

**Under the section entitled “The Life of Prayer” CCC 2699 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 expressions of prayer

1. vocal
2. meditation
3. contemplation

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

Jesus himself taught that we should address God with human thoughts and words:

Matthew 7:7            Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find;  
                                 knock and it will be opened to you.

**Guigo the Carthusian**            writing about 1150 said,  
“Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation.”

**A typical problem with vocal prayer can be:**

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.

**Intro to Meditation**

It is not accidental that the first two verses of the Bible’s book of prayer (the Psalms) deal with meditation

- Psalm 1            Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.
- Joshua 1: 8    The Lord told Joshua to meditate on the book of the law day and night.
- Twice we read in Luke’s Gospel that Mary pondered the word in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51)

Meditation is a practice that traces its roots to reading and praying passages from the Bible – an ageless custom of Catholic and before it, Jewish faith.

- A typical example is the monastic practice of *lectio divina*

**Definition of Discursive Meditation:**

Applying one’s mind to some supernatural truth (any truth related to God and the spiritual life) in order to

1. understand its meaning,
2. arouse a greater love for God,
3. and put this truth into practice with the assistance of grace.

It is to ponder, dwell on, chew on some truth about God which should bear fruit in two ways:

1. To increase our love for God
2. Change the way we live (in imitation of Christ)

**Example of Meditation:**

Matthew 11:28 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.

These two qualities of God, meekness and humility, are worthy of love and imitation

**St. Teresa points out**

- Meditation consists not so much as thinking a great deal but in loving a great deal. (Fourth Mansion, Book 1, Chap. 7)
  - Thinking is merely a preparation for the arousal of love

**With each progressive stage of prayer**

- Prayer moves from more complex to more simple
- From human effort to the action of God
  
- In the next stage (Affective Prayer) thinking (meditating) will give way to the arousal of love alone.

## **Two major difficulties with Meditation:**

1. Distractions
2. Not knowing what to do

### **Teresa of Avila**

- She needed some way to defend herself against stray thoughts so she would resort to reading

“All that time, except immediately after taking Communion, I never ventured to start praying without a book. My soul was as much afraid to engage in prayer without one, as if it had to fight against a host. With this protection, which was like a companion and a shield on which to take the blows of my many thoughts, I found comfort, for I was not generally in aridity. But always when I was without a book, my soul would at once become disturbed, and my thoughts wandered. As I read, I began to call them together again and, as it were, laid a bait for my soul. Very often had to do no more than open a book. Sometimes I read a little, sometimes much, according to the favor which the Lord showed me.”

## **What is good meditation material?**

- The Bible
- Daily Mass readings
- Magnificat

### **Books based on Scripture that are designed for meditation:**

- Imitation of Christ
- In Conversation with Christ
- Divine Intimacy

## **The subject matter**

One can meditate on a variety of subjects;

e.g., some scene or mystery from the life of Christ, the life and virtues of Mary or the saints, a particular virtue to be acquired or vice to be uprooted, a truth from dogmatic theology, such as the attributes of God or the indwelling of the Trinity, the prayers and actions of the sacraments, the Mass, and the liturgy.

### **The guiding principle for subject matter:**

- select what will help you reach the two-fold goal of meditation at this particular moment in your life

In general, young people or beginners in the practice of meditation will do well to utilize what has been called imaginative meditation

- scenes from the life of Christ, Mary, and the saints
- or moral meditations (which help one to uproot vices and cultivate virtue)

### **What do I do during Meditation?**

- There are many methods – the Carmelite is the most simple

Place oneself formally in God's presence

- Call to mind that God dwells in your soul
- He is present in the Eucharist

Begin to enter into a conversation with Him

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you in prayer

One's attitude is fundamental:

With what kind of attitude would you read a letter from your Beloved during WWII?

- God speaks to us through his inspire Word – Sacred Scripture
- **Pope Leo XIII** said, “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet His children and talks with them.”
- **St. Ambrose says**, “We have been given Sacred Scripture so that God and man may talk together; for we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying.”

### **Begin to Read.**

- As soon as something strikes you - Stop.
  - This is the food and drink for the soul.

- Think about what struck you as long as it nourishes your soul (until distraction sets in)
- Enter into a conversation with God
- Love Him for the truth being pondered
- Make a practical, concrete resolution that will help you live more Christ-like today
  - Remember the meditation all day.
  - Resolve to live the meditation all day.
  - Practically speaking, how am I to live out this meditation over the next 24 hrs
    - Practical, precise, concrete

**How to end the meditation:**

1. Thank the Lord for this time with Him
2. Ask for the grace to live the meditation that day.

**Importance of a Resolution:**

Meditation is conversion oriented prayer

- because it puts me in a crisis since I must reflect on what I am called to become.

Failure to make and practice the resolution is the reason why many souls who practice daily meditation get little or no practical benefit from this exercise of prayer.

They insist too much on that which is merely a preparation for prayer.

They pass the time in spiritual reading or speculation, but they do not make acts of love, nor do they make any practical resolutions.

**St Francis DeSales**

*The most important thing of all is that you cling firmly to the resolutions you have taken in meditation so as to practice them carefully. That is the great fruit of meditation, without which it is often not only useless but harmful. Why so? Because the virtues upon which we have meditated but not*

*practiced sometimes puff us up so much in mind and heart that we think we are already what we are resolved to be which no doubt is the case if our resolutions are solid and ardent. But when, on the contrary, they are not practiced, they are useless and dangerous.* (Introduction to the Devout Life, II Chap 8)

- Meditation is not completed by arousing love for God and the supernatural truth on which one has speculated.
- Any meditation that is properly made should terminate in a practical resolution for the future.
- Love cannot be idle; by its very nature it urges us to action.

### **Summary:**

Regardless of method, all meditation can be reduced ultimately to a basic framework containing all the essential parts of meditation:

1. consideration of some supernatural truth,
2. application of that truth to one's life,
3. and the resolution to do something about it.

These three steps, we believe, are absolutely essential for true meditation; the other details may or may not be used according to the needs of individual souls.

### **Difficulties in Prayer**

1. Do not let the meditation be too intellectual
  - Don't spend the entire time reading
    1. Leave space to:
      - Think; Listen; Apply
2. Distractions

It is normal to be distracted, and we should not be surprised or discouraged over this.

When our mind wanders off, simply, peacefully and gently bring your attention back to God.

- Go back to the point that struck you
- Or move on and read to another points hits you

- It is wrong to think we can achieve absolute concentration for the entire duration of prayer.
- Distractions do not prevent God from doing His work in your soul!
  - Keep a notepad with you
  - Practice abandonment and trust
    - 1 Peter 5:7 (God will manage these things for you)
    - Jesus to Catherine of Sienna

CCC 2729 To set about hunting down distractions would be to fall into their trap, when all that is necessary is to turn back to God in our heart: for a distraction reveals to us what we are attached to, and this humble awareness before the Lord should awaken our preferential love for Him and lead us resolutely to offer him our heart to be purified. Therein lies the battle, the choice of which master to serve.

Even if we were to spend an entire prayer period bringing our distracted attention constantly back to God it would not matter. That prayer is undoubtedly very pleasing to God!

### **Practical Tips**

#### 1. Time of Day

Most writers on the spiritual life state that the best times for meditation are

- early in the morning,
- the late afternoon before the evening meal,
- or late at night when one has finished all the duties and occupations of the day.

But even this cannot be given as a hard and fast rule, and perhaps the best norm to be followed is to meditate when one's mind is most alert and one can be recollected.

- If you leave it to the end the devil will set traps

2. Place

- Matthew 6 Go into your room, shut the door, and speak to your Father in secret
- Solitude and Silence
- Create a special place at Home
  
- Best place in the Presence of the Eucharist

3. Duration

- How much time is necessary for an intimate loving conversation
- Don't leave off too soon