

# ***The Seven Pillars of Catholic Spirituality* by Matthew Kelly**

Matthew Kelly's *The Seven Pillars of Catholic Spirituality* is a practical, accessible guide to revitalizing the spiritual life of everyday Catholics. Drawing from two thousand years of Christian wisdom, Kelly presents seven foundational practices—Confession, Daily Prayer, the Mass, the Bible, Fasting, Spiritual Reading, and the Rosary—that he believes can transform ordinary believers into deeply engaged disciples. His central conviction is that Catholicism contains a “timeless genius” capable of renewing individuals and, through them, the world.

Kelly begins by acknowledging a widespread spiritual restlessness. Many Catholics, he argues, feel disconnected from the richness of their tradition. They may attend Mass or identify culturally with the Church, yet lack a vibrant interior life. The seven pillars are offered as a roadmap back to spiritual clarity, purpose, and joy. They are not abstract theological concepts but concrete habits—disciplines that shape character and open the heart to God's transforming grace.

## **1. Confession: Returning to God**

Kelly places Confession first because he sees it as the gateway to spiritual renewal. Drawing on the example of worldclass athletes who constantly evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, he argues that spiritual excellence requires the same honest selfassessment. Saints, he notes, became saints precisely because they were willing to confront their faults and allow God to heal them.

Confession, in Kelly's view, is not about guilt but about freedom. To “repent” means to turn back to God, and when a person stands beside God, he or she becomes a better spouse, parent, friend, and citizen. Kelly laments that many modern Catholics avoid Confession out of discomfort or indifference, which he sees as a symptom of spiritual mediocrity. Yet he insists that the sacrament is a powerful tool for transformation: it restores peace, strengthens virtue, and reorients the soul toward holiness.

## **2. Daily Prayer: Building a Relationship with God**

The second pillar is daily prayer, which Kelly describes as the essential conversation of the Christian life. Just as relationships wither without communication, so too does the relationship with God. Prayer, he emphasizes, is not merely reciting formulas but opening one's heart—speaking, listening, and allowing God to guide one's thoughts and actions.

Kelly encourages Catholics to begin modestly: even ten minutes a day can reshape a person's spiritual landscape. Over time, prayer becomes a stabilizing force, helping believers navigate stress, temptation, and confusion. It also cultivates gratitude and attentiveness, enabling people to recognize God's presence in ordinary moments.

### **3. The Mass: The Source and Summit**

Kelly calls the Mass the “ultimate prayer” and the center of Catholic life. Many Catholics, he argues, attend Mass without fully understanding its meaning or power. He urges readers to rediscover the Mass as a profound encounter with Christ—one that nourishes the soul, strengthens community, and sends believers forth to live the Gospel.

He highlights the Mass as a place of renewal: Scripture speaks to the heart, the Eucharist unites the faithful with Christ, and the liturgy connects individuals to the universal Church across time and space. Kelly challenges Catholics to approach the Mass with intentionality, preparation, and openness, allowing it to shape their identity and mission.

### **4. The Bible: God’s Living Word**

The fourth pillar is engagement with Scripture. Kelly stresses that Catholics cannot grow spiritually if they remain unfamiliar with the Bible. He encourages readers to read Scripture daily—even a few verses—and to approach it not as an academic text but as a personal message from God.

He notes that the Bible provides wisdom, correction, encouragement, and clarity. It reveals God’s character and illuminates the path of discipleship. Kelly argues that Catholics who immerse themselves in Scripture become more confident in their faith and better equipped to discern God’s will.

### **5. Fasting: Training the Will**

Fasting, the fifth pillar, is presented as a discipline that strengthens selfcontrol and deepens spiritual focus. Kelly explains that fasting is not merely about giving something up; it is about training the will to choose the good consistently. By voluntarily denying ourselves small comforts, we become more capable of resisting temptation and more attentive to spiritual realities.

He also emphasizes fasting as a way to unite oneself with the suffering of others and to cultivate compassion. In a culture dominated by excess and instant gratification, fasting becomes a countercultural act that reorders desires and fosters inner freedom.

### **6. Spiritual Reading: Feeding the Soul**

Kelly’s sixth pillar is spiritual reading—books that inspire, challenge, and guide believers toward holiness. He argues that just as the body needs nourishment, so does the soul. Reading the lives of saints, theological works, or contemporary spiritual reflections exposes readers to wisdom that can reshape their worldview.

He encourages Catholics to make spiritual reading a daily habit, even if only for a few minutes. Over time, this practice expands the mind, strengthens faith, and provides practical tools for living virtuously.

## **7. The Rosary: A Pathway to Peace**

The final pillar is the Rosary, which Kelly presents as a powerful meditative prayer. Far from being repetitive or outdated, the Rosary invites believers to reflect deeply on the life of Christ through the eyes of Mary. Its rhythm calms the mind, centers the heart, and fosters peace.

Kelly emphasizes that the Rosary has been a staple of Catholic spirituality for centuries and remains a source of strength for countless believers. It is accessible, portable, and adaptable to any schedule—making it an ideal practice for busy modern Catholics.

## **Conclusion: A Call to Transformation**

Kelly concludes by reminding readers that the seven pillars are not ends in themselves but pathways to holiness. Catholic spirituality, he argues, is about becoming the person God created you to be—joyful, generous, courageous, and fully alive. The pillars work together to cultivate virtue, deepen faith, and strengthen one's relationship with God.

He challenges Catholics to embrace these habits with consistency and humility. Transformation, he insists, happens one person at a time, and through transformed individuals, God transforms the world. The seven pillars are an invitation to rediscover the beauty, depth, and power of Catholicism and to allow that rediscovery to shape every aspect of life.