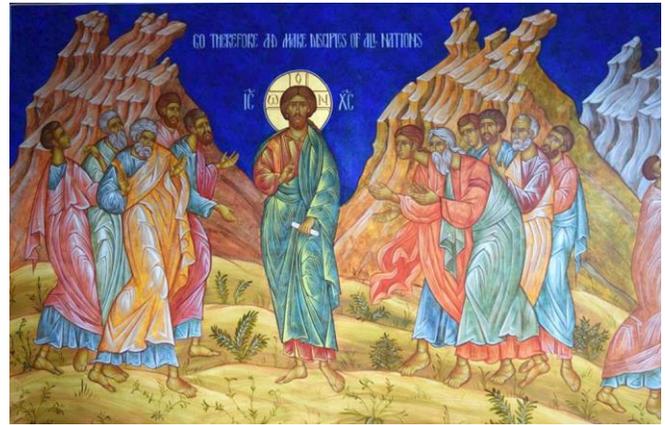


“Pray Without Ceasing”

Session 1

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” Galatians 5:22-23

“Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, A door of enclosure about my lips.” Psalm 140:3



Most gracious Lord! Send down upon us the grace of Your Holy Spirit to grant us intelligence and strengthen the powers of our soul, that we may attend to the instruction given us, and grow up to glorify You, our Creator, to gladden our parents, and to serve the Church and our people.

After receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Apostles followed Jesus Christ's instructions to go out into the world to teach the Gospel. Much of the New Testament tells us about their work of starting Churches in cities they, especially Saint Paul, visited. Once a Church was started, Saint Paul would often send letters to remind the new Church of how Christians should live, to help them deal with problems they may be having, to help them stay strong, and to keep growing.

→ These letters gave such important advice, that we still read and listen to them today. When do you hear these letters read?

→ Do you know another word for letters like these?

The words “pray without ceasing” are from an **epistle**, which Saint Paul wrote to the Church in the city of Thessalonica.

→ What does “without ceasing” mean? What are some things that are happening *ceaselessly* right now?

Can *you* really do anything without ceasing? Well, you already do! Your brain never stops working, sending messages to every part of your body...that's why your heart beats and you keep breathing. What Saint Paul is really telling us is that prayer should be as much a part of our lives as our own breath is.

Why breathing? We never stop breathing as long as our bodies are working. Even when we are asleep, our bodies know...without us telling it every second, to keep breathing in and out; steady and calm. Our prayer should be like breathing, our mind and heart praying – steady and calm, without being told to do so.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

First, let's talk about two things that prayer is **NOT**!

Prayer is NOT making a wish. Lots of people – adults and children – sometimes think that praying is almost the same as closing your eyes before you blow out the candles on your birthday cake! But prayer should **never** be confused with superstition or “luck.”

Prayer is also NOT “making a deal” with God...promising to “be good” or act a certain way if our prayer is answered the way we want it to be.

→ Can you think of why it would be foolish to think about prayer in these ways?

Now, let's start to learn what prayer really is!

Prayer is the language of our Faith.

From your very first words of baby-talk, language is one of the most important things you learn. Why do you think your family was so happy at your first words? How much more useful is your language today?

You probably know someone who didn't learn English as a child...maybe *you* spoke another language first. Depending on the age we learn a language, we may never be comfortable with it or think of it as our own, even after using it for many years. Many people continue to think and have dreams in their first language for their whole lives.

Language also grows as you do. As you've gotten older, you've gotten better at expressing yourself. If you think about prayer as a very special language used when talking to God, you can see how important it is to start learning when you are young. You must try to improve your language skills as you grow so you can express yourselves to God as the person you are.

There are two ways to get better at a language: to read and listen to it as it's used by more experienced people, and to use it yourself until you become comfortable. We want to make sure we will always be comfortable with the language of prayer and that it comes naturally to us.

You know by now that language can be one of our most useful tools, but it can also be a source of hurt or punishment. God Himself shows us this in Holy Scripture.

→ What is one time that God used our human language as a punishment

→ When did He use it in a most helpful way?

Prayer is the way we *communicate* with God.

Spoken or written language is just one way we have of *communicating*. What's the difference between just talking and communicating? Do you always listen to people who are talking to you? Do you always hear what they are really saying?

If communicating were just talking, it would be just about impossible to "pray without ceasing!"

"Communicate" comes from a Latin word that means "common"; that grew into other words meaning "fellowship" and "to do something together."

→ Can you think of any other words we use that come from the same base word?

→ How are they all related?

People can talk to themselves, but in order to really communicate four things are needed:

1. A message
2. Someone wanting to send the message
3. A way to send the message
4. Someone to receive the message

When we pray, we want to send a message to God. As we learn more about prayer, we'll talk more about what the message might be and ways God has given us, through His Church, to send our message. The most important thing to remember right now is that **GOD IS ALWAYS READY TO RECEIVE OUR MESSAGE.**

We use spoken language to pray but there are other ways we send our messages. We use our bodies and faces to communicate silently every day, sometimes without thinking about it or realizing we are doing so. We call this "body language." Sometimes our body language shows the world what we really mean, even if our words say something else!

Another way we communicate is through our *attitudes* and *actions*. What if you've been asked to do chores at home, but you choose to go spend time with your friends instead? Or you may do the chores, just not as well as you could have, or with lots of pouty body language. What are you communicating? What if you ask someone older to help you with a difficult math problem, and they explain it to you while they sigh out loud and roll their eyeballs, how do you feel?

Remember, actions sometimes speak louder than words!

Our body language, our attitudes and our actions are very important ways we communicate. When we use them to communicate love to those around us and to do our best at all times, we show God that we are living as He wants us to and that we are thankful for all He has given us. They help us to "pray without ceasing."



God's Language

by Lauren Sauter

What strange language is this?
With its enchanting syllables,
And its exotic sounds?
Can it be, has it finally been found?
Is it – Yes! It is indeed,
The Language of God
After years of searching,
And defeat, time after time again;
The Language has been found
Indeed, it took no more searching,
Then going to Church takes trouble.
The Search was so hard,
And yet, the Heart and Soul needed only to be opened
In truth, the Search would have been simple,
Had Belief only been apart of it.
But it makes no difference now,
For the Language has been found
And guess where it was,
During all those years of searching:
It was in my Heart, with my Savior,
Inside of me, all the time.

Lauren, 14, is a parishioner at St. John the Baptist Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Washington, D.C. She became an Orthodox Christian at age 10

Silent Contemplation Time: Scripture Reading on Love - 1 Corinthians 13