

What Are We Praying and Why?

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. (Document on the Liturgy, Vatican II) I have quoted and referred a number of times to these words from the Second Vatican Council's document on the Liturgy throughout these reflections on *What Are We Doing and Why?* at Mass. Indeed, the very purpose of these reflections has been to encourage and support the full, conscious, and active participation of all who come to Mass by providing information and understanding of its various parts and prayers. As I take a step back from the *WAWDAW?* question about the *specific* parts of the Mass, I think of a more general question about the motivation and meaning of *any and all* of our prayer as Catholic Christians. *Why do we pray, whenever, wherever, and however we pray?* One of the best talks on prayer I've ever heard identifies three basic motivations for our prayer. One motivation is a sense of *duty and obligation*; we pray because we are supposed to, we've been told and commanded to pray. A sign or indicator that this is our motivation for prayer is that, when we don't pray, we feel guilty and perhaps concerned that we will be punished or suffer some negative consequence for not praying. Another motivation for prayer can be a desire for *blessings and benefits*, we pray for what we can gain from it. We ask God for things we want, for ourselves or others, things material or spiritual, like health, rain, a job, peace, answers, or help in any number of ways. A sign or indicator that this is our motivation for prayer is that when we don't get what we pray for, we don't pray. *Oh, my prayers are never answered, it's a waste of time, why bother!* Both these motivations for prayer are found in the Bible and the Tradition of the Church, but the fullest and most mature and developed motivation for Christian prayer is the desire to grow in friendship and loving union with God. Jesus says to us *I no longer call you slaves, but friends*. The sign that this is our motivation in prayer is that when we don't pray, we feel an emptiness or longing because we have missed time with our good and loving friend. When we come to the prayer of the Mass, what is our motivation? *What Are We Praying and Why?*

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about. Contact our Council for Catechesis at tkautza@saintmaryhc.org.