

Calling on our beautiful forms of prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic calls us to embrace our prayer lives to develop an intimate relationship with God. The abrupt lifestyle changes remind us that we are on a journey to get closer to the heart of Jesus in our daily routines.

One of our greatest skills is the ability to remain in dialogue with God and grow in faith through a prayerful life. This is surely an opportunity to stay in conversation with God on behalf of the world, our country, our friends and families and our personal intentions.

It is a time to strengthen and exercise our faith lives while contemplating the deeper questions: Who am I? What is my purpose? How do I survive in a time like this?

As we struggle with those big-picture questions, Catholics can call on the many beautiful forms of prayer as we go to our “upper rooms.” Our prayer is not limited to time or space and cannot be stopped by a virus.

Liturgy (the Mass) – Even though most of us have not been able to attend Mass, we have found we can still pray the Mass, the highest form of prayer for Catholic Christians. We are making spiritual communions and uniting with others around the world at Mass via technology, apps and television.

Prayers of petition – The coronavirus makes us more aware of our dependence on God. This time propels us to verbalize our urgent needs. We have found that we can continue to offer our petitions virtually and with our families. As Jesus said, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20). We have the assurance that during our prayers of petition He is among us—that we have the promise that He hears our prayers.

Prayers of intercession – We are encouraged to pray for one another, and praying to God for others is indeed interceding. As our teaching tool the Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, “Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners.” Jesus wants us to pray for others: “Love

your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be Sons of your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:44-45).

Prayer of thanksgiving– Thanksgiving shows God gratitude for what He has done for us and acknowledges what He is currently doing. Our prayers of thanksgiving testify that we have hope in His grace and mercy and believe that He will make this moment pass. The Catechism reminds us to “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” and to “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

Praise and worship prayer– Prayers of praise and worship free us, allowing the Holy Spirit to embrace us and to be made manifest in us. As the Catechism says, “Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward him who is its source and goal: the ‘one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist.’”

Contemplation and adoration enrich our spirituality and allow us to connect and be with God. We may not be able to attend adoration, but we have found we can adore the body of God spiritually. Removing ourselves to pray allows us to adore the body of Christ within our spirits. There are many opportunities to connect to adoration chapels around the world via technology.

Devotions allow us to break away from our daily routines to connect with God. Christians who adopt a devotion can develop the kind of spiritual discipline needed to stay prayerful. Devotions bring us to a place of silence, prayer and dedication to seek the mercy and grace of our Lord.

Marian devotions remind us that Mary, the mother of Jesus, meditated on the life of her Son to maintain her intimate relationship with Him through prayer. Pope Francis has asked everyone to rediscover the beauty of praying the rosary at home during the month of May. Through the rosary, we are encouraged to emulate Mary and meditate on the life of Jesus. The Church honors Mary in a special way during May. This year is a special time to commit to praying the rosary and meditating on the life of Jesus through the joyous, luminous, sorrowful and glorious mysteries. It is heartening to see many people connecting around the globe via technology to pray the rosary during this health care crisis.

Let us continue to use these beautiful forms, uniting as one human family in prayer to ask Jesus, our Divine Physician, to have mercy and to come to our aid with His healing grace.

–By Andrei St. Felix with Colette Liddy. St. Felix is director of the Educational Opportunity Fund at Caldwell University. She received her master's in pastoral ministry from Caldwell where her final project focused on a "Journey to an Intimate Relationship with God" including how prayer is a relationship built through conversation with God. She is a member of St. Peter Claver parish in Montclair, New Jersey. Liddy is director of news and media relations at the university.