

## QUESTION 21

### Christ's Prayer

Next we have to consider Christ's prayer (*oratio Christi*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is it fitting for Christ to pray? (2) Is it fitting for Him to pray with His sentient appetite (*secundum suam sensualitatem*)? (3) Is it fitting for Him to pray for Himself or only for others? (4) Is each of His prayers heard (*exaudita*)?

#### Article 1

##### Is it fitting for Christ to pray?

It seems that it is not fitting for Christ to pray (*Christo non competat orare*):

**Objection 1:** As Damascene puts it, "Praying is asking for appropriate things from God." But since Christ is able to do all things, it does not seem fitting for Him to ask anyone for anything. Therefore, it seems that it is not fitting for Christ to pray.

**Objection 2:** It is not proper to ask in prayer for something that one knows for certain will occur; for instance, we should not pray for the sun to rise tomorrow. Nor is it proper for someone to ask in prayer for what he knows will not in any way occur. But Christ knew with respect to all things what was going to occur. Therefore, it was not fitting for Him to ask for anything in prayer.

**Objection 3:** In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, "Prayer is the mind's ascent to God (*as census intellectus in Deum*)." But Christ's mind did not need to ascend to God, since His mind was always conjoined with God, not only by the union of *hypostasis* but also by His enjoyment of beatitude. Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ to pray.

**But contrary to this:** Luke 6:12 says, "And it came to pass in those days that He went out to a mountain to pray and passed the whole night in prayer to God."

**I respond:** As was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 2-2, q. 83, aa. 1-2), prayer is a sort of unfolding of one's own will before God in order for it to be fulfilled by Him. Therefore, if there were just a single will in Christ, viz., the divine will, then it would not be at all fitting for Him to pray, since the divine will effects through itself (*per seipsam*) those things that it wants to—this according to Psalm 134:6 ("The Lord has done whatever He wanted to"). But because in Christ the divine will is different from the human will, and because the human will is not able through itself to accomplish what it wants to—except by God's power—it follows that it is fitting for Christ to pray insofar as He is a man and has a human will.

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ was able to bring to completion everything that He willed as God, but not everything that He willed as a man, since, as was established above (q. 13, a. 1), He did not as a man have omnipotence. Nonetheless, the selfsame individual, existing as God and man, willed to reach out in prayer to His Father, not because He was lacking in power, but in order to instruct us (*propter nostram instructionem*):

First, *in order to show that He was from the Father*. Hence, in John 11:42 He says, "Because of the people who are standing about I have spoken out loud"—i.e., the words of the prayer—"so that they might believe that You have sent me." This is why in *De Trinitate* 10 Hilary says, "He did not need the prayer; instead, He prayed for our sake, in order that the Son should not remain unknown."

Second, *in order to give us an example*. Hence, in *Super Lucam* Ambrose says, "Do not give Him an insidious hearing so as to think that the Son of God is praying out of weakness in order to ask for what He cannot effect. For the author of power, the master of obedience, is instructing us by His example in the precepts of virtue." Again, this is why, in *Super Ioannem*, Augustine says, "In the form of a servant

our Lord was able, if necessary, to pray in silence. But He wanted to show Himself supplicating the Father so as to be mindful that He is our teacher.”

**Reply to objection 2:** Among the other things that Christ knew as future, He knew that some things were going to be effected *because of His prayer*. And it was not inappropriate for Him to ask God for things of this sort.

**Reply to objection 3:** An ascent is nothing other than a movement toward what is above. But as *De Anima* 3 points out, ‘movement’ is said in two ways:

In one way, *properly speaking*, insofar as ‘movement’ implies going from potentiality toward actuality *insofar as the actuality is incomplete*. In this sense ascending belongs to what is potentially—and not actually—above. And on this reading, as Damascene puts it in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, “Christ’s human mind did not need to ascend to God, since it was always united to God both with respect to personal *esse* and by beatified contemplation.”

In the second way, ‘movement’ implies *the actuality of something complete*, i.e., of something existing in actuality, in the way that to understand and to sense are called certain movements. And on this score Christ’s [human] mind always ascends to the Father, since it is always contemplating Him as existing beyond it.

## Article 2

### Is it appropriate for Christ to pray with His sentient appetite?

It seems that it is appropriate for Christ to pray with His sentient appetite (*Christo conveniat orare secundum suam sensualitatem*):

**Objection 1:** Psalm 83:3 says, in the person of Christ, “My heart and my flesh have exulted in the living God.” But it is the sentient appetite that is called the desire of the flesh (*sensualitas dicitur appetitus carnis*). Therefore, Christ’s sentient appetite was able to ascend to the living God by exulting and, by parity of reasoning, by praying.

**Objection 2:** Praying seems to belong to that which desires what is asked for. But Christ asked for what His sentient appetite desired when He said in Matthew 26:39, “Let this chalice pass from me (*transeat a me*).” Therefore, Christ’s sentient appetite prayed.

**Objection 3:** To be united to God in a person is greater than ascending to God through prayer. But like every part of the human nature, the sentient appetite was assumed by God in a oneness of person. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the sentient appetite was able to ascend to God by praying.

**But contrary to this:** Philippians 2:7 says that the Son of God, with respect to the nature that He assumed, “was made in the likeness of men.” But other men do not pray with their sentient appetite. Therefore, Christ does not pray with His sentient appetite, either.

**I respond:** There are two possible ways to understand praying with one’s sentient appetite (*orare secundum sensualitatem*):

First, it can be understood in such a way that *the praying is an act of the sentient appetite*. And on this reading Christ did not pray with His sentient appetite. For His sentient appetite was of the same nature and species in Christ as it is in us. But in us the sentient appetite cannot pray, and this for two reasons. First, because the movement of the sentient appetite cannot transcend sensible things, and so it cannot ascend to God—which is what is required for prayer. Second, because prayer implies a certain ordering in the sense that the individual desires something as a thing that is to be fulfilled by God—but this belongs only to reason. Hence, as was established in the Second Part (*ST* 2-2, q. 83, a. 1), praying is

an act of reason.

In the second way, an individual can be said to pray with his sentient appetite because, in praying to God, His reason has proposed what was in his sentient appetite. And on this score, Christ prayed with His sentient appetite insofar as His prayer expressed a sentient affection as if it were an advocate of the sentient appetite—and this in order that He might instruct us about three things. First, in order to show that He Himself had assumed a genuine human nature with all its natural affections. Second, in order to show that a man is permitted, in accord with his natural affections, to will something that God does not will. Third, in order to show that a man should submit his affections to the will of God. Hence, in *Enchiridion* Augustine says, “So Christ, behaving as a man, exhibits the private will of a man when He says ‘Let this chalice pass from me (*transeat a me*)’. For this was a human will desiring something for itself and as something private. But because He wants a man to be upright and directed toward God, He adds, ‘Nonetheless, not as I will but as You will’—as if to say, ‘See yourself in me; for you can will something proper to yourself, even if God wills something else’.”

**Reply to objection 1:** The flesh exults in the living God not through an act of the flesh that ascends to God, but as an overflow from the heart into the flesh, insofar as the sentient appetite follows the movement of the rational appetite.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even if the sentient appetite wanted what reason was asking for, nonetheless, as has been explained, it was reason’s role to ask for it by praying, and not the sentient appetite’s role.

**Reply to objection 3:** The union in a person has to do with personal *esse*, which belongs to every part whatsoever of the human nature. By contrast, as has been explained, the ascent that belongs to prayer is through an act that belongs only to reason. Hence, the lines of reasoning are not similar.

### Article 3

#### Was it fitting for Christ to pray for Himself?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to pray for Himself (*Christo non fuerit conveniens pro se oraræ*):

**Objection 1:** In *De Trinitate* 10 Hilary says, “The spoken words of His prayer (*deprecationis sermo*) availed Him nothing, but He said them for the advancement of our faith.” Therefore, it seems that Christ prayed for us and not for Himself.

**Objection 2:** No one prays except for what he wants, since, as has been explained (a. 1), prayer is a sort of unfolding of the will in order for it to be fulfilled by God. But Christ willed to suffer what He suffered; for in *Contra Faustum* 26 Augustine says, “For the most part a man is saddened even if he does not want to be; he sleeps even if does not want to; he gets hungry and thirsty even if he does not want to. But He”—viz., Christ— “had everything because He willed it.” Therefore, it was not fitting for Him to pray for Himself.

**Objection 3:** In *De Oratione Dominica* Cyprian says, “The master of peace and unity did not want prayers to be made individually and privately in such a way that when one prayed, he would be praying only for himself.” But Christ did what He taught—this according to Acts 1:1 (“Jesus began to do and to teach”). Therefore, Christ never prayed for Himself alone.

**But contrary to this:** In John 17:1 our Lord Himself said while praying, “... glorify your Son.”

**I respond:** There are two ways in which Christ prayed for himself:

In one way, by expressing the affection of His *sentient appetite*, as has already been explained

(a. 2), or, again, by expressing the affection of His *simple will*, i.e., His will thought of as *nature* (cf. q. 18, a. 3)—as, for instance, when He prayed for the chalice of His passion to be transferred from Him (*cum oravit a se calicem passionis transferri*) (Matthew 26:39).

In a second way, by expressing the affection of His *deliberated will*, i.e., His will thought of as *reason* (cf. q. 18, a. 3)—as, for instance, when He asked for the glory of the resurrection (John 17:1). And this makes sense. For as has been explained (a. 1, ad 1), Christ willed to make use of His prayer to the Father in order to give us an example of praying and in order to show that (a) His Father is the source (*auctor*) from whom He proceeds eternally with respect to His divine nature and that (b), with respect to His human nature, it is from the Father that He has whatever good He has. But just as in His human nature He had certain goods from His Father which had already been received, so, too, He expected from Him certain goods which were not yet had, but were going to be received. And so just as He gave thanks to the Father for the goods which had already been received in His human nature, by recognizing the Father as their source (Matthew 26:27 and John 11:41), so, too, in order to recognize the Father as their source, He asked Him in prayer for those things that were still lacking to Him in His human nature, e.g., the glory of the body and other such things. And in this He likewise gave us an example, viz., that we should give thanks for gifts which have already been received and ask in prayer for what we do not yet have.

**Reply to objection 1:** Hilary is talking about [Christ's] vocal prayer, which was necessary for Him only for our sake and not for His own sake. This is why Hilary explicitly says that “the spoken words of prayer (*deprecationis sermo*)” did not profit Him. For if “the Lord hears the desire of the poor,” as Psalm 9:17 says, then *a fortiori* the mere will of Christ has the force of prayer before the Father. This is why in John 11:42 He said, “I know that You hear me always, but because of the people who are standing about I have said it out loud, so that they might believe that You have sent me.”

**Reply to objection 2:** Christ willed to suffer what He suffered for that period of time, but He nonetheless willed that, after the passion, He might receive the glory of the body, which He did not yet have. He expected this glory from His Father as its source. And so it was fitting for Him to ask the Father for it.

**Reply to objection 3:** The very glory that Christ requested for Himself while praying involved the salvation of others—this according to Romans 4:25 (“He rose for the sake of our justification”). And so, once again, that prayer which He made for Himself was in a certain sense for others. In the same way, when a man asks God for something good in order to use that good for the advantage of others, he is praying not for himself alone, but for the others as well.

#### Article 4

##### Was Christ's prayer always heard?

It seems that Christ's prayer was not always heard (*Christi oratio non fuerit semper exaudita*):

**Objection 1:** As is clear from Matthew 26:39, Christ asked that the chalice of the passion be removed from Him (*a se removeri calicem passionis*), and yet the chalice was not transferred (*non fuit translatus*) from Him. Therefore, it seems that not every prayer of His was heard.

**Objection 2:** As is clear from Luke 23:34, He prayed that the sin of those who crucified Him might be forgiven. Yet the sin was not forgiven in the case of all of them, since Judas was punished for that sin. Therefore, it seems that not every prayer of His was heard.

**Objection 3:** Our Lord prayed for those who were going to believe in Him because of the

preaching of the apostles (John 17:24), that they might all be one in Him and that they might all arrive at abiding with Him. But not everyone arrives at this. Therefore, not every prayer of His was heard.

**Objection 4:** Psalm 21:3 says in the person of Christ, “I will cry out throughout the day, and you will not hear me.” Therefore, not every prayer of His was heard.

**But contrary to this:** In Hebrews 5:7 the Apostle says, “Offering up [prayers and supplications] with loud cries and with tears, He was heard because of His reverence.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), prayer is a sort of expounding of the human will. Therefore, the prayer of the one praying is heard when his will is fulfilled. Now a man’s will is, absolutely speaking, the will *as reason* (*voluntas rationis*) (cf. q. 18, a. 3), since what we will without qualification is what we will in accord with reason’s deliberation. On the other hand, what we will in accord with a movement of the *sentient appetite* (*secundum motum sensualitatis*), or even in accord with a movement of the *simple will* (*secundum motum voluntatis simplicis*), i.e., the will thought of *as nature* (cf. q. 18, a. 3), is something that we will not without qualification (*non simpliciter*) but under a certain condition (*secundum quid*), viz., if nothing else that is standing in the way is discovered by reason’s deliberation. Hence, such an act of [the simple] will should be called a mere wish (*velleitas*) rather than an absolute act of willing, since a man would will it if nothing else stood in the way.

Now as regards the will *as reason*, Christ willed nothing other than what He knew God willed. And so every absolute act of willing on Christ’s part, including every absolute *human* act of willing, was fulfilled, since it was conformed to God, and, consequently, every prayer of His was heard. For the prayers of other men are likewise fulfilled to the extent that their wills are conformed to God—this according to Romans 8:27: “He who scrutinizes hearts knows”—i.e., approves of—“what the Spirit desires”—i.e., what the Spirit makes those who are holy desire—“since He makes petitions on behalf of the saints in accord with God”—i.e., in conformity with the divine will.

**Reply to objection 1:** The request that the chalice be transferred (*illa petitio de translatione calicis*) is explained in diverse ways by the saints:

For instance, in *Super Matthaicum* Hilary says, “When He asks that [the chalice] might pass from Him (*a se transit*), He is not praying that it might pass Him by (*non ut ipse praetereatur orat*); instead, He is praying that what is passing from Him might go beyond Him to the others. And so He is praying for those who were going to suffer after Him, so that the sense is this: ‘Let the others drink from the chalice of my passion in the way that I am drinking of it—without a distrustful hope, without a sense of sorrow, without a fear of death.’”

Alternatively, according to Jerome, “He says pointedly, ‘This chalice, i.e., the chalice of the Jewish people, who cannot use ignorance as an excuse for killing me, since they have the Law and the prophets, both of which prophesy about me.’”

Alternatively, according to Dionysius of Alexandria, “What He says here, ‘Transfer this chalice from me (*transfer calicem istum a me*)’ does not mean ‘Let it not come to me,’ since if it were not going to come to Him, then it would not be able to be transferred (*nisi enim advenerit, transferri non poterit*). Instead, given that what passes is neither untouched nor permanent, our savior asks that a slightly pressing trial might be repelled.”

By contrast, Ambrose, Origen, and Chrysostom claim that He is making His petition as a man who is by His natural will shrinking back from death.

So, then, if one thinks, with Hilary, that Christ is thereby asking that other martyrs become imitators of His passion, or if He is asking that fear of drinking the chalice not perturb Him or that death not detain Him, then what He is asking is altogether fulfilled. On the other hand, if He is understood to have asked not to drink the chalice of the passion and death, or not to drink it at the hands of the Jews, then what He asked for did not happen, and this because His reason, which proposed the request, did not want it to be fulfilled; instead, for our instruction, He wanted to make clear to us His own natural will

and the movement of the sentient appetite that He had as a man.

**Reply to objection 2:** Our Lord did not pray for all those who crucified Him or even for all those who were going to believe in Him; instead, He prayed only for those who were predestined to gain eternal life through Him.

**Reply to objection 3:** The reply to the third objection is clear from what was just said.

**Reply to objection 4:** When He says, “I will cry out and you will not hear me,” this should be understood to have to do with the affection of the sentient appetite, which was shrinking away from death. Yet as has been explained, it was fulfilled as far as the affection of reason was concerned.