

Pray as you can ...

1 Many people find it easier to communicate when facing the person to whom we're talking. That way, we can direct our voice toward them and observe the expressions on their face as we speak. We can also see to what extent our message is understood and if we need to say more or stop to listen.

In the same way, it's a good idea to look toward God when we pray. The Scriptures say that God is a Spirit so we need a form of prayer that is led by promptings of the Holy Spirit. During times of prayer, we direct our prayers toward God rather than into some vague space we might call 'Heaven'. That's why St Paul tells his disciples to 'Pray in the Spirit'.

When first learning how to pray in this way, it can be useful to consciously think of God using a picture of something that (for us) helps to represent God. We then direct our prayers to that image.

This practice will probably feel artificial at first. Nevertheless, when this sort of praying seems a little less self-conscious, it often helps if we next ask God to suggest a better image or picture. We hone the picture because our image of God is too immature or too small. He will improve it to make it more realistic.

God is a spirit so the best images of God are not so much pictorial as *representing* God. For that reason, it's not uncommon for God to gently lead us beyond images and introduce us to concepts. For example, He may ask us to use a single word such as 'God', 'love' or 'spirit'.

And do not be surprised when God asks you to dispense with images altogether. We still direct our prayers to God, but the sheer inadequacy of a pictorial approach actually gets in the way of praying.

... not as you can't

2 Sometimes our prayers feel plodding and (to be honest) quite a chore. We feel they're so boring that they will bore God too?

There is nothing wrong or sinful in stopping a prayer that is useless and pointless. God can deal with our honesty so perhaps we should start by telling him, 'Lord! I find praying is difficult and feel like it's doing no good ...'

But we should never give up. God allows us to treat prayer almost like an experiment. Trying out different ways of praying can be exciting! Here are a few suggestions.

Maybe we're sitting uncomfortably position or kneeling: all the time we're thinking of our knees and back. Find somewhere more comfortable, as you would when talking to a best friend. Sometimes it's easier to move back and forth between the prayers we want to say in our own words and the prayers we

find written by someone else in a book or service card. There's a place for both. We could try praying in a different way. Sometimes

we're praying at the wrong time of day. We're tired or hungry or upset. In that case we should try praying when we feel fresher, less distracted, more alive. But many of the best prayers don't involve words at all. Lighting a candle and gazing at its flame can be a good way of calming our soul before we even start. Or try looking at a sunset or the glories of nature. Using the imagination is generally a powerful way of getting close to God. We can imagine our-

selves in a crowd watching Jesus rise into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday or recreate the Last Supper in our mind's eye. Most of the saints looked at Jesus on the Cross in their mind's eye grew closer to God as a result.

