

ANGLICAN PRAYER BEADS

A BRIEF GUIDE

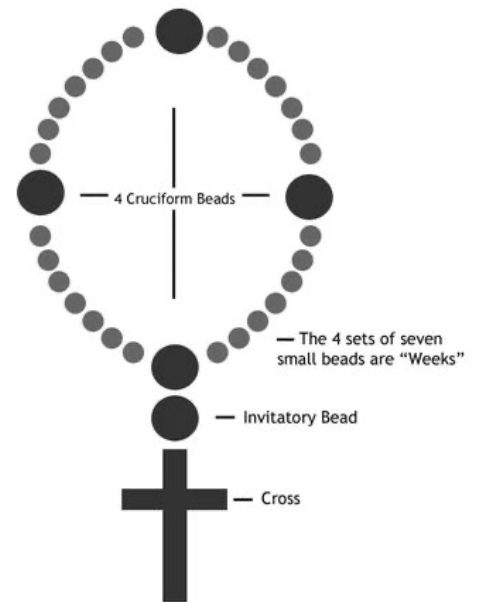


ST COLUMBA'S EPISCOPAL RETREAT HOUSE
INVERNESS, CA

ANGLICAN PRAYER BEADS

The Beads

Anglican prayer beads consist of a cross and thirty-three beads. The loop itself consists of thirty-two beads comprised of four sets of seven uniform beads called “weeks” and four larger beads between each set of ‘weeks.’ When laid flat, this creates a *cruciform* shape with each of the larger beads making up the four points of the cross (see image to the right). Extending from one of the cruciform beads is an additional single large bead called the “Invitatory,” which brings the total count of beads to 33.



Symbolism

The number thirty-three signifies the number of years in the earthly life of Christ, while the number seven signifies wholeness or completion in the faith, the days of Creation and the seasons of the Church year: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and the Season after Pentecost (otherwise known as “Ordinary Time”).

The Cross

Anglican prayer bead sets are designed with a variety of crosses or crucifixes depending on a person's individual spiritual sensibilities.

How to Pray the Beads

When used as an aid in meditation the beads serve to help 'embody' one's prayer, keeping the mind focused on one's meditation as their fingers move across each bead as they pray. Typically, one follows a pattern of prayer that begins with the cross, followed by the Invitatory Bead, and then, the first Cruciform bead just above the Invitatory. One then begins to move to the right through the first seven beads or "weeks" to the next Cruciform bead, and so on, continuing around the circle. If prayed three times around the cruciform loop one will have prayed 100 times (equivalent to an Eastern Orthodox prayer rope), signifying the lifetime of Jesus and the Holy Trinity.

The Prayer

Anglican prayer beads are adaptable to all manner of prayer and there is no "wrong" way to pray with them. There are books which will provide different patterns or approaches to prayer that can be associate with the beads as you pray. This guide will provide only three of the many ways one can pray with these beads to serve as an example. The first adopts the most ancient form of Christian prayer known as the *Jesus Prayer* or "Prayer of the Heart," the second is a Celtic Christian form drawn from the Prayer of St. Patrick, and the last is for use at night (when one has trouble sleeping).

THE JESUS PRAYER

Hold the cross in your hand and take several breaths before beginning. Consciously place yourself in the ever-abiding presence of God. And when ready you may begin:

HOLDING THE CROSS

Make the Sign of the Cross over yourself saying: “In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

INVITATORY

O God come to my assistance; O Lord make hast to help me.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

CRUCIFORM BEADS

Holy God, Holy mighty, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on me.

WEEKS

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.

**You may use any portion of this prayer as long as it includes the name “Jesus.” For example, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy.” Or “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” or “Lord Jesus,” or even just the name “Jesus” prayed on each of the seven beads.*

If you are not familiar with the tradition practice of the Jesus prayer, which can be prayed with or without beads, you will find a summary of the Jesus Prayer below.

The Invocation of the Name or, more simply, the Jesus Prayer, is a prayer that can be traced back to the New Testament (Luke 18:10-14) with more explicit references dating to the early seventh century. The form of the prayer is brief: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.” Yet as long as the name “Jesus” is invoked, the prayer may be reduced to any portion of this phrase, as, for example, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy,” or simply “Jesus.” When praying the Jesus Prayer, one simply calls upon the name “Jesus” repeatedly in the heart. It may be whispered on the lips or invoked interiorly in silence. The prayer is not prayed as if to call Christ from a distant place. It is prayed to the indwelling Christ of whose body we are extensions. It is prayed to Jesus, intimately present, and thus should be prayed quietly, whispered softly as if to our beloved, not forced or strained.



As thoughts, emotions, and memories arise you will find yourself distracted or you may realize at some point you have dropped the repetition of the name. Do not become anxious or frustrated. Simply return to the invocation of the name. Some find it helpful to associate the recitation of the name with their breathing. This can help ground your prayer in the silence of your body rather than in the chattiness of your mind. That is to say, allowing the prayer to ride upon your breath helps to ground you in the present moment by keeping you conscious of your body—uniting both body and mind in the cell of your heart.

Inasmuch as Jesus is the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is the breath of God. As we pray the name of Jesus, we too breathe the Spirit, echoing

the very love of God in whom Word and Spirit are spoken from all Eternity. Thus, the association of your prayer with your breath is a participation in the life of the triune God within you, and should thus instill a sense of peace and interior recollection.

As you pray, you need not strain your breathing in any way. Breathe naturally, and if it feels right, repeat the name slowly and gently with each breath.

When invoking the name, you need not attempt to conjure an image of Jesus but simply rest in his presence without any need for imaginative projections, thoughts, or concepts. With time and attention, you will find that the prayer begins to pray itself within you. With every breath you will find the name breathing you. Over time the prayer begins to cultivate a pervasive intuition of the divine presence because to invoke Jesus, the Christ, is to invoke the Trinity. As St. Basil the Great observed, “The invocation of Christ is the confession of the whole, since it is clear that God is the one anointing, the Son is the one anointed, and the Spirit is the anointing, as we have learned from Peter in Acts: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit (10:38).’” Thus, to invoke the name of JESUS is to call upon the Triune God.



CELTIC CHRISTIAN PRAYER

St. Patrick's Breastplate is a prayer for protection and intimacy with Christ attributed to the great Celtic Saint, Patrick. In this approach, the Anglican Prayer Beads, tether us to St. Patrick's prayer with each of the Weeks becoming one line of his prayer, returning to a refrain with each Cruciform bead.¹



THE CROSS

I bind unto myself today the strong Name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three. Of whom all nature hath creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word: praise to the Lord of my salvation, salvation is of Christ the Lord.

THE INVITATORY

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

CRUCIFORM BEADS

I bind unto myself today the strong Name of the Trinity, by invocation of the same, the Three in One, and One in Three.

¹ Words: attributed to St. Patrick (372-466); translated by Cecil Frances Alexander, 1889; Adapted for use with Anglican Prayer Beads by Laura Kelly Campbell

WEEKS

1. I bind this day to me for ever, by power of faith, Christ's Incarnation;

2. his baptism in Jordan river;

3. his death on cross for my salvation;

4. his bursting from the spiced tomb;

5. his riding up the heavenly way;

6. his coming at the day of doom:

7. I bind unto myself today.

1. I bind unto myself the power of the great love of cherubim;

2. the sweet "Well done" in judgment hour;

3. the service of the seraphim;

4. confessors' faith, apostles' word,

5. the patriarchs' prayers, the prophets' scrolls;

6. all good deeds done unto the Lord,

7. and purity of virgin souls.

1. I bind unto myself today the virtues of the starlit heaven,

2. the glorious sun's life-giving ray,

3. the whiteness of the moon at even,

4. the flashing of the lightning free,

5. the whirling of the wind's tempestuous shocks,

6. the stable earth, the deep salt sea,

7. around the old eternal rocks.

1. I bind unto myself today the power of God to hold and lead,

2. his eye to watch, his might to stay,

3. his ear to hearken, to my need;

4. the wisdom of my God to teach,

5. his hand to guide, his shield to ward;

6. the word of God to give me speech,

7. his heavenly host to be my guard.

PRAYER IN THE SILENCE OF NIGHT

For restless nights when sleep will not come, let your heart turn to God who abides with you throughout the night until you gently fall asleep in his arms.²

THE CROSS

In the Name of the Three-in-One and One-in-Three. Amen.

THE INVITATORY

Glory be to you, O God of the night, for the whiteness of the moon and the infinite stretches of dark space.

CRUCIFORM BEADS

For the quiet that surrounds me and your promise of peace deep within me, thanks be to you, O God.

THE WEEKS

The stillness of God be mine this night.

Last time through:

INVITATORY BEAD

The Lord's Prayer

THE CROSS

Glory be to you, Life of all life. Renew me this night in the depths of sleep, set free my dreams of the unknown. Safeguard this time of resting, O God, enfold me in the darkness of the night. Amen.

² Words: J. Philip Newell from *Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer Adapted for use with Anglican Prayer Beads* by The Rev. R. Derrick Fetz