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The following story is Chapter 9 from the book, *The Children of the Lantern* (1958). In this book, a nun in Rome (the “Lamplighter”) who teaches Saturday “lantern lessons,” to children, aged four to eleven—taking them through the catechism step-by-step using pictures, stories, and real life experiences.

Different Ways of Talking with God

“I like thinking about God, and talking to Him,” said Elizabeth one day, “but I don’t like saying my prayers!”

It was this comment of Elizabeth’s that made the Lamplighter decide that we must have one whole lesson on prayer because, of course, Elizabeth would not *dislike* saying her prayers if she had properly understood that they *were* just what she said she *liked*, “thinking about God, and talking to Him.”

Perhaps there are other children who think of “saying prayers” as one thing, and “talking to God” as something different, and if so—as that is the very greatest pity—this lesson will, it is hoped, show them that they are making a big mistake, and help them to see that prayer rightly understood is a very easy, and a very lovely, happy thing.

After we had sung our hymn to the Holy Child, there appeared on the screen a card with these words:

Different Ways of Praying

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Just thinking | 6. Making up |
| 2. Just looking | 7. Slow words |
| 3. Thanking | 8. Giving |
| 4. Being sorry | 9. Asking |
| 5. Being glad | |

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They were written in different colors, and the Lamp-lighter said, “We’ll take those different ways in turn, and I expect those of you who have been coming for some time to the lantern lessons to help me to give this one. Some of you know quite a lot about talking to God, but others, who have only begun to come lately, are, I think, in a little bit of a muddle about prayer, thinking of it as just something that must be *done*, not enjoyed!

“As we are going to begin with the prayer of ‘just thinking’, here is a picture of a friend of mine for you to look at first.



“Prayer is the lifting up of the mind and heart to God,’ the catechism¹ says. To raise, or lift up, your minds to God is then only another way of saying ‘*thinking of God*’, and that in itself is praying.”

¹ See Question 475 of the revised *Baltimore Catechism* of 1941.

Different Ways of Talking with God

“But is that little girl praying?” asked Jane.

“I don’t know. She is certainly *thinking*.”

“Yes, she’s having a good ‘think’,” said Renata.

“She hadn’t the least idea she was being photographed,” said the Lamplighter. “Someone saw her sitting in a lovely garden, all by herself, near a lilac bush—having a good ‘think’ as you say—and took the photo.

“Perhaps she *is* thinking of God and saying ‘Thank you for this lovely garden to sit in’.

“That would be a very good prayer, wouldn’t it, and though it belongs really to ‘thanking prayers’, she thanked only because she had first been *thinking*.”

“I’ve tried the thinking-of-God prayers a lot,” said Magda, “because in our church it’s so dark that I can’t always use my missal-book, and sometimes there are such big fat people in the bench in front of me that I can’t even see the altar!”

“Well, if Magda makes the best of the dark and the crowd, and just turns her thoughts to God, isn’t she making a good prayer?”

“Yes!” and Silvia added, “Of course, you’d have different thoughts, if it was Mass, to your Benediction-thoughts and—”

“And different ones too,” broke in Pietro, “if Mommy just took you in to church for a minute to visit with *Il Santissimo*.”

(“The Most Holy”—that is the beautiful name for our Lord in the tabernacle, which you hear in Rome.)

“But there’s no *time* to think at your morning and night prayers,” said Giovannino. “Miss always says to me: ‘Nino, be quick and say your prayers!’”

I Pray the Mass

THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

I am going to Mass, and I must think what this means. Mass is not only something *said*, it is something *done*. It is the holiest thing that can be done on earth. It is a Sacrifice. A sacrifice is something offered to God to show that he is the Master of all things. Because God is so great, so holy, and so good, we have to adore or worship Him. Because He has given us all we have, we must thank Him. Because we have offended this great and holy God, we must be sorry. And because we want many things for our souls and our bodies, we must ask Him for them.

Now, we cannot do any of these things properly by ourselves. We cannot adore Him enough, nor thank Him enough, nor be sorry enough for our sins, nor ask Him as we should for what we want. We are only poor tiny little creatures in God's sight. All this big world, and all the big worlds we see shining over our heads at night, are like specks of dust to Him—He is so great. We have nothing good enough to give Him. Thousands of gentle lambs and doves have been offered to God in sacrifice—but it was not enough. Not all the angels and saints, not our Blessed Lady herself, can give Him enough praise and love. Only our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God Himself, can give to God all He ought to have.

And so Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father when He hung upon the Cross. *This was enough*. The sacrifice of Calvary paid to God all we owe Him,

Many Ways to Pray

and bought us heaven and all we want to get there. But we have to bring into our souls the good things our Lord got for us on the Cross. There is plenty of water in the river, but unless we bring it into our houses, it is no good to us. How are we to get into our souls all our dear Lord died to give us? By the holy Mass.

The Mass is the same Sacrifice as that of Calvary. Our Lord is as truly on the altar as He was on the Cross. Only He does not die now. And we do not see Him offering His Sacrifice. He offers Himself by the hands of His priests. His Apostles were His first priests. At the Last Supper, they saw Him take bread into His holy hands and lift His eyes to heaven. They heard Him say over the bread, "This is My Body," and over the wine in the cup, "This is My Blood." Then He said, "Do this in memory of Me." What had He done? He had said the first Mass. He had consecrated, which means He had made holy, the bread and the wine by changing them into His holy Body and Blood. And He gave them power to do what He had done—to change bread into His Body, and wine into His Blood, and to pass on this power to the priests of His Church till He shall come again.

This is what is done at Mass. This is why the Mass is so great. One Mass pleases God more than all the songs of praise they sing in heaven. By one Mass we can thank Him as much as He deserves for all He has given us. And we can get from Him all that is good for us to have. I must try, then, always to go to Mass as I should.

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The Mass is the most perfect prayer because in it we adore, honor and glorify God, we thank Him for all His gifts, we ask Him to forgive us and we beg His graces and blessings.

MY PRAYERS BEFORE MASS

(Kneel)

I am going to try my best to pray the Mass. I want to begin right. I will be on time. I will genuflect. I will go to my place. I will kneel and pray. Then I will sit down. I will be quiet. If I have to wait for Mass to begin, I will read my prayer book or missal.

THE BEGINNING OF MASS

Mass begins. I kneel. I begin to pray the Mass with the priest. The priest makes the Sign of the Cross. I make the Sign of the Cross with the priest. "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

O my God, I want to share in Your joy.
I want to receive Your blessings.

WE ASK FORGIVENESS

I have sinned often.

I will ask for God's forgiveness.

I confess to God, to the Blessed Virgin, to the angels, to the saints, and to you, Father, that I have sinned. My sins are my fault, my own fault, my very own fault. I ask the Blessed Virgin, I ask all those who are in heaven, to pray for me.

Many Ways to Pray

“When I think, O dearest Jesus,
 What my sins have done to Thee.
How they in the lonely Garden
 Made Thee sad as sad could be.
I am very, very sorry
 To have given Thee such pain.
Do forgive, and bless, and help me
 That I may not sin again.

Amen.”

WE SAY THE ANGELS' WORDS

This part of the Mass honors the birth of Jesus. We say the words the angels sang, “Glory to God!”

We praise You, God. We bless You. We adore You. We give You thanks.

“Before You came into this world, dear Lord, everyone was afraid of You. They knew You are the great God who made the world and the starry skies. They knew that You are All-Holy and that You hate sin. They knew that You can do all things and that the strongest man is less than a little fly in Your sight. And so they thought men would be afraid of You when You came upon the earth. They did not know that You would cry when You were cold and hungry, that when neighbors came into the cottage of Nazareth to see Mary’s beautiful little baby, and took You into their arms, and smiled at You, You would smile back; that You would go out and play with other children, and come in when Your mother called, and fold Your little hands in prayer, before she put You to sleep. They did not know all this, or they would not have been afraid

I Talk with God

of You. How glad I am that I know it, that I did not live before You came, but now. You want me to love You, O little Child, and not to be afraid, now that You are coming so close to me, even into my heart. Dear little Jesus, I love You, I love You, come and let us love one another.”

“My God, I am glad that by this Mass, You will be praised and loved as much as You deserve, because Jesus will love and praise You, and He is God. I want to do what He does, and to give You glory with Him. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

WE READ AN APOSTLE'S LETTER

We now read a letter from a friend of Jesus to get us ready to read the words of Jesus. We thank God that we are Catholic.

WE READ THE GOSPEL

We stand to hear the words of Jesus Christ Himself, and make the Sign of the Cross on our forehead to show that we believe what Jesus Christ has taught us, on our lips to show we will never speak against it, and on our heart to show we love it and will do what He tells us.

Jesus often spoke to the people. He told them how to be good. The words He said are told in the Gospel. Now, we read some of the words of Jesus. Long ago, some boys and girls came to Jesus. They wanted Him to bless them. The Apostles stopped them, saying, “Go away!”

Jesus Teaches Me How to Talk with God:
Seven Scenes from
Our Lord's Life

1. OUR DAILY BREAD³

Our Lord once told the people that the best prayers were not very long ones, like those the heathens said. “*They* think that they will be heard because of their many words.” He said that *we* were *not* to think that, and then He taught them quite a short prayer: the Our Father.

Another day when Jesus was quite alone praying, the Apostles came to Him. They waited until He had finished, and then they asked Him to teach *them* to pray. There must have been something about the way Jesus prayed that made them somehow feel that their own prayers were not much good. And once again our Lord repeated, “When you pray, say . . .” and then He went through the words of the Our Father.

Jesus, I think I understand. You meant that it is not the length of the prayer that we say that makes You listen to it, but what we say and how we say it. Your own prayer—the Our Father—is not long, but it asks for all the things that really matter: That You may be known and loved and served, and to have *first* place in our hearts even now on earth; that we may have grace to do Your will—that is, anything we know You *want* us to do; that we may forgive others so that You may forgive us; that You will give us grace not to give

³ St. Matthew 6:5-15

in to temptation; that You will keep evil from us, especially the only real evil—sin.

But when I go to Communion, I like best of all to think of the words, “Give us this day our daily bread,” because they do not only mean, “Give us food for our bodies”—but they mean even more, “Give me yourself daily.” Come daily into my heart in Holy Communion because that will keep me from committing grave sin better than anything. I need food to keep life in my body; I need *You* to keep life in my soul. It is not hard, Jesus, to go to Communion every day at Catholic school: it is harder in the days of vacation, and perhaps it will be harder still when I am older. Please let me get into a habit now of going daily to You, so that I shall go on, if possible, doing it always.

“John” did not know he was to die so soon after that “week of Communions.” He must have been very happy, though, when he *did* die, that during his life he had been kept good through Holy Communion and so was ready for death.

Mary, Mother, say often to Jesus for me, “Give him this day his daily Bread”—and St. John say it, too, please, for me, and for all my friends, “Give them this day their daily Bread.” Amen.

Jesus, come each morn to be
Living Bread to nourish me,
You are strong, and I am weak;
Health and strength from Thee I seek.

2. FISHERS OF MEN⁴

It was very early in the morning and our Lord was walking alone by the Sea of Galilee. He had come out to find His first helpers in His work, His first Apostles. He knew that they would be doing their ordinary job—fishing in the waters of the lake. Simon Peter was casting his nets when our Lord passed and so was Andrew, Peter’s brother, and they must have been surprised by our Lord’s words, “Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Perhaps they did not quite know what He meant, but just felt that they must follow Him, so they left their nets that very minute and went with Jesus.

A little further on our Lord saw a boat pulled up on the beach. It belonged to a man called Zebedee, and he was sitting in it with his two sons, James and John, and some men that he had hired to help, and they were all mending fishing nets. Our Lord said that He wanted *them* to come with Him too, and they left their father and the boat and everything and followed Jesus at once with Peter and Andrew.

I am not old enough, Lord, to be a “fisher of men” in the way you wanted the Apostles to be—really helping You in Your work of getting hold of men’s souls and teaching them what to do with their lives, so as to get to heaven in the end. The only thing I can do *now* is to follow You by doing my best to please You each day and so, by degrees, becoming more useful to You. I have Holy Communion to help me, which those four fishermen had not. They were just doing their daily

⁴ St. Matthew 4:18-22; St. Mark 1:16-20

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tasks, but they must have done them well, in the way You wanted, for You to have called them to do bigger things.

Help me, Jesus, in Holy Communion to do my work well—not to be slack in lessons or games (It is harder at lessons.), so that I may be counted someday among Your friends who really help You.

I do not want just to keep out of grave sin. I want to show You that I am grateful for all You do for me by the way I try not to commit even small sins.

Please, our Lady, help me to be faithful to Holy Communion and to prepare for it by spending my day as well as I can.

St. John, pray for me. You were not always a saint and You know how hard it is sometimes to do what is right. When you followed our Lord that morning you were just an ordinary fisherman, but He turned you into an Apostle, a fisher of men. Ask Him to do that with me.

Lord, to be a “fisherman”
I am too small, and lowly;
But while Your priests are out at sea,
I can do some work for Thee
By trying to be holy.

3. AN EVENING OF MIRACLES⁵

Our Lord had spent a very busy day, and when, at sunset, He came out through the door of Simon’s little house He found the narrow street full of sick

⁵ St. Matthew 8:16-17; St. Mark 1:32-34; St. Luke 4:40-41