

The First Steps in Carmelite Prayer

Defining Characteristics of Carmelite Prayer:

- St. Ignatius, St. Benedict offered methods of prayer.
- The Carmel offers a WAY of prayer. It is a Direct Path to the Heart.
- What defines Carmel is the belief that God lives in the heart and that we can reach Him there through the Theological Virtues of faith, hope and charity.
- A relationship results, satisfying a person's thirst to be loved, loved by God.
- I find Him within through faith & love; I have trust in Him. It is a leap into the invisible.

Entering into Prayer: Where to Start:

- I go to my place of intimacy; find a beautiful intimate place where you won't be disturbed, and which brings to mind His presence;
- Open the Word of God; light a candle; look at a picture or at an icon;
- It isn't easy to enter into Recollection... so maybe a little walk before beginning prayer would help you to detach from the world;
- Relax and get comfortable. Your body is your friend. It is an associate.

Determination

- The beginnings are tough. We are acquiring a new habit;
- We need to be determined to persevere in prayer;
- We need to make a firm decision not to give up.

Flexible:

- Weekends, vacations can cause a lot of disturbances in our prayer practice; it can be difficult getting back into prayer after a break.
- Be who you are without pretense before the Lord; don't try and appear spiritual with the Lord.

Start Well:

- Turn off your phone; establish a length of time for prayer.
- Call on the Holy Spirit -the Master of Prayer- it is He who ushers you into God's world and who prays in you.
- Make the sign of the Cross; an Examination of Conscience; an Act of Contrition.

Go into the Depths:

- We then go within, putting our external senses on 'stand-by': 'Bees that go back into their hive as soon as the Queen has gone in' (senses=bees)
- The King is calling. I learn to see with the 'eyes of my heart'. To open my eyes with love is to unleash all of my faith, to come into contact with Him, and to open to His presence He is there waiting for me.
- I am there keeping Him company...it isn't about thinking a lot but about loving a lot anything that allows me to love I do that!

Eyes of Faith:

- To see with the eyes of faith means to activate the 'on' switch on a machine. It is a new way of seeing. It is the look of faith and love. Open to the presence of Christ. Faith is capable of this.
- Faith and love as St John says are the guides of the blind.

Recollection:

- Talk to Christ about where you are, what you are going through;
- Praise & adore Him; interior prayer allows a lot of freedom; be yourself !

End of Prayer Time:

- Offer it all up peacefully; place it in the hands of the Virgin Mary;
- Return to your active life, leaving your prayer time in place.

Difficulties:

- Let's be truthful, it is hard to pray and to persevere in prayer!
- But let's not judge our own prayer; only God can judge our prayer.
- If there is love, there is quality in prayer! We can't base our prayer on feelings or impressions.
- It is good to ask ourselves questions about our prayer life, to get training or to have a spiritual director...but don't judge what is DIVINE-what has to do with the Holy Spirit, what is invisible to us.

- Distractions:** They seem to bother us the most. It is to return to the surface, a departure from our deepest self; to latch onto an idea. It happens fast as our imagination is in perpetual motion. So then what?

-To return to this mysterious contact with Jesus you can repeat a word or a phrase that allows you to call Christ ... just come back to the heart to heart talk with Jesus. Jesus, I love you, Have pity on me!

- Look at a picture, a little reading, meditation, a prayer said slowly, whatever brings you back;

-Another tactic: the tactic of love, use your distraction, use the thought to come back to Jesus by praying for the person who came to mind.

-If the same distraction returns continually you may need to do something about it.

-Look at my prayer and my life, if my prayer is difficult and laborious, maybe my life is scattered with a lot of idols, attachments, futilities, entertainment. Prayer is a sounding board for my life; little by little my life will be evangelized by my prayer. If life becomes too complicated, look at my prayer life. As my life is purified and simplified, my prayer becomes simpler and more harmonious and peaceful.

-Sometimes I get bored in prayer. All the saints had this experience, it is normal. Don't pay so much attention to what you feel; the important thing is to be with Him, exposed to His brilliance, catching His rays so to speak. The important thing is to persevere in this act of **love**. Don't take back this time!

-A struggle in prayer is the struggle in a life that wants to be in keeping with the Gospel. It is a resurrection, the birthing of a new life; of becoming a child;

-A life of prayer is a **blessing**.

-Difficulties are a grace, welcome this poverty of heart, in humility we cry, it is so difficult to pray, to recollect oneself, to talk to Jesus. I become poorer not richer, this struggle isn't natural but supernatural. I can't do it alone, it is a gift from God, it is great that I can't do it alone, happily I can't manage on my own, happily, because prayer is God praying in me! All my struggles force me to cry out, 'Lord, help me, teach me to pray, bless me with the grace of prayer'

-Prayer is a long birthing process—from autonomy, pride, self-sufficiency---to having God as my reference point to dependence on Him. His grace, strength, patience, love, joy are presents He wants to give me if only I open my hands...empty hands; if only I ask, need, empty myself of all of my false riches.

Link between Prayer and Life:

-Let life enter into your prayer. Be yourself, talk about your Christian Catholic life to God.

-Practice the virtues per St. Theresa: Relationships with others or charity; relationship with God or humility; relationship with the world or detachment.

-My life is meant to be evangelized and to become more harmonious through my life of prayer.

Personal Mystery:

-A life of interior prayer has to be fed;

-It continually sends us back to fraternal communion... the meeting of Christ in the Sacraments in community with the faithful!

Goal of Prayer:

-Regularly cultivated prayer will introduce habitual recollection into our lives;

-Our prayer leads us into silence, interior silence, like a conquest, like a gift;

-One day when it pleases God, silence will overtake our deepest selves;

-A loving silence is the only language that pleases Him;

-A silent love says John of the Cross.

Unification:

-The place of unification of my being is within; all aspects of my being must come under the gentle authority of Christ by an act of faith...The gift of the whole self;

-Carmel always orients us towards God. To accept God's proposition of marriage, of union;

-I am made for this-to become one with God, to be transformed by Him, in love.

Conclusion:

-A life of prayer is a passage into a new life; we stay here for God not for his consolations;

-It is good to be together for this practice to encourage one another---A new way of being together;

-**Where love is first we will find a way** says St. Teresa of Avila.

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