



## PRAYER LIFE | Pagan Prayers

The ancient pagans offered sacrifices and chants to their gods in order to ask for something, to appease them for something, or to change the gods' attitudes. Do not our prayers, at times, seem like great efforts designed to sensitize God to things which do not appear to interest Him?

Many of our prayers seem especially pagan because we use the imperative form: orders and demands. We ask; we beg; we supplicate in an effort to make Him act. We often pray as if, were it not for God, were it not for this Great Obstacle, things in life would go much better. We pray as if God were a distant tyrant with whom we have to plead in order to lift Him out of lethargy and indifference.

*"We ask you to bring peace to the world."*

How dare we accuse Him of indifference to world peace when He has been trying to convince us of the stupidity of violence for thousands of years!

If we were to record some of our prayers and analyze them, we would realize that we often believe ourselves to be better than God.

*"Dear Lord, have pity upon the orphans ... the poor ... and the needy."*

In fact, we are asking Him to be more "human." We are asking Him to react because, compared with ourselves, He seems to lack sensitivity. He seems not to care enough. And then, when a flash of His divine love and of His divine suffering over the misery of the world finally reaches us and moves us, we run to Him with the news and pray: "Do something for these ones in need."

Unconsciously, we are asking that God intervene in our place. It is so much easier to pray, "Be with the poor," than to help them ourselves. We believe that if we pray, "Remember those in need," that frees us from all obligation. We believe that our prayer is of great value. After all, poverty is rooted in something outside ourselves, isn't it? Wouldn't it be more honest to say, "Lord, when I think of the poor around me, I must ask you to help me discover what I can do for them. How can I help to remedy this injustice which you hate and for which my lack of love is to blame?"

It is so sad that prayer has turned out to be our way of reminding God of His duties: "Lord, remember your church."

Who is in danger of forgetting the church, is He or are we?

Fortunately, God, in His mercy, listens and understands in spite of what we say. But if we wish to deepen our relationship with Him, we cannot be content to chant our prayers routinely. We must ask Him to continue to have patience with us and to teach us to pray. Paul said, "We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." The more we understand our need to relearn how to pray, the more sensitive we will be to the voice of the Holy Spirit. When we pray in a superficial way, He will help us change the tone and will help us concentrate. So our prayer will begin to sound like a real conversation with an intelligent being. We will begin to understand our need for God and for others and will begin to see ourselves for what we really are.

Prayer is not so much talking as listening. It is not so much asking as receiving. It isn't calling God as much as it is responding to His call.