

JESUS PRAYER

most content paraphrased from "Praying with the Church"

"Salvation is to be found through Him alone; for there is no one else in all the world whose name God has given to men by whom we can be saved." Acts 4:12

There are records back to the fourth century of followers simply reciting the name of Jesus as a one word prayer. Soon after, some expanded to use the words of the tax collector in Jesus' parable, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" This prayer, and many versions of it, has become prominent particularly in the Eastern church. It has come to be known as the Jesus Prayer or the Prayer of the Heart.

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

"The words 'have mercy on me' do not mean just 'pardon my sins.' Mercy, as the Orthodox use the word, means much more: it means grace and loving-kindness. So when you are asking for mercy, you are asking for Christ's graciousness and loving-kindness." - Anthony de Mello

The prayer is often used as an element of the pursuit of silence before God, the silence of centering on God. We become silent to return our hearts to God, to give full attention to the prayer itself, and to hear from God. The context of the Jesus Prayer is less often in public liturgy and more often in the private, silent devotion of everyday life. The Jesus Prayer is often prayed in rhythm with the beating of one's heart, repeating one word with each heartbeat.

St. Simeon recommended one...

"sit alone and in silence; bow your head and close your eyes; relax your breathing and with your imagination look into your heart; direct your thoughts from your head into your heart. And while inhaling say, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,' either softly with your lips or in your mind. Endeavor to fight distractions but be patient and peaceful and repeat the process frequently."

In addition to focused, silent moments alone, the prayer can be used in the flow of everyday life to stop, remember, and recognize God. It can be spoken as a prayer of confession of sin or used as a cry in times of crisis. It is a prayer that can be offered when one wants or needs to pray, but is missing the words to speak. The prayer, though often spoken in private, is also the joining of the corporate chorus of millions of other followers praying the same prayer at the same time.