



Practicing the Presence of God: Learning to Pray the Anglican Rosary

Workshop #1 – The Jesus Prayer

*Rejoice always, **pray without ceasing**, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. [...]*

Hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 ESV

1. Introduction – from *The Way of a Pilgrim* (p. 3-4)

2. Brief History

Prayer beads are used in various religious traditions to mark repetitions of prayers, mantras, chants or devotions. They are an aid to concentration and are often seen as a means to achieve inner stillness and union with the divine.

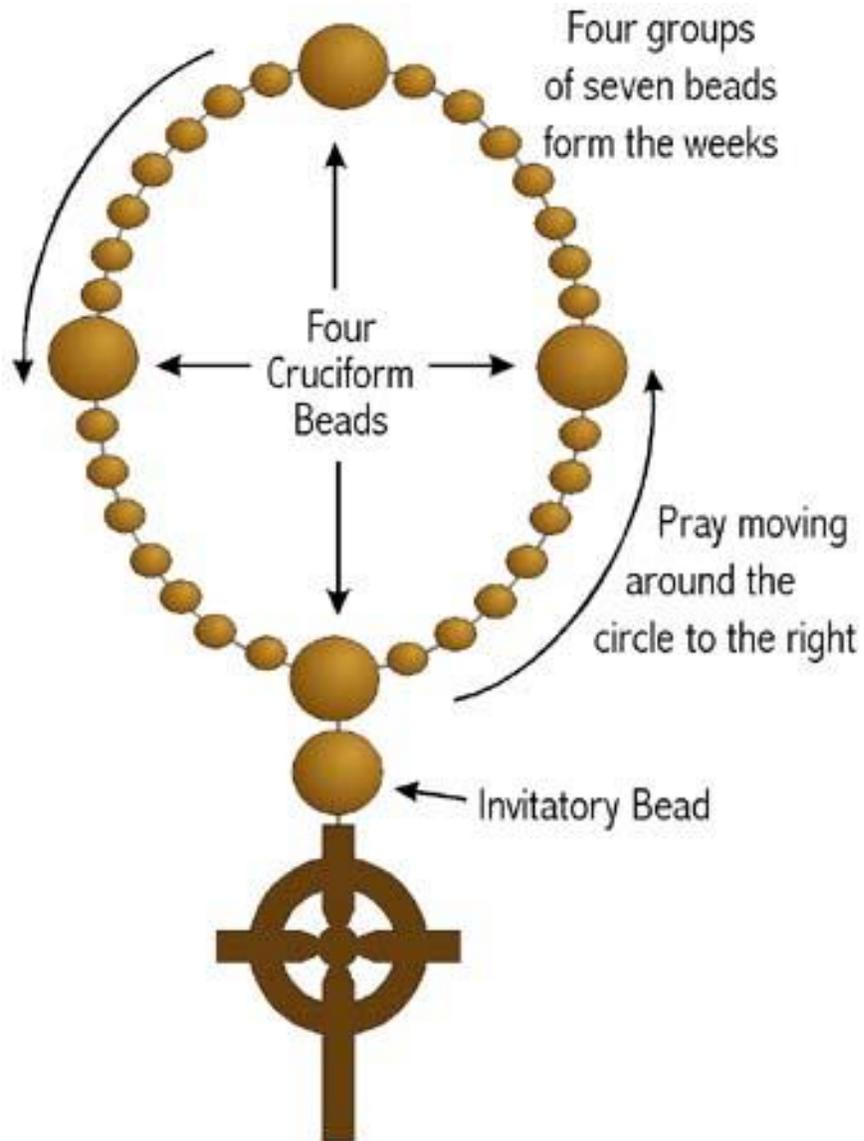
In Christianity, the number of beads varies by tradition and use. The Roman Catholic rosary¹ has 59 beads and is most often used with a particular set of prayers for Marian devotion and contemplation on the 'sorrowful mysteries of Christ.' The Orthodox prayer rope typically has 100 knots and is used to repeat the Jesus Prayer. The Anglican rosary was developed in the 20th century in the Episcopal Church. It has 33 beads, one for each year of Christ's life, plus a cross.

¹ Rosary: from the Medieval Latin *rosarium*, meaning 'rose garden.' The image of rose garden is used figuratively to refer to a garden or bouquet of prayers. We may also wish to make a connection with the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2-3) and the garden-city of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22).



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The use of prayer beads in the Christian tradition seems to have originated with the Desert Fathers & Mothers of Egypt in the 3rd-5th centuries. They used pebbles or knotted ropes to repeat the **Jesus Prayer**: *'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner.'* The wording of the Jesus Prayer has several variations. Choose the one you like best and commit it to memory:

- Lord Jesus, have mercy on me.
- Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.
- Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a poor sinner.

In this first session, we will learn to pray the Jesus Prayer using the Anglican Rosary.

3. The Goal of Praying the Rosary

In the spirit of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, this contemplative and meditative form of prayer enables us to achieve awareness, stillness and silence in the presence of God.

As Søren Kierkegaard said, 'If I were a doctor and I were asked for my advice, I should reply, 'Create silence.'" Surely our modern world is greatly in need of such a doctor! The Jesus Prayer is an entryway into true silence, into inner stillness in God's presence.



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The tangible movement of our fingers from bead-to-bead focuses our attention on God's presence (and away from our worldly preoccupations) and guards us from distraction, allowing us to go deeper in prayer. This gives us an inner stability and a peace which the world cannot give. This peace surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7).

The Jesus Prayer is an invocation of the Name of our Lord and Saviour, an expression of our living faith in Him, and our expectation that He will transform us by His 'mercy' through the power of His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the breath of God who enlivens us to be *a new creation* in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Therefore each repetition of the Jesus Prayer should be matched by slow, controlled breathing. Breathe in while praying the first half of the prayer; hold your breath for a moment; and breathe out while saying the second half.

- In-breath: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God' ...
- Hold
- Out-breath: 'Have mercy on me, a poor sinner.'

Since you cannot speak aloud and practice this controlled breathing simultaneously, pray the words in the silence of your heart. As you breathe in while invoking the Name of the Lord Jesus, you welcome Him into your heart as your honoured guest. You allow Christ to take up residence within you so that He *may dwell in your hearts by faith* (Eph. 3:17).



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Christ is formed in you (Gal. 4:19). With Christ now at the centre of your life, on your out-breath, you can now expel your anxiety, anger, attachments, guilt, shame, and whatever else may be troubling you.

You can also imagine your out-breath and in-breath as a mini-death and resurrection with Christ. As you breathe out, you die to your old self (with its brokenness, fears, etc.); as you breathe in with His Spirit, you rise again to *newness of life* in Him (Rom. 6:3-8; John 20:21-22).

The ultimate goal of this lifelong discipline of contemplative prayer is a deep transformation within ourselves that leads to a re-ordered and corrected perception of all things. We learn to see the world through God's eyes and to have *the mind of Christ* (1 Cor. 2:16). We train ourselves regard no one *according to the flesh* or from a merely human point of view (2 Cor. 5:16), but in the light of God's love.

This form of prayer enables us to master our inner life and rid our minds of bad habitual thought patterns, including unhealthy self-talk, harboured resentment, judgments of others, etc. In short, we learn to *take every thought captive to Christ* (2 Cor. 10:5).

The Jesus Prayer should be prayed intentionally using the rosary. By establishing this repetitive habit, the words are engrained deeply in our hearts.

The Way of a Pilgrim, (p. 3-4)



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With practice, the prayer will ‘flow’ through us. In the words of Kallistos Ware:

‘The effect is that if we say the Jesus Prayer frequently, even while we are fully engaged in some demanding task, even when we are not actually saying the Jesus Prayer, yet on a profound level of our deep self, prayer still goes on. There is within us, deep down, a continuing awareness of God. This will make us more aware and responsive to our neighbour. In the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov, ‘Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation.’ The aim of the Jesus Prayer is exactly to acquire inner peace. But this is not selfish, for it makes us by God’s grace and mercy an instrument of peace to others. If we pray alone ‘*with the door shut, in secret,*’ (Matt. 6:6) it may be for no more than ten or 15 minutes each day. Then, throughout the rest of the day, we shall be available to others, open to their concerns, loving, Christ-like, in a way that otherwise would be impossible.’

4. The Biblical Sources of the Jesus Prayer

- William Weedon, ‘The Jesus Prayer,’ [The Lutheran Witness](https://witness.lcms.org/2020/the-jesus-prayer/) (24 September 2020). <https://witness.lcms.org/2020/the-jesus-prayer/>

Kallistos Ware on the word ‘mercy’ in the Jesus Prayer



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'In Greek, the word for mercy is *eleos* and that is very similar to another Greek word, *elaion*, meaning 'olive oil.' Now in fact, I think, etymologically the two words are quite distinct, but the Greek Fathers liked to use plays on words. They thought of the mercy of God as being God's love poured out to heal, to forgive, to restore. And so, that is the way I understand the word *eleos* in the Jesus Prayer.

Some people think that to keep saying 'have mercy' is a rather gloomy, despondent thing to be doing. For me, the Jesus Prayer is not gloomy at all. It is full of light because the word 'mercy' to me speaks not so much of our sin, not so much of our alienation from God, but it speaks rather of our reconciliation with God. It speaks of the overcoming of sin through the love of God.'

- Kallistos Ware

