

Patience

Remember, this is a process and you will go through stages. Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov reminds us that our simple attentive beginnings lead us to the temple of the heart.

It is one thing to pray with attention with the participation of the heart; it is another thing to descend with the mind into the temple of the heart and from there to offer mystical prayer filled with divine grace and power. The second is a result of the first. The attention of the mind during prayer draws the heart into sympathy. With the strengthening of the attention, sympathy of heart and mind is turned into union of heart and mind. Finally, when the attention makes the prayer its own, the mind descends into the heart for the most profound and sacred service of prayer. All this is accomplished under the guidance of the grace of God. It is harmful to strive for the second before acquiring the first. (On the Prayer of Jesus, p 48)

How long to pray

Be sure to consult your spiritual Father on the amount of time you should devote to the Jesus prayer. As a general rule you should repeat it for a minimum of 15 minutes at any one prayer session.

Any less will not help you develop the attention needed for prayer of the heart. You should then fairly quickly work up to a period of thirty minutes.

You will need to measure your time to make sure you fulfil your desired time. One way is with a clock. Another way is to use a prayer rope. A prayer rope has 50 or 100 knots typically. Holding it between your thumb and index finger you can index one knot at a time each time you complete one complete recitation of the Jesus prayer.

Practice of the Jesus Prayer is a long and difficult path

A struggle is required in the practice of the Jesus Prayer. Saint Maximos said, *"Spiritual knowledge without ascetic practices is the theology of the demons."* (A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain, p 61) To transform our being

and free our mind from domination by passions, and to bring it into the heart to be aligned with God as its focus is not a simple task. Reflect on difficulty you encountered in developing other disciplines you have learned in your life, whether it relates to your work life, home life, or a sport. You will find that the same is even more true for your spiritual life.

The practice of the Jesus Prayer requires a firm commitment, much effort and time. The practice of the Jesus Prayer must become a daily practice and engrained in your daily life. It is not something that you can allow yourself to ever say, "I am too busy today", or "I feel too tired for prayer." It must become just like other things you do without fail, like the simple act of brushing your teeth, taking a shower, and other such activities that are not treated as options in your life. If you skip it you should have the same unclean feeling as if you skipped your shower or brushing your teeth. This is how daily prayer needs to find its place in your life. It needs to become an integral part of your life.

Jesus prayer is not a form of Eastern Meditation

The practice of this Prayer should not be confused with methods used in Eastern Yoga or meditation.

In all Orthodox Prayer we are seeking a relationship with a personal God based on faith and love. The difference from "New Age" practices or Eastern yoga meditation has been described by using the analogy of a framed masterpiece. We can admire the beautiful frame of a masterpiece, but the frame is not the masterpiece. The similarities between the Jesus Prayer and various meditation practices can be considered to be like the frame of a masterpiece. The masterpiece in the practice of the Jesus Prayer is union with Jesus Christ. The frame is only the methods used. There may be similarities with postures, techniques and other acts of the outer form of this prayer, but the content and aim is totally different and uniquely Christian.

JESUS PRAYER



"LORD JESUS CHRIST, SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME A SINNER,"

Numerous Church Fathers tell us that the Jesus Prayer is "essential" to our spiritual growth. It proclaims our faith and humbles us by asking mercy for our sinfulness and is thought to be as old as the Church itself.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom says the Jesus Prayer, "more than any other," helps us to be able to "stand in God's presence." This means that it helps us to focus our mind exclusively on God with "no other thought" occupying our mind but the thought of God. At this moment when our mind is totally concentrated on God, we discover a very personal and direct relationship with Him.

Jesus Prayer is both a discipline and a prayer. As a prayer it proclaims our faith in God and seek his mercy for our recognized sinfulness. As a discipline, its practice helps us to control our mind and its many wandering thoughts so that we can focus our attention on God more and more frequently during our daily life. The aim is to become one with God and have our entire life become one continuous prayer dedicated to act with the will of God.

Theological foundation

The prayer begins with the name of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts we are told, *"There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12) The power in the prayer comes from our proclaiming the Lord's name. In its simple form we confess our faith in Jesus Christ as our God and Lord.

Practice of the Jesus Prayer

The way our holy Fathers tell us to use the Jesus Prayer is to say it over and over hundreds of times as part of our daily prayer rule. It is best to add it to your morning prayers as this is when the mind is the quietest. Begin by saying it verbally focusing on each word. Repeat it continually for 15 minutes at first and then expand to 30 minutes as you begin to see the challenge in dealing with your thoughts. Attention is important. Be sincere in your prayer with contrition. It is that simple!

Two functions

The first is worship with repentance like all prayer. In this regard it must be repeated with total sincerity. It must be coupled with an attitude of repentance coupled with humility. We must also have a feeling of awe when calling on God's name, recognizing His perfect love and His awesome power. At the same time we must be fully aware of our limitations in being able to live the way He intended for us at our Creation. We know from the story of our creation in Genesis, He made us in His "image and likeness". So we have an incredible potential to live up to. If we honour this and recognize how far we miss the mark, we will approach Him with a contrite heart and along with a sincere desire to be helped and transformed so we can live up to this beautiful potential He gave to each of us.

The second purpose of this prayer is to help us concentrate our inner life, calming it, so we can focus our attention totally on God and his teachings. We may refer to this as a form of spiritual purification. If we study human behaviour we know that our brain is very active and easily distracts our mind as it continually reacts to various stimulus through our five senses based on hidden assumptions programmed in its inner workings. The repetition of this prayer is an ascetic discipline to help us focus the attention of our mind on God rather on the endless stimulation of our senses and our biased orientation to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Guidelines

1. Commit to daily Prayer
2. Select a quiet place for your prayer
3. Prepare to enter into a conversation with your God
4. Sit or stand quietly and let go of all thoughts of your daily life.
5. Repeat the prayer slowly over and over for at least 15 minutes working up to 30 minutes.
6. Concentrate on the prayer with vigour. When you find your mind wanders immediately bring your attention back to the words of the prayer.
7. Use of a prayer rope can help you concentrate.
8. When finished with your prayer sit quietly for a few minutes before going onto other activities.
9. Participate regularly in the Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion, fasting on Wednesday and Friday, and also participate in Holy Confession at least two times each year.
10. Seek guidance from your spiritual father on the above.

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Three stages of practising the Jesus Prayer

There are three stages of progress in the use of the Jesus Prayer. You begin with verbal prayer, then it becomes silent or mental and finally a continuous prayer in the heart. We begin with vocal prayer.

Humility is essential when using the Jesus Prayer

The practice of the Jesus Prayer assumes you are a regular participant in the worship services of the Church, in her Sacraments and aware of your sinfulness. Be sure to consult with and follow the advice of your spiritual Father. Humility is a prerequisite for all prayer.

Attention of the mind

You can expect to be bombarded with thoughts like a swarm of gnats. When your mind is distracted from the prayer by thoughts, and its will, be polite and gentle but firmly nudge your mind back to the concentration on the prayer and seeking God. When you recognize your mind is wandering do not let it continue on this path. Don't accept even good thoughts. Let your soul take charge and move your focus back to the words of the prayer.

Saint John of the Ladder puts it this way:

Try to restore, or more exactly, to enclose your thought in the words of the prayer. If on account of its infancy, it wearies and wanders, lead it again. The mind is naturally unstable. But He Who orders all things can control it. If you acquire this practice and constantly retain it, He who sets the bounds of the sea of your mind will say to it during your prayer: Hitherto thou shalt come, and shalt go no further (Job 38:11). It is impossible to bind a spirit. But where the Creator of that spirit is present, there everything obeys Him. (Ladder 28:17)