

## **A relationship with God through prayer is like a great adventure through an interior landscape**

- A landscape more wonderful than anything on earth
- But it is a journey to a place we have never been
- And we might not have any desire to go there
- Yet it is the source of the greatest happiness
  - A place where as Psalm 36: 8 describes it:
  - They will be inebriated with the richness of your house and you will give them to drink from the torrent of your pleasure.
- b/c it is the beginning of heaven on earth
- All who persevere will reach the destination

## **In order to understand each stage of the journey,**

- and how each stage prepares you for the next stage
- one needs see the entire landscape first
- that way you will know where to begin
- and how to proceed forward without getting lost or backtracking

## **What do we all want out of life?      Happiness**

God has designed us to need certain things to be fulfilled and to flourish as a human person

**7 Basic Goods:** physical goods, knowledge, achievement, beauty, human friendship, spiritual friendship, integrity and identity

**Happiness is** the permanent possession of these good things in life that complete or fill up our human nature.

These things are good and we are meant to pursue them

Yet, they are not enough

They are just the cups and the cups by themselves are empty

They need to be filled with the Living Water – God

God is the Living Water that quenches our every thirst

## **We receive this Living Water**

- Indirectly through the 7 goods
  - This is how we make the whole day a prayer
  - By doing all things to please God
  - By remaining in his presence all day
  - Speaking with him all day long
- We receive the Living Water directly through
  - Sacraments
  - prayer

Prayer at the most advanced stages is an experience of God

- in which we taste and see the very goodness of God (psalm 34:8-10),
- and we drink from the river of divine delight

Teresa of Avila (Doctor on Prayer) describes this receiving of the Living Water like someone setting out to make a garden:

A beginner must look on himself as one setting out to make a garden for his Lord's pleasure, on most unfruitful soil which abounds in weeds. His Majesty roots up the weeds and will put in good plants instead. Let us reckon that this is already done when a soul decides to practice prayer and has begun to do so. We have then, as good gardeners, with God's help to make these plants grow, and to water them carefully so that they do not die, but produce flowers, which give out a good smell, to delight this Lord of ours. Then he will often come to take his pleasure in this garden and enjoy these virtues.

Now let us see how this garden is to be watered, so that we may understand what we have to do, and what labor it will cost us, also whether the gain will outweigh the effort, or how long it will take. It seems to me that the garden may be watered in four different ways. Either the water must be drawn from a well, which is very laborious; or by a water-wheel and buckets, worked by a windlass – this entails less labor and brings up more water; or from a stream or spring, which waters the ground much better, for the soil then retains more moisture and needs watering less often, which entails far less work for the gardener; or by heavy rain, when the Lord waters it himself without any labor of ours; and this is an incomparably better method than all the rest.

Now apply these four methods of watering, by which this garden is to be maintained and without which it will fail. This analogy will enable me to speak about the four stages of prayer. (*Life*, p. 78)

As much as Teresa was attracted to water as a symbol of how God gives growth in prayer,

- she used more extensively an *Interior Castle* as the vehicle of explanation
- Teresa explained the four stages of prayer in the form of seven interior castles

Other masters describe the stages of prayer as:

- The purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive

Others point to

- meditation,
- followed by affective prayer,
- the prayer of simply “looking at God and God looking at you,”
- and the prayer of quiet,
- which precedes the suspension of the faculties of the soul in rapture and ecstasy.

The evolution of the life of prayer can be boiled down to (1) vocal prayer, (2) meditation, (3) affective prayer, (4) prayer of simplicity, (5) infused contemplation, (6) prayer of quiet, (7) prayer of union, (8) prayer of conforming union, and (9) prayer of transforming union.

The first four grades of prayer belong to the predominantly ascetical stage of the spiritual life; the remaining five grades are infused prayer and belong to the mystical phase of the spiritual life.

**Teresa says** that to all who persevere God will grant the victory (Life 77)

**Under the section entitled “The Life of Prayer” the CCC teaches:**

The Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to him, and each believer responds according to his heart’s resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer.

However, Christian Tradition has retained three major expression of prayer

1. vocal
2. meditation
3. contemplation (2699)

My own journey of prayer:

### **Fall 1991**

- Prayer of petition, thanksgiving, praise out loud with a good friend each morning
- Then I began to pray the Rosary every day
  - Incorporating a Scriptural Rosary
- I added the Divine Mercy Chaplet of St. Faustina
- Often used Praise and Worship music as prayer

### **Spring of 1992**

- It was suggested that I spend an hour each day in Eucharistic Adoration
- There I combined the Rosary, reading of Scripture and simply talking to God about my life
- At this point it almost all vocal prayer
- Almost never being quiet and listening

### **Fall 1992**

- I began spiritual direction with Fr. Reyland; he suggested 30 minutes of reading the Gospel and 30 minutes of silent thinking about the life of Jesus
- It was at this time that meditation/mental prayer began

As late as the summer of 1995

- I experienced the trap that to grow in prayer meant to add to the number of devotions I do each day – Rosary, Mass, Chaplet, reading, silence, liturgy of hours, ect.
- A seminarian in Rome urged me to simplify
- I did not know prayer was to grow in depth and simplicity
- Rather than in a multiplicity of tasks
- I could have made more progress with someone knowledgeable in the Interior life

### **The saints teach that growth in prayer is characterized by**

- Less effort
- Greater simplicity

**When we have decided that we want this divine intimacy, we may ask, “What should we do?”**

**In the first place**, we are all very different.

- Each person’s relationship with God is unique, and so too is his or her prayer.
- There is no single path or method for everyone.
- Each person must discover, under the guidance and the action of the Holy Spirit, the ways in which God wishes to lead him or her.

**In the second place**, our prayer life evolves and has stages of development.

- What is useful at one point in our spiritual journey will not be in another.

**What is prayer?**

Teresa of Avila says, “Prayer is to realize how much it means to you to have God’s friendship and how much He loves you.”

Prayer is an interpersonal contact/union of slowly developing intimacy between the indwelling Trinity and the human person.

The forms of prayer (CCC 2644) include:

- Blessing and Adoration; Petition; Intercession; Thanksgiving; Praise

**Fr. Thomas Dubay includes:**

- Longing and yearning
  - At times in life we need quietly and patiently to wait for the Lord, who will fill us in due time (Ps 37:7; 40:1)
- The Prayer of Suffering
  - After the model of Jesus in the Garden: in the midst of the Garden of Olives he shares with the Father his inner pains and expresses his desire that the divine will be done (Mt 26:39)
- Sorrowing for sin
  - There is need in any honest heart to join David and the publican (Luke 18:13) in begging pardon of the all-holy God, for we are sinners.
  - The Seven Penitential Psalms 6; 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143
- Singing

- St. Augustine taught – they who sing pray twice
- As Vatican II put it, the Church in her liturgy is “vox sponsae ad Sponsum” – the voice of the bride singing to her Spouse.

CCC 2697 Prayer is the life of the new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all. This is why the Fathers of the spiritual life...insist that prayer is a remembrance of God often awakened by the memory of the heart: We must remember God more often than we draw breath.

But we cannot pray “at all times” if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it.

### **Vocal Prayer** (CCC 2700-2704)

By vocal prayer we mean any form of prayer expressed in words, whether written or spoken

St. Thomas gives three reasons why vocal prayer is suitable:

- (1) it arouses interior devotion;
- (2) it gives homage to God with our body as well as our mind and heart; and
- (3) it gives expression to the spiritual sentiments that flood the soul in prayer.

The two essential requirements of vocal prayer are:

2. Attention
3. Devotion

Actual attention is present when those who pray have complete awareness of what they are doing here and now.

Virtual attention is that which is had at the beginning of prayer and extends throughout the prayer without being retracted, although there may be involuntary distractions.

St. Teresa says:

That prayer which does not attend to the one it is addressing and what it asks and who it is that asks and of whom it asks, such I do not call prayer at all, however much one may move the lips. For although it is true that sometimes



and the prayers in the liturgy.

Unfortunately, their constant repetition readily degenerates into a purely mechanical recitation.

2701 Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life.

The necessity of fervent recitation of vocal prayer cannot be emphasized too much, because vocal prayer is one type of prayer that can never be omitted completely, even when one arrives at the height of sanctity.

The time comes in the practice of mental prayer when the inferior grades yield to the superior grades as one progresses in union with God,

- but this never occurs with vocal prayer.
- It is always beneficial,
- either to arouse devotion
- or to give expression to the intensity and fervor of one's love to God.

Any attacks on the practice of vocal prayer must, therefore, be interpreted as the sign of an evil spirit, and this spirit has been manifested by many deluded souls and false mystics in the history of spirituality.

**The limitations of this type of prayer:**

- It does not necessarily foster a personal relationship with God.
- A relationship is a two-way street
  - Not only talking but listening to the other person

**The distortions of this type of prayer:**

- I can do this type of prayer without thinking about it,
- Failing to give the person I am speaking with my attention
- In this way it can become mechanical and impersonal

**A typical problem:**

The excessive multiplication of vocal prayers to the neglect of “pondering the word day and night” (Ps 1:2)

- The mistake here may be that we do not allow the Holy Spirit to take us to a deeper level of prayer.