

Landry: How to suit up for the Battle of Prayer

Whenever Lent approaches, many Catholics begin conversing about the penances they will undertake – what we’re giving up for Lent this year.

There are many online lists [like this one](#) that go through different ways to make the most of your Lenten sacrifices. Since we’re approaching the halfway point of Lent, you’ve probably already done that. But when you give something up, the question becomes “What am I going to do with that time or space?”

Well, if you’re giving up something like screen time, a particular show, or even listening to music while you drive or get to school, the answer to that question is simple: you should fill that space with prayer. While the answer is simple, the realization can be much more difficult. This is why the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks about the “Battle of Prayer”:

Prayer is both a gift of grace and a determined response on our part. It always presupposes effort. The great figures of prayer of the Old Covenant before Christ, as well as the Mother of God, the saints, and he himself, all teach us this: prayer is a battle. Against whom? Against ourselves and against the wiles of the tempter who does all he can to turn man away from prayer, away from union with God. We pray as we live, because we live as we pray. If we do not want to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ, neither can we pray habitually in his name. The “spiritual battle” of the Christian’s new life is inseparable from the battle of prayer. ([CCC 2725](#))

When I was younger, I didn’t really think of prayer as a battle. The truth is that I didn’t really see it as much of a conversation as well. It was like writing a postcard: hey God, I’m checking in, thanks for the gift of today, and by the way here’s a list of things I might need. When I reached the point in my life where I began to take prayer seriously, it was a revelation to me that God might answer my prayers in a way that I might hear Him.

It shouldn’t be surprising that with an approach to prayer like that one, it wasn’t something I did with any regularity until my parish youth minister challenged me to spend 15 minutes a day in prayer. I think this is where the “battle of prayer” really began for me. Fifteen minutes is a lot more than just a postcard. It meant I had to learn some of the rich prayers that come from our Catholic tradition like the rosary – but it also meant that I had to learn to do more than just talk in prayer; I had to learn to listen for God’s voice. And I’ll be honest, because in the twenty some years that I’ve been trying to listen, I’ve learned just how much of a battle prayer really can be.

But there are a few weapons we can bring to this battle. The first of these is the “determined response” mentioned in the catechism. We need to make a firm

decision that our relationship with God is going to become a daily priority, setting aside a time within which our prayer will happen (and, if that moment is early in the morning, don't stay up too late and sabotage the next day's prayer!)

Second, we need to find the field of battle – a sacred space in which we are able to make the time for conversation with Christ. Some of us have the blessing of daily access to a church or chapel, and it is an incredible blessing to be able to spend time with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

But even when that's not possible, we can find ways to create a sacred space in our own homes. When Jesus tells us to go into your room and shut the door ([Matthew 6:6](#)), this often means we need to literally go into a room and shut the door from the noise and busyness of our everyday life. It may mean shutting down our screens as well so that we aren't distracted by the notifications that have come in.

Third, we have access to all the traditional forms of prayer that the Church has to offer us. I often explain to students that learning to pray is like learning to talk. We didn't just make up our own language, we copied the sounds we heard from our families.

To learn to pray, we have the gift of traditional prayers like the rosary, various forms of [Lectio Divina](#) that can help us pray with scripture, and the ability to go and sit face to face & heart to heart with Jesus in Eucharistic Adoration. We don't need to make it up – we can learn from the saints and spiritual giants who've come before us.

Finally, one of the most important weapons we have for prayer – and one that is often forgotten – is the ability to listen. A priest friend often says that God gave you two ears and one mouth, so we should use them proportionally when we pray, listening for God's voice twice as much as we speak to Him. For me, that is a tremendous battle (because I have so much that I want to say.)

When we go to prayer in this way – taking up these armaments and the many others Christ provides us with – we allow our Lord to transform us, helping us to resist not only nefarious plots to distract our lives... but to become Catholic Christians who have the ability to bring light into a darkened world.

*"You go to pray; to become a bonfire, a living flame, giving light and heat."
–St. Josemaria Escriva*

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