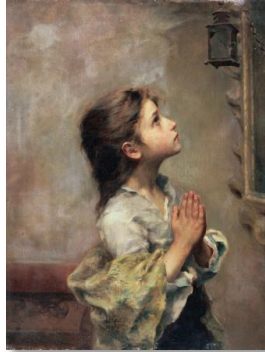


An open discussion in the Beloved Community on Personal Prayer:  
**How are we, each one of us, in conversation with God?**

August 6, 2023

Rev. Elizabeth River



*Praying Girl*  
Roberto Ferruzzi

**Readings**

Philippians 4:6-9

New Revised Standard version

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Praying

Mary Oliver

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just patch

a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.

## 1. A few thoughts about this subject including what I wonder about

How do others talk to God? What words do they use? Do they always depend on prayers they've known since childhood whenever they need to make a connection with God, Higher Power, the Divine Source, Mother of us all? Or do they make up words in the moment when the need to pray arises?

I want to hear how you express to God in your own words what you hope will happen perhaps when you are anxious or fearful or discouraged. When you are in need? When someone you love is needing something? I want to acknowledge that everyone has all this stuff (anxiety, fear, dread, depression, loss of hope, low expectations, etc.) as the world turns in everyday life. I want us to recognize ourselves as a community of individual voices, to hear prayers from the tiniest things to the huge ones, from the personal to the communal, to the problems of people far away or close by.

I want us to know each other in our hindrances as well as our strengths and competencies, from our griefs to our triumphs, and in the ordinary, humdrum days too!

I want us to talk about asking – not only asking God, but asking each other, and those we meet in ordinary days. Isn't that often when we get an answer, but then it comes from someone else? Who is that? I want us to consider that asking offers the one you asked the opportunity to give and be generous and helpful and allow their full hearts to overflow as the giver!

I want us to talk about specific ways of thanking or praising God, and of being intimate with God, and how we refresh our faith and certainty that *God is indeed still listening*.

Okay, now it's everyone's turn. Do any of you have a memorized prayer that you use in time when you need to say a prayer? And can anyone share a personal prayer (your own words) that comes to mind for a particular circumstance or person or situation, now or in the past?

## 2. Types of prayers (give my own examples, if needed)

Asking for what you need Any examples?

*"Oh God, help me! I do not know what to do. Please get in here and tell me what to do or just fix this!!! Now! Please!"*

Expressing gratitude Any examples?

*"Holy cow, thank you for this incredible gift! What did I do to deserve this? Oh, right – nothing. This is that Grace thing, right? It's what you do!"*

Praising, celebrating, being awed by the Divine in our midst. Any examples?

*"OMG I can't believe it – it's beyond my comprehension and over-the-top amazing, God. I'm absolutely astonished!"*

Invite people to express a personal prayer of asking

- for themselves.
- for a loved one.
- for something else.

Can anyone tell about a time when you were an answer to someone's prayers?

Can you think of a time when someone showed up and did or said something that turned out to have been an answer to your prayer? Without your having asked them directly?

### 3. Making up a prayer on the spot

Okay one more thing: Turn to a person next to you or in front of or behind you. Person A, tell your partner of a situation or person you are concerned about. Person B, make a prayer about Person A's concern. Person B, offer a concern. Person A, make a prayer.

Back in the big group: Does anyone want to share the prayer you created?

### 4. The Lessons (readings)

In the Mary Oliver poem she says making a prayer "isn't a contest, but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak!"

The big lesson I take from the reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians is at the very beginning: *Do not worry about anything!* In other words, instead of going nuts worrying about what so-and-so is going to do next on social media, or how the homeless are ever going to be housed, or about the horrors of any of the major catastrophic problems that are happening right now, prayer and supplication are suggested: *let your requests be known to God*. Offer thanks, perhaps in advance, and praise all that is worthy to be praised!

Nothing elaborate. A few small stones. Weeds in a vacant lot. Your singular, unique, worthy, significant voice. In prayer. That is enough. You are enough.

Amen.



Mary Oliver