Glimpses of Grace

PRAYERS *for* HOLIDAYS,
HOLY DAYS, *and*
ORDINARY DAYS
of the ACADEMIC YEAR

Michael Lovette-Colyer



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For Ella

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Introduction

"The raising of one's mind and heart to God." This classic definition of prayer, articulated by St. John Damascene in the eighth century, expresses eloquently the essence of prayer—as well as the desire that moves many of us to pray.

In the midst of our busy lives, however, especially the breakneck pace and unpredictable nature of the academic year, it can be difficult to find the time and space to lift our eyes from our screens much less raise our minds and hearts to God. Regardless of how much we may want to pray, or how intensely we feel the need to pray, our attention is frequently scattered by long to-do lists, urgent emails, budget constraints, personnel conflicts, time-consuming meetings, and other pressing matters of the day.

The vast majority of us who work in Catholic higher and secondary education do so out of a sincere sense of vocation—a response to God's invitation to offer our gifts and talents to make the world more peaceful and just. Staying connected to that call amid our daily demands is an urgent need. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes prayer as a "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (no. 2558). Such a relationship is at the very core of Catholic education, both for those who teach at and lead schools as well as for our students.

This book strives to meet that need and foster that relationship. It is a user-friendly, comprehensive resource for busy administrators, faculty, staff, and teachers. The text contains prayers for each season of the academic year, all of which are designed to provide moments of recollection and renewed awareness of the privilege and blessing of the ministry of education. By providing

prayers for each movement of the school year—including a selection of feast days of various saints and holy people as well as prayers relevant to civic holidays—this book provides punctuation, allowing the beauty and joy of our work to emerge in sharper relief, refreshing our minds, replenishing our hearts, and restoring our spirits.

Also included here are prayers that correspond to various occasions that occur on a regular basis throughout the year (e.g., welcoming new students in the fall and graduation each spring) as well as events that happen less regularly but which typically call for prayer (e.g., the retirement or departure of a colleague). The third and final section of the book contains a prayer for each of the principal themes of Catholic social teaching (CST). Altogether, the three sections of this book provide carefully considered prayers addressing the unique rhythm and reality of the academic year in Catholic colleges, universities, and schools. The subtitle of the collection expresses its hope—that we may recognize every day as sacred and precious, seeing God at work and grace underlying all that we do, no matter how "ordinary" it may appear.

The majority of the prayers in the collection are succinct, designed to provide groups with approximately three to four minutes of reflection. The prayers created to mark the start of each month—and select others—are longer, structured to be proclaimed by various readers across a period of about five to seven minutes. In addition to groups of administrators, faculty, staff, and teachers, these prayers can be used fruitfully with students—whose lives are typically even busier and whose attentions are more distracted.

The eminent Catholic theologian Father Michael Himes (1947–2022) described Catholic education as an apprenticeship in beholding the presence of God in all things. The effort to support our students in recognizing the presence of God in the world, of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary and the divine in the mundane, requires we regularly raise our minds and hearts to God. This book seeks to help us do just that.

Holidays, Holy Days, and Ordinary Days

The definition of prayer presented in the introduction—the raising of one's mind and heart to God—is foundational and eloquent. It expresses well the essence of prayer: fostering our relationship with God by dedicating time to being with God.

While I profoundly resonate with and greatly appreciate that understanding of prayer, I claim no great skill with it. To be sure, I am not an expert. I often fall short of my best intentions to pray and, even when I make the time and carve out the space, regularly find myself distracted and restless. Rather than raising my mind and heart to God, thoughts of all I have to do bounce around in my head.

It is because, not in spite of, my struggles with prayer than I felt called to compose this book. Prayer is too important, too life-giving, too essential to be left to "experts." This collection of prayers is designed to be a resource for the great majority of us who need support with what often feels daunting.

As mentioned in the introduction, one intriguing way of thinking about the value of prayer, especially for busy people, is to view it as punctuation. Prayer provides the structure to make sense out of and fully appreciate the coherence underneath the innumerable words, phrases, ideas, data points, alerts, and notifications that constantly come our way.

For example, with punctuation this:

> nothingismorepracticalthanfindinggodthanfall
> inginloveinaquiteabsolutefinalwaywhatyouarein
> lovewithwhatseizesyourimaginationwillaffectev
> erythingitwilldecidewhatwillgetyououtofbedinthe
> morningwhatyoudowithyoureveningshowyouspen
> dyourweekendswhatyoureadwhomyouknowwhatbrea
> ksyourheartandwhatamazesyouwithjoyandgratitudefall
> inlovestayinloveanditwilldecideeverything

Becomes:

> Nothing is more practical than
> finding God, than
> falling in Love
> in a quite absolute, final way.
>
> What you are in love with,
> what seizes your imagination,
> will affect everything.
>
> It will decide
> what will get you out of bed in the morning,
> what you do with your evenings,
> how you spend your weekends,
> what you read,
> whom you know,
> what breaks your heart,
> and what amazes you with joy and gratitude.
>
> Fall in Love,
> stay in love,
> and it will decide everything.
>
> ("Fall in Love," in *Finding God in All Things: A Marquette Prayer Book*, Marquette University, 2009)

Simple punctuation and basic formatting allow the exquisite meaning of this beautiful prayer by Joseph Whelan, SJ (often attributed to Pedro Arrupe, SJ) to emerge. Prayer is like that. It need not be fancy or complicated. No one needs to be an expert. With a simple desire to make time, with a basic focus on breathing, slowing down, and paying attention, the meaning and truth of our ordinary lives sustained by God's extraordinary grace can reveal itself.

One of the best things about working at a university is its intrinsic dynamism. Each fall, new students arrive, bringing enormous energy, emerging aspirations, and an orientation to the future. Faculty members pursue exciting research, writing, and creative projects reflecting their great passions as well as a desire to contribute both to their discipline and the work of making the world a better place. Countless administrators and staff serve the institution out of a profound sense of vocation and love. All of this, and more, make the campus community a uniquely vibrant environment. This dynamism—and all the activity—however, can be disorientating. Every year, the early days of August quickly fly by and before we know it, we have reached mid-October, wondering what happened in September.

Developing a prayer routine provides the pauses necessary to appreciate, savor, and reflect on the breathtaking bustle of campus life. Without regular moments of prayer and contemplation, the frenetic activity of a college, university, or high school can become consuming, leaving us with the desire merely to survive the nonstop nature of the academic year. The prayers in this compilation are designed to serve as punctuation, giving us the pauses we need to understand what has happened and to provide insight into what is emerging—not only around us but, more importantly, inside of us.

The prayers in this first section are aligned with the pattern of the academic year. Starting with the fall term, prayers are presented for each month of the year as well as for civic holidays like Labor Day and Thanksgiving, and for other notable observances such as Election Day, Veterans Day, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Black History Month. These chronological markers serve as a

road map, providing an intuitive way of praying through the months and weeks of the year.

Complementing the prayers focused on the predictable sequence of academic life, prayers are offered for the feast days of various saints—for example, St. Mother Teresa, St. Francis of Assisi, Mary, Joseph, etc. Some of the individuals included are well-known while others are less recognized. My hope is that the prayers for popular saints will allow us to grow in appreciation for those figures while attention to the lesser-known individuals will elevate the splendor and significance of their lives. Following the Catholic custom, the prayers inspired by saints coincide with the day of their death. By remembering and celebrating these luminaries, I hope the witness of their lives will inspire and inform our work, inviting us to consider how we might emulate their heroic virtues in our own time and place.

In addition to the officially recognized saints, there are prayers throughout the year for holy women and men whose lives radiated the love of God but who are not among the officially canonized. These include, among others, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Sister Dorothy Stang, Sister Thea Bowman, and Pope Francis. Some of these may one day be added to the formal list of Catholic saints. Regardless, each has much to offer as we seek to remain grounded in our purpose and our dedication to Catholic education.

Without a doubt, the individuals I've included reflect my spirituality, sensibility, experience, and background. The two Jesuits (Ignatius and Pedro Arrupe) hint at my education and formation at multiple Jesuit universities; the two Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (RSCJ) sisters (Madeleine Sophie Barat and Rose Philippine Duchesne), along with the Didacus of Alcalá, reveal my many years of service at the University of San Diego, a school cofounded by the RSCJ order and named after Didacus.

Surely, other authors would compose a different set of prayers by focusing on a different roster of holy women and men. Those

included here, however, go beyond those I was most familiar with in order to present some measure of the rich tapestry of individuals whose lives deserve to be remembered and emulated. I have been intentional about creating a diverse selection of holy men and women, people from across the centuries and from various cultural contexts. This is one of the most incredible gifts of the Catholic understanding of the communion of saints—we are connected to all those who have gone before us, whether we know it or not.

This first group of prayers also includes those timed for solemnities such as All Saints' Day, the Immaculate Conception, Christmas, Easter, and other special days of prayer. In sum, the prayers in this first section—titled Holidays, Holy Days, and Ordinary Days—offer a wide variety of inspirations to pray along with the movement of the calendar. Whether it is the start of a new month, the turning of one season of the year to the next, a feast of a saint or holy person, or the observance of a holiday and/or solemnity, these prayers present ample opportunity to raise our hearts and minds to God, to be attentive as we journey through the academic year.

Most of the prayers coinciding with a month of the year or civic holiday include formatting which suggests multiple voices (Reader 1, Reader 2, etc.) while those marking the feast day of a saint or holy person do not. These designations are suggestions. Please feel empowered to use these prayers in a way that best honors your context and serves your colleagues. Every prayer in this compilation could be fruitfully proclaimed by multiple preestablished individuals or by taking turns around the table. Likewise, each prayer could be read by one person while everyone else listens and/or reads along.

AUGUST

READER 1:

God of Beauty,
thank you for the abundant beauty in our lives.
For the splendor of nature and the ways you reveal yourself through creation.
For the gift of summer, time to vacation, slow down, reflect, be renewed.
For the diversity and difference which make our unity and community much richer, more real.
For all this beauty—and so much more—we give you thanks.

READER 2:

God of Goodness,
thank you for the profound goodness of our lives.
For the love of family and friends which nourishes and sustains us.
For the generosity of teachers, coaches, mentors, and ministers; all those who encouraged us to become our most authentic selves.
For the blessing of meaningful, consequential work.
For all this goodness—and so much more—we give you thanks.

READER 3:

God of Truth,
thank you for the great truths you have helped us understand.

For the recognition of our own, and everyone else's, dignity.
For the insight that we become who we are meant to be through our relationships.
For the call to dedicate our gifts to making the world a better place.
For the desire to live generously, compassionately, joyfully.
For all these truths—and so many more—we give you thanks.

READER 1:

God of Love,
ground us deeply in your beauty, goodness, and truth.
Help us to be always mindful of how immensely blessed we are,
alert to the countless gifts we have received,
trusting in your tender care.

READER 2:

Enable us to rest secure in your love, confident in your steady presence with us,
so that throughout the coming academic year,
with all the challenges, conflicts, and stresses it will bring,
we never lose sight of beauty, goodness, and truth,
and so may savor the surprises, graces, and blessings that will also surely emerge.

READER 3:

Empower us, we pray, to bring the very best of ourselves to the work of leading with vision, wisdom, and grace.

Amen!



St. John Vianney

August 4

Merciful God,
thank you for the witness of St. John Vianney,
whose humble heart, vibrant faith, and generous service
revealed your love to all he encountered.

He knew you are boundless in compassion,
quick to run to us when we have wandered far off,
eager to embrace and restore us to right relationship.
Anxious to forgive our sins.

St. John Vianney,
patron of priests and of all who minister to others,
inspire our community to seek wisdom with humility,
to use our gifts to build a world
that is more forgiving, inclusive, and filled with hope.

Guide our students as they discern their paths,
our faculty and staff as they teach and accompany,
and our administrators as they exercise leadership.
May all of us learn, as you did,
to rely on God's grace more than our own strength.

May all who serve in education and ministry
reflect God's immense mercy as you did,
and help our students become the people they were created to be.

Amen!

The patron saint of parish priests, St. John Vianney (1786–1859) was a French Catholic priest widely known and revered for his pastoral ministry—especially his tireless work of hearing confessions, leading people to God's mercy.



St. Clare of Assisi

August 11

Christ Jesus,
St. Clare's life was a radiant testimony of faith in you,
a living echo of her counsel to her companions:
"*Do not be afraid. Trust in Jesus.*"

As we celebrate her feast,
may her example awaken in us deeper faith and steadfast trust,
stirring us to live the Gospel with courage and joy.

Through Clare's witness,
teach us to embrace simplicity and service,
to respond to the needs around us with humility, gentleness, and generosity.

May the fervent prayer that sustained and nourished Clare
inspire us to carve out moments of silence and contemplation,
so that we might encounter the immensity of your love,
and be strengthened in our sharing of that love with others.

As we remember her remarkable life,
remind us that "*we become what we love,*
and who we love shapes what we become."
Draw our hearts ever closer to you,
so that we may become your presence and peace in our world.

In your Holy Name we pray. Amen!

An Italian saint and one of the first followers of St. Francis, Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) founded a monastic order for women that

included a strict rule of poverty. Following her death, the order she founded was renamed in her honor as the Order of St. Clare or, more commonly, the Poor Clares.



St. Augustine

August 28

Almighty and Ever-living God,
you have made us for yourself
and we are restless until we rest in you.

Through the witness of St. Augustine,
stir within us a holy restlessness,
one that moves us to examine our motives,
letting go of vanity, ambition, and pleasure,
to embrace humility, community, and prayer.

Teach us, as Augustine learned,
that disquiet is a gift,
offering clarity about what we most deeply long for.

Give us the courage to turn away from that which cannot satisfy,
to rightly order our desires,
to listen to your voice in the depths of our hearts,
to love without measure.

Our hearts are restless, O God,
until they rest in you.
Through the intercession of St. Augustine,
draw us closer to the lasting peace and happiness only you can offer.

We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, our Lord.
Amen!

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) was a bishop, theologian, and philosopher in present-day Algeria. His writings substantially influenced the development of Western Christianity, and he is widely regarded as one of the most important figures in the patristic period. Among his most important works are *The City of God* and *Confessions*.

Blessings and Prayers for Occasions

A Blessing for New Students

Loving God,
as we continue this transition, be with us;
help us know that we belong,
that we are supported in our belief,
and that you are with us in every step of the journey
as we become ever more fully our true selves.

When we feel different, left out, or alone; when we are homesick and missing our high school friends; when we aren't sure we are in the right place or made the right choice:
Help us, loving God, to know that we belong, just as we are, and give us the patience we need to settle into our new home.

When we feel connection and acceptance; when we meet others who encourage us to be our best; when we find ourselves delighting in laughter and joy:
Help us, loving God, to be grateful for the gift of community and inspire us to invite others in—especially those still searching for their place.

When we feel far away from you and struggle to believe; when life is difficult and we worry about those we love; when fear makes it hard to trust:
Help us, loving God, to be honest about our doubts, to rely on the strength of others, and to seek the support we need.

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic social teaching (CST) is a framework for thinking about our most complicated social issues. Taking inspiration from the Hebrew prophets and grounded in the life and teaching of Jesus, CST has been elaborated by popes, bishops, and other theologians.

The modern era of Catholic social teaching began with Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical titled *Rerum Novarum*. The English translation of that document—"Of New Things"—denotes its context and intent. Leo XIII was addressing the novel challenges brought about by the industrial revolution, especially the struggles of the working class. In that emerging reality, the encyclical affirmed workers' rights and the dignity of work as well as the importance of just wages and private property. Leo XIII also sought to articulate an alternative to the extremes of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism.

The ongoing significance of Catholic social teaching was highlighted by Cardinal Robert Prevost selecting the name Pope Leo XIV when he became Holy Father in May 2025. By identifying himself with Leo XIII, Leo XIV clearly aligned himself with his predecessor's emphasis on CST.

One helpful way of understanding Catholicism is to view it as three interconnected sub-traditions, woven together to form the larger Catholic tradition. As the three overlap to a significant degree, the distinctions between these three sub-traditions are not rigid. Nevertheless, examining them separately sheds light on each as well as the overall immensity and beauty of the tradition.

The first and foundational sub-tradition is the Catholic spiritual tradition. Jesus is the basis as well as the continuing inspiration for this tradition. Those who knew Jesus of Nazareth, the historical person who became fully human while also being fully divine, grew in their understanding of him as God. This was especially true during his public ministry as well as the climactic events of his arrest, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. His disciples and other followers—as well as those they reflected on and discussed his life with—came to understand that the man Jesus was God and that while no longer living on earth, had returned to God the Father and had sent the Spirit to continue to be with and guide them. Many of Jesus' followers were profoundly touched by his life—his teachings as well as his actions. After the resurrection, they sought to remain connected to him by living as he had, continuing to follow the Way he had illustrated and following his instructions. This led them to develop a spirituality, and a religiosity focused on Jesus.

The Catholic intellectual tradition is the second sub-tradition. Not long after the events of Jesus' life, those who knew him as well as those who came to know him through the preaching and evangelizing efforts of his disciples began to think carefully and critically about who Jesus was, what his life meant for his followers (as well as those who were not followers), and what impact this had or could have on every aspect of their lives. St. Paul was a key figure in this process. While he had not been one of Jesus' disciples, Paul had an intense spiritual experience with the risen Jesus which led him to reorient his life, to stop persecuting Christians in order to spread the message of Christ. The primary way he did this was through his letters, many of which are collected in the New Testament, written to the early communities seeking to live as followers of Jesus. Most of these letters address specific questions that had arisen in those communities (such as, can we eat food sacrificed to idols, how do we deal with disagreements and disunity, what do we do about members who behave poorly

or act unethically, etc.). Thus, Paul began applying the spiritual experience of Jesus and extending it to all the other aspects of life. This process would be continued and expanded by the first theologians—figures such as Origen and Tertullian—as well as by ordinary people thinking through what Jesus meant for them and their lives.

The third sub-tradition is the Catholic social tradition. In addition to thinking through the meaning of the Truth Jesus revealed, his followers began trying to live in accord with Jesus' example and instructions. Guided, for example, by his words at the Last Supper to "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35), Jesus' disciples and those who joined their movement sought to live lovingly while navigating all the complexities of being human together. Then, as now, it was a messy process of determining how to balance truth with charity, individual well-being with collective responsibly, a desire for unity with respect for differences. As the earliest followers of Jesus told and retold the stories of his life, they wrestled with what it required of them, how they were called to live in light of the spiritual and intellectual engagement with him.

Imagining Catholicism as the weaving together of the Catholic spiritual, intellectual, and social traditions illustrates the great potential and appeal of Catholic social teaching. The principles of CST often resonate with and make sense to people from many different religious backgrounds. Thus, CST is a way to engage those who are not Catholic and/or those who may not understand, accept or appreciate the Catholic spiritual tradition. The Catholic social (and intellectual) tradition is an incredibly rich resource for fostering greater shared understanding of mission and identity at a Catholic college, university, or school. Moreover, Catholic social teaching is a uniquely coherent and comprehensive framework for considering the moral and ethical implications of contemporary challenges—the sort of inquiry that ought to take place in a unique way at institutions of Catholic higher education.

One of the most powerful aspects of CST is that it is comprehensive; that is, it seeks to hold together what is too often pulled apart. By doing so, it offers a unified moral framework, a consistent ethic of life. For example, CST advocates for the dignity of the unborn as well as for the undocumented. It addresses the implications of morality in our personal lives as well as in our social lives. Thus, it offers an intriguing, if also challenging, alternative to the polarized partisan arguments that characterize political discourse in the United States.

While a strong consensus exists on the major themes of CST, there are minor differences among various sources. Without disregarding the insight of any other author, I have drawn upon the seven themes articulated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Catholic social teaching is often described as "the church's best-kept secret." Despite the appeal and potential of this amazingly rich body of thought, too many Catholics—and others—are unfamiliar with it. I have included prayers for each of the seven key themes of CST in the hope of helping correct this, making CST less of a secret and more of a touchstone for our shared spiritual lives.

These prayers can be engaged as a series, leading a group to appreciate the richness of the Catholic social teaching over a period of several weeks. Or, one of the prayers might be especially appropriate for a particular moment or event on campus. Alternatively, at a time when there are no other pressing concerns or celebrations, praying with the themes of CST will be a fruitful experience. In addition, these CST prayers would enrich community service and immersion reflection moments, connecting participants' lived experience to the Catholic spiritual tradition.

Since these prayers are longer than many others in the collection, they are best proclaimed by multiple voices. A group might designate a leader and/or a number of readers who take turns reading

designated stanzas. Alternatively, a group could agree to each person reading one of the stanzas, going around the room until the prayer's conclusion.

In addition to conceiving of prayer as punctuation and as poetry, we might do well to imagine it as preparation for action. During prayer we often find ourselves folding our hands. If it is a long, loving look at the real, however, prayer should motivate us to open our hands, to get to work addressing the realities of injustice and suffering of our neighbors that come into view. While quiet moments of stillness and resting in the peace of God's love are essential, putting our prayer into action is also critical.

Many of the prayers included in this book reflect this perspective by not only thanking and praising God, but also by asking God to inspire, empower, embolden, and motivate us to take compassionate action on behalf of those in need. St. Teresa of Ávila expressed this memorably:

> Christ has no body but yours.
> No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks
> Compassion on this world,
> Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
> Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
> Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
> Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
> Christ has no body now but yours,
> No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks
> Compassion on this world.
> Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

This is prayer at its finest: A remembrance that we are called to incarnate God through our loving words and deeds. Prayer, thus, helps the meaning and beauty of life emerge, involves developing a mysticism of open eyes, and prepares us to act.

Human Dignity

God of Life and Love,
fill our hearts with your compassion so that we may recognize
the immense beauty and incomparable worth of every person—
those similar to us, with whom we feel close,
as well as those from different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives,
those who seem distant.

Open our eyes to the dignity of every human,
no matter who they are or where they live,
and help us to see that people are always more important than things.

Empower us to transform the throwaway culture into a culture of life,
a society in which the sacred nature of life is honored and protected,
from its very beginning to its natural end, and at every moment in between.

God of Wisdom and Truth,
in this era of artificial intelligence and accelerating technology,
fill us with spiritual intelligence so that we remain rooted in what makes us authentically human.

May the example and teaching of your Son
stir us to care for the vulnerable as he did,
working to eliminate poverty, hunger, disease, violence, and war,
advocating for the unborn, the undocumented, the unhoused, and the unloved.

Lead us beyond the temptation to individualism
into deeper communion and solidarity,
caring for one another as members of one human family.