

The **Challenges** we face in **interior prayer** & **what happens** to us in **Prayer**.

In our society today, we have a problem knowing who we are and what goes on inside of us. We tend to **live on the surface of ourselves** and to define ourselves by the **roles we play in society** and/or in **relationship with one another**. We have trouble identifying what happens within ourselves but, there are however **guideposts**, **'maps'** to help us navigate within.

1/The Human Being is Multi-dimensional:

We are **not** a **solid block**: this is one of the first important things to know about ourselves. **Example** of cutting the finger, only the part cut hurts not the whole body.

Bringing this idea to our **interior world**, into our **prayer**, something can happen at one level of the soul while the other levels are not affected. People get discouraged though & give up because of the distractions on one level but we have several realities within us. These different levels have to gradually be discovered. We realize we are complex beings. **Self-Discovery or Self-Knowledge**: We progressively learn who we are. One of the **first fruits** of prayer is the discovery of **ourselves**. Once we begin to learn to live less at the **surface of ourselves**, we see our poverty, we learn that we are **incapable** of praying as we ought, we yawn, get bored, get distracted, look at our watch.

2/Dimensions of Man:

St. John of the Cross tells us that we have **two dimensions** — a Body (senses) & a Spirit (soul & spirit).

A. SENSORY Self:

Our bodies have 5 external senses & two internal senses that connect us to the world around us. It **isn't here that God acts in prayer**. What happens to these senses in prayer? Some traditions want us to cut ourselves off from our senses...but is this the goal? It isn't easy to do either. **External Senses**: Sight, touch, hearing, smell, taste; **Internal Senses**: Imagination & Appetites.

-Imagination: is the cinema open 24/7; John of the Cross calls it the **fantasia**. It is part of the **sensory world (interior senses)**. It is between the senses of the body (turned outward) & the faculties of the soul (or spiritual part of man, turned inward).

What should we do since we **can't stop the imagination** in prayer? We have to **give the imagination something to do** because we can't stop it—there are techniques to stop the imagination but is this the goal? Teresa says we have to give it **'some grain to grind'**. If we are **sad** St. Teresa tells us to keep Jesus company in the Garden; If I am **joyful**, I can be with our Lord during the Transfiguration. It is also possible to use a **book**, an

image, an **icon**. These are techniques to occupy the imagination so that it **doesn't scatter** in a million directions. The difficulty for us is that we tend to **identify** with our imagination. We think that if it is **agitated** that our whole being is agitated. This isn't true. A good example of this is a storm at sea (calm beneath the surface, surface in turmoil). We have to discover & then access this deeper reality within ourselves.

-Appetites (St. John of the Cross) are another problem. They are our **Needs and Desires**, 2 sides of a same coin. We have to manage our Needs/Desires or a desire can get out of control. We are full of them and they demand satisfaction of what's missing. Sometimes they contradict one another—I want to pray; I don't want to pray. I want calm; it is too calm I want noise.

This happens at the sensory level. **Real prayer** doesn't take place at this level. In prayer we discover the unsatisfied and contradicting appetites.

How can we bring them into **harmony**? We try to deal with them at a sensory level by forcing ourselves to quiet them but this is ineffective. It isn't about eliminating God-given desires, necessary in themselves; It isn't about anorexia vs boulemia -all or nothing-.

What is important is to know that we have **disordered appetites** and **God** gradually, through prayer, orders our appetites at the **spiritual** level allowing this deeper, more stable level, to take over **governing** the sensory level. When we **begin** the practice of prayer it is the exterior, sensory level that governs the interior, more stable level of the faculties of the soul. The practice of prayer progressively 'flips' this order so that the interior spiritual self, governs the exterior sensory self. It isn't an easy process.

B. SPIRITUAL Self:

What is found in our spiritual selves? There are **3 Spiritual Realities** at this deeper, abstract level of our being. It is at this level that God acts in prayer. We are made in God's image-will, intelligence & memory like- God Trinity. God has an intelligence, a will but not an imagination, senses or memory as He is eternal and lives outside of time.

-Intelligence: Intelligence allows us to 'read' our interior life and establish cause and effect relationships between things. This ability to turn within, to 're'flect is unique to man. Intelligence also enables us through interior prayer to **find this divine presence within**.

-Will: It means to decide or chooses at the level of the spirit. This has nothing to do with 'feeling like'(senses). The **true choice**, the choice between **good & evil** is made by the will. The human being has a certain control over his existence. In prayer what do I choose? **Do I want to unite my will with the divine will** or, am I just praying to get God to do my will or for self-satisfaction all the while thinking God thinks like me? Prayer is

the discovery that I am entering into a relationship where there are two of us, another with a will too.

Memory: This faculty allows one to be situated in time; to be aware of time. Man has projects, projects himself in time. God isn't in time, He is eternal.

3/ Theological Virtues & Baptism:

God is transcendent (other, another nature) while at the same time very near. He maintains us in existence. God is 'The Center' of the soul per St. John of the Cross. We believe or come to learn to believe that this exercise of interior prayer leads us to **discover that we will find God at our center.**

Why can't we find him there right away? Well, we have many layers of attachments to the world that we are comfortable with. During prayer Christ acts within. It is important to let Him act. Little by little we discover Him and He becomes the **Master of our being**; the '**motor**' of our being.

He gives us His life, He allows us to participate in His Life (Baptism). He wants us to become 'sons of God', His sons, so He gives us a **theological life**; this life comes from God & allows us to **unite** with God. He gives us the **3 Theological virtues** that are **grafted** into **the soul at Baptism.** (see handouts: Baptism; Nature of Man)

a/ **Faith:** is a gift from God that attaches to the **intelligence.** The intelligence is **purified & transformed** by faith from an inaccurate understanding of things; faith allows the intelligence to be elevated and transformed. The more we allow God to act in us, the more intelligent we become. We acquire the '**intelligence of faith**'. Faith gives us a vision of things, an understanding that by ourselves we wouldn't be able to understand.

Faith and Reason: faith isn't rational or irrational. So improved reasoning doesn't mean that I am getting closer to God. Faith is '**super**'- rational, it raises the reason above its capacities. It **renews** our thinking.

Example: Peter when asked by Jesus who He was, answered, '**The Christ**'. Christ replied that it wasn't his 'flesh (body) and blood (soul)'-- his **human nature**-- that allowed him to know this, but rather the **Father, the virtue of faith.** Then Jesus then began to talk about His Passion & all He would endure, Peter objected saying that this wouldn't happen, that he would never abandon Christ--his **human nature** responded.

So, the same man can '**make an act of faith** that **transforms his intelligence,** and in this case, gave us **the foundation on which the Church is based---You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church,** then his **human nature takes over** and he can't conceive of what the Christ is saying about his future suffering...

So, a **life of prayer** allows us little by little to reach **another understanding**-- we don't go to Mass or confession, look at creation, spouse or children the same

way. The **theological virtues transform** our way of both thinking and being in the world. But this all takes time.

b/ **Charity:** is a gift that attaches to our **will.** It is not 'love' (sensory) it is charity which **transforms** our way of **wanting.** God is not sensory love but **charitable love.** His charity gradually transforms our wills to where we love God more, and in turn this transformation allows us to love others more--the 1st & 2nd Commandments.

c/ **Hope:** is a gift that attaches itself to our **memory.** Memory concerns our relationship to **time.** I used to think that I didn't have the time for this or that; or that because of my past there was no hope for a decent future. Hope awakens in us another relationship with time. It brings about a change in priorities and allows us to **hope against all hope.** This profoundly transforms us.

4/ Transformation:

Little by little, our **spiritual self** is transformed by our **theological life &** gradually takes over the **sensory self** through God's grace. In other words, the **inside** (spiritual) now governs the **outside** (sensory). The spiritual **re-orders** both the **imagination** and the **appetites** for the **service of good.** This reorders our deep selves. The spiritual & the sensory selves are now in harmony. This **transformation** makes us more harmonious beings who are more efficient, agreeable, likeable people who now live more in God's grace because God has transformed us. This **process** is simultaneously a process of:

- developing an **interior life**;
- being made over into the **image of God.** God gradually becomes the **motor** of our lives;
- becoming more **fully human** because God is the motor of our lives and has restored order in us;
- experiencing **liberation**--freedom from what has kept us enslaved thus allowing us to become **fully human.**

5/ Fruits of Prayer: one of the first fruits of silent prayer is Self-Discovery. We begin to realize things about ourselves. For example, we thought we had a strong will but realize it needs to be fortified; or we discover that we are not in balance, not harmonious. Maybe we are too intellectual or have too active an imagination which throws things out of balance, suffocating the rest of the person.

5/ Classic Prayer Experience: our surface (imagination) is agitated while at the deep spiritual level we are recollected with Christ. We realize just how complex we are... This is often realized after not during prayer; it is realized with hindsight.