacy with God and celebrate communion with God, others and creation through prayer and worship;
- ❖ Appreciate the gift of the common prayers of the Church and how they teach us to pray;
- ❖ Incorporate Sacred Scripture into their prayer life as a reflective form of prayer that reveals the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

PR 1.1: Identify the obstacles to prayer and the ways to overcome these struggles so that prayer and our Christian life are inseparable. [CCC nos. 2725-2751]

“Prayer is both a gift of grace [given to us by God] and a determined response on our part.” CCC 2715 We have to show up and be present, then God takes over. **Ask your students if they know someone who is prayerful. Ask them how they observe their prayerfulness > in other words, how do they know the person is prayerful? It will probably be about going to Church (Mass), having a prayer table or religious objects (crucifixes and/or statues) in the home, blessing themselves with the sign of the cross, and saying grace before every meal. Ask them if they consider themselves as prayerful.** One of the obstacles to prayer is “**erroneous notions of prayer.**” Some people do not believe in prayer because they think it is just talking to themselves. Some think it is a way of psychologically pacifying themselves. Some think that it takes great amount of time and they don’t have time to give to it. So we need to correct these mistaken notions of prayer. Prayer is about building a relationship with God. Just like building friendships and love relationships with others, we can do so with God. Prayer involves speaking and listening. It grows more comfortably over time. All we need to do is show up and be open to God. God will take over. “Prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives.” CCC 2727

We can pray throughout the day by keeping ourselves open to God’s self-revelation. God will communicate with us throughout the day when we have the openness. For example, when we see a hummingbird, or a sunset, or a baby laughing, our response can be “O my God.” Maybe we are swept up in the beauty and we respond in gratitude to the Creator. “Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.” CCC 2727

Another obstacle in prayer is “**distraction.**” It is better once the distraction is apparent, to let it go and return to prayer. If we put too much energy into fighting the distraction, then we fall into a trap. “Sometimes distractions reveal to us what we are attached to.” CCC 2729

A third obstacle in prayer is “**dryness.**” It is the experience of receiving no sense of goodness or connectedness to God during prayer. Often people who experience this obstacle, stop praying. It is exactly what we ought not do. It is important to continue to pray through the dryness. It helps us to grow in discipline.

The fourth obstacle in prayer is “**temptation.**” It is the experience of never staying in prayer until it is over. We say we are going to pray for five minutes and then three minutes into the prayer time, we are distracted and we leave because nothing is happening.

It is important that once we become aware of the distraction that we return to prayer and stay for the whole time.

Students will not probably have much experience with these obstacles or the vocabulary to speak about them. I offer to come in to help with this lesson. I can give personal experiences to bring more light to these obstacles and I feel free to share them. Just invite me in.

PR 1.2: Identify real life situations of injustice (poverty and starvation, oppression, prejudice, environmental harm, etc.) and develop intercessory prayers on behalf of those in need. [CCC nos. 2634-2636]

Bring newspapers to class. Ask the class to look at the news of the world and to search for situations of injustice (such as the examples given above.) Then

have the students develop intercessory prayers on behalf of the people involved in the situations. Begin the intercessions by framing them as:

Let us pray for the people involved in..... We ask God to We pray to the Lord. **Lord, hear our prayer.** At the end of the class, or the next day, pray the intercessions created by the class. Later ~ Invite the students to make up intercessory prayers for the needs of the school community for the next Mass. Give them the opportunity to use their prayers in real time.

PR 1.3: Explain how praying the psalms and prayers of the Catholic Tradition (e.g. Prayer of St. Francis, St. Ignatius of Loyola) transforms the hearts of persons (teach and form us through the gift of God's grace) and apply the messages of justice, peace and reconciliation found in these prayers to issues of injustice, peace and reconciliation young people face today (e.g. cyberbullying, vandalism, poverty, inequality, exclusion). [CCC nos. 2585-2589; 2607-2615; 2683-2684] Invite your students to look at the book of Psalms. Ask them to identify any themes that they may find there. Show the class the Prayer of St. Francis (Make me a channel of your peace) and the Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola. [Take O Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All that I am and all that I possess You have given me; I surrender it all to You to be disposed of according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace; with these I will be rich enough, and will desire nothing more. Amen+] Ask your students - How could these two prayers alone transform the hearts of people? Identify the themes in these two prayers. (peace, reconciliation, simplicity, desire for God alone) Look through the newspaper for the issues of injustice, poverty, etc. Ask your class - If people sincerely prayed these prayers and the psalms, could the world be transformed?

PR 2.1: Identify which liturgical seasons present scripture passages (i.e. Old and New Testament) which focus on the social justice dimension of the Christian life and show how these are expressed in the tradition of vocal and meditative prayer. [CCC nos. 2652-2655; 2659-2660] The social justice dimension of the Christian life is identified in the scripture passages associated with the seasons of Advent and Lent in a particular way. During Advent the first readings will be taken from the prophetic tradition of Isaiah speak about the Messiah and messianic times. During Lent it is important to teach the social consequences of sin as well as the fact that the heart of the virtue of penance is hatred of sin as an offence against God. These first readings will also be taken from the prophetic traditions. The Gospels are part of the New Testament and are read during both Advent and Lent. The tradition of "vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life." [CCC 2701] Explain the above liturgical seasons as times of preparation > preparation for building the Kingdom of God that will be what God wants. Use the Lord's Prayer as an example of vocal prayer that all Christians learn early in life. Look at the words. It speaks about praising God and God's kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. It speaks about themes of justice – everyone getting daily bread and forgiveness for wrongs done. Asking for assistance to avoid the occasions of sin as these come into our lives. We pray the Our Father every day but do we really believe what the words say or ask. Do we just say the words. Vocal prayer ought to lead to action on our part. Meditation that is spoken of in this expectation is not Christian silent meditation but the use of the mind to ponder and reflect on reality and seek ways to make the kingdom of God come into our reality. "Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart and strengthen our will to follow Christ." [CCC 2708] If you would like a guided meditation to lead for your class, send me an email and I can assist you or send you one that you can use to lead your class.

PR 2.2: Identify and demonstrate how in the Mass, the Liturgy of the Word can become a source of meditation and prayer with scripture which assists us in living the Christian life (i.e. moments of silence, lectio divina, homilies, commentaries on scripture). [CCC nos. 2652-2655; 2659-2660] To make this expectation an experience, find out what the Gospel reading will be for the next school mass. Have the students find a biblical commentary online to discover a deeper meaning for the passage. You can do this a few days before the Mass. Commentaries give an explanation of a gospel passage from a biblical scholar. Do lectio divina with the gospel reading. That means, you would have the gospel passage read three times by three different good readers. Ask your class to make a jot note each time the passage is read...what word or phrase stood out for them as they heard the passage. Do this lectio divina the day before the Mass. At Mass have the students make jot notes when the priest is giving his homily. Then come back to class to compare the commentary, the lectio divina and homily notes. Did the whole process increase the understanding of the message for the students?