

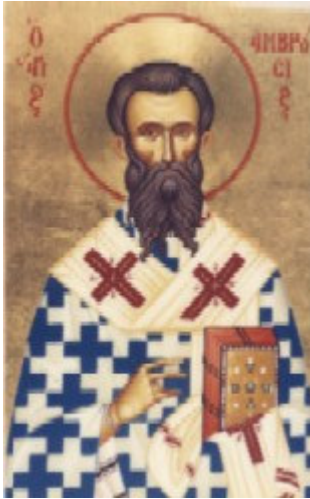


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Some Advice On Prayer

St. Ambrose of Milan

Early Church Father and Doctor of the Church



*St. Ambrose was the bishop of Milan, Italy who baptized St. Augustine in the second half of the 4th century AD. This excerpt on prayer from his treatise *On Cain and Abel* (Lib. 1,9,34-39 CSEL 32, 369. 371-372) is used in the Roman Catholic Office of Readings on Monday of the 27th week in ordinary time. It highlights the value of engaging the prayer of the whole body of Christ, the Church, rather than simply praying by yourself for yourself.*

*Offer to God a sacrifice of praise and pay your vows to the Most High. To praise God is both to make your vow and to fulfil it. That is why the Samaritan in the story is placed above his companions: with nine other lepers he was cured of his leprosy by the command of the Lord, but he alone came back to Christ, praised the greatness of God and gave thanks. Jesus said of him: *There was none of these who returned and thanked God, except this foreigner. And he said to him: Rise up and go on your way, for your faith has made you whole.**

The Lord Jesus also taught you about the goodness of the Father, who knows how to give good things: and so you should ask for good things from the One who is good. Jesus told us to pray urgently and often, so that our prayers should not be long and tedious but short, earnest and frequent. Long elaborate prayers overflow with pointless phrases, and long gaps between prayers eventually stretch out into complete neglect.

Next he advises that when you ask forgiveness for yourself then you must take special care to grant it also to others. In that way your action can add its voice to yours as you pray. The apostle also teaches that when you pray you must be free from anger and from disagreement with anyone, so that your prayer is not disturbed or broken into.

The apostle teaches us to pray anywhere, while the Savior says *Go into your room* – but you must understand that this “room” is not the room with four walls

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that confines your body when you are in it, but the secret space within you in which your thoughts are enclosed and where your sensations arrive. That is your prayer-room, always with you wherever you are, always secret wherever you are, with your only witness being God.

Above all, you must pray for the whole people: that is, for the whole body, for every part of your mother the Church, whose distinguishing feature is mutual love. If you ask for something for yourself then you will be praying for yourself only – and you must remember that more grace comes to one who prays for others than to any ordinary sinner. If each person prays for all people, then all people are effectively praying for each.

In conclusion, if you ask for something for yourself alone, you will be the only one asking for it; but if you ask for benefits for all, all in their turn will be asking for them for you. For you are in fact one of the “all”. Thus it is a great reward, as each person’s prayers acquire the weight of the prayers of everyone. There is nothing presumptuous about thinking like this: on the contrary, it is a sign of greater humility and more abundant fruitfulness.

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