

When it comes to prayer, remember ACTS and ALTAR

The old saying, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” is wrong. I’m learning all the time! Allow me to share two new insights about prayer.

Most of us as children learned the four parts of prayer through the acronym ACTS. A for adoration. C for contrition – telling God we’re sorry. T for thanksgiving. S for supplication – asking God for what we want. I hadn’t found a simpler way to teach about prayer – until recently! A lady about my age taught me the same four steps only in different language. Her four steps were: “Wow!” “Oops!” “Thanks!” and “Please!”

Wow is a great word for adoration. If we’re honest, life is a wow experience. In prayer we acknowledge that. We are in awe of the immensity of creation, of the power of love, of the entering of God into history, of the presence of God in our lives. So many things to be in awe of!

Oops is a good word for contrition. Too often I can really beat myself up for failures, for sins. But oops has a way of lessening the punishing voice. Hamartia, an ancient Greek word for sin, simply means ‘missing the mark.’ Sin doesn’t mean I’m terrible. It just means I missed the mark. Oops.

Thanks, of course, is thanks. As a great mystic, Meister Eckhart put it: “If thanks was the only prayer we ever said, we would be very holy people.”

And, please is just that. We ask for what we want and need, and for the wants and needs of others. We don’t demand God’s time or attention. We simply put our needs and requests on God’s list, and then we trust.

Another acronym that I have learned recently is very helpful at another time in prayer. What do we say to the Lord right after we have received him in Holy Communion? An acronym for that moment is the very easy word ALTAR. A for adoration. L for love. T for thanksgiving. A for asking. R for resolutions.

With the Lord of the universe and the Lord of our lives now present within us in bodily form, what better time to adore him? We praise God for being God, and for his goodness to us.

We express our love for God. I wonder how often we tell God we love him. Mostly we want to receive love. Do we ever think of offering love?

Thanksgiving can also come naturally at this moment. What better time to thank God for all that we are and all that we have?

Again, what better time to ask for what we need, and to ask for what others have asked us to ask for?

Finally, resolutions. What better time to ask the Lord for help in transforming my life, and for help in transforming the world?

Finally, I want to share a little prayer that I pray often while taking my nightly walk. You can pray it at any time. I call it my prayer for the transformation of the world:

“Spirit of the living God, surround the world with light, and fill all the peoples of the world with light.

“Cast out Satan, sin, death, disease, darkness, fear, anxiety, depression, self-hatred and self-rejection.

“Cast out terror, suicide bombings, ethnic cleansing, slavery, terror, violence and cruelty of every kind.

“Fill all people of the world with light, love, joy and peace. Bring abundance and prosperity to all people. Heal us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

“Forgive us. Save us. Transform us.

“Protect us. Keep us safe. Keep us well. Keep us as your own.

“Thank you, Lord.”