

# Theory 2

## THE STAGES OF PRAYER

“Prayer...is nothing other than becoming a longing for God.”

Pope Benedict XVI, *Mary, the Church at the Source* p. 15

We all have a powerful God-given passion within us called “eros.”

- The passion of eros is a hunger and thirst for infinite beauty, goodness, and truth.
- We have this desire because we were made for union with God.
- Eros is ultimately a desire for God.

CCC 27      “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.”

Faced with this desire, we have three options:

1. Become a stoic who sees our fallen misplaced desires as bad and, as a consequence, represses all desire and just follows the rules of religion.
2. Become an addict who tries to fill his infinite desire with the finite pleasure that can never satisfy but only enslave.
3. Become an aspiring mystic; one who longs for God.

“Prayer...is nothing other than becoming a longing for God.” God satisfies this desire by giving Himself to us in proportion to our longing.

# Desire and Openness to Prayer

Jesus said to Angela of Folingo:

Make yourself a capacity, and I will make myself a torrent.

How do we increase our desire and make ourselves a capacity to receive God?

1. Think about, visualize, imagine the Living Water Jesus wants to pour out on us.
2. Come to the Fountain in the Sacraments
  - a. To everyone Jesus said: If *any man* is thirsty, let him come to me! From my heart shall flow fountains of living water. (John 7:37-38)
  - b. The Heart of Jesus is the Fountain of Living Water
3. Open up and drink the Living Water in Prayer
  - a. "Prayer is the self-opening of the human spirit to God." (Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth vol 2*, p. 233)

## Prayer Is Friendship with God

CCC 2558 Prayer is a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God.

CCC 2559 Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.

CCC 2697 Prayer is the life of a new heart. It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget who is our life, and our all... We must remember God more often than we breathe. But we cannot pray "at all times" if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it.

**Teresa of Avila:** Mental prayer...is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. (CCC, 2709)

What does it take to build a friendship?

- Time
- Talking – sharing
- Listening, understanding, loving
- Just being together

This corresponds to the **three major expressions of prayer** in CCC 2699: (Cf. 2721)

- Vocal prayer - speaking to God
- Mental/Meditation – listening to God
- Contemplation – just being with the One who loves us

**The landscape of prayer has been divided into 9 stages:**

1. Vocal prayer
2. Meditation – 1<sup>st</sup> Teresian Mansion
3. Affective prayer – 2<sup>nd</sup> Mansion
4. Prayer of simplicity – 3<sup>rd</sup> Mansion
  - a. The Dark Night of the Senses
5. Infused contemplation – 4<sup>th</sup> Mansion
6. Prayer of quiet
7. Prayer of union – 5<sup>th</sup> Mansion
8. Prayer of conforming union – 6<sup>th</sup> Mansion
  - a. The Dark Night of the Spirit
9. Prayer of transforming union – 7<sup>th</sup> Mansion

## 3 Major Expressions of Prayer:

### Vocal Prayer

CCC 2700 Through his Word, God speaks to man. By words, mental or vocal, we speak to God.

Vocal Prayer is speaking to God silently or out loud.

Examples of vocal prayer:

- Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be
- Prayers of the Mass
- Liturgy of hours – praying the Psalms
- Litanies, Divine Mercy Chaplet
- Any devotional prayer you find or compose
- Brief spontaneous sentiments spoken throughout the day

CCC 2701 Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life. Jesus taught the Apostles the “Our Father” - a vocal prayer.

#### **What is the danger of this type of prayer?**

1. It can become mechanical, just saying the words without thinking of the person to whom we are speaking.
2. We do all the talking and never listen to God.

A relationship involves both talking and listening, mostly listening. People often say, “God never speaks to me.” But we need to ask ourselves...

- Do we ever shut up and listen?

- Do we spend time in silence to listen?

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“In the silence of the heart God speaks. If you face God in prayer and silence, God will speak to you. Then you will know that you are nothing. It is only when you realize your nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with Himself.  
Souls of prayer are souls of great silence.” ~ Mother Teresa

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**According to Mother Teresa**, peace, service, love, faith and prayer all find their origin in silence:

We must improve our prayer and, flowing from that, our charity toward others. It can be difficult to pray when we don't know how, but we can help ourselves through the use of silence. Souls of prayer are souls of great silence. This silence takes a lot of sacrifice, but if we really want to pray, we must be ready to take that step now. Without this first step toward silence, we will not be able to reach our goal, which is union with God.

We forget that in the silence of the heart God speaks, and from the fullness of the heart we speak. Only when we have heard Him in the silence of our hearts, only when we have learned to listen to God in the silence of our hearts, only then can we say: I pray. There is no either/or about prayer and love. We can't say we have either prayer or love: There is no prayer without love and no love without prayer.

The fruit of silence is prayer.  
The fruit of prayer is faith.  
The fruit of faith is love.  
The fruit of love is service.  
The fruit of service is peace.

Jesus said to St Faustina:

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Oh, if souls would only want to listen to My voice when I am speaking in the depths of their hearts, they would reach the peak of holiness in a short time. (*Diary*, 584)

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## Meditation

Meditation is often called *Mental Prayer* because it involves our imagination. Traditional devotions like the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross are meditation because they engage our imagination, which places our mind with the Lord, which opens the faculties of the soul to be with Him in spirit. As you progress in meditation, however, your prayer will involve your affections more and more, which is why the spiritual masters talk about *Affective Prayer*.

## **In Meditation – we move from talking to listening**

CCC 2705 Meditation is a Quest

The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking.

Jordan Aumann, O.P. says that meditation is “a reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into practice with the assistance of grace” (*Spiritual Theology*, p. 318).

Meditation is to turn your attention to God:

- to think about what He has said or done in order to understand it.
- to love God for the things He has said and done.
- to form firm convictions that we will put into practice with the assistance of grace.

### **What do we meditate upon? The Word of God**

Jesus is the Word of God; therefore, the content for meditation is all that Jesus has said or done which is contained in the Deposit of Faith.

- The Deposit of Faith is handed down to us by Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium.
- We can reflect or think about anything and everything from the Deposit of Faith.

We can reflect on:

- the Old Testament through the Psalms.
- the life of Jesus in the Gospel.
- the letters of Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude.
- the writings of the Fathers like St. Augustine.
- the writings of the great theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas.
- the writings of saints like St. Therese the Little Flower or St. John of the Cross.
- The Rosary!

### **Meditation through praying the Rosary**

CCC 2708 highlights Lectio Divina and the Rosary for meditation

Mary urgently requests the daily praying of the Rosary

- In San Nicolas, Argentina, Mary tells us, “The weapon that has the greatest influence on evil is to say the Rosary.”
- She described pride as the great evil in the world of today.
- To fight this, she said that there should be special devotion to the Holy Rosary.

John Paul II has written much on the benefits of the Rosary in his encyclical *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*: “The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is “fully formed” in us (cf. Gal 4:19).”

When we pray the Rosary, the Holy Spirit transports us to the events in the life of Jesus and to Mary's side, that she may teach us and form us to be like Jesus.  
The Rosary leads us to contemplate the face of Christ at the School of Mary.

## Methods of meditation

Regardless of method, all meditation can be reduced 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. The resolution to do something about it

Meditation is like having coffee with a Friend.

- Set a specific time and place conducive to a leisurely intimate conversation.
- Talk and share.
- Listen and understand.
- Just enjoy the time together.

## Contemplation

Everyone is built for Contemplation. We were created to share in the life of God.

Teresa of Avila: “The Lord invites us all...I feel sure that none will fail to receive this living water unless they cannot keep to the path.” (*Way of Perfection*, 19)

Psalm 36:8 describes contemplation as

- drinking from the river of divine delight:
- They shall be inebriated with the richness of thy house and you shall give them to drink from the torrent of thy pleasure. (Ps 36:8 Vulgate)

### With Stages 3 and 4

We begin to desire to spend time with Jesus and Mary **without** talking, **without** trying to figure things out (discursive meditation) but simply to remain alone with Him in quiet.

**John of the Cross describes this as...**

An inclination to remain alone and in quietude...If those in whom this occurs, know how to remain quiet (not talking or trying to figure things out) they will soon in that unconcern and idleness delicately experience the interior nourishment.

### **This prepares us for stage 5 (contemplation)**

“Contemplation is nothing but a hidden, peaceful and loving inflow of God. If it is given room, it will inflame the spirit with love.” ~ John of the Cross

**The transition from stage 4 to 5 involves** the Dark Night of the Senses.

### **Which accomplishes two things in us...**

1. Purges the soul of all
  - a. disordered attachments
  - b. misdirected desires
  - c. idols and addictions that block God from entering more fully
    - i. Pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust
2. Prepares the soul to share more fully in His divine life.
  - a. We could not handle His divine life if He didn't prepare us.
  - b. It would be like pouring new wine into old wineskins.

Contemplation is a simplification of prayer. A passage from our effort to God's action, from complex to more simple. Prayer gets easier as we go further.

The essential characteristic of this gift is that it transforms prayer once dominated by human effort into prayer dominated by God's action.

God infuses this prayer into one's soul as a gift which requires no effort. In this kind of prayer, the soul does nothing. It allows itself to be acted upon, rather than to act.

Our job is to maintain an attitude of

- simplicity
- abandonment
- and loving attentiveness to God

Difference between meditation and contemplation is that of

- Rowing a boat versus sailing.
- Our effort versus the action of God.

Contemplation is a gift from God (CCC 2713). No method or technique can produce this. It is a Gift from God when we are ready for it. *Regardless of the starting point, the Lord wants to lead all souls to contemplation.*

**We get ready for the gift of infused prayer by means of:**

1. Fidelity to daily meditation and a resolution
2. Rooting out vices and taking on a life of virtue
3. Frequent sacramental life
4. Unconditional gift of self to God – to be ‘nada,” unconditional with God – totally surrendered to Him
5. Perseverance