

The Importance of Intercessory Prayer

The simple act of praying for others can make a big impact.



[Caroline Manno](#)

For years, I kept a rosary in my car I'd purchased at a second-hand shop. Every time I held those beads and prayed, I thought about the person, or people, to whom those beads had belonged and offered a prayer for them. No one is beyond the need or scope of our prayers. Though our sphere of influence is extremely limited when it comes to doing temporal, tangible things, when it comes to praying for people, the opportunities are boundless, completely uninhibited by time or space.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church has this to say about intercessory prayer:

Since Abraham, intercession—asking on behalf of another—has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's,

as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks “not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others,” even to the point of praying for those who do him harm. (CCC 2635)

We are all familiar with the story of St. Monica’s fervent prayers of intercession for her son, St. Augustine, and the fruits her persistence bore. Perhaps we are less familiar with the power of intercessory prayer for [St. Pelagia](#), a dancer and prostitute from the fourth century. Seeing her pass by his church one day, Bishop Nonnus prayed for her conversion. Like Augustine, she converted and left her old life behind.

Finding people to pray for isn’t difficult. Every day, we encounter friends, family, and fellow community members. Every one of them could benefit from our prayers. The Holy Spirit is ever ready with promptings to draw us to prayer if we only pay attention.

I recently read a [story](#) about a powerful instance of intercessory prayer. The story was unique in that the person who offered the prayer got to see pretty quickly the power of his prayer. He offered a simple Hail Mary during his morning jog when he saw an ambulance at a home he was running past. On a subsequent jog, the neighbor stopped him and told him that in the midst of her medical emergency, she knew he had prayed for her. **Imagine knowing what happens each time we offer a prayer for someone. Someday, God willing, we will know.**

We are inundated constantly with news stories about tragic or scandalous events that beg our prayers. Perhaps the eternal purpose of our age of over-information is that we can pray for all those people around the world who are in need of prayer but whom we will never encounter personally, celebrity and normal folk alike.

[ESPN](#) ran a story a few years ago about a successful college basketball star who became a cloistered nun. Reading her story

affected me deeply because of one particular thing she said. The reporter asked sister about 9/11. She told him that the nuns prayed for all those involved, but they never read or saw any stories about the event. They were aware, they could pray, but they didn't know—or need to know—the details.

Most of us have a natural desire to know the details. But we really don't need to. [It could even be harmful](#) for us to know—or seek—all the gory details. There is no benefit to witnessing someone else's tragedy.

A recent example is Charlie Kirk's murder. Seeing video of the moment at which he was shot and killed doesn't aid our prayers for his soul or for the comfort of his wife and children. In fact, it could raise our ire and lead us to unforgiveness—the exact opposite of [what Kirk's own wife has offered his killer](#). Both our emotional and spiritual welfare, not to mention our respect for the dignity of the victim, are at stake when we allow morbid curiosity or an obsession with “knowing” to lead us to unnecessary overexposure.

We can, and should, pray for others without taking their tragedy on as our own. We can share in their suffering without bearing it ourselves, and this is helped by having a limited knowledge of the situation. All the sordid details of someone's trials and tragedy can also tempt us to gossip and judgment. It's far better to have some level of detachment—to pray for people's intentions without becoming emotionally involved. A healthy detachment helps us keep an eternal perspective—the big picture, if you will. As a result, you have the time and emotional energy, and clarity of mind, to offer prayers for even more people and situations.

Of course, we may still respond emotionally to suffering in the world, and that's fine. That's human. We should feel something. **But we shouldn't obsess about it or take it on ourselves. And we shouldn't feel guilty for not doing so.** That is what it means to surrender a situation to God's

love and mercy. In fact, that's what the Catechism says: interceding for others is "characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy." That's beautiful. I want that kind of heart.

The point is, our prayers do matter. They do effect change; they do help those for whom they are offered. Our prayers may not dramatically change their circumstances or save their lives; they may simply help them carry whatever burden they are experiencing. That's no small thing.

I recall a time when my family was faced with something of a crisis. I reached out to a group of friends and requested their prayers for my special intention. Throughout the day, I was filled with peace, despite experiencing a situation that I had every earthly right to panic over. Philippians 4:6-7 came to mind:

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by a crisis that we have difficulty praying. In these situations, it is helpful—and humbling—to reach out to others for their intercession. The peace that surpasses all understanding that you feel in the midst of tumultuous times may very well be the power of other people's prayers for you.

In our independent, I-can-do-it-myself society, it can be really, really hard to ask for help in the form of prayers. Our pride, embarrassment, or the need to protect someone's reputation can all prevent us from reaching out to others. Fortunately, there is always the anonymity of calling it a "special intention." There is nothing wrong with requesting these nonspecific prayers. Again, no one needs to know all the details in order to offer prayer for a situation; you might even be doing your benefactors a favor.

You rarely know what others are dealing with, but it is guaranteed that they can use your intercession for something. It doesn't have to be difficult or take much time. Just offer up a brief prayer—or a suffering in your own life—for the benefit of another. This unites us to Heaven and can, quite literally, change lives now and for eternity.

Of course, the need for our intercession is not limited to this world. The Holy Souls in Purgatory are always in need of our intercession. While we can offer informal prayers for them, [St. Gertrude the Great's prayer](#) for the souls in Purgatory should also be invoked. **The month of November, which is dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory, is the perfect time to start a habit of praying for the deceased.**

Lastly, while I have focused here mostly on spontaneous prayer because it can be done on the spot and at any moment and by anyone—and let's be honest, **when we delay our prayers, we often forget to offer them**—obviously, **the most powerful prayer we can offer is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.** [Have those Masses said](#)—for the souls in Purgatory, for your neighbor experiencing a health crisis, for your child or spouse on their birthday, even for that celebrity walking down a dark path. **No prayer for another goes to waste. Interceding for others through prayer and sacrifice truly is the least we can do, and it is so simple to accomplish.**

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