The Prayer of Recollection

The Way of Perfection
St. Teresa of Avila
Prayer of Recollection

Foundations of Prayer

- **Love of Neighbor**: importance of friendship and its growth into perfect love, *compassion* is essential.

- **Detachment**: in observing the human condition Teresa was struck by how quickly things come to an end; the result of detachment is *inner freedom* from worry about bodily comfort, honor and wealth.

- **Humility**: Humility and detachment are so closely joined that Teresa couldn’t speak of one without the other; *humility implies detachment from oneself* -- from worry about esteem and honor; by humility the soul draws love to itself; in humility one realizes that every good thing comes from God and could be taken away; humility does not disturb or disquiet, it comes with peace, delight, and calm; the pain of genuine humility expands the soul enabling it to serve God more.
Do not be frightened, daughters, by the many things you need to consider in order to begin this divine journey which is the Royal Road to heaven. A great treasure is gained by travelling this road; no wonder we have to pay what seems to us a high price. The time will come when you will understand how trifling everything is next to so precious a reward. (W 21 1)

...How they are to begin is very important - in fact, all important. They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end (to drink from this water of life), come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don’t have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses. (W 21 2)
Realize, Daughters, that the nature of mental prayer isn’t determined by whether or not the mouth is closed. If while speaking I thoroughly understand and know that I am speaking with God and I have greater awareness of this than I do of the words I’m saying, mental and vocal prayer are joined…

(W 22 1)

It is very possible that while you are reciting the Our Father… the Lord may raise you to perfect contemplation… His Majesty shows that He listens… it is His grandeur that speaks to the soul, suspending one’s intellect, binding one’s imagination … The soul understands…this divine Master is teaching it by suspending its faculties… the soul is being enkindled in love … the will is enkindled without understanding how….this good cannot be merited or gained… it a gift from the Lord… What I have described is perfect contemplation.

(W 25 1-2)
Represent the Lord Himself as close to you and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you ... remain with so good a friend as long as you can.

If you grow accustomed to having Him present at your side, and He sees that you do so with love and that you go about striving to please Him, you will not be able –as they say- to get away from Him; He will never fail you; He will help you in all your trials; you will find Him everywhere.

Do you think it’s some small matter to have a friend like this at your side? (W 26 1)

Method for Recollecting One’s Mind

Begin with an examination of conscience, the act of contrition, and the sign of the cross must come first.

...since you are alone, strive to find a companion. What better companion than the Master Himself who taught you this prayer?
I am not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I am not asking you to do anything more than look at Him... (W 26 3)

Carry about an image or a painting of this Lord... look at it... speak often with Him... He will inspire you with what to say... acquire the habit. (W 26 9)

It is also a great help to take a good book written in the vernacular in order to recollect one’s thoughts and pray well vocally... little by little accustom the soul with coaxing and skill not to grow discouraged;

...many years have passed since the soul left the house of its Spouse... our soul and our thoughts are so accustomed to wandering about at their own pleasure –grief- that the poor soul doesn’t understand itself. In order that it get to love remaining at home once again, a great deal of skill is necessary. (W 26 10)
Do you think it matters little for a soul with a **wandering mind** to understand this truth... there is no need to go to heaven ... to speak with one’s Eternal Father or find delight in Him? Nor is there any need to shout ... He is near enough to hear us ... All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself... with great humility speak to Him as to a father.

Beseech Him as you would a father, tell Him about your trials, ask Him for a remedy ... realizing that you are not worthy to be His daughter. (W 28, 2)

The intellect is recollected much more quickly with this kind of prayer even though it may be vocal; it is a prayer that brings with it many blessings.

This prayer is called ‘**recolletion**’ because the soul collects its faculties together and enters within itself to be with its God.

And the divine Master comes more quickly to teach it and give it the **prayer of quiet** than He would through any other method it might use. For centered there within itself, it can think about the Passion and represent the Son ... and not **tire the intellect**.

Those who can enclose themselves within this little heaven of our soul, where the Maker of heaven and earth is present ... should believe they are following an excellent path and that they will not fail to drink water from the fount...it is the **path of heaven**.

(W 28 4, 5)
At the beginning since the recollection is not so deep – for there are greater and lesser degrees of recollection— the soul should get used to this recollection … If we make the effort to practice this recollection for some days, and get used to it, the gain will be clearly seen … (W 28 7)

Let’s speak a little about how we should get accustomed to a method that’s so good …

Let’s imagine that within us is an extremely rich palace, built entirely of gold and precious stones… you have a part to play in order for the palace to be so beautiful;

For there is no edifice as beautiful as is a soul pure and full of virtues… in this palace dwells this mighty King …seated upon an extremely valuable throne, which is your heart…(W 28 9)

I understood that I had a soul. But what this soul deserved and who dwelt within it I did not understand because I had covered my eyes with the vanities of the world …

if I had understood as I do now that in this little palace of my soul dwelt so great a King, I would not have left Him alone so often. I would have remained with Him … striven…not to be so unclean. (W 28 11)
The solitude enjoyed between the soul and its Spouse when the soul desires To enter this paradise within itself to be with its God… you must understand that this recollection is not something supernatural, but that it is something we can desire and achieve ourselves with the help of God — for without this help we can do nothing, not even have a good thought. This recollection…is an enclosure of the faculties within the soul. (W 29 4)

I’m speaking only of how vocal prayer should be recited… we should see and be present to the One with whom we speak… all the harm comes from not truly understanding that He is near, but in imagining Him as far away… to acquire the habit of easily recollecting our minds and understanding what we are saying and with whom we are speaking… the exterior senses must be recollected…be occupied… We have heaven within ourselves since the Lord of heaven is there. (W 29 5)
With this method we shall pray vocally with much calm, any difficulty will be removed...He is very fond of taking away our difficulty...

Get used to praying the **Our Father** with this recollection, you will see the benefit before long.

This is a manner of praying that the soul gets so quickly used to that it doesn’t go astray, nor do the faculties become restless... try this method... it may mean some struggle... before the habit is acquired. (W 29 6)

I never knew what it was to pray with satisfaction until the Lord taught me this method. ... so many benefits from this habit of recollection... you can, if you want, avoid ever withdrawing from such good company;

...if you can, practice this recollection often during the day; if not, do so a few times...once this recollection is given by the Lord, you will not exchange it for any treasure. (W 29 7)

...if you try, within a year, or perhaps half a year you will acquire the habit... see how little time it takes for a gain as great as is that of laying a good foundation. (W 29 8)