

The Practice of Silent Prayer

"Beginning to be a servant of Love" (V 11,1)

"Well, let us speak now of those who are beginning to be servants of love...to follow resolutely by means of this path of prayer Him who loved us so much" (V 11,1)

I / The evangelical foundation of prayer

In inviting us to pray, to "be prayer", Teresa of Jesus invites us in a certain way to imitate Christ Jesus himself: "Now the news spread more and more about him, and many crowds were assembled to hear him and to be healed of their illness. But he [Jesus] remained in the desert and prayed." (Luke 5:15-16)

In the beginning of chapter 5, Jesus first taught the crowd, then called the first four disciples and finally healed a leper. Luke gives us a little summary of verses 15-16. Jesus made the choice to stop two important activities: the announcement of the Word of God and the healing of the sick for an "activity" even more important- prayer. Jesus stopped "doing" to "be" with his Father.

To take time to pray is to take time to leave one activity that might be good, perhaps very good, to be with God; to let yourself be loved by him. It is time freely given to God.

This is why it is important to change places to pray. If possible I change rooms in order to completely stop my previous activity. If this is not possible, simply changing seats signals to me that I am changing activities. How to realistically accomplish this change of activity is of course up to each one of us individually depending on our personal circumstances.

II / Prayer, a theological act

Praying is not only about stopping my activities it is also about living on a theological plane. It means putting into practice daily the theological virtues of **Faith, Hope and Charity**. It means believing in the loving and active presence of God encountered in prayer in spite of what I am feeling or experiencing. It is hoping in the realization of God's promises who through his only Son wants to make me his beloved child. Hope helps me to move through time...Love Him who we know loves us. Contemplate love because "love attracts love". Come and freely keep him company for his sake.

Remember that this encounter with God can only be lived in Faith, Hope and Charity. I have to plunge deep down to the theological level (and remember to plunge back down there again and again whenever my senses take over).

III / How to practice silent prayer

You have to "choose" to pray; to decide to stop all other activities and choose to enter into prayer. It may be useful to have a dedicated "prayer corner". It can be very simple: an open Bible, a crucifix, a candle ... A small space that helps you "move" into something else. Decide in advance how much time you will spend in prayer and stick to it. It is important not to give in to your feelings; when all is going well you prolong your prayer time; when faced with dryness, you stop praying all together. If possible, establish your prayer time at the same time and place daily to help to develop the habit.

a) Entering into prayer

There are **three key keys** to help enter into prayer: **Body, Heart and Spirit**

-Body

Take the time to welcome your body. Find a position that allows you to remain awake and comfortable so that you don't have to change positions every two minutes. Your body is who you are. It allows you to relate to the world around you, to others and to God. Its position influences your prayer. You don't pray the same way when seated as you do when standing or kneeling or if your hands are raised or placed on your thighs. Welcome your body so that it helps you to focus, to turn within and to recollect yourself. Following your breath is a good way to calm down and go within. "Do you not know that your bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit" I Cor. 16:19

-Heart

You don't meet people with your intellect. You meet them with your heart. The heart is the seat of the emotions. It is where you make decisions. It is where you engage. Take time to plunge deep down into your heart and discover what's there. Praying from the heart allows you to pray from your own reality. Your prayer is then based on your own life and being. It is no longer some pre-established idea of what you should pray. It is important to feel free to tell the Lord exactly what is in your heart without any obligation. The heart is the place where freedom is exercised.

What do you really want? What do you want to experience right now in this moment? What are you looking for? You make these decisions in your heart starting from your own reality (sometimes grabbing hold of it, sometimes detaching myself from it) to determine what you want to experience in this friendship with the Lord.

-Spirit

We don't really know how to pray. We need the work of the Holy Spirit within us to truly pray. Prayer is the joint work of both man and God. Take time in your daily prayer to ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Become a beggar of the Holy Spirit.

b) Persevering in prayer

-Rely on the Word

Remember that in this encounter you are preceded by the Lord, by his love and by his Word. Your prayer is like an answer to the God in you and in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. This illustrates the link between reading the Word (*Lectio Divina*) and prayer. You can pray by murmuring the name of Jesus in your heart, allowing him to completely invade you and thus achieve an inner silence by grace. It is also good to take the time to meditate on Scripture. Begin by reading and reflecting on a short text paying attention to the words and to Christ's gestures. Observe Christ Jesus in his holy humanity. Allow the words that touched you and awakened love in you resonate in your heart and being.

-Start from where I am

Sometimes a life situation invades my entire being, so this is where I have to begin. I start by explaining to the Lord what's bothering me. My intent is to offer it up to him. I do this by inserting my concerns into the Our Father for example: that your Kingdom come ... Yes, that it

come into this situation ... that your Will be done ... Yes, that it be done in this situation ... Forgive us our trespasses ... Forgive me for my role in the situation; forgive this or that behavior... It is important to persevere in surrendering all- myself and my life-- to the Lord. Conversion is what is needed here. It's a true spiritual exercise.

- Offer myself to the Lord

There will be days when the Word doesn't speak to me. When this happens I have to just put myself at the feet of the Lord and offer myself to him. I consciously surrender myself to his creative gaze and put myself in his hands. I believe, hope and love with my whole being.

c) Concluding a prayer session

Give thanks to the Lord when the time set aside for this friendship with him has come to an end. Thank him for his presence and for his creative work in you and in the world.

Determine to pay attention to other people: smile at the first person you meet; be attentive to the needs of another person. Love and service to our brothers and sisters sharing a common humanity is the fruit of prayer and of our meeting with the Lord.

d) Prayer: a spiritual combat

-Take time

What are your priorities? You make time for what you like to do. Your choices clearly reflect your priorities.

-Distractions

If a little butterfly appears in the sky of my thoughts I simply let it go by. The problem is that I often hunt for butterflies. I entertain the distractions. I let myself be carried away by them. To refocus my thoughts on the Lord I can read Scripture or open my eyes and look at the cross, the Bible or an icon or I can repeat the name of Jesus. It is important to have several tools to not to let distractions lead me astray. A "determined determination" and vigilance are necessary to take these actions.

- Preoccupations

If the distraction enters my mind, its origin is in my heart. To prevent a concern from becoming an obstacle to prayer, I "cover" it with the prayer of Jesus, the Our Father, so that by his grace it becomes a prayer (See above: Start from where I am).

-Boredom

When I am bored I need to ask myself about how I entered into prayer. I need to review the measures I took to be present to the One who "delights in the children of men" (Pr. 8,31). If I have used the **three keys** (above: body, heart, spirit) to enter into prayer and I am still having trouble after having sought to meditate on a text of Scripture ... then I allow myself to be bored for the love of the Lord. This changes everything. I give him my time, I give him myself and I freely make an act of Faith, Hope and Charity.

-Temptations

It is possible to experience awful thoughts and temptations that might cause you to want to give up prayer. Don't give in to this temptation! Engage in spiritual combat. Don't try and resist the

temptation by taking an opposite action but rather raise your heart to the Lord. Hope in His mercy and take refuge in him. You love God and so just allow yourself to be loved by him. Admit your poverty and misery. Don't resign yourself to it, just place it in the blazing furnace of love that is the heart of God.

- Consent

Sometimes you just can't consent to what is being asked of you even though you may intuitively sense that it is God's calling. Remember that you are never alone when you pray. The "yes" that you can't pronounce, ask Jesus, who was "yes to the will of the Father" to say it in you. Put your heart in the hands of Jesus or Mary and ask them to obtain the grace of consent for you. Ask your brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for you without revealing the intimate details of your situation to them.

IV / Some advice from Saint Teresa of Jesus

"Anyone who cannot find a master to teach him prayer should take this glorious Saint [Joseph] for his master and he will not go astray." (V 6, 8)

"In spite of any wrong that he who practices prayer does, he must not abandon prayer since it is the means by which he can remedy the situation." (V 8, 5)

"This is the method of prayer I then used: since I could not reflect discursively with the intellect, I strove to picture Christ within me, and it did me greater good—in my opinion – to picture Him in those scenes where I saw Him more alone. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted, as a person in need, He had to accept me. I had many simple thoughts like these." (V 9, 4)

"Now in the beginning strive to walk with joy and freedom. [...] Have great confidence, for it is necessary not to hold back one's desires, but to believe in God that if we try, we shall, little by little, even though it may not be soon, reach the state the saints did with His help. » (V 13, 1-2)

"I trust in the mercy of God, who never fails to repay anyone who has taken Him for a friend. For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us." (V 8, 5)

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