

# **HOW TO PRAY**

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How to Pray by Abbe Grou & R. F. Clarke

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**ABBE GROU & R. F. CLARKE**

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# HOW TO PRAY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF  
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EDITED WITH PREFACE  
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## PREFACE.

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**T**HERE are very few Christians who have not learned by their own experience how difficult it is to pray, or at all events to pray well. Anyone who will teach us how to pray is a friend indeed, to whom we can never be as grateful as we ought. Such a friend we have in Père Grou, S.J., the author of the following pages, which are but a portion of his larger work, "L'Ecole de Jésus Christ." It is a privilege, both for the translator and myself, that we have taken a part in introducing them to English readers, and we do so with a confident belief that they will be a source of comfort and encouragement to many a poor disconsolate soul that has long struggled against aridity and desolation in prayer, and will enable many, whose prayers have hitherto been imperfect and ill-directed, to pray better than they have ever done before.

R. F. CLARKE, S.J.

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## CHAPTER I.

### GOD ALONE CAN TEACH US HOW TO PRAY.

THE Apostles once said to Jesus Christ:  
“*Lord, teach us to pray.*”\*

It was the Holy Ghost who inspired this request, and who, then and there, gave them the most perfect idea of prayer, by means of which the creature draws nigh to God, adores Him, gives Him thanks, begs pardon for his offences, and lays before Him his needs. Filling them with a sense of their own nothingness and of the greatness of God, the Holy Ghost convinced them of their inability to perform these supernatural acts unaided, and He drew them interiorly to have recourse to Jesus Christ as the only Master who could teach them how to pray and by His grace help them to do so. It was on this occasion that Jesus taught them the Lord's Prayer. Later on we shall explain it.

There is no single Christian who is not in the same need as the Apostles, and who ought not, with like humility, to say to our Blessed Saviour: “*Lord, teach us to pray.*” Would that

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\* *Luke xi. 1.*



we were convinced of our ignorance on this great subject, and the need we have of such a Master as Jesus Christ! Oh, if only we would make our petition to Him with confidence, and entreat Him to instruct us Himself, sincerely wishing to be the disciples of His grace in the science of conversing with God, how soon should we become versed in this science, and make ourselves acquainted with many of its most secret mysteries. It is not enough to say that Jesus has taught us through His apostles, and that we know the prayer they learnt from Him. The words, indeed, of that prayer we know, but without His grace we cannot understand their meaning, and can neither ask nor obtain what it expresses. We are outwardly taught, as were the Apostles, when our Blessed Saviour complied with their request, but that is not enough. We must, like them, be taught inwardly; and this teaching they received only when the Holy Ghost came down upon them at Pentecost. Then it was that, thanks to their humble request, they received the sublime gift of prayer which was bestowed upon them by the Most Holy Spirit.

What is it that prevents us from receiving this same gift in that degree in which it shall be the good pleasure of God to communicate it? Can we doubt that Jesus Christ is anxious to grant it

to us? But do we ourselves desire it? Do we ask for it? Do we feel the need of it? How many Christians, alas! do not even know what it is! And how many, too, instead of wishing for it, dread it, because it would bind them to aim at a perfection which they have abandoned.

We know by heart some set forms of prayer, others we find in books at our desire; this satisfies us when we have read them or recited them from memory; we think not of anything more being required. How grievously mistaken are we! With all these forms, however beautiful may be the sentiments they express, we do not know how to pray, and during most of the time we are not praying at all, or rather we are praying according to our own fancy, not as God wishes. Where is the Christian who would not be offended, were he told he did not know how to pray? And where is he whose chief prayer consists in begging God to teach him how to pray? Nevertheless it is a fact that nearly all are very ignorant on this subject, and it is a fact that no one but God alone can instruct us by speaking to our heart; finally, it is a fact that none but spiritually minded persons, animated by the grace of God can pray according to His mind, whatever may be their prayer, whether vocal or mental.

To come now to something more definite, I

affirm that it is necessary that God should teach us everything concerning the nature of prayer, its *objects*, its *qualities*, the *dispositions* it requires, and the *personal application* we must make of it according to our needs. This is to say that in the matter of prayer we are as ignorant of the theory as we are of the practice.

We know in general that prayer is an act of religion, but when there is a question of our own prayers we easily lose sight of the truth that it is a supernatural act, which consequently is above our strength, and is one which we can only acquit ourselves worthily by the inspiration and help of grace. Thus St. Paul says: "*Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*"\*

Have we habitually this thought in our mind, and in our heart the feeling of our own insufficiency? Do we acknowledge it when we place ourselves in the presence of God? Is it with this intimate avowal of our weakness that we begin our prayers? I do not say we must always expressly invoke God's help, but it should ever be in our heart, and this disposition should be predominant during the whole course of our prayer.

Now, if we are to expect all from God, all our good thoughts and all our good feelings,

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\* 2 Cor. iii. 5.