

Treasures Old and New

Traditional Prayers
for Today's Catholics

Philip Neri Powell, OP



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Imprimi Potest: Thomas D. Picton, C.Ss.R.
Provincial, Denver Province, The Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri
To order, call 800-325-9521 or visit www.liguori.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Powell, Philip Neri.

Treasures old and new : traditional prayers for today's Catholics / Philip Neri Powell.
—1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7648-1840-0

1. Catholic Church--Prayers and devotions. I. Title.

BX2149.2.P69 2009

242'.802--dc22

2009024015

Scripture citations are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Printed in the United States of America
13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1
First Edition

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Introduction

A Theology of Prayer

Praying as Christians does not come to us naturally. Crying out for help; wishing for something better; saying “thank you” under our breath—all of these seem to come to us naturally; that is, they all seem to arise out of some deeply held sense that there is something or someone “out there” to whom we ought to address our most intimate words, something or someone out there that we need to address, that we want to talk to and with.

But what we Christians might want to think of as a natural tendency to incline our deepest groans toward “something larger” is really a supernatural gift that makes us want to seek our perfection. Human prayer *per se* might be a natural inclination. Christian prayer is an entirely different sort of inclination altogether.

First, Christian prayer—a baptized person’s internal and external conversation with God—is made possible by the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. To be baptized is to be brought through and along with the Paschal Mystery that offers all rational creatures salvation in Christ. When a Christian prays, he prays as Christ prays; that is, he is Christ praying. Therefore, no Christian ever prays without the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We pray because the Holy Spirit nudges us and says, “Hey, this is a good time to pray, dontcha think?”

Second, to be brought through and along with the Paschal Mystery is to be made Christ for others. There is no other reason for us to be made Christs in this world except to be made Christs for others. If our creation *ex nihilo* was a gift (and it was!), and if your continuing existence is a gift (and it is!), and if our reconciliation to our Creator is a gift (and it is!), and if our eternal lives with him as his perfected creatures is his gift (and it will be!), then if we are to honor these gifts (which is really just one gift), we must be gifts ourselves to and for others.

Third, we are gifts—for one other. The only proper response to a gift is gratitude. Certainly, after receiving a gift, we respond with a “thank you.” But in the life of a Christian, life itself is a gift. That you are here at all is a gift. Every blessing after this first blessing of life is gravy. Therefore, give thanks now for every blessing you will ever be given. In fact, make it a discipline to make your only prayer a prayer of thanksgiving for all the blessings you have received, are receiving, and will ever receive. A gift is not a gift until it is received as such. So, your prayer for others should be, “Lord, thank you for the blessings/gifts you have given, are giving, and will give to me, my family, and my neighbors.” Remember: our Lord will not force a blessing/gift on you. Receive and give thanks.

Fourth, prayer is participation; that is to say, to pray is to play, to go along with, to share in and contribute toward. When you pray for yourself and especially for others, you are exercising your baptismal ministry as a royal priest. Think of praying as being submerged in water. Surrounded by God’s life-giving grace, you live and move and work and play in his gifts. As a gift, you are at home among his gifts. Prayer then is our primary way of being with God, being in God, participating in his work and partaking of his divine nature. The supreme and insurmountable moment of prayer for the Christian is the Eucharist, that moment in our ecclesial life

when Christ offers Christ to Christ through the priestly office of Christ for his Body, the Church!

Finally, because we are imperfect creatures on the road to perfection with the help of God's grace, we must come to accept the reality that the first person changed by prayer is the pray-er. God is not changed by prayer. There is no magic in prayer. Novenas, Masses, candles, processions—none of these change God. Our Lord is not some forest god who can be influenced with promises or bribed with sacrifices. The point of prayer, the whole purpose of prayer is to change the pray-er so that the pray-er may be better prepared to receive God's gifts in gratitude. Gratitude prepares the soul for humility; humility makes prayer come more easily. The more we rest and work and play in prayer, the more we come to resemble prayer itself—the Word spoken to the Word in thanksgiving.

Part One
The Novenas

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Credo Novena

Early in the history of the Church, believers often found themselves confronted by any number of competing versions of the faith. Most of these were heretical deviations from the catholic faith of the apostles. Some were theological explanations of revelation that made extensive use of the Greek philosophical terms and concepts. So that the faithful might have a solid foundation upon which to build their lives in Christ, the bishops of the Church met in Nicaea in 325 AD. These bishop-theologians wrestled with the problem of how to incorporate the fundamental tenets of the Christian teaching into language that would exclude from the faith the prominent heresies of the day. The bishops of Nicaea produced the Nicene Creed. Meeting again in Constantinople in 381 AD, the bishops revised the Nicene Creed in order to further clarify basic Christian teaching. It was common among the early Church Fathers to use the creed as a kind of textbook for teaching those just entering the Church at Easter (i.e., “catechumens”). Today, we use this ancient creed in the celebration of the Eucharist to reaffirm our faith. The commentary on the creed in this novena is taken from the work, “A Sermon to Catechumens on the Creed,” written by St. Augustine.

Daily Opening Prayer

In you, O Lord, we place our trust.

You who reign forever.

With you, O Lord, we trust our lives.

In you, O Lord, we place our trust.

Almighty and living God, always and everywhere we seek the truth of your Word, to live and love as we ought. Knowing that we are always tempted by the wisdom of this world to abandon our faith in you and take after alien philosophies, your servants

composed a creed that guides us to this day. Though we make no claims to absolute understanding, we confess a ravenous hunger for knowing more and better the teachings of Christ given to his Apostles. As we contemplate the truths of this creed, open our hearts and minds to all that you would teach us. Grant us peace without complacency, certainty without arrogance, and goodness in all humility. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Daily Hymn (for Each Day)

O Lord, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

*Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.*

*You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

O Lord, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

PSALM 8

Alternate:

*The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised;
so I shall be saved from my enemies.*

*He brought me out into a broad place;
he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

*With the loyal you show yourself loyal;
with the blameless you show yourself blameless;
with the pure you show yourself pure;
and with the crooked you show yourself perverse.*

*The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock,
and exalted be the God of my salvation,*

*For this I will extol you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.*

*Great triumphs he gives to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his descendants for ever.*

PSALM 18:2-3, 19, 25-26, 46, 49-50

Daily Closing Prayer (for Each Day)

Lord God, we stand on you, the sure foundation revealed to us in your Son, Christ Jesus. We proclaim as true all that this creed contains and vow again to teach and preach only these truths. By baptism we entered your coming kingdom, dedicating ourselves to the apostolic faith. Grant us every grace, every talent, every virtue we need to hold fast to you. May this creed be a shining light on the way to you. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

DAY ONE

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, of all that is, seen and unseen.

Daily Opening Prayer

God is Almighty, and yet, though Almighty, He cannot die, cannot be deceived, cannot lie; and, as the Apostle says, “cannot deny Himself.” ...To our Almighty Father, it is quite impossible to sin. He does whatsoever He will: that is Omnipotence. He does whatsoever He rightly will, whatsoever He justly will: but whatsoever is evil to do, He wills not.... It was He Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, invisible and visible. Invisible such as are in heaven, thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, archangels, angels: all, if we shall live aright, our fellow-citizens. He made in heaven the things visible; the sun, the moon, the stars. With its terrestrial animals He adorned the earth, filled the air with things that fly, the land with them that walk and creep, the sea with them that swim: all He filled with their own proper creatures. He made also man after His own image and likeness, in the mind: for in that is the image of God. This is the reason why the mind cannot be comprehended even by itself, because in it is the image of God.

“A SERMON TO CATECHUMENS ON THE CREED,” 2

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY TWO

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.

Daily Opening Prayer

Man begets not an ox, sheep begets not dog, nor dog sheep. Whatever it be that begets, that which it is, it begets. Hold ye therefore boldly, firmly, faithfully, that the Begotten of God the Father is what Himself is, Almighty....He that is begotten mortal generates that which himself is; the Immortal generates what He is: corruptible begets corruptible, Incorruptible begets Incorruptible: the corruptible begets corruptibly, Incorruptible, Incorruptibly: yea, so begets what Itself is, that One begets One, and therefore Only....Here too, when you believe that He is the Only, believe Him Almighty: for it is not to be thought that God the Father does what He will, and God the Son does not what He will. One Will of Father and Son, because one Nature. For it is impossible for the will of the Son to be any whit parted from the Father's will. God and God; both one God: Almighty and Almighty; both One Almighty....The Son of God...was begotten perfect. And being begotten perfect, if He grows not, and remained not less, He is equal. For that you may know Almighty begotten of Almighty, hear Him Who is Truth. That which of Itself Truth says, is true. What says Truth? What says the Son, Who is Truth?

“A SERMON TO CATECHUMINS ON THE CREED,” 3, 5

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY THREE

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

Daily Opening Prayer

...this Only Son of God, the Father Almighty, let us see what He did for us, what He suffered for us....He, so great God, equal with the Father, born of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary, born lowly, that so that He might heal the proud. Man exalted himself and fell; God humbled Himself and raised him up. Christ's lowliness, what is it? God has stretched out a hand to man laid low. We fell, He descended: we lay low, He stooped. Let us lay hold and rise, that we fall not into punishment. So then His stooping to us is this, "Born of the Holy Ghost and of the Virgin Mary." His very Nativity too as man, it is lowly, and it is lofty. Whence lowly? That as man He was born of men. Whence lofty? That He was born of a virgin. A virgin conceived, a virgin bore, and after the birth was a virgin still.

"A SERMON TO CATECHUMINS ON THE CREED," 6

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY FOUR

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Daily Opening Prayer

Of His cross what shall I speak, what say? This extremest kind of death He chose, that not any kind of death might make His Martyrs afraid. The doctrine He showed in His life as Man, the example of patience He demonstrated in His Cross. There, you have the work, that He was crucified; example of the work, the Cross; reward of the work, Resurrection. He showed us in the Cross what we ought to endure, He showed in the Resurrection what we have to hope. Just like a consummate task-master in the matches of the arena, He said, Do, and bear; do the work and receive the prize; strive in the match and you shall be crowned. What is the work? Obedience. What the prize? Resurrection without death. Why did I add, "without death?" Because Lazarus rose, and died: Christ rose again, "dies no more, death will no longer have dominion over Him."

"A SERMON TO CATECHUMENS ON THE CREED," 9

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY FIVE

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

Daily Opening Prayer

The quick, who shall be alive and remain; the dead, who shall have gone before. It may also be understood thus: The living, the just; the dead, the unjust. For He judges both, rendering unto each his own. To the just He will say in the judgment, Come, you blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For this prepare yourselves, for these things

hope, for this live, and so live, for this believe, for this be baptized, that it may be said to you, Come ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. To them on the left hand, what? Go into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Thus will they be judged by Christ, the quick and the dead. We have spoken of Christ's first nativity, which is without time; spoken of the other in the fullness of time, Christ's nativity of the Virgin; spoken of the passion of Christ; spoken of the coming of Christ to judgment. The whole is spoken, that was to be spoken of Christ, God's Only Son, our Lord...

"A SERMON TO CATECHUMINS ON THE CREED," 12

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY SIX

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

Daily Opening Prayer

This Trinity, one God, one nature, one substance, one power; highest equality, no division, no diversity, perpetual dearness of love. Would ye know the Holy Ghost, that He is God? Be baptized, and you will be His temple.... A temple is for God: thus also Solomon, king and prophet, was bidden to build a temple for God. If he had built a temple for the sun or moon or some star or some angel, would not God condemn him? Because therefore he built a temple for God he showed that he worshipped God. And of what did he build? Of wood and stone, because God deigned to make

unto Himself by His servant an house on earth, where He might be asked, where He might be had in mind.... If then our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, what manner of God is it that built a temple for the Holy Ghost? But it was God. For if our bodies be a temple of the Holy Ghost, the same built this temple for the Holy Ghost, that built our bodies. Listen to the Apostle saying, "God has tempered the body, giving unto that which lacked the greater honor;" when he was speaking of the different members that there should be no schisms in the body. God created our body. The grass, God created; our body Who created? How do we prove that the grass is God's creating? He that clothes, the same creates.... He, then, creates Who clothes.... If then it be God that builds our bodies, God that builds our members, and our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost, doubt not that the Holy Ghost is God. And do not add as it were a third God; because Father and Son and Holy Ghost is One God. So believe you.

"A SERMON TO CATECHUMINS ON THE CREED," 13

Daily Hymn

Daily Closing Prayer

DAY SEVEN

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

Daily Opening Prayer

God is pointed out, and His temple. "For the temple of God is holy," says the Apostle, "which (temple) are you." This same is the holy Church, the one Church, the true Church, the catholic Church, fighting against all heresies: fight, it can: be fought down, it cannot. As for heresies, they went all out of it, like as unprofitable