



To Whom Do I Pray?

This may sound like an odd question, but it is an important one. This tip is simply an encouragement to consider to whom I'm praying and to experiment with different types of praying.

The classic definition of prayer reminds us that there are **four types** of prayer: **praise, thanksgiving, petition, and contrition**. When we think of the times we turn to God, this is a pretty good definition. Yet, as we grow in our relationship with God, we probably would nuance the lines between these four types of prayer. If prayer is **relationship**, then we can talk about a whole variety of types of prayer that are the stuff of ordinary relationships. I can imagine a type of prayer that is simply sharing with God what has gone on in my day. I can spend time just listening to God's love for me in the powerful or tender words of one of the prophets. Or, at difficult times, I might turn to God to express anger, doubt, confusion or fear.

To make this all the more wonderful, I can turn to different **Persons** when I pray to God. Depending upon the feeling or movement within me, and the grace I desire, I can turn to God very differently. God's creation of the world; the Incarnation; the life, death, resurrection and gift of the Spirit - these mysteries give us access to great depth and texture in our relationship with God.

The public prayer of the Church is almost always addressed to God, the Father. The prayer concludes: "we ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever."

When we pray, in our ongoing relationship with God, we can pray however we like. At times I will turn to God, the Creator. Though God has no gender, I might join Jesus in calling God, "Father" or with the more affectionate, "Abba." I can just as easily use the feminine images of God. At other times, I will turn to Jesus. He is God, become flesh. He is how God is, as a human being. All I know about Jesus now, I can draw from his life. Jesus the Lord, still has holes in his hands and feet and side. He still is comfortable with prostitutes and sinners. He still allows himself to be recognized in the breaking of bread. And, at times, it is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, I will turn to.

It is important to remember that we have gender. Those of us who are women and those of us who are men may relate to the persons of God differently. How I relate to the Creator can be different for me as a man or as a woman. My love and affection for Jesus will differ. And my experience of the gathering Spirit might be different.

It is good to ask, "to whom am I praying to at this moment?" It can be quite wonderful to experiment with being in relationship with each of the persons of God. If this is new or uncomfortable, just jump in with the request for a grace: "Dear Jesus, I want to talk with you, as a man. To say I'm sorry, to ask for help, to learn from you about how to love. Please guide me, show me, draw me." "Dear God of all creation, show me how to be with you, as woman. Touch and release the feelings and movements within me that connect with and flow from your own creative love."