

Lecture 11: Prayer

(Why to pray, and How to pray)

1. Introduction
 - a. If you master the beatitudes, it makes you a beautiful, desirable person
 - i. Why did everyone find themselves drawn to John Paul II and Mother Teresa?
 1. Certainly, it was not due to physical beauty, but rather to the inner beauty that came from living the beatitudes
 - b. But mastering the beatitudes seems too difficult. In fact, it's impossible.
 - i. We just can't do it on our own
 1. On my own I don't even *desire* to follow the beatitudes
 - ii. This is why we must pray, because without God's help it won't work
 1. Prayer will unleash the power of the Holy Spirit, so that we will desire to live the beatitudes, and will in fact be able to live them
 - c. Testimony of Our Lord
 - i. Luke 5:12-16, Jesus cures a leper, and soon there are hordes of sick people waiting to be cured
 1. Would be like someone miraculously curing someone in the cancer ward; the next day there would be a great mass of cancer patients outside his door the next day
 2. But Christ doesn't heal a single person
 - a. Instead, he goes off to pray – shows the primary of grace
 - ii. Mt. 14:23; Lk 6:12; Mk 1:35; Mt. 26:36-46
 1. Our Lord, who had the most important, time-consuming, and difficult work in human history, was constantly in prayer
 2. Mt. 6:5-6 “And when you pray...”
 - a. Explicitly tells the Apostles to pray
 - b. Doesn't say, “And *if* you pray.”
2. Four Reasons why we don't pray
 - a. “Too busy” We think there is too much to do
 - i. But no one was potentially more busy than Jesus
 - ii. Fulton Sheen: It is never true to say that we have no time to meditate; the less one thinks of God, the less time there will always be for God. *The time we have for anything depends on how much we value it.* Thinking determines the use of time; time does not rule over thinking. The problem of spirituality is never, then, a question of time; it is a problem of thought. *For it does not require much time to make us saints; it requires only much love.*
 - b. So really, the problem is that we are not interested in God
 - i. For if we were interested, we would make time for God

- ii. If a man is pursuing a woman, he will certainly make time to be near her, to talk to her, to seek her out
 - 1. Won't be "squeezing in" time with the girl he loves; he'll be "squeezing in" time for everything else
 - iii. The question is, what do we *want*?
 - 1. Because if we want union with God, then we'll spend time praying to Him
 - iv. Prayer is an active pursuit of God
 - c. Most people don't know how to pray
 - d. Lack of Fortitude/Perseverance
 - i. I don't like to pray, I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of it
 - ii. After a while, instead of staying strong, the person gives up and just stops praying
 - iii. Two things to remember:
 - 1. God deserves our time and attention, especially after all He has done for us
 - 2. We know that prayer will be beneficial to us – time with Our Lord couldn't be otherwise! – even if it doesn't seem like it at the time
3. How to pray
 - a. Set a time
 - i. Can't say, "I'll pray sometime tomorrow."
 - 1. Way too general
 - 2. By the time tomorrow begins, you'll have a ton of stuff to do, there will be unexpected things turning up, someone will want to talk, or invite you out, and then when you get home you remember all the other stuff you forgot to do, and soon it will be night, and you'll be so tired, and you'll have to get to bed, because you have to get up early, and before you fall asleep, you'll say to yourself, "I'll pray tomorrow."
 - ii. Have to state a specific time.
 - b. Pick a place
 - i. Go somewhere where there is solitude and silence
 - 1. If I really want to talk to someone about personal stuff, I'm not going to take them to a bar where we have to scream in each other's ears over the music and ruckus
 - a. I'll take them somewhere where we can be alone and undistracted
 - 2. Has to be a quiet place: that's what makes the chapel good
 - a. In our culture, we're scared to death of silence
 - b. We don't know how to react when we have nothing to do but quietly sit and think
 - ii. Mt. 6:6 "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret."

1. St. Augustine, Jerome, and Ambrose understand by “room” the privacy of the heart
- c. Prayer is a conversation with God
 - i. By words, either mental or vocal, we speak to God
 - ii. When we speak to another person, it is only right that we give them our attention as well as our words
 1. So when we pray the Our Father, or the Hail Mary, our mind should be fixed on God or some aspect of our faith/spiritual life
4. Three stages of Prayer
 - a. Vocal Prayer
 - i. These are the prayers we say out loud
 1. Christ taught us to pray vocally: Our Father
 - ii. Four kinds of vocal prayer: Praise, Repentance, Petition, Thanksgiving
 - iii. However, we cannot stop with Vocal Prayer: this can’t be our only form of prayer
 1. We have to go on to meditation
 - b. Meditation (Should do this at least ½ hour a day)
 - i. Place oneself formally in God’s presence
 1. Pray to the Holy Spirit for help
 - a. Lord, inspire me in all that I do, and never let me neglect even one of your inspirations
 - ii. Read a book designed for meditation
 1. Bible is the best, but there are others
 - a. Imitation of Christ
 - b. Divine Intimacy
 - c. In Conversation with God
 - d. The Way, Furrow, (Josemaria Escriva)
 - e. Life of Christ (Fulton Sheen)
 2. Read, but don’t study
 - a. Study: taking a thing in order to analyze it
 - i. Here, you’re not trying to finish the reading
 - ii. Not trying to solve some problem
 - b. In meditation, when a thought strikes us, or jumps out at us, don’t move on with the reading. (Take the thought as a prompting that God wants you to think about it)
 - i. Wait and dwell on the thought, let it sink in
 - ii. Talk to Our Lord about it, and ask Him what He wants you to draw from this meditation
 3. Make a resolution
 - a. A resolution in prayer is : something you think God wants you to know, to think about, to dwell on, to do, to integrate into your life
 - b. Something to take from your meditation

- i. e.g., could be something to just keep in mind for the day, or it could be the realization that God wants you to adopt a new behavior for the rest of your life---or anything in between
 - c. Resolution is the fruit of Meditation
 - 4. Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving, and ask for help to carry out your resolution
- c. Contemplation
 - i. This is the stage of prayer where God takes over
 - 1. While meditative prayer involves reading, thinking, imagining drawing conclusions, and conversing inwardly with the indwelling Trinity, contemplation is none of these
 - a. In meditation, God is certainly active, and guiding our prayer, but we are still in control
 - b. Meditation is like Rowing, whereas Contemplation is like sailing
 - 2. In Contemplation, we are swept up and follow where God leads
 - ii. Therefore, Contemplation isn't something we can achieve by a technique, or by our own effort; God will bring us to contemplation when He wills
 - iii. However, we should prepare ourselves for contemplation
 - 1. By daily fidelity to meditative prayer
 - 2. By identifying and getting rid of mortal and venial sins
 - 3. By living the Gospel with heroic generosity, with Magnanimity
 - iv. God will only grant us contemplation when we are ready, that is when we are sufficiently purified of sin by this renewing lifestyle, we are constant self-giving in the ordinary details of life and faithful to daily meditative prayer
 - v. Contemplation is the height of human beauty and excellence
 - vi. There are three degrees of conversion:
 - 1. Root out sin
 - 2. Live more generously
 - a. Grow in virtue
 - b. Be consistent in meditation
 - c. These two degrees we accomplish by our own effort, (of course, with God's help)
 - 3. Contemplation
 - a. Where God takes the reigns, and brings us to a more perfect love and knowledge of Him

Recommended Reading:

Catechism of the Catholic Church, ##2558-2758