

Oral and Mental Prayer

Think about what you are saying

It has already been said that it is impossible to speak to God and to the world at the same time; yet this is just what we are trying to do when we are saying our prayers and at the same time listening to the conversation of others or letting our thoughts wander on any matter that occurs to us, without making an effort to control them. (W 24,4)

...consists in thinking of what we are saying, understanding it, and realizing Whom we are addressing, and who we are that are daring to address so great a Lord. To think of this and other similar things, such as how little we have served Him and how great is our obligation to serve Him, this is mental prayer. Do not think of it as one more thing with an outlandish name and do not let the name frighten you. To recite the Our Father and the Hail Mary, or any other petition you like, is vocal prayer. But think how harsh your music will be without what must come first; sometimes even the words will get into the wrong order. In these two kinds of prayer, with God's help, we may accomplish something ourselves. (W 25,3)

Find some Company

...the first things must be examination of conscience, confession of sin and the signing of yourself with the Cross. Then, daughter, as you are alone, you must look for a companion—and who could be a better Companion than the very Master Who taught you the prayer that you are about to say? Imagine that this Lord Himself is at your side and see how lovingly and how humbly He is teaching you—and, believe me, you should stay with so good a Friend for as long as you can before you leave Him. If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, and if He sees that you love Him to be there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away, nor will He ever fail you. He will help you in all your trials and you will have Him everywhere. Do you think it is a small thing to have such a Friend as that beside you? (W 26,1)

The Prayer of the Look

I am not asking you now to think of Him, or to form numerous conceptions of Him, or to make long and subtle meditations with your understanding. I am asking you only to look at Him. For who can prevent you from turning the eyes of your soul (just for a moment, if you can do no more) upon this Lord? ... He is only waiting for us to look at Him, as He says to the Bride. You will find Him. He longs so much for us to look at Him and He will not fail to help us. (W 26,3)

... Turn your eyes upon yourself and look at yourself inwardly, as I have said. You will find your Master; He will not fail you: indeed, the less outward comfort you have, the [much] greater the joy He will give you. (W 29, 2)

You will find it very helpful if you can get an image or a picture of this Lord—one that you like—not to wear round your neck and never look at but to use regularly whenever you talk to Him, and He will tell you what to say. (W26, 9)

It is also a great help to have a good book, written in the vernacular, simply as an aid to recollection. With this aid you will learn to say your vocal prayers well, I mean, as they ought to be said—and little by little, persuasively and methodically, you will get your soul used to this, so that it will no longer be afraid of it. Remember that many years have passed since it went away from its Spouse, and it needs very careful handling before it will return home. We sinners are like that: we have accustomed our souls and minds to go after their own pleasures (or pains, it would be more correct to say) until the unfortunate soul no longer knows what it is doing. When that has happened, a good deal of skill is necessary before it can be inspired with enough love to make it stay at home with its Spouse; but unless we can gradually do that we shall accomplish nothing. (W 26,10)

Contemplation

In case you should think there is little gain to be derived from practicing vocal prayer perfectly, I must tell you that, while you are repeating the Our Father or some other vocal prayer, it is quite possible for the Lord to grant you perfect contemplation.(W 25,1)

The soul understands that, without any sound of words, it is being taught by this Divine Master, Who is suspending its faculties, which, if they were to work, would be causing it harm rather than profit. The faculties rejoice without knowing how they rejoice; the soul is enkindled in love without understanding how it loves; it knows that it is rejoicing in the object of its love, yet it does not know how it is rejoicing in it. It is well aware that this is not a joy which can be attained by the understanding; the **will** embraces it, without understanding how; but, in so far as it can understand anything, it perceives that this is a blessing which could not be gained by suffering all the trials suffered on earth put together. It is a gift of the Lord of earth and Heaven, Who gives it like the God He is. This, daughters, is perfect contemplation. (W 25, 2)