

THE JESUS PRAYER

By Father Andrew Wach

“Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” [1 Thessalonians 5:16-18].

As witnessed by the scriptures, prayer is an important part of being a Christian. To be a true Christian, one must pray. Through the many centuries Christians have examined the whole question of prayer in great depth. The Jesus Prayer is one of the many ways developed in the Christian East.

The Jesus Prayer comes to us from a spiritual movement called “Hesychasm” (Greek for “rest” or “tranquility”) which flourished especially on Mount Athos (a peninsula off the Greek coast). From Mt. Athos the Jesus Prayer eventually spread throughout Greece and other countries of the Christian East including Ukraine.

The Jesus Prayer is said on a special rosary called “Chotky”. The chotky are knots made on a wool cord. The two ends of the cord are joined together and here a cross is fashioned from the wool. Typically the chotky has four groups of twenty-five knots.

Each group of twenty-five are separated by one bigger knot; the total number of knots being 104. Some chotky have 100 and others 107 knots. The chotky are used as a counter as well as an aid to keeping rhythm in praying the Jesus Prayer. Because it is made of fabric, this rosary is silent and does not distract those who have entered into this prayer.

The Jesus Prayer is a very simple prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” This prayer is scriptural in that it uses as its foundation, prayers prayed in the Gospel. One prayer being that of the two blind men: “Son of David, have mercy on us” (Mt.9:27), the other being that of the publican: “God, have mercy on me a sinner.” (Lk. 18: 13). The words “Lord Jesus Christ” are found in Acts 16:31.

The Jesus Prayer can be divided into two parts; the first part being: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” the second part: “Have mercy on me a sinner.” The word Jesus is the center of the first part of the prayer. Actually it is the core of the whole prayer. In fact, just the name “Jesus” is all that is needed to say the Jesus Prayer. Jesus in Hebrew means “Saviour” or “Yahweh is salvation.” Jesus is the name of our Lord, the one we love, the one who is close to us. When the word Jesus is said, it is said with the intention of calling. We are invoking His name. We are calling Him.

There is power in the name of Jesus. “Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you.” [John 16:23]. Jesus wishes to transform and transfigure the whole world through us.

By pronouncing the holy name of Jesus we release this transforming power of Christ. By pronouncing this holy name in faith, love, hope, and in prayer, one becomes transformed. “God has given him a name which is above all names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.” [Phil 2:9-10]

The other words which surround the word “Jesus” are our titles for Him. They say who Jesus is for us. Firstly, Jesus is our Lord. He is my Lord. He is the center of my life and everything revolves around Him.

Jesus is also the Christ. Christ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew “Messiah” which means the “anointed one”. By calling Jesus the Christ, we are proclaiming that He is the anointed one.

Jesus is also the Son of God. This points to the divinity of Jesus. He is not just a great man or a great prophet, but God. In the second part of the Jesus Prayer, the focus is on the word “me”. The first part of the prayer looks to Jesus and the second part focuses on us. Who am I? There are many different adjectives which can apply to the word “me”. There are teachers, students, farmers, shopkeepers, managers, store employees, old, young, teenagers, and priests. But the one word which adequately describes all, is the word “sinner”. We are all sinners before God. The word sinner means that we are broken, that we don’t have it all together. It means that we need God.

The word “mercy” joins Jesus and me in the Jesus Prayer. In Greek the word mercy has as its root the word for oil. Oil in ancient times was used for healing. It was medicine. It was used to sooth the parched skin. It was used to anoint kings. In other words, in the Jesus Prayer one asks Christ to pour His oil of healing, of love, of forgiveness upon him/her. The Jesus Prayer is like a balm, a salve which heals the broken soul.

When we say this prayer one should concentrate on every word, say the prayer in faith, and allow it to penetrate into our hearts. This prayer is repeated many times and can even be chanted. One reason why advertisers show their commercials many times on TV is so that they enter into our subconscious. The same is true with the Jesus Prayer. The more we pray it, the deeper it enters into our being. It is my hope that the Jesus Prayer can be for you a way to be close with our Lord and to receive His great peace.

For more information about the Jesus Prayer see www.jesusprayer.us