

Praying with the Wisdom of the Saints

Training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer ... We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4).... Is it not one of the "signs of the times" that in today's world, despite widespread secularization, there is a widespread demand for spirituality, a demand which expresses itself in large part as a renewed need for prayer? Other religions, which are now widely present in ancient Christian lands, offer their own responses to this need, and sometimes they do so in appealing ways. But we who have received the grace of believing in Christ, the revealer of the Father and the Savior of the world, have a duty to show to what depths the relationship with Christ can lead. The great mystical tradition of the Church of both East and West has much to say in this regard.

✠ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31 - 33

Three Stages (or "Ways") of Prayer

1. The Purgative Way – The Stage of Beginners

- ✠ *"Through the blood He shed for us I ask those who have not begun to enter within themselves to do so; and those who have begun, not to let the war make them turn back... Let them trust in the mercy of God and not at all in themselves, and they will see how His Majesty brings them from the dwelling places of one stage to those of another... and they shall enjoy many more blessings than one can desire – blessings even in this life, I mean."* (**St. Teresa of Avila**, *The Interior Castle* [24])
- ✠ *"Put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming upon the disobedient. By these you too once conducted yourselves, when you lived in that way. But now you must put them all away: anger, fury, malice, slander, and obscene language out of your mouths. (**Colossians 3:5 – 8**. See also Romans 8:5 – 13, Ephesians 4:17 – 24)*
- ✠ *"I seized [the Bible], opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord, Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Romans 13:13 – 14)."* (**St. Augustine**, *Confessions*, [40]).
- ✠ *"But this is a hard thing. If you attempt it in your own strength, it will be as though you were trying to stop the raging of a torrent, or to make the Jordan run backwards.... If anyone aspires to climb to the summit of that mountain, that is to the perfection of virtue, he will know how hard the climb is, and how the attempt is doomed to failure without the help of*

the Word.... Surely all things are possible to someone who leans upon him who can do all things? What confidence is in the cry, 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me!'" (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs [116 – 117])

- ✘ *"Since prayer places our intellect in the brilliance of God's light and exposes our will to the warmth of his heavenly love, nothing else so effectively purifies our intellect of ignorance and our will of depraved actions.... I especially counsel you to practice mental prayer, the prayer of the heart, and particularly that which centers on the life and passion of our Lord. By often turning your eyes on him in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with him. You will learn his ways and form your actions after the pattern of his. (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life [121])*

2. The Illuminative Way – The Stage of Proficients

- ✘ *"I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned. (Romans 12:1 – 3)*
- ✘ *"Those whose souls are warped in this fashion (i.e., through attachment to worldly things) cannot love the Bridegroom, because they are not friends of the Bridegroom, they belong to this world. Scripture says, 'Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God' (James 4:4). Therefore, to pursue and enjoy the worldly warps the soul, while, on the contrary, to meditate on or desire the things that are above constitutes its uprightness. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs [206])*
- ✘ *"I understand and know from experience that "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Jesus has no need of books or teachers to instruct souls; He teaches without the noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that he is within me at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what I must say and do. I find just when I need them certain lights that I had not seen until then.... (St. Therese of Liseaux, The Story of a Soul, [296 – 297]).*

3. The Unitive Way – The Stage of the Perfect

- ✘ *"I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me." (Galatians 2:19 - 20)*
- ✘ *"While meditating upon these words of Jesus (John 15:13), I understood how imperfect was my love for my Sisters.... It is no longer a question of loving one's neighbor as oneself but of*

loving him as He, Jesus, has loved him, and will love him to the consummation of the ages. Ah! Lord, I know you don't command the impossible. You know better than I do my weakness and imperfection; You know very well that never would I be able to love my Sisters as You love them, unless you, O my Jesus, loved them in me... Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to him, the more also do I love my Sisters. (**St. Therese of Liseaux**, *The Story of a Soul*, [151])

- ✘ “When she loves perfectly, the soul is wedded to the Word.... Although the creature loves less, being a lesser being, yet if it loves with its whole heart nothing is lacking, for it has given all. Such love, as I have said, is marriage, for a soul cannot love like this and not be beloved; complete and perfect marriage consists in the exchange of love.... ” (**St. Bernard of Clairvaux**, *On the Song of Songs*, [380 - 381])

Three Forms of Prayer

1. Vocal Prayer

- ✘ “They must be said with strict attention of mind and with affections aroused by the meaning of the words. Do not hurry along and say many things but try to speak from your heart. A single Our Father said with feeling has greater value than many said quickly and hurriedly. (**St. Francis de Sales**, *Introduction to the Devout Life* [126])
- ✘ “Refuse to be satisfied with merely pronouncing the words.... It is even an obligation that we strive to pray with attention. Please God that with these remedies we shall recite the Our Father well and not end up in some other irrelevant thing. I have experienced this sometimes, and the best remedy I find is to strive to center the mind upon the One to whom the words are addressed... (**St. Teresa of Avila**, *The Way of Perfection* [128]).

2. Meditation

- ✘ “For mental prayer is in my opinion nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us.... Speak with him as a father, or a brother, or a lord, or as with a spouse; sometimes in one way, at other times in another....(**St. Teresa of Avila**, *Her Life and The Way of Perfection* [127 - 128])
- ✘ “However, if you have the gift of mental prayer, you should always give it first place. Afterwards if you cannot say your vocal prayers because of your many duties or for some other reason, don't be disturbed on that account.... During vocal prayer if you find your heart drawn and invited to interior and mental prayer, don't refuse to take it up. Let your mind turn very gently in that direction and don't be concerned at not finishing the vocal prayers you intended to say. The mental prayer you substitute for them is more pleasing to God and more profitable for your soul. (**St. Francis de Sales**, *Introduction to the Devout Life* [125])

3. Contemplation

- ✘ *“It wasn’t through the ears, because nothing is heard. But one noticeably senses a gentle drawing inward, as anyone who goes through this will observe.... It seems to me I have read where it was compared to a hedgehog curling up or a turtle drawing into its shell.... In the case of this recollection, it doesn’t come when we want it, but when God wants to grant us the favor.... I for myself hold that when His majesty grants it, He does so to persons who are already beginning to despise the things of the world. (St. Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle [286 – 287]).*
- ✘ *“It may seem to anyone who doesn’t know about the matter that vocal prayer doesn’t go with contemplation; but I know that it does. Pardon me, but I want to say this: I know there are many persons who while praying vocally, as has already been mentioned, are raised by God to sublime contemplation [without striving for anything or understanding how]. (St. Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle [292])*

Three Key Tips for Prayer

1. Prayer is about Surrendering Yourself to the Will of God

- ✘ *“Not only are [good feelings in prayer] not true devotion but very often they are tricks played by the enemy. He charms such souls with these trifling consolations to make them content and satisfied with such things, and keep them from further search for true, solid devotion. True devotion consists in a constant, resolute, prompt, and active will to do whatever we know is pleasing to God.” (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life [153]).*
- ✘ *“The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer – and don’t forget this, because it is very important – should be that he work and prepare himself with determination and every possible effort to bring his will into conformity with God’s will. Be certain that ... the greatest possible perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. (St. Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle [153 – 154])*

2. Prayer involves Periods of Dryness & Suffering

- ✘ *“It is ourselves who are often the cause of our own sterile, arid state.... God holds back consolations from us when we have a foolish complacency in them and are subject to the worms of presumption.... You have glutted yourself with worldly pleasures and it is no wonder that spiritual delights disgust you.... Those who are rich with the world’s pleasures are incapable of spiritual delights. (St. Francis de Sales, Introduction to the Devout Life, [165])*
- ✘ *“Since God puts a soul in this dark night in order to dry up and purge its [passions], he does not allow it to find sweetness or delight in anything. Through this sign it can be inferred that*

*this dryness and distaste is not the outcome of newly committed sins and imperfections... There is a notable difference between dryness and lukewarmness. The lukewarm are very lax and remiss in their will and spirit, and have no solicitude about serving God. Those suffering from the purgative dryness are ordinarily solicitous, concerned, and pained about not serving God.” (St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, [172 – 173])*

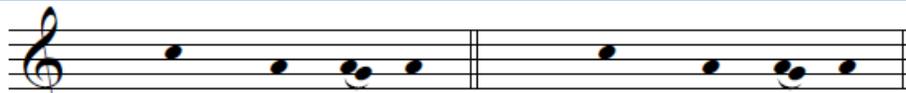
- ✘ *“Since unpurified souls must undergo the sufferings of fire in the next life (i.e., purgatory) to attain union with God in glory, so in this life they must undergo the fire of these sufferings to reach the union of perfection. This fire acts on some more vigorously than on others, and on some for a longer time than on others, according to the degree of union to which God wishes to raise them, and according to what they must be purged of (St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love* [352])*

3. Prayer and Action are Inseparable

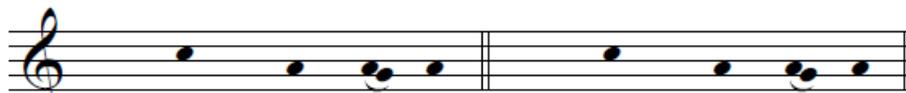
- ✘ *“Let those who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and good works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer.... Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm.... However much they may appear to achieve externally, they will in substance be accomplishing nothing; it is beyond doubt that good works can be accomplished only by the power of God. (St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle* [392])*
- ✘ *“Most of all, after you rise from meditation you must remember the resolutions and decisions you have made and carefully put them into effect on that very day. This is the great fruit of meditation and without it meditation is often not only useless, but even harmful. Virtues meditated on but not practiced sometimes inflate our minds and courage and we think that we are really such as we have thought and resolved to be. (St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life* [124])*

*All bracketed page numbers cited above are from *The Fulfillment of All Desire*, by Ralph Martin, Emmaus Road Publishing, 2006.*

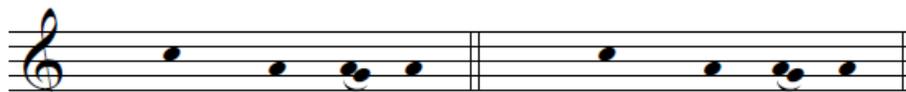
The Litany of Saints



V. Lord, have mer-cy. R. Lord, have mer-cy.



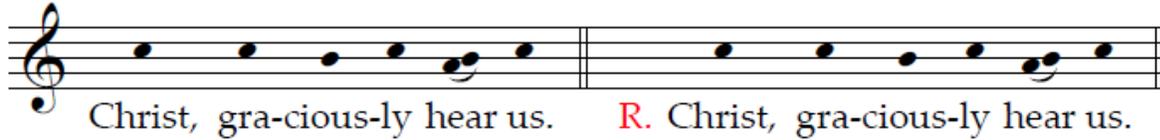
V. Christ, have mer-cy. R. Christ, have mer-cy.



V. Lord, have mer-cy. R. Lord, have mer-cy.



Holy Mary, Mother of God, [] R. pray for us.
 Saint Mich - ael,
 Holy Angels of God, []
 Saint John the Bap - tist,
 Saint Jo - seph,
 Saint Peter and Saint Paul, []
 Saint An - drew,
 Saint John, []
 Saint Mary Mag - da - lene,
 Saint Ste - phen,
 Saint Ignatius of An - ti - och,
 Saint Law - rence,
 Saint Perpetua and Saint Fe - li - ci - ty,
 Saint Ag - nes,
 Saint Gre - go - ry,
 Saint Au - gus - tine,
 Saint Atha - na - sius,
 Saint Bas - il,
 Saint Mar - tin,
 Saint Ben - e - dict,
 Saint Francis and Saint Dom - i - nic,
 Saint Francis Xa - vi - er,
 Saint John Vi - an - ney,
 Saint Catherine of Si - e - na,
 Saint Teresa of Je - sus,
 All holy men
 and women, Saints of God, []



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Lectio Divina: The Agony in the Garden

Matthew 26:36 - 46

³⁶ Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ He took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me.” ³⁹ He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.” ⁴⁰ When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, “So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? ⁴¹ Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ⁴² Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again, “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!” ⁴³ Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. ⁴⁴ He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. ⁴⁵ Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand when the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. ⁴⁶ Get up, let us go. Look, my betrayer is at hand.”

Step 1: Reading (“Lectio”)

Read the passage of Scripture slowly, taking note of key ideas and phrases. *What stands out to you?*

Step 2: Meditation (“Meditatio”)

Meditate for several moments on the reading, seeking to better understand the meaning of the text. *What is God trying to tell you?*

Step 3: Prayer (“Oratio”)

Talk to God about the reading, asking him for the grace to know and do whatever He is calling you to through this passage.

Step 4: Contemplation (“Contemplatio”)

Spend a moment in God’s presence. Resolve to promptly do whatever God has asked you to do during this time of prayer.