

Learn to Pray with



Teresa of Avila

*The important thing is not to think much
but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love.*

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Important Dates In Saint Teresa's Life



- **1515** (March 28): **The birth of Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada.**
- **1535** (November 2): **Teresa enters the Incarnation Convent.**
- **1554: Teresa's Conversion** (Saint Augustine, Christ's wounds...)
- **1562** (August 24): **Foundation of Saint Joseph's Carmel.**
(December): **Teresa begins The Way of Perfection.**
- **1568** (November 28): **The foundation of first male Discalced Carmelite monastery with John of the Cross.**
- **1572** (November 16): **Teresa experiences the Grace of Spiritual Marriage.**
- **1582** (October 4/15): **Teresa dies "Daughter of the Church" in Alba de Tormes.**
- **1614** (April 4): **Teresa's Beatification by Paul V.**
- **1622** (March 12): **Teresa's Canonization by Gregory XV.**
- **1970** (September 27): **Teresa is named Doctor of the Church by Paul VI.**

Silent Prayer



- ❖ For Teresa all who are **baptized** are invited into mystical life, not just a few elite souls.
- ❖ Mystical life is the **fulfillment of Baptismal grace;**
- ❖ **Silent prayer** is the path to **union with God**. This way of prayer is practiced two hours daily by all **Discalced Carmelites**.



Theresa de Jesus

*Interior Prayer is, in my opinion,
simply an intimate exchange of friendship
where we speak often, one on one,
with God who we know loves us.*

St. Theresa of Avila (V 8, 5)

The Royal Road to Heaven



*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...how you begin is very important—in fact, all important. You must have a great and very resolute **Determination to Persevere** until reaching the end, come what may....*

St. Teresa of Avila (W 21)

*Draw near, then, to this
Good Master
with **strong determination**
to learn what He teaches you...
He will not abandon you if
you do not abandon Him. (W 26 10)*



*Imagine that many years have passed since
the soul **left the house of its Spouse**
...there's a great need that it know how to
deal with Him.*

*For so we sinners are: our soul and our
thoughts are so accustomed to
**wandering about at their own
pleasure- or grief...** 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...*

*Take a good **book** ... to recollect one's
thoughts ... and little by little **accustom**
the soul with coaxing & skill not to
grow discouraged.*



Lord, teach us to pray...

More people than you would think would be capable of practicing **interior prayer**, but no one taught them. And, *without an interior life*, the baptized run out of breath, their actions become noisy gongs and even their religious practice, when it exists, dries up.”

John Paul II September 29, 1982

Lord, teach us to pray....



“We need a Christianity that distinguishes itself above all in the **art of prayer**. {...} prayer must not be considered self-evident. *It is necessary to **learn to pray***, ... as the first disciples: ‘Lord, teach us to pray!’” (Luke 11:1).

Through prayer a **dialogue** develops with Christ which allows us to become his intimate friends:

“Remain in me and I in you” (John 15:4).

This reciprocity is the **essential element** of the soul in the Christian life {...}

“Yes, our Christian communities must become authentic ‘**schools**’ of prayer,.....

What is the **Goal** of Silent Prayer?

The whole **aim** of any person who is **beginning** prayer
—and don't forget this, because it's very important—
should be that he work and prepare himself
with **determination** & every possible effort
to bring **his will** into **conformity** with **God's will**.

Be certain that, as I shall say later, the **greatest perfection** attainable
along the spiritual path lies in this conformity.

It is the person who lives in more perfect conformity
who will receive more from the Lord and be more advanced on this road.

Don't think that in what concerns perfection
there is some mystery or things unknown or still to be understood,
for in **perfect conformity** to God's will lies all our **good**. c 2, 8



“**Represent the Lord Himself as close to you** and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you. Believe me, you should 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?

I’m 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’m not asking you to do anything more than look at Him.**

For who can keep you from **turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord**, even if you do so just for a moment if you can’t do more?”

Saint Teresa of Avila, Way of Perfection, 26,1-3

1

WHAT IS PRAYER?



“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 85)

I invite you to something very simple: live a **friendship** with Jesus, talk to this friend in silence, in a personal meeting... in prayer...interior prayer.

As with all friendships, several conditions are necessary so that the friendship will last, so that it will be ever more solidified. To become a **person of prayer**, it is necessary to take care of:

- *your relationships with **others** by being respectful, loving, supportive, forgiving.*
- *the relationship with **yourself**.*
- *the relationship with **Jesus**.*

And then, something else is necessary, ‘a **determined determination**’. Indeed, in order to reap the long-lasting fruits of the relationship with Jesus, you will need to start on the path of interior prayer with determination, enthusiasm --without fearing the difficulties (because there will be some!)---and with consistency.

II BEFORE BEGINNING...



Let's move to the actual prayer, the interior prayer. If you begin without forethought, you could run into difficulties. To get started these few little **suggestions** could be of help to you:

- look for a **silent spot** that agrees with you.
- choose a **Gospel passage** and maybe also an object, a **hymn** or else a **picture**: any of this will help you focus your attention on Jesus.
- make yourself **comfortable**, in a posture that will help you to center yourself & go within yourself.
- little by little **become aware** of your breathing, your body and your inner world to be able to go there with minimal distraction.
- now, **center your attention** on Jesus: His loving presence is in you and in all things.

III

ENTER INTO PRAYER



Now, you have to find your own way to pray, to practice interior prayer: this will depend on what kind of person you are, on your sensitivity, on your current situation.

What is important is that you **turn** to Jesus and **look** at Him, to enter into His mystery with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Here are a few **suggestions** that you might find helpful:

- imagine the Living Jesus within you.
- when withdrawing within yourself, look at Him in a Biblical scene.
- look at an image of Jesus or repeat a sentence that expresses what you would like to say to Him.
- recite the Our Father very slowly which is Jesus' prayer, savor every word.

It is a good thing to reflect a bit, to go deeper, to understand ... but this mustn't be the center of the prayer, for friendship involves the **heart**...

IV DEEPER



The **center of our prayer**, of our interior prayer, is the person of **Jesus**. It is not important how you go into prayer.

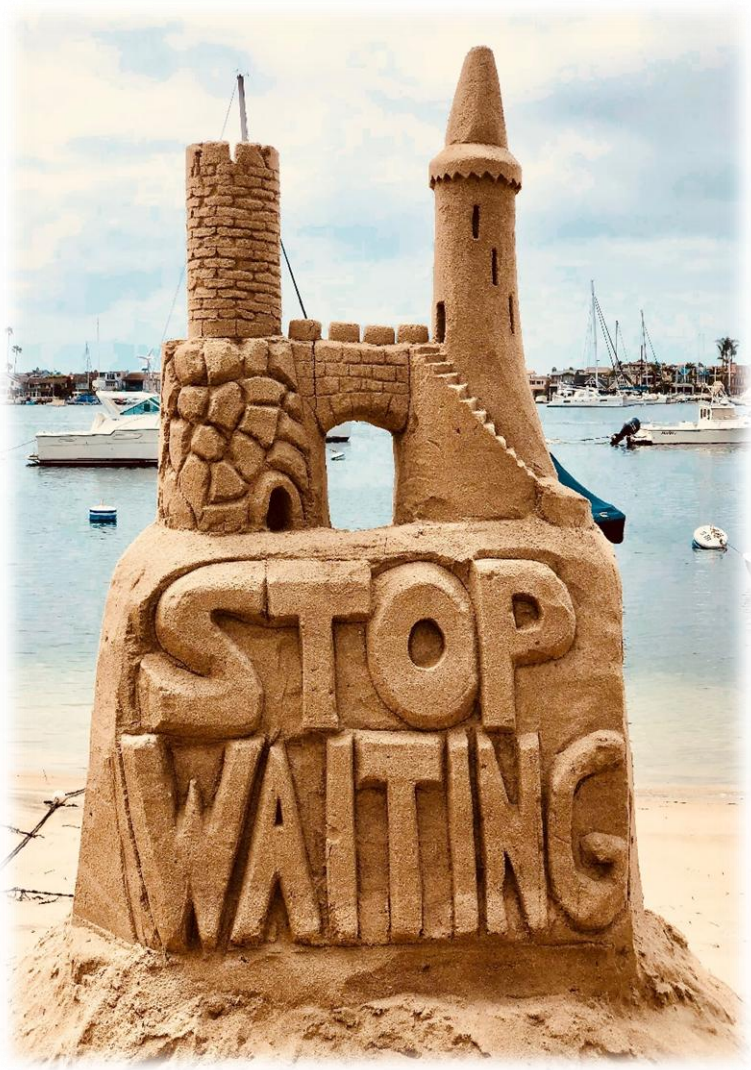
The **essential thing** is to **stay next to Him**, to allow yourself to be looked at by Him, to listen to Him, to welcome His light in order to learn to know Him, to enter into His mystery starting at His own heart and to let yourself be **enveloped by His presence**.

“Stay here, and that your intellect be silent. Look! Jesus is looking at you. Go with Him, talk to Him, pray with Him, and rejoice with Him. Ask Him for the grace to always know how to please Him, because it is from Him that all good things have come to you.”

It is the moment to **receive God’s gift**, to let Him take the initiative. It is also the moment to **answer** Him: a word, a gesture, an expansion of the heart, a request. It is especially the time to be **grateful**, to give thanks: His love works wonders!

At last, it is the time to **ask** Him His **will**, to discover how God is going to concretely be present in your life.

V
**SOMETHING
BEGINS TO HAPPEN**



Interior prayer is not a moment but rather a **path**.

Gradually, you will begin to see **who Jesus is**, His mystery, His way of seeing things, His calling, His feelings, and the love with which He welcomes you and looks for you...at the same time, He will help you to **know yourself** in a new way: know who you are, how you live.

It is about **looking at Jesus & yourself**, just as you are, as God sees you and desires who you are. Even if it isn't the main point, don't neglect this as it is the only way by which we can **live in truth**. There is no prayer without **truth**; just as with **friendship**!

And also, the call of Jesus to live more and more **in interior freedom** will become meaningful for you. It is true freedom, that which is given by the Gospel.

Whatever the circumstances of your life, Jesus invites you to live with and like Him. To be a **person of prayer** is to **follow Jesus**, with all the consequences that that may bring.

VI AND AFTER?



Very often your **prayer time** will be one of peace, interior joy and light...but not always!

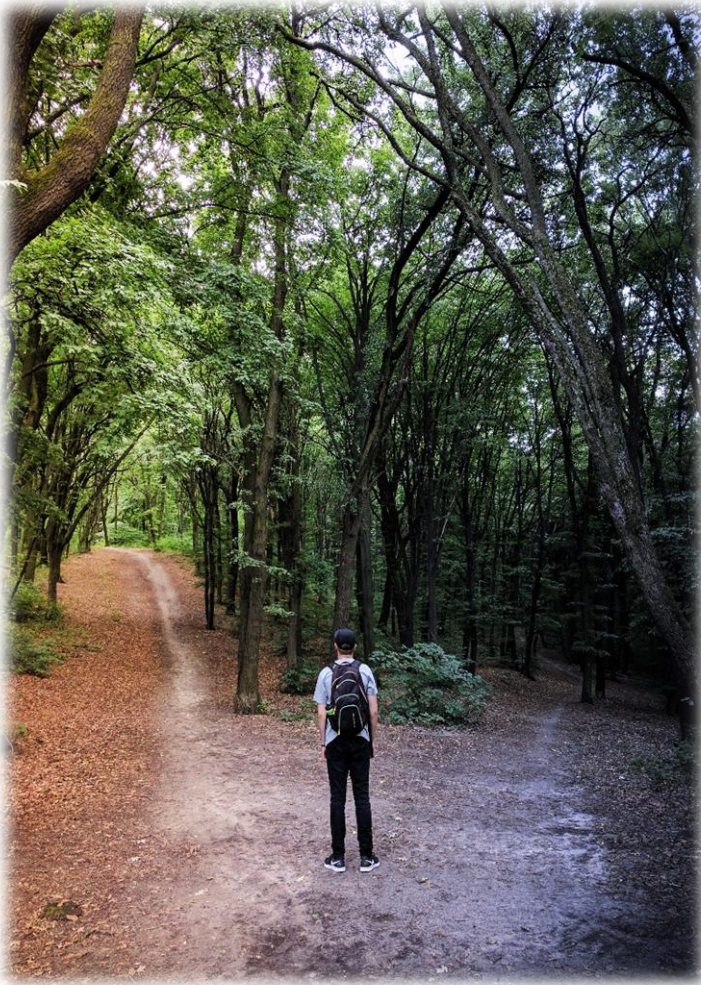
Life circumstances, your actual situation, the questions that you encounter in interior prayer are such that the **feelings** that arise in prayer are always **different**.

But don't **evaluate** the quality of your prayer based on this. What's important is that the meeting with Christ took place; that you are in a mindset of **loving attention** and **open to listening**.

Take the insights received and thank the Lord for His presence and His love that you do or don't feel. Interior prayer is a matter of **faith**, of **persistence**, of **consistency** & of **commitment**.

Take a look outside of yourself; aren't you starting to **see things differently**? Others, daily life, what's going on in the world: everything takes on a new light, the **light of hope & love**.

VII PRAYER'S FOOTPRINT



Prayer leaves its footprint within us: *'it has an interior impact'*. It isn't about having *'right desires'* or about making *'right resolutions'*.

Prayer, like friendship, is above all a **gift**, a present that needs to be received with the heart, and it causes something new to grow within us.

Prayer **changes** us. This is noticeable on the outside: *'the internal effects of prayer are confirmed by works'*.

All the feelings that can come up during prayer are only of relative importance. What is **fundamental** is the work of Jesus within us and our **response** to it.

It will be reflected in a **new way** of **being & acting** in life--new values, new criteria and new, deeper feelings.

Jesus loves us without limits and unconditionally; loving Him is not just saying nice words, it is about *'serving Him with justice, decisiveness & humility'*.

Have a great journey

REMINDERS

Make Time for Regular Periods of Mental Prayer

“Mental prayer... means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us”. (L8,5)
Teresa speaks of ‘the hour I had determined to spend in prayer’
(L8,7).

‘I should consider the time of prayer as not belonging to me and think that He can ask it of me in justice when I do not want to give it wholly to Him’ (W 23,2).

Distractions are Normal

Distractions are ‘unavoidable ... and should not be a disturbance or affliction for you ... Pay no attention to these thoughts ... and let’s not blame the soul for what a weak imagination, human nature, and the devil cause’ (IC 4,1).

I consider distractions an incurable disease” (L, 10/9/81).

REMINDERS

Be Prepared for Dryness

“As for... dryness, it seems to me that the Lord is now treating you as one who is strong. He wants to try you in order to know the love you have for Him, whether it is present in dryness as well as in spiritual delights. Take it as a very great favor from God. Don't let it cause you any grief, for perfection does not consist in delight but in the virtues. When you least expect, devotion will return. (L 8/7/1580)

Pray Always

“The true lover loves everywhere and is always thinking of the Beloved! It would be a thing hard to bear if we were able to pray only when off in some corner” (F5,16).

“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” (W 26,1).

*Great **Treasure** is Gained*



This **Divine** journey
is the
Royal Road to Heaven
....a great **treasure**
is gained by
travelling this road