

The Faithful Seek God's Mercy

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“Pray for me.” How often we hear these words or see them in emails or on social media. When our prayers are requested, there is a trust that God will hear us. When we pray for someone, we exercise the power of our Baptism by sharing in the priesthood of Christ, who intercedes for us at God’s right hand.

In the liturgy, this is most fully expressed in the Prayer of the Faithful, also known as the Universal Prayer or in some places, the Bidding Prayers. These petitions were part of the liturgy in the first centuries of the early Church, but toward the sixth century they fell into disuse. Fortunately, they were restored by the Second Vatican Council.

The local parish has the freedom to write these prayers so that they are suited to its time and place. For guidelines, the Church states that the intentions are to be:

- a) for the needs of the Church;
- b) for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- c) for those burdened by any kind of difficulty;
- d) for the local community.

In a particular celebration, such as a Confirmation, the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, or a funeral, the intentions may be concerned more closely with the occasion.

Though the Church tells us for whom to pray, it doesn’t provide specifics. The Church prays first for herself, recognizing the need for God’s presence. We pray for those charged with the responsibilities of civic leadership. We pray for those who long to be liberated from various burdens, such as those suffering from illness, addictions, or poverty. We pray for the unity and peace of the entire human race. We pray for the local community or for needs in our parish, such as our teens who are on retreat, our catechumens, a child who is being baptized that day, our newly confirmed, and so on. Because these are considered general intercessions, the prayers express needs with a broad approach. We don’t pray for a specific person who is sick because we understand that he or she is included in the prayer for all the sick.

The priest announces the Prayer of the Faithful with a brief introduction. The prayers can be read by a layperson, but if there is a deacon present, he announces them. Historically, it was the deacon who, in his role as servant to the community, would know best who might be in need of prayers. The priest concludes the petitions with a prayer.

Each prayer is followed by a response from the assembly, which can be spoken, sung, or responded to in silence. The typical response is “Lord, hear our prayer,” but that can

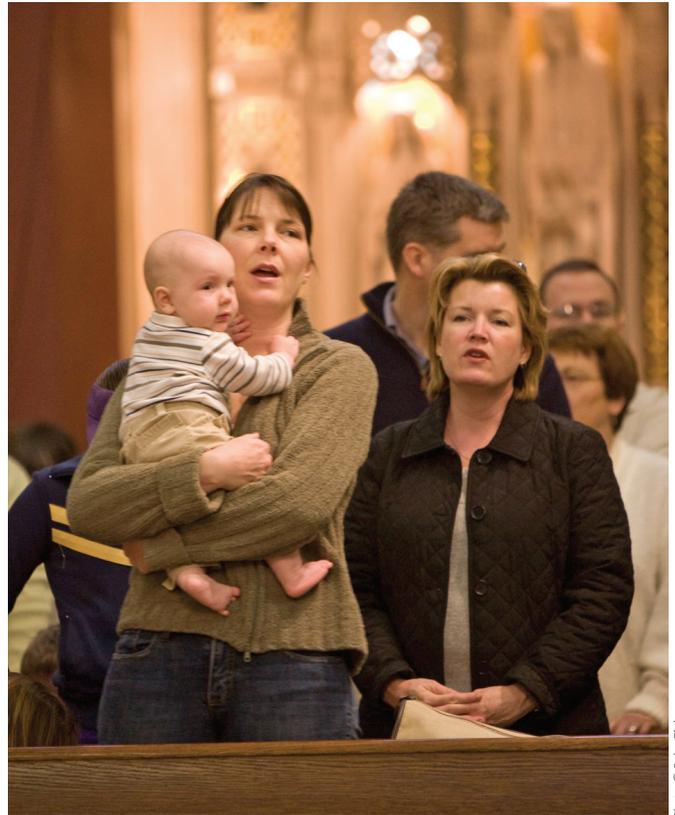


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During the Universal Prayer, the faithful petition God for the needs of the Church, people in leadership, those burdened by difficulty, and the local community.

be changed from week to week. Using different responses such as, “Renew us in your love, O Lord,” or “Guide us by your wisdom, God,” not only puts different prayers on our lips, it helps keep us attentive. Different responses also can connect the prayers to the readings of the day. Responses such as “Come, Lord Jesus,” during Advent or “Have mercy on us, Lord” during Lent can help link the prayers to particular liturgical seasons.

Whatever prayers we compose and whatever responses we use, the Prayer of the Faithful forms us to recognize the needs of those close to us and those around the world and helps us to see ourselves as agents of God’s grace.