

Meditation on the Creed

**According to the Teachings of
Blessed William Joseph Chaminade
Founder of the Marianist Family**

The North American Center for Marianist Studies, located in Dayton, Ohio, provides programs, publications, and resources on Marianist history and charism to the comprehensive Marianist Family—religious men and women and lay people engaged in Marianist ministries or belonging to Marianist lay communities. We believe our service to the world today is informed by the richness of our heritage. So we may better understand, appreciate, and share the Marianist spirit, NACMS strives to bring this heritage into dialogue with issues of contemporary church and culture. For more about NACMS, log on to www.nacms.org.

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I. Introduction

“Whoever wishes to participate in the ways of prayer should start with mixed mental prayer on the Apostles’ Creed.”

—Blessed Chaminade

Prayer is the breath of faith. We experience the “living God” through prayer. Each time we use silence and go to encounter Christ, we strengthen our faith in his resurrection. It is possible to find Christ because he rose from the dead. Prayer is the dialogue with Christ who is ever present in history and in the depths of the human heart. Blessed William Joseph Chaminade wanted to form a Family of believers and of missionaries of Mary. Their distinctive trait would be living out their faith with sincerity . . . not a speculative kind of faith, but rather a committed faith involving their whole life. A believer is one who takes the truths of faith into her or his heart and life. To help in this process, Blessed Chaminade offered to his disciples a “prayer method based on the Creed.” It is a prayer exercise that seeks to incarnate the faith and to transform it into a living faith.

In this booklet, we offer some outlines or prayer models to meditate on the Creed following the Chaminadean method. After using these, each person can fill in the different parts with his or her own ideas and personal feelings. After going through the outlines and experiencing them, one can go back to those areas that were not as nourishing. There, we can take up again the ideas that touched us most, or we can simply repeat the prayer response from the heart, which is like the culmination of the method. We will discover that the spiritual wealth of the Creed is truly inexhaustible.

“The content of the Creed is enough to keep a man occupied throughout his entire life. What am I saying? There is enough there to keep us occupied throughout eternity because the saints in heaven are eternally occupied in contemplation of the divinity.”

—Blessed Chaminade

II. Presentation of the Method

The current prayer outline may be used either in community or individually. For *community prayer*, a guide should be chosen to lead the group in prayer. Each outline indicates, in parenthesis, what needs to be done by the guide. It is important to read the various parts of the outline out loud and in a clear, measured way, giving time to the members of the community to follow the directions and to live out the contents. For the *individual exercise* of the method, it is recommended to read the “silent exercise” ahead of time and to be able to follow it without looking at the paper. Then, the booklet can be picked up again to continue with the other parts of the method.

Development of the Method: Each prayer outline consists of two parts:

1. Placing Oneself in God’s Presence
2. Meditation on the Creed

1. Placing Oneself in God’s Presence

- The prayer will start with the *sign of the cross*. Then, one of the “*silent exercises*” may be used, from the appendix in the booklet. These exercises will help to quiet the mind, body, and feelings to create an inner silence. In community prayer, this exercise will be lead by the “guide.”

We will then *invoke the Virgin Mary* with the following or similar words: “Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help me to listen to God.” In community prayer, the guide will say this out loud and the rest will repeat it to themselves. It would be good here to quote the very words of Blessed Chaminade: “Union with Mary is an essential disposition for prayer” (*Método de Oración sobre el Credo*, p. 80)

- We then fill our silence with our *love for God and with his presence*. We will repeat, “My Lord, my God,” trying to follow the rhythm of our own breathing.
- Blessed Chaminade placed great importance on this first moment of prayer: “We would have made a good prayer if we had spent the whole time in this holy exercise of the presence of God because we would have done all that is required for a good prayer” (Blessed Chaminade, op. cit., p. 70).

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a. *Recitation of the Creed:* It shall be done slowly and with silent pauses. Everything included in the text from here on will be read by the prayer guide. The Creed will be recited out loud by the guide alone.
- b. *Selection of one of the truths from the Creed:* One of the outlines shall be chosen.
- c. *Time for reflection:* This is the most appropriate time for using our intelligence in prayer. It is a matter of praying by reflecting on the contents of the Creed. The text will be given in short sentences to allow silent pauses.
- d. *Applications:* This is the time to compare our own life with the truths of faith. By responding interiorly to the suggested questions, we can make a resolution regarding our life, if appropriate. Let us now read how Blessed Chaminade presented this moment: “Thus, I question my faith. I compare Jesus’ behavior with my own behavior. Then I see through my behavior how miserable and imperfect my faith really is” (Blessed Chaminade, op. cit, p. 40).
- e. *Prayer response from the heart:* Drawing close to God with love and repeating the short prayer presented in the outline, we search again for inner silence and mental quiet. The repetition helps to feel more what is said in the prayer each time.
 - End the prayer with the sign of the cross.

III. Prayer Outlines

Outline 1

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) Slow recitation of the Creed (the guide does this out loud) (Include pauses)
- b) (The guide says) "I believe in God the Father almighty."
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
 - (Guide) To believe is to yield, to place oneself in God's hands. To believe is to give oneself totally to someone, without any conditions. Only God can ask this yielding in Faith. God assumes a human face in Jesus, but still remains invisible. He asks us to trust even when we do not see. To believe is to say yes to the invisible God.
 - The first article of Faith declares that God is our Father. God is my origin; my whole being comes from Him. I belong to God; I am his child. God knows me and understands me. God does not forget me, always thinks of me, takes care of me.
- d) *Applications*
 - Do I always look for God's will?
 - What is the will of God for my life right now?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
"Father, may your will be done."

Outline 2

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) "Creator of heaven and earth."
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)

- (Guide) God is the creator of everything. God sustains my life right now. Everything I am, everything I have is his creation, his gift. I am rooted in God. He is the constant source of my life.
 - No person can say that his own qualities, his ideas, his things are merely his; all things are God's gift. Also, the good in other people is God's gift. Envy makes no sense. We are all absolutely poor before God. The good we find in others is a gift for them as well as for myself.
 - God is present in all things, giving them existence. God is not in front of me, but within me. God lives in the deepest, most secret part of my being.
- d) *Applications*
- Do I envy the good I see in others?
 - Do I thank God for the gift of life?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
- “Lord, my whole being is yours.”

Outline 3

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Mediation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “I believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord”
- c) *Time for reflection*
- (Guide) Jesus, born in Judea, carpenter, preacher, sentenced prisoner ... is God. Jesus is the Son, equal to the Father in everything. He existed before there was light in the universe. Through him and for him all things were made. He is the Word that expresses the beauty of God. The Word that expresses infinite Love.
 - Jesus is the Lord. I cannot worship any human being. I only kneel before Jesus, only he is absolutely necessary. Everything with Jesus, nothing without him. Life continually offers me other lords, false idols. They shine for a while and then they go out leaving a great emptiness. Only Jesus is the steadfast rock.
- d) *Applications*
- Have I made my basic choice for Christ?
 - Am I serving other lords: my career, my relationship with another person, my self-image before others, etc.?

- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“My Lord, my God.”

Outline 4

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
- (Guide) Jesus comes from the Spirit. He lives with us, is one of us, but he also comes from above. Something completely new comes into our history with Jesus. History begins and ends with Jesus. Everything that exists searches for Jesus. He is in the heart of all things.
 - Jesus comes from Mary. Jesus is a man; he has a body that suffers and feels the cold; he has hands that caress and that get calloused from work. He has a heart capable of joy and of sadness.
 - Jesus belongs to Mary: he has her gaze, her smile, her way of confidently yielding to God.
- d) *Applications*
- Have I meditated on the humanity of Jesus?
 - Is there trust between Jesus and me?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“Jesus, brother and friend.”

Outline 5

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)

- b) (Guide) “He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.”
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
 - (Guide) Jesus suffered for us. He redeemed us by his sacrifice. To sacrifice is to make something sacred. Sacrifice is a bridge between God and humanity. The whole of redemption is a work of love of the Father: God sends us his son to allow us to return to God. A work of love of the son: he reveals to us the love we had lost. A work of the love of humanity: the children once again love their Father and their brothers and sisters.
 - To sacrifice oneself is to learn faithfulness, true love. It means to die to selfishness that refuses to give. That is what Christ did: he gave of himself. Without selfishness. He busied himself in the Father’s interests. Thus, he expresses the love of God in the human condition.
- d) *Applications*
 - In what measure do I accompany Christ in his sacrifice? (silence)
 - Is my love a true “Gift”?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
 “Lord, I accept my cross.”

Outline 6

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “On the third day he rose from the dead.”
- c) *Moment for reflection* (include pauses)
 - (Guide) Christ rose from the dead. He did not merely push away the stone from the tomb: he freed us. He made us free to live in love. He gave us the option to destroy our selfishness and our class and race differences.
 - Christ is risen. He is still living. Christ gives us life. We feel his life when we love one another. His love gives life. He gives us the hope of our own resurrection. In Jesus, we are called to eternal life.
 - The risen Jesus greets us with: “Rejoice.” Rejoice about receiving a new light ... a light in the midst of a world burdened with problems and anxieties. His resurrection is the final triumph.
- d) *Applications*
 - Is there joy in my life? (silence)
 - Are we truly free people?
 - Are we the light of the world?

- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“Jesus, let your light shine in me.”

Outline 7

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “He descended into hell, ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.”
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
- (Guide) The risen Jesus is the New Man. He transcends space and time. The Father elevated Jesus and placed him at the center of history; from there, he embraces and liberates all, from all times.
 - Jesus is the liberator of all those who were feeling around for God. Jesus saves the great believers of the People of God who were awaiting the Messiah. Jesus redeems all the “gentile saints” who loved God without knowing him.
 - History moves toward Christ; the whole universe moves toward him. Each step taken by nations toward a more humane situation is a step toward Christ. The smallest gesture of love, the daily effort of work, everything truly human comes from Christ, the Lord of history.
- d) *Applications*
- Do I take my daily tasks and professional work seriously... knowing they come from Christ?
 - Do I trust in the power of Christ that leads the history of my people? Do I promote pessimism or hope?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
Jesus, Lord of history.”

Outline 8

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.”

- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
 - (Guide) There will be justice at the end of time. Justice is not something that can be wholly attained in our history. It will be one of the gifts that God reserves for us at the end of the journey. However, we should not passively wait for justice; to walk toward justice is to already begin to carry it out, to set it up as the basis for peace. But we need not despair and resort to violent solutions, asking more of the world than it is able to give. Asking for absolute justice is a first step toward despair, which ends by giving up the struggle for justice.
 - At the end of life we will be judged on our love, on our mercy. We are already undergoing this judgment now. This judgment is defined by our attitude toward others. In each brother that approaches us, the Lord comes asking for our response, proposing a response of love.
- d) *Applications*
 - Do I accept the injustices I have to suffer with serenity?
 - Do I recognize Christ in all those who approach me?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
 “Jesus is in my brother.”

Outline 9

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- *Silent exercise.*
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”
- c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)
 - (Guide) The Holy Spirit is strength. It is freedom. It is joy. It is becoming children of God. Christ is our goal. Our model is his image, the Holy Spirit. Living in the Holy Spirit is the way to holiness.
 - Letting ourselves be led by the Spirit. It is hard. It requires action. It requires heroism. It soaks us in Love. We must be a temple of the Spirit. Each Pentecost we revive the strength of the Spirit of God in us.
 - Pentecost is the loving and strong manifestation of the Spirit in the world—loving and strong enough to change my life. I decide to take God seriously, as seriously as God takes me.
- d) *Applications*
 - Am I conscious of the Holy Spirit?
 - Am I a Christian in whom the Spirit of Christ resides?
 - What is the Holy Spirit proposing to me at this stage of my life?

- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
Thank you, Jesus, for your Spirit.”

Outline 10

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “I believe in the holy catholic Church.”
- c) *Time for reflection (include pauses)*
- (Guide) The Church is a true fraternity. When it is full of love, it remains united, open to everyone, faithful to her Spouse. Her mission is to make Christ visible, to reveal the glorious face of the risen Christ. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. Our mission is to save others, those who are near to us, those who need to be saved.
 - The Church is Christ’s sacrament. It has been given powers to make the manifestation of Christ be extensive, fruitful, permanent. It endlessly relives the Mystery of his Death and Resurrection. It requires that we leave behind the old self in order to rise as the new self.
 - The Church is all of us faithful. We are objects of faith. This is why it is not perfect as Jesus was. God loves in each one of us a being that we ignore. He gently calls us. We must believe in one another in order to recognize the hidden Christ in each one of us.
- d) *Applications*
- Do I try to save those around me?
 - Do I feel that I am an integral part of the Church?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“Jesus, teach us to love.”

Outline 11

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “The communion of saints”
- c) *Time for reflection (include pauses)*

- (Guide) The Holy Spirit establishes communion and solidarity among us. Unity is possible, necessary, and urgent. We believe that the strength of the love of the risen Christ is able to bring us together. There exist in God several persons that love each other. We must try to continually increase the number of people that love each other in the world.
 - Jesus was the origin of the communion of saints. The apostles saw him, listened to him, consulted him. They felt the life that he continually communicated to them. Our communion is also established with those who have died. They are born to a new life. We can communicate with them through prayer.
- d) *Applications*
- What is my attitude before the death of a loved one?
 - Do I believe in a future reunion with the departed ones?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
 “Lord, help us to be reunited.”

Outline 12

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.”
- c) *Time for reflection*
- (Guide) Original sin came from pride: it was a rejection of God, wanting to do without Him. Redemption, on the other hand, is fulfilled in humility. Sin does not consist in the transgression of some commandment; it consists in refusing to love the One who gave us the commandment.
 - Grace is inexhaustible for us. Because of our being forgiven and loved, we will learn about forgiveness and love. We always have to learn again about the Father’s love through his forgiveness.
 - The forgiveness of sins is God offering to man the capacity of becoming able to love. All sins involve lack of love. But God loves us even when we do not love. God does not love us for us to love God back, but for us to learn from the Creator how to love. This is *a new baptism*, a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. It reinstates in us the capacity to love God. It brings us back into the community of our brothers and sisters.
- d) *Applications*
- Do I love God with my whole heart?
 - Do I love others without reservation?
 - Am I willing to forgive everyone?

- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“Jesus, teach us to love.”

Outline 13

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)
- b) (Guide) “I believe in the resurrection of the body.”
- c) *Moment for reflection*
- (Guide) The flesh is not synonymous with the body. It means the whole person, natural weaknesses and all. The resurrection of the body is the restoration of the whole person—human dreams, joys, and emotions.
 - Christ opens a life of eternal happiness for us. The resurrection of the body assures us that this supernatural happiness will also be human. Everything we are will have to be purified and transformed in order to be divinized. Such a transformation will make us more human.
 - Being a Christian requires a basic commitment from each of us, with God and with our sisters and brothers. The commitment with our brothers and sisters must be based on justice; thus, we must fight for social justice. We must declare our solidarity with others at work, at school, and on the street.
- d) *Applications*
- Do we support people in their daily problems?
 - Do I work for social justice?
- e) *Prayer response from the heart*
“Lord, I want to commit myself to you.”

Outline 14

1. Placing oneself in the presence of God

- Silent exercise.
- *Virgin Mary, Mother of Silence, help us to listen to God.*
- *My Lord, my God.*

2. Meditation on the Creed

- a) (Guide) Slow recitation of the Creed (include pauses)

b) (Guide) “I believe in life everlasting.”

c) *Time for reflection* (include pauses)

- Salvation is personal. No one would be saved despite oneself. But salvation is also collective. We will not get to heaven by ourselves. Those who are concerned only about their own individual salvation condemn themselves.
- Christ is life. We who believe in Christ have eternal life, which begins with our Baptism. We are in eternity right now. The Kingdom of God is already in our heart now. We will have no other eternal life than the one we have started today. Our life is the parable of moments lived with love in our earthly pilgrimage. Everything we have truly loved will become eternal.
- Heaven is the place where people love each other. We can only go into heaven freely. The existence of hell is the expression of what God feels regarding our freedom. Hell is the place of those who have rejected God.

d) *Applications*

- Do I feel that I am in true community with my brothers and sisters?
- Do I live with the hope of eternal life?

e) *Prayer response from the heart*

“Lord, give us your Kingdom”

IV. APPENDIX

Silent Exercises

Exercise 1

Posture: Sit down, back straight, shoulders loose, hands resting on your thighs with palms up or folded together. Eyes closed. The feet must be well supported on the floor.

Breathing: Take three slow and deep breaths trying to release any tension with each exhalation.

Go through the body: Slowly go through each part ... letting go and loosening up: the scalp, ears, forehead, eyelids, cheeks, lips.

Quieting the mind: Examine the mind. Images and ideas will probably spring up. We are aware of them; we do not dwell on them. While following the rhythm of your breathing, repeat a word or phrase (in our case it could be “My Lord, my God”).

Exercise 2

Close your eyes. Focus your attention on your brain ... identifying yourself with your cerebral mass. Figure out the exact area that bothers you or that is tense. Quietly and lovingly, and closely identifying yourself with this area, start to say, thinking or speaking softly: “Calm down, be still, be at peace”; continue to repeat this until the trouble disappears. Do the same with each part of the body. For example, focus on the heart. Relate to it as if it were another person. Remain still and with peace and love ask your heart to: “Calm down, work quietly, more slowly...” Then go through the external parts of the body, relaxing them, loosening them up: arms, hands, abdomen... To finish up, experience intensely and all at once the following fact: “There is a total calm throughout my entire body.”

Exercise 3

Pick up an image (e.g., a figure of Christ or Mary); that is, a holy card that has powerful meaning for you. Place it in your hands, before your eyes. With great calm, look closely at the image for a minute. Then, for about three minutes, try to figure out the feelings that the image evokes in you: intimacy, tenderness, strength. Next, try to identify ... revive the feelings inspired by the image and finish the exercise “soaking up” these feelings.¹

- These exercises are helpful to enter into prayer. Those who can easily go into an atmosphere of silence will need them less. But in our world of activism, tensions, and economic problems, it is not easy to go into silence, and they can be very useful.

¹ Some of these exercises are taken from the book *Muéstrame tu rostro* (“Show Me Your Face”) by Fr. Ignacio Larrañaga. Other, similar exercises are provided there.

Blessed Chaminade: Master of a Life of Prayer

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade (1761-1850) was a master of spiritual life. A man of prayer himself, he recommended prayer for everyone in a convincing way. His teachings on prayer have guided thousands of men and women to intimacy with God. Here are some guidelines of Blessed Chaminade about prayer:

- Prayer means to praise, give thanks, laud, proclaim, repent. Above all, prayer means consciously entering into the presence of our merciful and faithful God.
- Prayer unites us to God; it puts us in communication with God. It binds our spirit with the Spirit of God, our heart with the heart of God. Prayer is a creative encounter with God that generates something new in us.
- Is it possible for a creature to enter into a relationship of love with its creator and not be transformed? The fundamental result of Christian prayer is that it makes us better; that is, it makes us be ever more similar to Jesus Christ.
- Blessed Chaminade suggests that, at the beginning of our prayer, we place ourselves with all our senses in the presence of Mary and that we remain in her presence throughout the time of our prayer. At our side during prayer, Mary will help us to pray little by little more like she did: with profound faith, unlimited trust, and infinite love for our God.
- Entering into a relationship of prayer with God requires a truly deep faith from us. This “prayerful faith” will slowly lead us to accept the whole of reality (about God, ourselves, and our world).
- What happens in prayer should permeate everything else in our life, and everything we do during the day should predispose us to be with God in prayer. Jesus himself reminds us that we need to pray without ceasing.

Blessed Father Chaminade,

During difficult times you knew how to firmly preserve your faith in God and in people. Convinced that God is faithful and will carry out a plan of salvation for humanity, you consecrated yourself to Mary, the woman chosen by God to incarnate the son into our world.

Continue to bless us and to watch over us. Encourage us that we may be a people of saints making Christ visible with our life; a people of missionaries of Mary, happy to work like her and with her for the coming of the Kingdom.

May the Spirit that inspired you teach us faith of the heart. May it urge us to obey in everything the word of Mary to the disciples: "Do whatever he tells you." And in this way, "may the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary."

+ Amen.