

## **The Major Catholic Prayer Traditions**

Catechists should be aware that the prayer of the Catholic Church is far more than the memorized vocal prayers, devotional prayers (such as the Rosary) or the prayers we say together at Mass.

For over a thousand years, the Church has developed rich prayer forms such as contemplative prayer (Christian meditation), liturgy of the hours, prayer using scripture, and prayer using nature, to name a few.

For centuries, only priests, monks and cloistered nuns participated in many of these prayer forms, but today we recognize the value these spiritual practices have for lay people.

In a culture where New Age spirituality can be attractive to many people, including youth and young adults, it is important for Catholic students to receive the information that we have our own beautiful treasury of prayer – ways to draw closer to God that are perhaps less familiar, but not difficult.

To make this happen, catechists should be aware of at least the following prayer traditions: Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican, Franciscan and Ignatian. (See Quick Summaries below.)

### Some General Resources on Catholic Spirituality & Prayer:

Reading or viewing these resources and providing a written report to your principal or director of religious education can be applied to diocesan catechist certification credit in “knowing”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part 4: “Christian Prayer”.

Curran, Dolores Dolores Curran On Family Prayer, Twenty-Third Publications, 1997.

Halpin, Marlene, O.P., The Ball of Red String: A Guided Meditation for Children, Loyola Press, 1998.

Haring, Bernard, Our Father (a simple meditation on the Lord’s Prayer) St. Mary’s Press, 1995.

International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours, Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1986.

Jeep, Elizabeth McMahon, Children's Daily Prayer (annual) Liturgy Training Publications Lane, George A., S.J. Christian Spirituality: A Historical Sketch, Loyola Press, 2004.

Loyola Productions, Meaningful Conversations About Prayer video series and Gathering Guide (for adults, available August 2005).

Mathson, Patricia, Bless This Day: 150 Everyday Prayers for Grades 1-5, Ave Maria Press, 2002.

Odell, Catherine & Margaret Savitskas, Loyola Kids Book of Everyday Prayers, Loyola Press, 2002.

SOME GENERAL ONLINE RESOURCES Loyola Press: [www.findinggod.org](http://www.findinggod.org) click on "Resources", then "Prayer and Spirituality" – includes online retreats. Sadlier: [www.cyberfaith.com](http://www.cyberfaith.com) - Click on "Spirituality Resources" for prayers for the current saint or season, or prayers to use with faculty.

[www.ixeh.net/faith/cpt.html](http://www.ixeh.net/faith/cpt.html) Catholic Prayer Traditions - an interactive bilingual site for prayer, viewing religious art, and learning history and customs of the Rosary, Stations of the Cross and several chaplets.

L - Prayer Traditions 1 QUICK SUMMARIES OF MAJOR PRAYER TRADITIONS

## **1. BENEDICTINE PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY**

Benedictines are best known for communal living according to the Rule of St. Benedict, its founder, in which the two main principles are manual labor and communal prayer. Recently, there has been a movement for lay people to live elements of the Rule as well. The Rule can be simplified as: Commitment, Balance and Relationship. Lay Oblates live the Rule and receive ongoing spiritual guidance.

Associated saints: Benedict of Nursia and Scholastica, his sister

The communal prayer of the Benedictines is the Liturgy of the Hours, a structured liturgical prayer consisting of psalms, prayers, songs and readings, following the rhythm of the times of day and of the Church Year. Lay people are encouraged to use the simplified version found in Christian Prayer, and includes Morning and Evening Prayer.

Benedictine tradition includes a simple form of prayer using scripture – Lectio Divina (holy reading) – that facilitates understanding what God may be saying to a person through a reading. The four steps are

1.) Lectio: read or listen to the text, paying attention to any words or phrases that stand out.

2.) Meditatio: meditate on what speaks to you, repeating it to yourself and allowing it to interact with your thoughts hopes, memories and desires.

3.) Oratio: pray, entering into loving conversation with God, allowing the word you have heard and meditated on to touch and change you.

4.) Contemplatio: simply rest in the presence of God and accept His loving embrace. In silence, let go of your own words and simply enjoy being in the presence of God.

The contemplative tradition of the Benedictines is best known from the Trappist monks, who observe a strict rule of silence. Their form of contemplation was recovered from the ancient tradition of meditation based on the desert Fathers and Mothers, the fourth movement of Lectio Divina, and the mystical tradition of The Cloud of Unknowing. This prayer form is called Centering Prayer, or The Prayer of the Heart. Famous 20 th Century American Trappists include Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Basil Pennington, William Meninger, and even Henri Nouwen, who spent a year as a “part-time” Trappist.

### **Some Resources on Benedictine Spirituality:**

Benedictine Order international website: [www.osb.org](http://www.osb.org)

Casey, Michael, OCSO, Sacred Reading: the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina, Triumph Books, 1995

Chittister, Joan, OSB, Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today, 1990

Keating, Thomas, OCSO, Open Heart, Open Mind: The Contemplative Dimensions of the Gospel, Element, Inc., 1992. see also [www.centeringprayer.com](http://www.centeringprayer.com)

Merton, Thomas – any books or journals see [www.merton.org](http://www.merton.org) for biography, bibliography and information

Norris, Kathleen, *The Cloister Walk*, Riverhead Books, 1996.

Pennington, Basil, *Lessons from the Monastery that Touch Your Life*, Paulist Press, 1994. See also [www.masteryfoundation.org](http://www.masteryfoundation.org) , click on “Interfaith.”

St. Procopius Abbey, Lisle, IL – website: [www.procopius.org/spirituality.htm](http://www.procopius.org/spirituality.htm) - local information and resources

Stewart, Columba, OSB, *Prayer and Community: the Benedictine Tradition*, Orbis Books, 1998.

## 2. CARMELITE PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY

The earliest Carmelites were hermits who stayed on the slopes of Mount Carmel near the end of the twelfth century. They lived in poverty and sought solitude on the mountain where Elijah the prophet had made his home, while meditating on God. Today, they look to the mountain, to Elijah, to Mary, and that tradition of solitude as their spiritual wellspring. The symbol of Carmel stands for the intimate encounter that God brings about between the person and God in the midst of all that is most ordinary in life. The expression and source of this encounter, contemplation and prayer, are the very heartbeat of the interior journey of transformation of the Carmelite today, whether vowed religious or layperson.

Associated saints: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Therese of Lisieux, Edith Stein (martyr)

The symbol of Elijah is central to Carmelite spirituality. He is seen as a man on a journey who hid in the desert in a time of dryness and journeyed back to meet God in new and unexpected ways. This symbol is operative in a key concept of Carmelite spirituality from St. John of the Cross: the “dark night of the soul” -- a period of spiritual dryness where God seems not to be present to the seeker. Mary is associated with the rain of God’s Grace that ends the dryness, like the little cloud Elijah sees in 1 Kings 18:44.

Key concepts in Carmelite spirituality are 1.) Allegiance to Christ, 2.) Openness to Scriptures, 3.) A sense of silence and solitude, and 4.) The undivided heart. The primary Carmelite prayer forms are solitude and meditation.

The Carmelite mystics, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Therese of Liseux expanded the original vision, writing about new ways to understand the soul’s

continuous longing for union with God and the daily struggles of the journey to reach it. Their writings and poems help lead us into visionary prayer.

### **Some Resources on Carmelite Spirituality:**

Carmelite Province of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, Darien, IL – website: [www.carmelnet.org](http://www.carmelnet.org) local information & resources

Egan, Keith J. Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21 st Century, Paulist Press, 2003. Griffin, Eltin, ed. Ascending the Mountain: The Carmelite Rule Today, Columba Press, 2004.

McGreal, Wilfrid, O. Carm., At the Fountain of Elijah: The Carmelite Tradition, Orbis Books, 1999

Order of Carmelites, Rome – website: [www.ocarm.org](http://www.ocarm.org)

St. Edith Stein, Edith Stein: Essential Writings, John Sullivan, ed. Orbis Books, 2002.

St. John of the Cross, writings, especially The Ascent of Mt. Carmel, The Dark Night or Spiritual Canticle St. Teresa of Avila, writings- especially The Way of Perfection and The Interior Castle St. Therese of Lisieux, Story of a Soul Welch, John The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path for Today's Pilgrim, Paulist Press, 1996.

### **3. DOMINICAN PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY**

Founded by St. Dominic de Guzman in 1286, the Dominican Order has a history of teaching, writing, art and preaching. Dominicans focus on following Christ, the wandering preacher who sent his disciples out in pairs to prepare for his coming. Their spirituality is rooted in the vocation of the preacher - being filled with the wonder of the Good News of salvation, which they want to share with the world. Their outlook on life is influenced by Dominic's special insights into the Good News. Dominican spirituality is diverse, though some major themes can be taken from the works of some its main practitioners. Basic to understanding their spiritual practices is a sense of both the hiddenness and unknowability of God and the imperative call to loving ministry. Some lay people join the Third Order to live the Dominican call in the world.

Associated saints & others: Dominic, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Sienna, Rose of Lima, Martin de Porres, Meister Eckhart, the Beguine Mystics

Dominic was a cheerful and energetic saint and his spirituality reflects that. Dominican prayer, while it borrows from other traditions, follows the following principles:

- 1.) Rooted in the Eucharist - Dominic said it was “Christ’s last and perfect prayer to the Father”.
- 2.) Liturgy of the Hours (the Divine Office) -- important as a mainspring of community life.
- 3.) Contemplative Study - not an emptying one’s head of thoughts, but rather a discursive, meditative analysis and study of scriptural truth and truth in general.
- 4.) Fruitfulness – contemplative action in the world (ministry)
- 5.) Praying Whole- using the whole body when addressing God – Dominic had “Nine Ways” to do this

There is also a mystical thread to Dominican spirituality, centering in silent praise of the inaccessible splendor of God, spiritual poverty, and detachment, found in the writings of Catherine, Aquinas, and Eckhart.

### **Some Resources on Dominican Spirituality**

Borgman, Eric, John Bowden (translator) Dominican Spirituality: An Exploration, Crossroads, 2001.

Central Province, Dominican Order (men) [www.op.org/domcentral](http://www.op.org/domcentral) (Includes Illinois) - click on “Tradition” then “Spirituality” for a list of online books

Order of Dominicans international website: [www.op.org](http://www.op.org)

OP Sources: Resources for promoting the Dominican Charism – <http://opsources.edgewood.edu>

Springfield Dominican women web site: [www.springfieldop.org](http://www.springfieldop.org) - Springfield, IL

Tugwell, Simon, Early Dominicans: Selected Writings, Paulist Press, 1982.

Woods, Richard, OP, Mysticism and Prophecy: the Dominican Tradition, Orbis Books, 1998.

## 4. FRANCISCAN PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY

Franciscan prayer is definitely in and of the world, at the same time it is an experience of God. Francis did not speak about spirituality so much as he lived his prayer - as Celano (an early biographer of Francis) said "He became prayer" and in the intimacy of his relationship with God he would have his followers join him. "Hold back nothing of yourself for yourself, so that he who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally," Francis said.

Franciscans seek God through an incarnational approach – God is our loving Father and all we have is gift; Christ is our Brother and the Spirit of that love lives in us. The Franciscan approach is Trinitarian, not static. Again Francis was practical - the Crib, the Cross, the Eucharist were his way to God, and finally his relationship to the Triune God led to an intimacy and familiarity with all wonders of creation so that he could address them as Brother/Sister - all are members of the one family.

Associated Saints: Francis of Assisi, Clare, Anthony of Padua, Bonaventure, Francis de Sales, Maximillian Kolbe, Frances Xavier Cabrini, Padre Pio and many more.

Features of Franciscan spirituality are community and solitude, prayer and penance, humility and poverty. Prayer can be vocal prayer, prayer using nature as its source and inspiration (see Francis' Canticle as an example text is in popular hymn "Canticle of the Sun"), contemplation, or Lectio Divina. The contemplative dimension often focuses on union with God, and experiences of divine love. Yet, Franciscans are active contemplatives who find their mission in social justice ministry, and they are often found helping the poor, the elderly and the sick in homeless shelters, nursing homes and hospitals.

### **Some Resources on Franciscan Spirituality**

Bodo, Murray, *The Way of St. Francis: The Challenge of Franciscan Spirituality for Everyone*, St. Anthony Messenger, 1995.

Delio, Ilia, OSF, *Franciscan Prayer*, St. Anthony Messenger, 2004

Foley, Leonard, *To Live as Francis Lived: A Guide for Secular Franciscans*, St. Anthony Messenger, 2000.

Franciscan Order (worldwide) [www.ofm.org](http://www.ofm.org) - click on "Franciscans" for English

Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Frankfort IL web site: <http://my.ais.net/~francis/index.htm>

Franciscan Web Page – a directory of links, including saints, etc. [www.wtu.edu/franciscan](http://www.wtu.edu/franciscan)

Sacred Heart Franciscan Province web site [www.thefriars.org](http://www.thefriars.org) - the local men's province for the OFM

Short, William J. OFM, Poverty and Joy: The Franciscan Tradition, Orbis Books, 1999.

Talbot, John Michael, The Lover and the Beloved: A Way of Franciscan Prayer, Crossroads, 1985.

## 8. IGNATIAN PRAYER & SPIRITUALITY

Ignatian spirituality is intellectual, visual and eminently practical. It aims to assist people to know God, understand their interior struggles, and discern what God is asking. St. Ignatius Loyola developed the Spiritual Exercises and founded the Jesuit Order as a way to teach others to do all of this. The role of a spiritual director as a compassionate listener/advisor is key to Ignatian spirituality. Ignatian prayer forms include visual meditation, examination of conscience, prayer of discernment, journaling and more.

Associated saints: Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, Peter Claver, Robert Bellarmine, Isaac Jogues

The steps of Ignatian prayer in the Spiritual Exercises are

- 1.) Quieting oneself
- 2.) Naming a desire one has – the reason for the prayer
- 3.) Exercising the imagination through a visual meditation on a Scripture story
- 4.) Applying the senses – savoring the parts of the experience that provoked the strongest reactions Afterwards, there should be a colloquy – a prayer conversation with a member of the Trinity or with Mary, relating the experience back to the desire. This step may continue later with a spiritual director.



Ignatian visual meditation begins with Composition of Place – placing oneself in the scripture story, by imagining how it looks, feels, smells and sounds. This can be done by oneself after reading a Scripture, by viewing a painting of a Scripture story subject, or can be guided by a leader and conducted in groups.

The Ignatian Examen, or examination of conscience, has five steps:

1. Quiet oneself.
2. Pray for the grace to see clearly, understand accurately and respond generously.
3. Review in memory the history of the day (week, month) looking for concrete instances of the presence and guidance of God, and the activity and influence of evil. (Pay attention to strong feelings associated with experiences and encounters).
4. Evaluate those instances in which we have either cooperated with God or yielded to the influence of evil.

Express gratitude and regret.

5. Plan and decide how to collaborate more effectively with God, and how, with God's help, to avoid or overcome the influence of evil in the future.

### **Some Resources on Ignatian Spirituality**

Bellarmino Jesuit Retreat House, Barrington, IL [www.jesuits-chi.org/retreat/bellarmino.htm](http://www.jesuits-chi.org/retreat/bellarmino.htm) - local resource.

Lonsdale, David, *Eyes to See, Ears to Hear: An Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality*, Orbis Books, 2000.

Loyola University Chicago Bibliography- Studies on Ignatian Spirituality:  
[www.luc.edu/jesuit/sheldrake.html](http://www.luc.edu/jesuit/sheldrake.html)

Marquette University Ignatian Spirituality Center: [www.marquette.edu/cis](http://www.marquette.edu/cis)

Prayerwindows – use art to enter into Ignatian prayer: [www.prayerwindows.com/ignatian.html](http://www.prayerwindows.com/ignatian.html)

[www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie) Sacred Space is a daily online interactive Ignatian prayer, posted by the Irish Jesuits

St. Ignatius of Loyola, Spiritual Exercises –any edition.

Silf, Margaret, Inner Compass, An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality, Loyola Press, 1999.

Society of Jesus, USA [www.jesuit.org](http://www.jesuit.org)