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Introduction

Prayer is a gift.

It is time surrendered and oriented very differently to the other uses of time wedged into the busyness of the day. It is time honoured as we free ourselves from digital demand or due dates and deadlines. Especially in school systems with their regulated timetables and bells and assessment tasks and the corridor crush, we can often feel like we are running on empty.

Prayer can replenish us, giving us that spiritual uplift to get on with good work and God's work. It is an energy source for the goodness in our lives. Prayerful pauses, meditation or time for gentle reflection is a benison for all who take this time out to ponder the sacred in their lives; the grace notes all around us, the blessings in disguise, the simple joys of the day ahead, still with its busyness and tasks to do, but hinged with the holiness and dignity of work and agency.

Prayer sanctifies the daily struggle and allows us the time to recognise the everlasting in the everyday. When we pray we commit to doing and being better; we get out of our own way to think of others and of God and how we can live more authentically. Prayer promotes an expansiveness of heart and mind when we have the time to focus on the higher things. It moves us from words to action. In prayer, we do not have to perform or please, we just need to slow and listen, finding that reservoir of internal peace upon which to build the better angel of ourselves.

Pope Francis reminds us to be people of peace in prayer and deed. The two must work together if we are to make our classrooms, schools, homes, neighbourhoods, states and countries peaceful. We can model both prayer and peace for our students in the way we interact with our colleagues and with the wider community.

Prayer is transformative. Perhaps the question we should ask ourselves is:

Do we pray-oritise?

Do we allow ourselves and others to be the beneficiaries of this sacred and profound religious and human tradition?

When we pray we enter that special spiritual zone where we offer the truth of ourselves to God. We are unmasked and unmediated. We are in direct communication. We may not be eloquent or articulate in our private prayers, but we are heartfelt and earnest. God hears anything that we want to say to him; our doubt, our hopes, our uncertainty, our joy. Sometimes, we can pray together in words long-loved and traditional that remind us of our identity and belonging and the common ground we share. We recite these from the heart. Sometimes our own urgencies and preoccupations will be the impetus for spontaneity; prayers that spring from our anxieties or questions or our love and compassion for others in our lives.

As we pray we psychically remove ourselves from the clang and clamour of the external world to reside, albeit briefly, in the silence of spiritual surrender. Occasionally, we may seek further solitude to help us recalibrate. We know that prayer puts us into a different time frame as we commune with the Creator. We step off the chronological runway or chronos time and into kairos time; time not measured, drawn and quartered or data-analysed, but time heavenly and eternal.

This means we see prayer time as qualitative, not quantitative. It is about God's time, the opportune moment, being present, the exhalation of breath when the world stops and we finally get hold of our true selves. We clock off from our external pressures to allow ourselves the gift of communion, of truth-telling, of being in an authentic relationship with the God who loves us unconditionally. The writer, Kathleen Norris, suggests that this special time is oriented to process rather than productivity. We are present in

time, willing to wait attentively in stillness and silence, rather than rushing to reach a deadline in the noise and haste of the minutes and hours of the other push and pull times in our lives.

In prayer, we are immersed and present. Here we have the chance for the nourishment of the soul - that part of us that wants to be united with the universal goodness of the Spirit. In prayer, we ask and seek and thank and lay our hearts open to be lifted up. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta reminds us God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer.

Are you listening?

True for ourselves and true also for our students is that we must make the time to pray. This small sliver of time has to be built into and recognised as important to daily practice. It is symbolic of what is normative in a worshipping community. Prayer may well be part of homeroom gatherings or time set aside at the start of an RE lesson and its routine nature becomes, over time and with consistent and careful practice, embedded as part of the school culture. It is then normative to respond with prayer to daily concerns and larger liturgical celebrations, and the occasional life or death events which can cause upheavals or uncertainty in generally cohesive and stable groups.

With prayer as a natural response to all that happens in a community it becomes the glue and the grace that identifies and holds that community together. We reminded that whenever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name, he is there amongst them. And if our days are hemmed in with prayer, a morning offering and a small evensong, our worlds may be more navigable because we have entrusted them to God.

Corrie Ten Boom writes that what wings are to a bird and sails to a ship so is prayer to the soul. Prayer builds us into betterment as we call on the Holy Spirit to energise us with the faith to keep going, to see God in all things, to be bearers of light in the darkness, to bring the gospel alive in the stories we tell of Jesus of Nazareth.

Again, Pope Francis reminds us that we pray in a majestic river of invocations that precedes and proceeds after us. These prayerful voices are passed from generation to generation in a continual intertwining between personal experience and that of the wider human community to whom we all belong. This swell of sanctity is part of our belonging to the communion of saints, the anointed and the anonymous, all those who have come before us and will come after us. What a magnificent thought - we are connected to all those who have prayed like us throughout the course of human history.

Prayer is an eternally renewable energy!

It is hoped that these prayers and reflections assist you on the journey of your mission possible as you negotiate the 2025 teaching year. They may enable you to enjoy a prayerful pause point during the busyness of your day or a moment to reflect and refocus on all that you do in carrying out God's work and good work in building the Church and country of the future in this Great South Land of the Holy Spirit.

Ann Rennie



Sample

January

20 January – 24 January

Monday

20.1.2025



Whether the calendar year, the school year, the liturgical year, or one's birthday, there is something refreshing that happens when a new year begins. It presents the opportunity to participate more deeply in God's mercy as we set the counters back to zero and begin again. We can rule the line under the previous year and deepen our hope that the new year will be better, or at least different.

A new year might also bring a certain dread. With global uncertainty heightened and groups preferring conflict to peace, some people may feel more anxious. Life is at times difficult. We might want to escape the swirling ocean for the calm of the lifeboat. Yet somehow, we know we're not made for the lifeboat. We may need to have a little rest but then we get back on the ocean – we are pilgrims after all.

The gift of our faith reminds of us that God is the God of the second chance. Every new year meets the desire in each of us to have a second chance, to begin afresh, to begin again. The grace of every new year is to allow us to see and embrace that second chance.

God is good, good indeed.

Archbishop Pat O'Regan
Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide,
South Australia

Tuesday

21.1.2025



I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart.

Psalm 9:1

Bellbirds

*By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling;
It lives in the mountain, where moss and the sedges
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges;
Through brakes of the cedar and sycamore bowers
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers.
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,
The notes of the bellbirds are running and ringing.*

Henry Kendall (1839-1882)

**Let's thank God and appreciate the beauty of this glorious
Earth that is our home.**

Wednesday

22.1.2025



I believe in the sounds of life's music; the voice raised in song, the whoop of glee, the whistle of workmen, the swell of a symphony, the sweet swoon of a mother's lullaby, the a cappella waterfall of beautiful harmonies, the MCG baying and barracking, the ding-ding of a Melbourne tram making its slow way down a busy Collins Street, the joyous gurgle of birdsong in the morning, the whispered I love you, golden oldies on the radio, the soft invocation of prayer, the Last Post.

These beautiful noises tell me I'm alive as the world hums and thrums in its unique cosmic concerto.

Ann Rennie

Thank God today for the beautiful noise in your life.

Thursday

23.1.2025



Lord of the Spirit,

Enkindle in us the fire of faith.

Let us hear the gentle whispers and the giant shouts and the persistent invitations that call us to do good.

Let us gather together to do Spirit-filled work and to know that the Spirit is the wind beneath our wings whenever we move beyond the expected and easy, when we are moved to stand up and be counted, to voice our concern, to be bigger than ourselves.

Let the universal language of God's love speak to all.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

Ann Rennie

Friday

24.1.2025

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF EDUCATION
(AUSTRALIA DAY 26.1.2025)



God of all peoples, Lord of the journey
who always walk with us,
in this land you have blessed us
with the first inhabitants of the land
who have loved it through the ages:
for them we give you thanks.

You have blessed us in the settlers
who made this land their home,
and forged a nation with their toil:
for them we give you thanks.

You have blessed us in the many peoples
of different languages and cultures
who have found a new home here:
for them we give you thanks.

We ask that you make a home among us,
so that justice and truth may flourish here
and all Australians may walk together into the future you
are preparing:

for that we give you thanks.

Through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge
Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane

Meet the Authors



Juliette Hughes

Juliette Hughes is a Melbourne writer who was born in the north of England. After graduating from Melbourne University in Pure English, Juliette became a writer and teacher of English, RE, History, and Singing. She now sings mainly at church, but still loves a wide range of music. She has written columns, features, and reviews for *The Age*, and is a regular columnist, reviewer, and feature writer for *Eureka Street* magazine, the online Jesuit publication.



Ann Rennie

Ann Rennie is a Melbourne-based writer and teacher, former REC and has qualifications in educational leadership and religious education. She currently teaches at Genazzano FCJ College. Ann has written a regular column in the *Australian Catholics* magazine for the past 16 years. She contributes regularly to mainstream media, her parish newsletter and has written a number of books. Ann believes in the power of prayer and the importance of words that celebrate community.