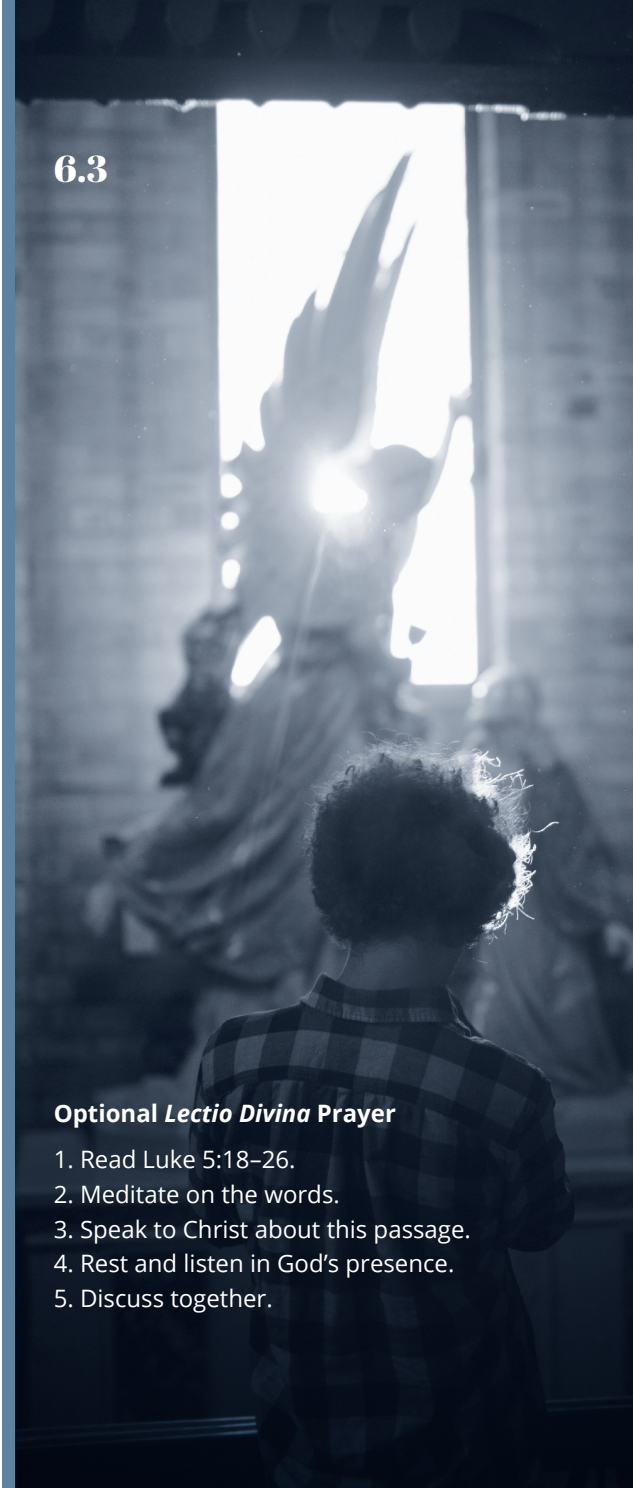
6.3

INTERCESSORY PRAYER



Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Luke 5:18–26.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

In 1887, France was gripped by a murder mystery involving the grisly deaths of three women in Paris.

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After the investigation had taken several twists and turns, the police arrested Henri Pranzini, a known criminal with a sordid past. Pranzini denied the triple murder and tried to provide an alibi, but the evidence gradually mounted against him. His trial lasted just five days and, at its conclusion, Pranzini was found guilty and sentenced to death by guillotine.

Despite the evidence, Pranzini showed no remorse or shame. He refused to repent of his past life or of the crime he committed. On the morning of his execution, a chaplain came to his cell to offer confession. With bravado, Pranzini walked past the priest and up to the scaffold to face his death. As he arrived, he changed his mind; he turned to the priest, asked for a crucifix and kissed Jesus' wounds three times as a sign of faith and repentance.

While all of France was fascinated by the fate of Pranzini, one fourteen-year-old girl took a particular interest in the case. Upon hearing of Pranzini's death sentence, she felt a specific call to pray for the man so that his soul did not fall into hell. While she was confident that God would hear her prayer no matter what, she asked for a sign, even a small one, to show her that her prayer was answered. While we'll never know the full story, Pranzini's kiss of the crucifix seemed to be a sign that the prayer of this fourteen-year-old girl — later known as St. Thérèse of Lisieux — was answered.

Thérèse's intercessory prayers for others was one of the hallmarks of her life. She prayed not only for lost souls like Pranzini and people around the world who did not know Christ, but she also always prayed for family members, religious sisters in her convent, and the novices entrusted to her care. She had a specific mission of fervently praying, fasting, and making sacrifices for missionary priests, empowering their work in evangelization to bear much fruit and help save souls. One of these priests wrote to Thérèse's convent asking for a nun to pray for his soul and his mission.

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Thérèse responded, "Let us work together for the salvation of souls. We have only the one day of this life to save them and thus to give Our Lord some proof of our love."[1]

Thérèse has continued her mission of interceding for others while in heaven. Shortly after her death, her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, was printed and distributed in France, then in Europe, and then through the whole world. Over time, hundreds of letters poured into Thérèse's convent, telling of the miracles that occurred through the intercession of this incredible saint. In 1927, just thirty years after her death, Pope Pius XI named this powerful intercessor the patroness of missions.

DISCUSS

St. Thérèse had an incredible desire to win souls through her intercession in prayer. Do you have this same desire to intercede for others? What is your current experience with intercessory prayer? Do you feel comfortable sharing the power of this prayer method with others?

A VISION FOR INTERCESSORY PRAYER

The *Catechism* says that intercessory prayer "consists in asking on behalf of another" (CCC 2647). What kind of power does this prayer hold? As Pope Francis tells us, "Intercession is like a 'leaven' in the heart of the Trinity. It is a way of penetrating the Father's heart and discovering new dimensions which can shed light on concrete situations and change them."[2]

When we practice intercessory prayer, we imitate our Lord. While on Earth, Jesus prayed for others, and he continues to be an advocate for us in heaven. As Hebrews 7:25 tells us, "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Not only does Jesus intercede for us, but he also responds to our intercessory prayers for others. In Luke Chapter 5, we see what happens when people bring the needs of their friends to Jesus.

The crowds are beginning to follow Jesus because they hear of his healings. Several men carry their paralytic friend up to be healed by Jesus, but they can't reach him through the crowds. Unwilling to be stopped, they lowered him through a hole they had made in the roof tiles. What happens next tells us something incredibly important about the power of intercessory prayer: "And when [Jesus] saw their faith he said, 'Man, your sins are forgiven'" (Lk 5:20). Notice how Jesus forgives the man because of the faith of his friends.

When we love and intercede for each other, the Father delights; it opens his heart and moves him to respond. The faith of this group of friends is what moves Jesus to action. They loved their friend so much that they were willing to work and sacrifice to bring him to Jesus. Are you willing to do the same for the people in your life? You know people who are suffering, who don't know Christ, or who are not practicing the Catholic Faith. Do you bring them to Jesus through your fervent prayers for them? If Jesus sees your faith, he may work a miracle in their lives.

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Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God's heart.

— St. Padre Pio

DISCUSS

Do you believe that your personal prayers can actually make an impact in the lives of others? What, if anything, holds you back from being open to the Holy Spirit in this way?

GETTING STARTED

Most of us know that intercessory prayer is important. Unfortunately, sometimes it can become just a "good idea" or something we do sporadically, whenever someone comes to mind. However, it's important to make it a part of our lives each day. Throughout the

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history of the Church, intercessory prayer has played a vital role in the work of saving souls. As missionary disciples, we ought to spend time every day talking to God about people and spend the rest of the day talking to people about God.

To do this, we must come to prayer with the right disposition and build up good habits of praying for others. Let's look at a few key truths about prayer and try and build this habit in our lives.

Dispositions in Prayer

As you consider praying for others, here are some things to keep in mind as you prepare to pray:

- God truly hears our prayers. Don't underestimate how vital and powerful your prayers can be.
- This is God's work. The Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization. When we intercede for others, we allow him to do the heavy lifting in our work of bringing souls closer to Christ.
- Have confidence in God. Our reliance on God in prayer banishes fear and allows us to place situations and people in his hands. Sometimes we feel small, weak, and helpless, but all our requests and feelings can be given over to him.

You pay God a compliment by asking great things of him.

— St. Teresa of Avila

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- Be humble. We don't come to God with our list of expectations, which he must then fulfill. We come to him with trust, like children coming to their parents. In fact, interceding for others should lead us to be less self-centered as we step outside of ourselves and consider the needs of others.

- Pray specifically. Pray boldly. What do you want God to do? Don't feel like your prayer needs to be couched in pious language. Share your heart honestly with God. And don't think anything is too big for God. Often, we ask for too little, not too much!

Practices of Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer can take many different forms. Each time you go to Mass, you can offer it for a particular person or intention. You might consider gathering a group of people together and praying out loud for the needs of others. You could even make little sacrifices, like not putting cream in your coffee or drinking only water, as prayers for people's needs. The ways we can intercede for others are endless. Here are a few practical ideas to consider:

- Write down people's names and pray for their needs daily.

- Imagine the people you want to pray for in your own mind or place their pictures somewhere near where you pray. Seeing their faces can motivate you to pray for them more specifically and more regularly.

- Pray with others in person. Your prayer doesn't have to be alone and in silence. It's great to pray for people when you are with them. Be sure to get their permission first, ask them what they need prayers for and then pray out loud for their needs. Praying in this way can be very powerful. Instead of just saying "I'll pray for you," they get to hear your prayer right away in that moment.

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- Pray at specific locations. Maybe it's where you have Bible study; maybe it's a place that needs conversion; maybe it's a room where you study, work, or teach: All of these places are great reminders to intercede for others daily. By praying in specific places, you ask for God's blessing upon all who enter there.

- Pray as you plan. Our work should be God's work, first and foremost. Therefore, whenever we begin an apostolic task, we should ask for God's guidance and blessing on all we are about to do.

- Consider offering up some sort of fast or penance alongside your prayer for others. Jesus himself notes the spiritual power of prayer paired with fasting (Mk 9:29), and St. Paul describes the value of offering up our suffering for the Body of Christ: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24).

DISCUSS

What keeps you from praying for others more often? How can you make intercessory prayer a daily habit in your life?

TAKE ACTION

One simple way to get started praying for others is to write down some names and to start praying! You can use your Prayer and Accompaniment Chart (pg. 171) to help you get started. As you recognize where people in your life are on the journey of missionary discipleship, you can pray for them more specifically and intentionally. This tool is a great way to keep those you are accompanying lifted up in prayer.

After you write down a few names, take some time right now to pray for someone. Feel free to use some of practical suggestions in the article. Intercede for this person and ask for the Lord to work powerfully in their life.

KEY CONCEPTS

Intercessory Prayer: Modeled by Jesus and the saints, praying for others is a key part of the Christian life (Heb 7:25; 2 Tm 1:3; CCC 2634–36).

Intercession and Missionary Discipleship: Missionary disciples ought to spend time every day talking to God about people and spend the rest of their day talking to people about God.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CCC 2634–2636: "Prayer of Intercession"

Notes

[1] Patrick Ahern, *Maurice and Therese: The Story of a Love* (New York: Image Books, 2001).

[2] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* accessed March 30, 2020, Vatican.va, 283.