

Practical Exercises for Every Day:

## 8 Tips to Recollect Yourself

"Sometimes I manage to quiet my inner devil and let silence take over. It's like I've cleaned house. I am proud of the short-lived cleanliness. I feel like a member of the resistance who lights three fires at night to allow the "friendly" plane to drop its secret cargo. God wants to find me, but I have to make a small place for Him. » *Thierry Bizot*

How does one go about this? Elizabeth of the Trinity expresses it so simply: "I stop talking, I listen to Him, I love Him."

You will find below "**spiritual exercises that are very useful to the soul and which equip it to offer God a prayer that is pleasing to Him**" and not "**a specific method or manner of praying.**"

These exercises to recollect yourself were given to us by Saint Teresa of Avila.

"How should they **begin**? (Beginners) I think it is very important, even crucial, to have a great and very **determined determination** to persevere until the source is reached, no matter what happens or how much effort it takes." Saint Teresa of Avila

1 – **Strive to imagine and then to feel the Presence of God.** (Blessed Carmelite Brother, Laurent of the Resurrection)

I was careful to practice the presence of God all day and even while at work. I imagined Him near me and often in the depths of my heart. At first, it was not easy Laurent admitted. He said that sometimes he even forgot God for extended periods. It was not without difficulty that Lawrence learned to live in the presence of God but with "**a lot of cowardice and imperfections.**"

To those who want to follow his path, he advises not to be surprised if at first we feel like we are wasting time and even feeling an aversion to the practice. But, if we persevere in wanting to live in

God's presence, through a real practice, an on-going and sustained attention of the heart, the awareness of God's presence becomes natural.

Laurent confirms this many times: "**The habit isn't easy to form, but once formed, everything will be done with pleasure...**" and again, "**This presence of God, which is a little painful in the beginnings, if practiced faithfully, secretly brings about wonderful effects in our soul.**" Our thoughts automatically turn to Him and convey our affection towards Him, creating an **invisible bond**.

"**Thinking of someone**" often becomes synonymous with loving that person.

## 2 - **Being distracted 76 times and yet choosing the Lord 77 times** (Saint Teresa of Avila)

Teresa of 'Avila in talking about distractions says the following: "**Sometimes I could not have a sustained thought either of God or of anything good. My mind was like a madman that no one could chain.**" »

This is not to say that my prayer was bad or that I that I was not able to practice prayer. On the contrary, this experience is completely a part of prayer. In fact, distractions only affect the periphery of one's being. God, on the other hand, gives Himself to us in the depths of the soul. So distractions do not prevent Him from working in the soul and transforming it.

So what should we do about the distractions? First, persevere in prayer. Then neither dramatize nor entertain them. As soon as you notice the distraction offer it up to the Lord. They can be used to come back to the Lord.

If I start to think about my pots and pans, my work or a beautiful motorcycle, I use these thoughts to return to God. "**Lord I want to serve you while cooking, while at work or even while riding my motorcycle.**" Another thing I can do when distracted is to slowly repeat a holy word, reread a passage from Scripture or say a vocal prayer slowly until I am once again recollected.

The key is to keep choosing the Lord. Letting go of a pleasing distraction that we like, to return to Christ, is an **act of love**. In a sense, a distraction is useful to us in the sense that it strengthens our will to seek and find God and it increases our desire to unite with Him. Difficulties in prayer allow us to seek God for Himself.

Don't worry about distractions! Our entire prayer time can simply be a time of coming back to God. Allowing ourselves to be taken over, very gently transforms us.

Just because I feel like a sinner does not mean that I am not worthy to pray. Above all, let's not judge our prayer. It is a special time that is set aside during which I give myself to God and He gives Himself to me. God is happy to give Himself. He is certain to give Himself to us when we seek Him, despite or rather thanks to our weaknesses... If you are distracted 76 times, simply re-choose the Lord 77 times!

### 3 – Repeat your request to God without ceasing as do the Orthodox.

The **perpetual inner prayer** is the **unceasing effort** of the human spirit to reach God. To succeed in this benevolent exercise, it is necessary to ask the Lord often to teach us to **pray without ceasing**.

The inner and constant **Prayer of Jesus** is the continual and uninterrupted **invocation of Jesus' name** with the lips, the heart and the intelligence, while feeling His presence, in every place and at all times. It is expressed in these words: "**Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner!**"

This invocation brings great comfort to the soul who gets used to praying it. After a while, a need to pray this prayer develops. The soul can no longer remain without it. The prayer begins to flow within.

### 4 - Choose with the Holy Spirit a word that solidifies our inner silence (Following the English mystics of the 14th Century, Julianne from Norwich)

« It is appropriate for you to fold and package your impulse toward God in a word in order to stick with

it; a small word with few syllables. The shorter it is, the better it is in line with the work of the Spirit. Examples are words like God or love. You can choose whatever word you like or find pleasing as long as it only has a few syllables.

Attach this word firmly in your heart so that it never departs. If something happens this word will be your shield and your sword in times of peace or in times of war. With this word, you will strike the cloud and darkness above you [the divine world]. And with it, you put all thoughts under the cloud of oblivion. So much so that if a thought from above bothers you and asks you what you would like to possess, you will not answer with any word other than that word which suggests its importance. In offering to skillfully explain the qualities and properties of the word, simply say that you want to keep it and possess it intact in its entirety, not broken or broken apart. »

In their work of adapting this ancient tradition of prayer, the monks advised choosing a word that best expresses our relationship with God. It can be words like Hallelujah, Savior, Maranatha, Maran (Lord), Kyrie, Lord, Jesus, Father, Abba or a word inspired by the Holy Spirit. We must pray to the Holy Spirit to help us make the choice. Once we have found our word, we must preciousy cherish it.

### 5 – Meditating very slowly on each word of a prayer like the Our Father. (From Ignatius of Loyola)

"After saying a preparatory prayer, while either kneeling or sitting depending on your body and the soul, with the eyes closed or fixed in one place, and not letting them wander, say the first word of the *Our Father*. We linger on this word as long as we find meaning, comparisons, interest and inner consolation in the consideration of the title of Father. We will do the same on each word of the *Our Father*, or any other prayer that you would want to meditate on in this way.

Another way is to pray from the heart, and to speak with the mouth, with each breath or sigh, a word of the *Our Father* or another prayer, in such a way as

to utter only one word between each breath. In the space of time that flows from one breath to another, one strives mainly to consider the meaning of the word, or the excellence of the person to whom the prayer is being addressed.” St Ignatius of Loyola

#### **6 – Use your imagination to meditate on a Gospel scene**

This meditation allows the soul to experience an intimate moment with the Lord and his Mother. To begin, the person meditating is invited to imagine a church, a place where Christ and the Virgin Mary are together or a Gospel scene ... once his imagination is focused on the Lord and is at peace, it will be easier to return to silence... It is only at this point that prayer begins ...

#### **7 – Concentrate your thoughts on the candle in front of you in your place of prayer to learn to detach from it.**

Gather your thoughts on the flickering flame of the candle; allow your ever- changing distractions to dissipate and turn to smoke like the flame and return to the light of God's presence.

#### **8 - Let yourself be looked at by your icon**

The icon is a holy image. It is an expression of the divine economy which “represents the real presence of God among us.”

It may be helpful to not stare at the icon but to let yourself be looked at by it and to let its gaze penetrate you deeply...

But above all, as soon as calm has returned .. abandon any effort ... in order to return without words or method ... to union with God- sweet, trusting, loving.

AMEN