

three times a formula of praise to God most great, and falling on his knees he three times bends forward, until his nose and forehead touch the ground between his outspread hands, and all the time mutters short forms of prayer and praise. Then he settles back

upon his heels, and mumbles over various small petitions, and after these are concluded he begins at the beginning again. Any slip in the ritual is supposed to nullify the entire prayer, and it requires considerable drilling to do it without a blunder.

APPLICATION

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As he was praying, v. 1. One might think that Jesus would have been above the necessity of prayer. Yet he prayed in the Jordan at His baptism, and the

"The Christian's
Vital Breath"

Spirit descended on Him like a dove; on the lonely slopes of Mount Hermon, and He was transfigured, and His raiment became "white and glistening;" in the gloomy shades of Gethsemane, and angels came and ministered unto Him. True, He did not need to cry for pardon; but the better a man is the more irrepressible is the eagerness of his heart to commune with God, and the more impossible is life without His presence. Thus the Son of God becomes the supreme model for the praying Christian. "Let me breathe," says a man gasping, "or else I die." "Let me pray," says the Christian, "or else I die."

Teach us to pray, v. 1. We can do little without learning. We learned how to walk, to talk, to play, to read, to sing, to work.

The Art of
Prayer

We must needs be taught how to pray. It is easy to pretend that we know. Certain men will loiter around the doors of the palace, that they may seem to be among the friends of the king. We may haunt the house of prayer, and even become familiar with the customary forms of address to God, and yet have little fellowship with Him. Only Christ can teach us how to order our thoughts and our hearts aright in the divine presence.

Our Father, v. 2. Edwin Booth, having once repeated the Lord's Prayer so as to draw tears and sobs from his auditors, declared that it took him thirty years' practice to acquire the power of repeating it so impressively. But to pray it in the fulness of its spirit what a lifelong walk with God and submission to His will would be needful.

A Lifelong
Task

Thy name . . . thy kingdom . . . thy will . . . Note the attitude the suppliant must assume. His eye is first turned to the Name—God's name,

First Things
First

the Kingdom—God's kingdom, the Will—God's will; only afterwards it is directed to His own necessities. He must be surrendered before He can say, "Thy will be done." "This is a revolutionary petition. It would make many a man's shop and store tumble to the ground to utter it. Who can stand at the end of the avenue, along which all his pleasant thoughts and wishes are blossoming like flowers, and send these terrible words crashing down through it? It is the most fearful prayer to pray in the world."

Because of his importunity, v. 3. Jesus illustrates His point from the action of a very selfish man. You go to a neighbor's house in need. It is midnight; he is

An Eager God

in bed; he cannot be troubled. But you keep on knocking. Eventually, to rid himself of your importunity, he rises and gives you what you want. Now, if a hard-hearted, self-centred neighbor can be thus forced to act by the very persistence of your entreaty, think you not that God will graciously hear who has said, "Ask and it shall be given you." The little child knows how, by kisses and tears and throwing her arms around her father's neck, to win what otherwise would have been refused. Even the suppliant eyes of the dumb dog will win from the beggar half of his last crust. How much more will not God, who spared not His Son, freely give us all things?

Ask . . . seek . . . knock, v. 9. Yes, ask! Lay the axe at the root of your foolish pride, and recognize the patent fact, that for the necessities and enjoyments of life

Three
Imperatives

you depend upon God! *Seek!* Let others give themselves up, if they will, to the search for earthly