

August 16, 2026—20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

God is present everywhere in His creation. When we hear about an encounter with God in the Bible, you never read about someone going down into a swamp to find Him. They always go up a mountain. Moses up to Mount Sinai to receive the 10 Commandments; last Sunday, we heard about the Prophet Elijah walking to that same mountain to meet God; there is the Mount of the Beatitudes and the Mount of the Transfiguration, as well as Mount Calvary. Jerusalem was built on a mountain along with its magnificent Temple—you always went up to Jerusalem. In a Catholic Church the sanctuary should be reached by going up steps to the altar. Modern architecture in stadium style seating looking down on the altar doesn't understand this principle.

Isaiah, in the First Reading, spoke about God's ultimate plan for salvation. Not just the Jews, but all nations will be able to worship Him. Isaiah wrote: **“them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”** Each Catholic Church with the Blessed Sacrament is a house of prayer for all people.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is our greatest prayer. It is, first of all, a sacrifice, a renewal of Jesus' one sacrifice on Calvary. It is the perfect form of worship because it unites us to Jesus' perfect sacrifice of love on the Cross. He would not let any obstacle stop Him from giving Himself completely in love: not physical pain, not betrayal, not desertion by His friends, not the unbearable pain of the sins of the world. He made of Himself the perfect sacrifice of Love. In the Holy Mass we unite our poor offering—our sufferings, works, praise and thanks—with Jesus and He lifts them up, purifies them to allow us to give a fitting offering to our Heavenly Father. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in the Holy Mass!

In our reflection on prayer, I would like to think about what it means to pray with the heart. Before the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest invites you to **“Lift up your hearts”** and you respond with **“We lift them up to the Lord.”** In those words, you are once again giving yourself to God along with Jesus. Praying with the heart means being attentive to your words or thoughts as you pray. We all find it difficult at times (maybe I should admit, most of the time) to focus on our prayer and avoid distractions; we start to pray and then think about our schedule or solving some problem or just about anything that pops into the mind. This human condition is one of the reasons the CCC speaks about the Battle of Prayer.

Everyone has this battle; you are not unique; that is why we can't give up praying. God knows your struggle and wants you to keep fighting.

The Bible speaks about the "heart" over 1000 times. The CCC (#2562-3) asks the question **"Where does prayer come from?"** The answer is from the heart. Then it gives this definition **"The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live. . . . The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully."**

Those paragraphs are worth meditating on. Prayer is something deep; it is a mystery because we are mysteries to ourselves. Why did I do that, why did I say that? Even the great St. Paul laments in Romans 7: **"I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do"** (Rom. 7:18-19). We are a mystery to ourselves and to others. We need the Holy Spirit to help us to pray; St. Paul wrote in the next chapter of Romans: **"the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought"** (Rom. 8:26). It is good to begin praying by asking the Holy Spirit to help me to pray with the heart.

Although there is good that comes from technology, the devil is using it to keep us from finding quiet time and getting to this hidden center of ourselves, the heart. He uses social media and unending entertainment to keep us distracted and even worse, to lead us to sin. He doesn't want us to find peace of soul or even begin to look for it. Satan wants us to lose sight of the very center of our being.

Sometimes we are surprised by the apparent rudeness of Jesus to the Canaanite woman, this non-Jew in the Gospel this Sunday. He puts her off by saying, He has come first to the lost sheep of Israel, then **"It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."** Is Jesus calling her a dog? You know that there is some good purpose behind Jesus' words. He hears her prayer, but He knows that it needs to be deepened; it needs to be strengthened by faith. When she comes back with a clever answer and isn't deterred by Jesus' words, her faith has been deepened, her prayer has been purified. His whole demeanor changes immediately; He exclaims, **"O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish."**

Prayer is not about getting what we want, as if we could change God's mind. God is a good Father, He already wants to give us everything that is good. When we pray, we begin to understand the good things that God wants for us, especially the

wisdom and love and mercy that He alone can give. We will continue next Sunday with a further reflection on prayer.