

The Time of Renewal.

Part V: The Catholic and Prayer

Survey Report

This is the fifth article in a nine-week series based on a recent opinion survey conducted by the Catholic Diocese of Rochester.

The sample questions to the right were taken from that part of the survey which deals with this week's topic: How important is prayer to the Catholic faith today?

The survey demonstrated that a high proportion (75%) of Catholics attend Mass weekly but that only 8% of Catholics find prayer at Mass most meaningful. Group prayer or worship through other traditional Church services such as Stations of the Cross, Novenas, First Friday Devotions, appears to be fading fast in the Diocese of Rochester. Fully 95% of the Catholics surveyed were unaware of any services other than Mass in their parishes.

Prayer seems to have the most meaning for Catholics as a personal and private expression of faith. A majority (67%) find prayer most meaningful alone in solitude. And, this



The following questions appeared in the recent Diocesan Time of Renewal Survey.

What special services, such as Mid-week Novena, are available to parishioners?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

In daily life at work and at home, to what extent do you find you can apply the principles of the Catholic faith as you understand it?

- Always
- Frequently
- Sometimes
- Occasionally
- Never

When facing a serious decision or problem, which source would you be MOST likely to go to for help if you were uncertain as to what you should do as a Christian? (one response)

- Prayer
- Guidance of the Pope
- Catholic friend
- Your parish priest
- Your confessor
- Your spouse
- The Bible/Gospel
- Billy Graham
- None of these

Under what conditions do you find prayer most meaningful?

- Alone in solitude
- With my family
- A group of close friends or relatives
- During Mass
- Makes no difference
- I don't pray
- Other (SPECIFY) _____

Survey questions related to each weekly topic will be printed here throughout the Time of Renewal newspaper series. The completed survey, answers and findings will be published in a book, "Dialogue For Renewal," available this Fall.

appears to be related to the large number (62%) who say they can regularly apply the principles of the Catholic faith as they understand it, in their daily lives.

While 67% of the Catholics who responded find prayer most meaningful in solitude, only 20% would turn to prayer as "the first source" of help when faced with a serious problem or decision. 33% would first seek out the guidance of their priest or confessor, and another 20% would first turn to their spouses.

Family prayer

In general, most Catholics look on private prayer as a sustaining force in

The Time of Renewal should bring us to a new discovery of prayer. Prayer is not just a matter of ticking off a few Our Fathers. It's an attitude, a responding, a turning of attention to God, a tuning in to the vibrations of God's presence. TV and radio waves are present even when our sets are not turned on. God is present with us and in us, always, even when we are not tuned in to Him. All we need to do is to dial ourselves in. We have to pay attention to God, focus on Him, respond to His presence with words, spoken or unspoken, of praise, admiration, thanks, crying, pleading for our needs and the needs of others.



St. Diego at Prayer, by Murillo, Seville Cathedral

God is the one "who sees," as no one in this world sees or is able to see. He sees through the way things seem to be. But God's "seeing" is not a cold, heartless appraisal. It is from the depths of His love. He sees and cares. Jesus assures us of this. "Not a single sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you, every hair of your head has been counted; so do not be afraid of anything. You are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows" (Mt. 10: 29-31).

restrict ourselves to the asking kind of prayer. Our horizon is widened to larger vistas of thanksgiving, admiration and praise, and remorse for our sinfulness. We get to see God, not just as Helper and Provider, but as beautiful, adorable, lovable, thankworthy, yes, even vulnerable to our waywardness.

There is an even deeper dimension of prayer—the Christian dimension. The Christian always has a partner in prayer—the spirit of Jesus, who dwells within us. The Bible says:

"The Spirit who helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought; but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in speech" (Rom. 8: 26).

Renewal in prayer must reach also to those times when God calls us to join with others in prayer. Here too we are to find the Lord, and to speak to the Father through Him. "Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

We cannot discover the fullness of Christ if we do not seek to find Him in our brethren. Private prayer is indispensable, but it must be mindful of the community. Praying with others, especially at Mass, will be anemic and hollow unless it is nourished by personal prayer.

Fortunately, the Holy Spirit is at work today, inspiring people to gather for group prayer at neighborhood meetings, Prayer Centers and retreat houses throughout the Diocese.

When Prayer becomes a part of daily life, we wonder how we could ever have lived without it. With its life can be beautiful even in the darkest times. Without it, life can be flat and tasteless even on the brightest days.