



Praying through the Kerygma



Office of Education, Evangelization and Catechesis
INSPIRING FAITH, KNOWLEDGE AND COMMUNITY



ARCHDIOCESE *of* HARTFORD

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Praying through the Kerygma

What a wonderful decision you have made to spend some time praying through the powerful Gospel proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ!

Before you begin:

Try to find a quiet spot. This is no easy task for some people, but God often speaks to us in whispers. Blocking out distractions will greatly improve your experience.

- Sometimes soft instrumental music in the background can be helpful since extremely quiet conditions can feel like a distraction in and of itself.
- Often the calming sounds of nature can provide a beautiful background to prayer, so if you are able to be outside, give this a try.

A few other notes:

- Some people enjoy journaling and writing down thoughts and feelings. This can be a very powerful way to experience the kerygma, so have a journal ready if you would like or use the spaces provided.
- Reflecting upon God's living words found in Holy Scripture is also a compelling way to experience God, so you will find Bible verses and passages found throughout this prayer guide. When you read these, try to see beyond the words and literal meaning. Look at these phrases as a love letter written to you by God. Think about what God is saying to you personally.
- Another way of experiencing the grace of God is through music, so you will see links for songs sprinkled throughout this prayer experience. While listening to the lyrics of these songs, jot down in your journal any words or phrases that are resonating in your heart.
- Once you find your quiet prayer space, intentionally put all other thoughts aside. All of your worries, stresses, to-do lists...visualize putting them into a box that you can go and get later. Be gentle on yourself if these thoughts creep back to you during your prayer time. Just imagine tucking them back into that box.

Make this prayer experience personal. Pause when you truly need to ponder a thought or image.

Now you are ready to begin!

Take a moment to imagine that you are about to read a story. It is a love story and it is the greatest love story of all time. You are about to delve into your own personal love story with God!



Chapter One

God is love and wants to have a loving relationship with me.

Say these sentences to yourself (or better yet, say it aloud!)

*God loves me! God has created me!
God wants to be in a loving relationship with me!*

Say it again. Now once more. At this moment, let this mighty truth sink in deeply. Know that it is God's deepest desire to be in a loving relationship with you.

Try and truly believe that God created you to be exactly who you are. Those quirks, those parts of yourself you don't always appreciate, well God uniquely designed every part of you with a purpose. Nothing was a mistake. All of you is precious to God.

Long before your parents even thought about the possibility of you, God knew you. God knew you because you were God's idea and God created you to love Him.

Reflection Moment

Reflect upon this scripture passage:

*"You formed my inmost being;
You knit me in my mother's womb.
I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;
Wonderful are your works!
My very self you know."*

Psalms 139:13-14

Now read that passage once more, but try and imagine that you were the author of these words. Really try and see yourself as 'wonderfully made.' Realize that our culture tries to tell us that our self-worth is tied to worldly things....like our income, our popularity, our grades, our careers, our athleticism or our physical appearance. This is a lie. It is a lie because our self-worth is absolutely, entirely and completely dependent on being a child of God. A child of God who is *wonderfully made!*

Here is another scripture verse that can really demonstrate this intimate knowledge that your Creator God has of you.

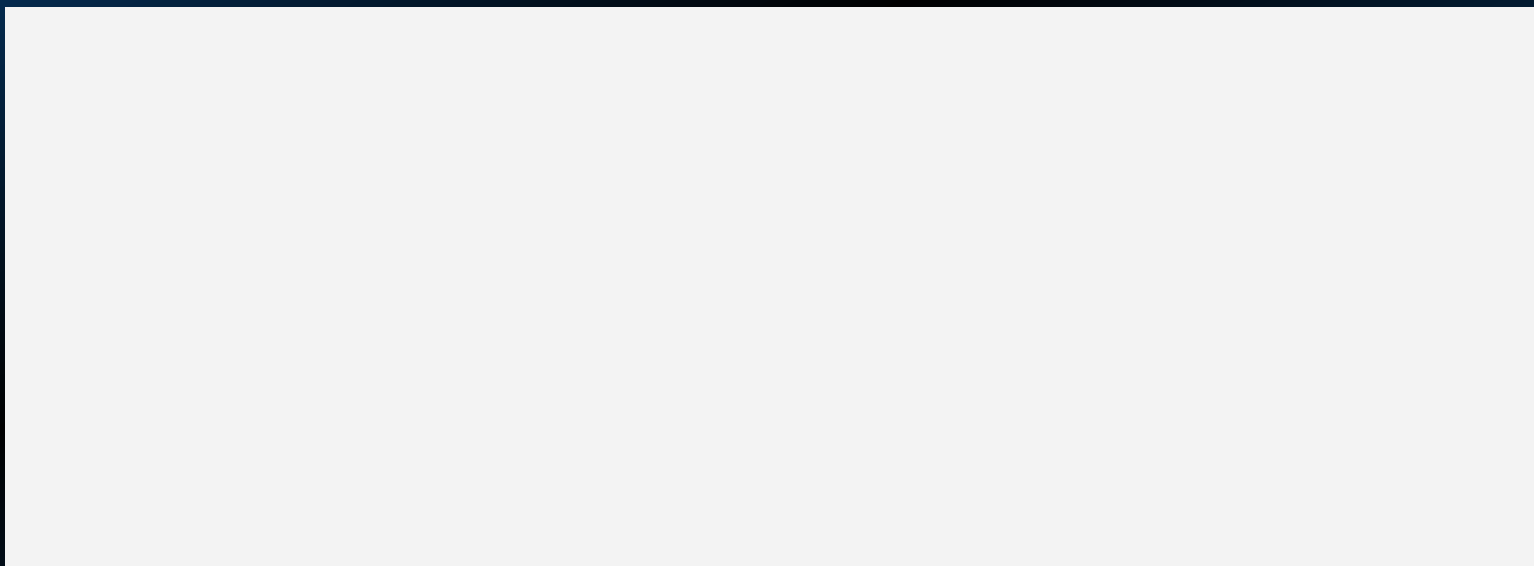
*Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid.
You are worth more than many sparrows."*

Luke 12:7

Wow! How could anyone possibly know how many hairs are on our head? Only God.

Journal Moment

How does it feel to know that God cares enough about you to know
the number of hairs on your head?

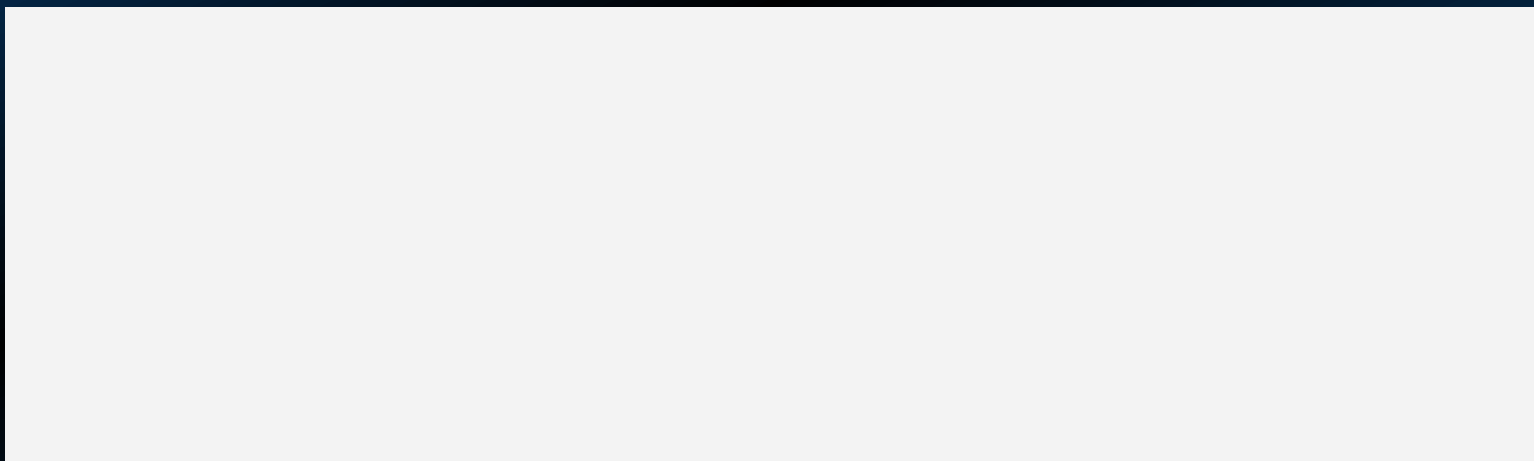


Ponder this quote by Saint Augustine:

*"You have made us for yourself O Lord,
and our hearts are restless until is rests in you."*

Journal Moment

Think about any restlessness that lives in your heart.
Any discontentedness that lingers there.
What is keeping you from feeling joy, peace and hope?



These restless and discontent feelings can and will be pushed out when we make room for God. An important part of this love story is the understanding that our hearts were designed to hunger for God. Imagine that satisfied feeling you got in your stomach when you last enjoyed a good meal. We can get that same satisfied feeling in our hearts when we seek God in our lives.

Another thing about the love that God feels for us is that it is unconditional. You **did not** and you **do not** need to earn it, or ask for it, or hope for it. This love is yours forever and always....no matter what.

Reflection Moment

Close your eyes and take a moment to imagine the face of someone in your life who has shown you unconditional love. Take a deep breath as you relish in these happy feelings of being loved and cherished. That love that you are feeling right now when you think of this person.....well God's love for you is even greater.

Take a moment to praise God for creating you, for giving you life and for loving you unconditionally. Ask God to help you feel this profound love deep within your heart. View your self-worth through the eyes of your Creator.

Music Moment

[God of All My Days](#), by Casting Crowns

What words or phrases in this song spoke most deeply to your restless heart.

You may pause here for this day, or continue on for an extended prayer time.

Chapter Two

I have broken my relationship with God by my sin.



Your love story continues. So far it has been a joyful story full of complete love initiated by God. All you needed to do in chapter one was open up your arms and receive this gift. Chapter two gets a bit tricky.

That beautiful loving relationship with God can get blocked....but not by God's choice. Imagine a giant raging river deep and murky. Picture you standing on one side and God on the other. God is reaching for you, but the fog that sits on this river is too thick to see across it. God is calling your name, but the crashing sound of the rapids makes it impossible to hear God's voice. This separation is not God's doing. This is on us. Our humanity is mixed with our holiness, so we fall into sin and the river rages on.

Sin is our choice that goes against God's love. It's how we say "no" to God.

Some of our sins are obvious. Those moments when you just know you messed up and wish you could turn back time. Other sins we commit are more subtle however. Like when we withhold forgiveness, or break a promise, or fail to be fully present to those who need us.

These sins hurt those we love but more sadly, they block our relationship with God. This causes us to feel distant from God and that restlessness and that hunger will replace our peace and our joy.

But this wouldn't be called the **Good News of Jesus Christ** if there wasn't some good news coming up. So don't lose heart yet!

You have a job to do right now. Ask God to shine a light into the darkest corners of your heart so that any sins or burdens you are holding on to can come into the light. Sin cannot live in the light. Once it is exposed, acknowledged, and brought to God, it cannot hold you prisoner.

Journal Moment

Take a moment to think about how you have said 'no' to God with your choices. This is difficult and can be painful. But realize that these tough feelings are temporary as we allow these burdens to be lifted up out of our hearts.

Many people tend to stall out at this part of the love story because they become paralyzed by guilt and shame. So let's unpack these words for a moment. **Shame** is a useless and damaging concept that serves no purpose. It prevents us from experiencing any healing, redemption and reconnection with God and others. **Guilt** on the other hand is different. Guilt is our conscious kicking into gear. In the same way that your muscles ache after a hard and vigorous exercise workout, guilt is our heart's way of reminding us that we have said 'no' to God and have fallen into sinful patterns or moments. Guilt is our reminder that we need to own, name and bring this sin to God to seek forgiveness. This step must occur in order for this amazing love story to continue.

There's an interesting form of saying 'no' to God that is important to think about. It's when we strive for control. Those times in our lives when we want to be in charge of everything (and maybe everyone). It's when we don't accept people as they are, or situations as they may be. It's a lack of surrender to God. This is a heavy and burdensome way to live life.

Journal Moment

Take a moment to think about these questions:

What aches and hurts are you carrying?

What burdens do you want to be free of?

What is causing you guilt and shame?

What do you truly need to let go of in order to experience joy?

What might you be trying to control with your own will?

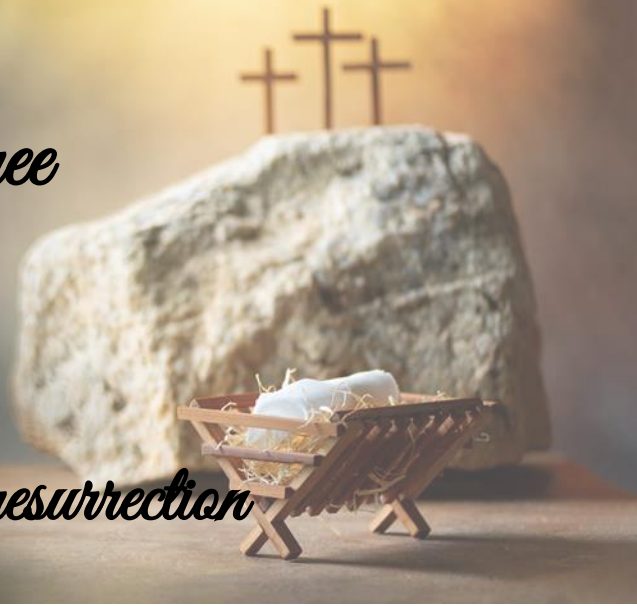
Reflect upon these questions for a few moments. Imagine the heavy fog that has laid upon the river between you and God lifting. Imagine the raging rapids of that river quieting down as you offer up these hurts, burdens, and sins.

If you are still battling the damaging effects of shame, ask God right now to free you from these chains.

It is not recommended that you take a long pause after this particular chapter of your love story, but if you are short on time today, then at least read through the first few lines of the next chapter before you take your break.

Chapter Three

Jesus restores my relationship with God through His life, death and resurrection



More good news! In that last chapter, we mentioned that the fog on the river lifted and the raging rapids quieted down. Someone allowed this peace and calm to happen. One person. His name is Jesus!

It is Jesus who restores our broken relationship with God. He did this out of love. More unconditional love!

Jesus died so that you could be forgiven for your sins. Jesus died so you might live....and by *live*. He means live in peace and joy, reunited with God. Living with Jesus by your side. On your team. In your corner. Never to leave you or forget about you or abandon you. Now this is good news!

Reflection Moment

Reflect on this scripture passage:

"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

1 Peter 1:3

That ‘*new birth to a living hope*’ is your gift from Jesus. Sin, sadness and worry all weigh you down. We feel burdened and distant from God. Sometimes when it’s really bad, you might feel like you are in a walking death. Jesus was willing to die a painful and humiliating death so that your sins would be forgiven and erased and you could feel alive again. Forgiven and new and alive!

Journal Moment

What does it really feel like to be truly forgiven?
To have your sins erased and your burdens lifted?
Knowing what Jesus did for you, reflect on this question:
What difference has Jesus made in your life?

Music Moment

[Forever](#) by Kari Jobe

What words or phrases in this song spoke most deeply to your renewed and restored heart?

You may pause here for this day, or continue on for an extended prayer time.



Chapter Four

*Jesus invites me to trust Him, to turn from sin,
and to give my life to Him.*

So let's review your love story for a moment. Chapter one was all gift from God. Chapter two is where you messed things up. Chapter three redeemed and restored your relationship with God by what Jesus was willing to do for you. Well chapter four gets pretty interesting. It can be thought of as an '*amazing invitation*' and it has two parts. You see here is where Jesus is calling you and asking you to trust Him and follow Him. He is calling you by name. Jesus knows your name! But what needs to follow an invitation? A response! You can say 'yes' to trusting your life to Jesus, or you can say, "No, I'd rather go it alone. I've rather do things my way."

The interesting thing is that you don't give this response once and then you're done. You are being asked to say your yes to Jesus over and over and over. Every day. Sometimes you might forget this and you might drift away from wanting to answer His call to you. It takes practice and repetition and diligence to keep saying "Yes, I trust you Jesus."

Think about your life as being a hike. When you say your 'yes' to Jesus, you are letting Him guide this hike and lead you on this path while you trust in His directions and guidance. When you say 'no' you leave Jesus behind and you venture off on your own. It may seem exciting at first to be so in-charge of where you are heading and be your own leader. However, remember, this hike will go through thick forests and night will fall and it will become dark. It may even become quite stormy. It will be easy to lose your way. Before you know it, you could be completely disoriented, unable to find your way. Because that's what life can feel like at times.

Remember though, this love story is good news! So all we need to do is call out to Jesus. He never leaves our side, even when we don't necessarily feel his presence. He is with us and He is waiting for us.

Reflection Moment

Reflect upon these scripture passages:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matthew 7:7-8

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Hebrews 4:16

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Journal Moment:

What areas of my life am I still trying to control which I could release to Jesus?

I am trying to change someone? I am not accepting a circumstance?

Where might I need to do some surrendering to Jesus?

Music Moment:

[Living Hope](#) by Phil Wickham

What words or phrases of this song touched me in a deep way?



Chapter 5

*Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit
into my heart to bring me to new life in His Church*

You've reached the last chapter of your love story with God! This final chapter is where our newly surrendered hearts cling to the power of the Holy Spirit. It is what life looks like when you have chosen to follow Jesus. It's the fertile soil where love, joy, peace, forgiveness all grow in your life. All because you have the Holy Spirit living within you.

So let's do a little "Holy Spirit" review. After Jesus was crucified and resurrected from death, He said something profound to His disciples: even though He would be leaving shortly, He would send them an advocate, a helper, a counselor. This would be the Holy Spirit who would live within them. The same powerful Holy Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead would actually live within them. And you know what is amazing? When you were baptized, that same powerful amazing Holy Spirit came to live in you! So this means that Jesus lives within your very heart! It means that you can be courageous and strong because the source of that strength is Jesus. It means you can forgive others when forgiveness seems hard because the Holy Spirit will help you to forgive! It means no more chains of sin or worry or hopelessness!

Just try and remember this amazing truth! Jesus has poured the Holy Spirit into your heart.

To be honest, the Holy Spirit can do things in your life that you cannot even imagine!

Reflection Moment

Reflect on this scripture passage written by the Apostle Paul to new Christians:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to accomplish far more than all we ask or imagine, by the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 3:14–21)

Journal Moment

Can you think back throughout your life to a time when you received either help or support or blessing from God that went beyond what you could have possibly imagined?

Music Moment

[Holy Spirit](#) by Francesca Battistelli

What words or phrases that are singing to your hopeful heart in a special way.

Now that you have begun to think about the many ways that Jesus has been a part of your life and the ways He wants to continually give you new life, reflect on this passage that Jesus spoke to his disciples and his followers, and now speaks to you.

A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

The abundant life that Jesus refers to encompasses the Fruits of the Holy Spirit:

Love	Patience	Faithfulness
Joy	Kindness	Gentleness
Peace	Generosity	Self-control

These are the things that you can have in abundance when you continue your journey with Jesus. Once you experience these 'fruits', you'll want to share this abundance with others and tell them why you are experiencing more joy and peace and love. So shout it from the rooftops! Tell them about your beautiful love story and let them know that this is their story also.

When you are walking through life with Jesus, you will want to be as close to Him as possible. Carving out time to pray each day will be essential. There are so many different ways to pray, so it will be very exciting to learn a variety of prayer styles to try out. There is no way to be any closer to Jesus, however, than when you receive Him in the Eucharist, so going to Mass and receiving Holy Communion will help keep this beautiful love story alive in your heart each and every day.

Okay, let's recap your amazing love story:

God created you, just as you are, so that God could have a wonderful loving relationship with you. Because you are human, you occasionally say 'no' to God and this choice blocks this beautiful relationship. Jesus, however, who loves you unconditionally, restores your broken relationship and He did this by willingly dying on the cross. The Holy Spirit rose Jesus from the dead to give Him new life. You also get to experience that new life! Whenever you feel like all is lost or hopeless, or you can't find your way or feel any joy, just remember that Jesus is calling you by your name. He wants to share his life with you and fill your heart with the Holy Spirit. When you say yes to Jesus and truly try and surrender your life to Him, that is when you begin experiencing more love, joy, peace and hope. This 'new life' in Jesus will cause you to want to seek Jesus in the sacraments, worship Him at Church and share your love story with others.



Resources

[Jesus: The Story You Thought You Knew](#) by Deacon Keith Stroh

In *Jesus: The Story You Thought You Knew*, Deacon Keith Stroh invites you not just to read about Jesus, but to have a transformative encounter with him. This isn't a book of theology, or an abstract story with little impact on your real life. It is the story that can and will transform you if you're open to it. In these pages, you will discover who you truly are and what you were created for. You will meet Jesus, not simply as an historical figure, but as our living and present Savior and friend. Reflection and discussion questions are included at the end of each chapter.

[Under the Influence of Jesus: The Transforming Experience of Encountering Christ](#) by Joe Paprocki

Many Catholics feel catechized but not "evangelized", meaning they know about Jesus but do not feel they know him personally. The bridge between where we are and where we want to be in our faith journey can be confusing without the right guidance. In *Under the Influence of Jesus*, best-selling author Joe Paprocki explains complex spiritual concepts with engaging discussion so that "everyday" Catholics can integrate and articulate their faith and live the Gospel in a way that is simple, compelling, contemporary, liberating, and life-changing.

If music is one of your prominent forms of spirituality, these songs will help you connect with God as you contemplate the Kerygma:

[You Say](#) (For when you need to be reminded what God REALLY thinks of you)

[Reckless Love](#) (For when you feel lonely or unloved)

[That's What Faith Can Do](#) (For taking in the greatness of God)

[Love Moved First](#) (For when you feel a bit 'lost')

[Voice of Truth](#) (For when you are anxious or scared)

[Truth Be Told](#) (For when you're struggling to hold it all together)

[Maybe It's Okay](#) (For when you feel rejected)

[We Believe](#) (To remember what it is we believe)

[Fear No More](#) (For when you need strength)

[No Matter What](#) (For when you've really messed up)

[Fear No More](#) (For ANYTIME!)

[Lions](#) (For when you want to be reminded of how powerful we are when we trust in God)