

The Art of Teresian Prayer

School of Prayer,
Carmelite Friars, Paris, France
Advent 2020

1	Introduction Learn to Pray	<p>We invite you to discover Silent Prayer with the Carmelite School of Prayer. Learning to pray is quite a program! It is both so simple (at least on paper) while at the same time so complicated, so difficult (at least at the beginning). You will be offered regularly a short meditation on an aspect of silent prayer to advance on this path of an encounter with God. The aim is that each session be short, practical, within everyone's reach without headaches. You don't have to be a specialist, you just have to come as you are, with the desire to get closer to God, in order to prepare to welcome the One who comes to be born in our hearts: Christ our Savior. There is no alternative to learning to pray than to pray. So, let's attempt the experience of an encounter with God.</p> <p>Definition: Mental (silent) prayer is, in my opinion, an intimate commerce (exchange) of friendship where we speak often one on one with this God who we know loves us" (Life 8). Teresa of Avila</p> <p>The Retreat Prayer Let Nothing Disturb You Let nothing frighten you. Everything passes, God never changes. Patience obtains everything. Whoever has God lacks nothing God alone suffices Teresa of Avila</p>
2	Make a Decision to Pray	<p>So here we are in Advent. It is a rich time offered to us. It is a call to conversion. We are all called to follow this path. What better way to follow it than through a school of prayer?</p> <p>A teaching of less than 2 minutes is provided to better discover what prayer is by exploring the basics. Some practical suggestions will be given to help you stick with it.</p> <p>Saint Teresa of Avila tells us we have to have a 'determined determination' or in other words an energetic determination. We make an act of the will. We make a decision. We recognize that we are ready during this time to pray, to put ourselves in God's presence, to put ourselves in our Lord's school in order to get closer to Him, to live a time of personal conversion that will lead us to His coming.</p> <p>There is the liturgy, but there is also our personal undertaking that is carried out in prayer. As the saying goes, it is in working with iron that one becomes a blacksmith. It is by praying that one becomes an agent of prayer. So slow down. Sit down. Take the time to stop and listen to the Lord.</p>

3	The Prayer Corner	<p>Here we are in the second day of our school of prayer. Today we are going to look at our surroundings. Of course, you tell me that we can prayer anywhere and at any time no matter what the situation. That is true, but once we choose to stop each day, with this repetition that will now recur and become a routine, it is important to consider paying close attention to the place that prayer will take place.</p> <p>This simplest is that it take place at home. A prayer corner is not only for children, but is a place that is really going to help us concentrate and become centered in order to turn towards our Lord. What better than to use a pretty picture or an icon, perhaps a candle so that this special place becomes beautiful to us; that it become a place where we can settle down; a place where we turn our heart towards the Lord.</p> <p>This special place of prayer invites us into beauty and greatness. It is not a source of distraction but rather a source of prayer. It is here that we can turn our hearts towards him who is already there and waiting for us. So, take good care of this special place of prayer where we will try to meditate daily.</p>
4	Preparation for Prayer	<p>We have looked at the external surroundings where we pray, our prayer corner. Today we are going to consider our preparation for prayer.</p> <p>We do not come to prayer in a neutral state. We bring with us all that we have done before. We need to incorporate a break before attempting to pray in order to calm down and to be available for this time of prayer. It is important not to only allow five minutes to unload everything and expect to be available to pray. It is important to think about our prayer time well in advance.</p> <p>We have to take care of our front door. Let us take the example of going to a friend's house to visit. We first ring the doorbell; we wipe our feet and take off our coat before going into the living room to sit down. It is the same thing with prayer. We do not flop down on the couch after entering the room through the window.</p> <p>We need to take care of this entrance; of the preparation for this relationship; of our coming into contact with God. We make ourselves present to God. To begin we make a beautiful sign of the cross. Then we assume a position, either sitting or kneeling, that allows our bodies to enter into prayer. If we mess up our entrance, we risk messing up this opportunity to pray and unfortunately, both will happen. It is as if the plug were never plugged in. So, pay attention that you prepare yourself well.</p>

5	A Relationship with God	<p>Now that everything in our external surroundings is in order and our preparation is complete, it is important to talk about the relationship. When I enter into prayer, it is obviously to enter into relationship with God. It is important to realize that it is with him that I am entering into relationship. Do I do this automatically without realizing the One in whose presence I am?</p> <p>If I do not take my partner, in this case God, into consideration is it because I do not see, hear or feel him? He is there though and he is waiting for me. I am nothing less than with God. I am baptized. I have the Presence within me. God made me his son (or daughter). I am a child of God. I am therefore entering into a privileged relationship with God. Become aware of him with whom I am entering into prayer. It is not just anyone, someone I would pass on the street. It is really God, the One who created me. The One who gave me life. The One from whom I receive everything. I need to take this into consideration during the preparation of putting myself in God's presence. The One who created us all.</p>
6	A Friendship	<p>We have seen that we are entering into a relationship with God. But what kind of relationship are we talking about? To respond to this question, I would like to turn to Saint Teresa of Avila who says in the book of her Life:</p> <p>'Silent prayer is a business (exchange) of friendship where we speak often, one on one, with God who we know loves us. (Life 8:5).</p> <p>The 'business' of friendship. She is after all the daughter of a merchant and that is what comes to her mind. We can also speak of an exchange of friendship, a friendship. This is what we live with our Lord, this level of friendship. There is a type of equality that is created in prayer as there is with friend. That is right, "as" with a friend, I am not God. He created me but he is offering me his friendship.</p> <p>We all have friends. We know how that works. We think of them. We can tell them what we have in our hearts. The ties are fortified and unified more and more. Yes, that is what is offered us in prayer. It is simple. We are asked to let go of what we know to be certain; to truly speak, not with the intellect, but with the heart, as a friend speaks to his friend. Therefore, this is the path that opens for us today. Enter into this path of friendship, will you?</p>

7	Set a Time & Hold to It	<p>There is a subject, which needs to be discussed. It certainly is not an easy one. It concerns setting a time to pray. When we pray we need to set aside a reasonable amount of time. We are going to be in prayer, remain in prayer and give thanks at the end of the time of prayer. It is up to you to decide on an amount of time that will be beneficial to you –ten minutes, fifteen minutes or more for those who are used to it. Once this time is set, we have to hold to it.</p> <p>This time is a gift I offer to God. He created me. He gave me life. He gave me his Son, the Christ. He has given me the biggest gift. Therefore, humbly and simply, I offer him the gift of time even if I am bored, the time seems long or I have a ton of things to do. We are all in the same situation.</p> <p>Therefore, I give God this time. Consider this time like a visit to someone. Maybe nothing happened or I have the impression that nothing happened, but this time belongs to God. It is the most beautiful thing I can do for God. He will be there by my side. He will listen to me. He is there.</p>
8	Desire for God	<p>The theme I would like to take up with you today is desire. The desire for God. We are at our core beings of desire. If we have no desires depression often sets in or a lack of interest in anything. Desire is at the heart of human existence. We need it.</p> <p>Among the desires deep within us is a desire for God; a desire to meet him. We see this in the Gospel with the Samaritan woman. Jesus brings forth the desire living within her. Then there are the miracles where Jesus asks of those he meets: “What do you want?” It seems strange to ask a blind man: “What do you want me to do for you?”</p> <p>Jesus wants to hear their answer; what is going on within them. The question that we can ask ourselves is: “What do I desire?” “What am I hoping for in my meeting with God?” “Do I really thirst for God?” Not to worry!</p> <p>The desire is there but it is often covered up by a certain number of things that are preventing it from surging forth. It can be likened to a spring that is clogged up and so water is not able to reach the surface. So, let us dig down for this desire. Let us bring it into the light in order to accomplish the reason we were made which is to meet with God; to be with him, at his side, to render him present.</p>

<p>9</p>	<p>Inner Life</p>	<p>Yesterday we spoke of the desire that lives within us. Today I want to continue along the same lines by talking to you about the inner life or interiority. We have lives that are busy often very busy. The restrictions imposed in our current lives have allowed us to center ourselves; to move from the exterior to the interior.</p> <p>One of the great actions in prayer, when we stop and put ourselves in his presence, is that we move from the outside where there is often a lot going on causing us to flit around, to the inside.</p> <p>From the moment of our Baptism, God is present within us. He makes us children of God, Sons of God. If I look within there is the presence of God. Know that God inhabits us. It is a marvelous treasure. It is what happens during silent prayer, I make myself present to the One who is already present, who lives within me and who waits for me in the deepest part of myself.</p> <p>So, let us center ourselves, concentrate and be attentive to the presence of God within us. He waits for this. He waits for us to look within. This is why we often close our eyes when we pray to not be scattered so that we can be more attentive, to open another look within.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Surge of the Heart</p>	<p>If God is present within us, if we turn within, it is to speak to him, to turn towards him. Saint Therese of Lisieux (the Little Flower) gives us her definition of prayer in an inspiring statement found in Manuscript C of her autobiography. She says: “Prayer is, for me, an surge from the heart; it is a simple glance towards Heaven; it is a cry of gratitude and of love in the midst of a trial as well as in the midst of joy!</p> <p>In a word, it is something exalted, supernatural, which dilates the soul and unites me to Jesus. I will focus on the first part of the definition- prayer is a surge of the heart. In prayer, we need to let our heart speak out. Saint Teresa of Avila, who came before, (just an aside, we refer to them as the Big Teresa and the Little Teresa) when speaking about prayer tells us: In prayer, it is important not to think much but to love much.</p> <p>Prayer is not an exercise of a method but rather a meeting between two hearts who love one another; the heart of God and the heart of man. Let our hearts speak. Avoid great ideas and eloquent presentations. Let our hearts speak as a friend speaks to a friend, like a deep friendship of many years that allows us to live within ourselves.</p>

11	The Virgin Mary & Prayer	<p>Today is the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The Virgin Mary joins us during this season of Advent to help us to pray, to help us to learn to pray. To do this I would like to talk about a well-known Gospel story, the Marriage Feast of Cana (John 2). It is the story where Jesus changes water into wine. Mary is the author of this miracle. She noticed that the wine was getting low and so she simply went to her Son and said: ‘They don’t have any wine.</p> <p>‘A simple statement that seems completely ordinary but that shows us the attitude that we should have in prayer. When we have something to ask the Lord, something to present to the Lord, you notice that we do not have to insist or demand. We do not have to take God’s place by telling him what to do or how to do it. No, we simply approach him with what we have in our hearts and present it to him. Look Lord, my friend is sick. There you have it.</p> <p>He can inspire us; help us. We all encounter difficult situations in our lives or things that we need to overcome such as a difficult upcoming encounter. We need to be able to present this to the Lord in the same way the Virgin Mary did: ‘They don’t have any wine.’</p>
12	The Presence of God	<p>We have seen that God is present within us. There is the movement of turning within towards our Higher Interior, the presence of Grace, which indicates that God lives within us. However, God makes himself present in other ways.</p> <p>We might choose to be in a church for our time of prayer allowing us to turn towards the tabernacle where God is present in the Eucharist. He is also present during Eucharistic adoration when the Holy Sacrament is exposed. Knowing this could help us spend more time in prayer and pay more attention to the One who is there with us and within us.</p> <p>Another way the Lord is present is in his Word when we read the Scriptures or the Scripture of the day. This could help us enter into prayer. God is present in his Word and when two or three unite to pray in his name. He is also present in the poor, in the one we help, in the one we rescue. All of this to show that the presence of God is not limited to my time of prayer but that there are one thousand and one ways to meet the Lord. My daily prayer time allows me to discover how the Lord is present in my own life.</p>

<p>13</p>	<p>Distractions, Preoccupations</p>	<p>Today we are going to talk about a subject that unfortunately occupies a good part of our prayer time. It happens to all of us. We are going to discuss distractions and preoccupations.</p> <p>Let us begin with distractions. We are distracted beings but we can help ourselves focus. We can learn to do what is necessary so that our minds are more disciplined; not going in a million directions.</p> <p>Distractions are a part of life. If I was distracted in prayer, this certainly does not mean that my time of prayer was not real or effective. It is not a reason for me to become discouraged or disappointed in myself.</p> <p>What should you do when faced with distractions? Well, Nothing! Simply, let them go by as water off a duck's back; return to the Lord when you realize you are distracted; refocus on your prayer. You do not have to make a big deal of it.</p> <p>Preoccupations, on the other hand, happen when something in my life is troubling me such as a sick child; a friend who is not doing well; difficulties at work. There are many, many examples I could cite. You have only to look at your own life.</p> <p>In this case, it is absolutely necessary to act! I cannot just let it go as with distractions. I need to present my concern to the Lord as we saw on 8 December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. I need to present my troubles, 'My colleague is not doing well.' I present them to the Lord and let him handle them. I can then simply resume my prayer. My concerns have been incorporated into my prayer. This is what I am invited to do.</p>
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<p>14</p>	<p>Dryness or Nights</p>	<p>Yesterday we talked about distractions and preoccupations. These are very common subjects in everyone’s life not only in prayer.</p> <p>However, dryness or a night, a deeper disturbance, eats away at us. There are times when going through this state that we could be tempted to abandon everything. We could be tempted to walk away from prayer telling ourselves that prayer just is not us. We just cannot pray.</p> <p>The first reason is a lag between how I am living my life and what God expects from me. In other words, God expects a conversion. He expects that I make decisions and choices for my life to fall into line with what He expects from me. As long as there is this hiatus or lag, my prayer life stops because my life and my prayer life are one.</p> <p>It could be, we have to discern this objectively, that this night is a spiritual step. A step of detachment where God is waiting for me to let go of certain securities or other things to further my relationship with him, to get closer to him, to grow up.</p> <p>There are crises in physical development from infancy to childhood, from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood. We find the same process in the spiritual life. There are a certain number of steps to take. It is here that the Lord waits for us.</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>Meditation</p>	<p>We have seen how to enter into prayer and how to watch over our ‘front door.’ But what will happen during this time of prayer? What am I going to do? How will I spend this time?</p> <p>Well, it a time of meditation. It’s a moment when I take a passage from Scripture, from the Bible, perhaps the Gospel passage of the day or a spiritual reading or the writings of my favorite Saint.</p> <p>It’s about taking a short passage. It is not at all a time to read pages and pages. Not at all. It’s about taking a short passage to meditate on. In other words, I use my intellect to read and re-read it, to try and understand it. But in addition to my intellect, I allow my heart to transform the passage into prayer that resonates within me. I allow the passage to evolve step by step, word by word.</p> <p>It has nothing to do with setting a goal to read a certain amount but rather to engage with the text to avoid a wandering mind and distractions. I strive to focus on the one who is waiting for me, who is there in the deepest part of me. The passage is only an excuse to encounter the Christ.</p>

16	Contemplation	<p>Yesterday we talked about meditation where we use a written text to help us turn towards our Lord. There is, however, another attitude or posture that we can strive for and to which we are all called; that posture is contemplation.</p> <p>We will be led to contemplate. When this happens, we need to let go of meditation along with all written material in order to enter into a more passive posture. We need to allow ourselves to be guided. But be careful. This is not something that we can bring about, but rather something that is given to us little by little. There comes a time when the use of texts in meditation no longer bears fruit. We naturally let go of our written material, to enter into a more passive movement. We contemplate. It is a bit like two lovers seated on a park bench. They initially have a lot to say to each other. Over time things become quiet as with us in prayer. Yet we are there present with God, in communication with him. What interests us is that we are united to God, connected to him.</p>
17	Prayer & Saint John of the Cross	<p>Was it a coincidence or was it the providence of the calendar that we are celebrating Saint John of the Cross today, 14 December?</p> <p>It is a blessing to have him with us on this path of prayer during this time of Advent because he is a true master in the spiritual life, in the life of prayer, and especially in the area of contemplative prayer.</p> <p>Through his story, closely linked to his spiritual experience, he shows us how to gradually detach ourselves. He shows us how to gradually let go of everything that weighs us down. To illustrate, imagine a bird that wants to fly off but is attached by either an enormous chain, a chord or a little piece of string; he will not be able to fly.</p> <p>The work of the spiritual life is to make ourselves available so that the Lord can help us make progress on the contemplative path. Our part is to ‘lighten up’ so to speak, to let go of everything that holds us back. In other words to let go of all that is not from God; all that we are attached to that could cause confusion or disorder in our lives. We are to seek to let go of our attachments and to truly turn our hearts towards God in order to be united to him. The more we are truly united to him, the more we will truly be able to love God and our neighbor.</p>

<p>18</p>	<p>Adoration vs. Silent Prayer</p>	<p>Today we are going to look at two different ways of praying that unfortunately are often set in opposition to one another. A discussion often transpires about which one of the two forms of prayer is better, superior over the other. It is a false debate because both adoration and silent prayer have a single and unique goal: union with God.</p> <p>It depends on each one of us to determine which of these two paths attracts us and will help us the most. The choice is made based on our personal history and spiritual journey. It is important that we do not oppose an individual's choice but rather that we respect the path of each person.</p> <p>In adoration, Christ is present in the Eucharist. The Holy Sacrament is exposed on the altar of a church, a chapel or another dedicated place at specific times of the day or even all day.</p> <p>Here we fix our gaze externally; it then moves towards the interior. We welcome Christ's gaze upon us. His gaze is one of love for us that strips us down, that transpierces us, that allows us to grasp how much we are truly loved by the Father. We strive to respond to him by gazing upon him and loving him.</p> <p>On the other hand, silent or interior prayer is an inward gaze. We gaze within through the eyes of our hearts. We make ourselves present to the Lord who resides within.</p> <p>Two different ways of proceeding that have but one unique goal, which is to love Jesus.</p>
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19	God speaks- Listen	<p>One of the fundamental attitudes in prayer is to listen. Very often, we feel the need to speak to the Lord. This is secondary. The first thing in prayer is to listen. Listen to the Lord because he speaks to us. This is why the first prayer the Jewish people say in the morning is: “Listen, Israel.” “Shema Yisrael.”</p> <p>This welcoming attitude is one of opening our heart to God’s message. One of the great rules of Saint Benedict in the monastic life is to listen to our center.</p> <p>If we want to advance in our life with Christ and be more united to him, we need to have a heart that listens. We need to strive to put aside all that preoccupies us or that we want to ask God, to be able to listen to him.</p> <p>One of our primary convictions should be that God speaks. God is not silent. Perhaps he does not speak audibly but rather in the depths of our hearts, through encounters, intuitions and his Word. All of this works within us to discover his presence.</p>
20	I speak to him; what do I say?	<p>Yesterday we talked about listening. We said that listening is a fundamental attitude of the person praying. Of course, when we consider listening, we then think of being able to speak. We consider what we are going to say to Our Lord.</p> <p>Our response is not about our prayer intentions. We are not presenting a list of errands or a list for Father Christmas. We are not laying out all we want him to do for us in hopes that he will answer by making our lives better. Well then, when I speak to him what should I say?</p> <p>The Orthodox have helped us answer this question. They explain that our intelligence needs to descend into the heart. This prevents us from being fragmented. We seek union between our intellect and heart. It is then, from this union that we can genuinely speak in truth.</p> <p>Teresa of Avila told her nuns that in prayer: ‘it is not about thinking a lot but about loving a lot.’ It is not an intellectual exercise but an exercise of the heart. It is all about allowing our hearts to speak. It is like a friend speaking to a friend about what preoccupies him, what motivates him, about his joys, about his desires, about his longings and about his sadness. In sum, we speak in words and in silence about the love within us, about our gratitude and recognition for all God has done.</p>

21	Silence	<p>We have talked both about listening and about the Word. Today we are going to talk about silence. It makes up an important part of prayer. There are several forms of silence and we need to be careful not to confuse them.</p> <p>There is silence in the negative sense of the word. For example at school we might hear: “Shhh!!! Be quiet!” or at home: “Hey, be quiet, stop talking!” Talking is forbidden; the restriction is generally not well received. This form of silence does not allow us to grow. We must be quiet! Then there is silence from the Far East that is experienced as nothingness in prayer. Through yoga or zen, we go through a process that arrives at nothingness.</p> <p>Finally, in the Christian tradition, silence is not nothingness but rather is filled with the presence of God. On Mount Horeb, the prophet Elijah experienced God. We have the description of his encounter with the Lord in the book of Kings. The elements were unleashed: God was not in the storm; God was not in the fire; God was in the gentle murmur of silence. It is something unspeakable yet God is there. Silence is tamed because it is the place of the presence of God.</p>
22	Our Father	<p>The Our Father is the most excellent of prayers. You may ask yourself however what it has to do with silent prayer. Well, resorting to the Our Father could be of help to you when you are experiencing dryness and are having trouble making progress.</p> <p>Jesus taught this prayer to his disciples. Perhaps you remember the episode when they told Jesus what John the Baptist was doing for his disciples. They wondered what Jesus could do for them. Jesus opened his heart and taught them the Our Father. It is a prayer of thanksgiving, a series of requests to the Father. It is the perfect Christian prayer. We are invited to bring it into our hearts, to meditate on it and to make it our own.</p> <p>In speaking of the Our Father, we are led to remember what Saint Teresa of the Little Flower said in her Manuscript C: “At times, when my soul is in great dryness, it is impossible for me to think a thought that unites me with God. It is then that I recite the Our Father followed by the Angelic Salvation (the Hail Mary). This delights me and nourishes my soul more than if I had recited them hurriedly one hundred times.”</p> <p>Return then to the Our Father when you find yourself in dryness and need to reinvigorate your prayer.</p>

23	God's Word	<p>Yesterday we saw the important place the Our Father has in prayer as it was given us by Jesus Himself. We discovered how the Our Father can help us in silent prayer when we find ourselves in dryness or struggling to pray. In such cases we learned that we can slowly recite the Our Father as did Saint Teresa of the Little Flower in times of trouble.</p> <p>The Bible is another prayer support that can be used daily and in a general way. It is God speaking to us through his Word as he spoke to the prophets, as he speaks today and as he will continue to speak over time.</p> <p>We begin by choosing a Bible text. The easiest is to simply take the readings of the day. We can choose between the first reading, the psalm or the Gospel. It is not about reading everything but rather about nourishing our soul through God's Word.</p> <p>We begin by meditating on the chosen passage to enter into prayer. Prayer is not automatic. It is about entering into a relationship. It needs to be nourished and renewed. What better way to do this than through Scripture where God speaks to us?</p> <p>Do not hesitate then to have the Word of God next to you during prayer to help you both enter into prayer and continue to pray overtime.</p>
24	Spiritual Reading	<p>We have seen the importance of the Our Father and of the Word of God in prayer. Today we will look at the last leg of the Trilogy which is Spiritual Reading. These three tools help us in our relationship with God.</p> <p>We are well aware that our body needs to eat to survive. It is the same thing in our spiritual life; our soul requires nourishment. Spiritual nourishment is not limited to a single food type. There are a variety of items that nourish our soul: the Sacraments; the Eucharist; confession; individual or group prayer; and, finally spiritual reading. You may enjoy reading about the lives of the Saints or studying their writings. Perhaps you prefer articles that address certain subjects, specific questions or the spiritual life.</p> <p>As human beings, we need this input otherwise, our spiritual life stagnates either in infancy or adolescence and never reaches adulthood. It is an obligation, if we take our relationship with God seriously, to nourish our soul.</p> <p>Do not hesitate to use your choice of spiritual writings even having them next to you during prayer where you can take a short passage when you feel yourself in dryness.</p>

25	Prayer: A Free Gift	<p>Why should we pray you ask? What can we expect from prayer? We could answer that we pray because we hope for something; we want something good to happen in our lives; we have a special intention; or something that is important to us.</p> <p>We tend to forget that prayer is a gift that is freely given. It is a relationship of love. It is said that when we love, we do not keep score. If prayer is about tit for tat, I will do this if you do that, it is destined to fail.</p> <p>It is important to have the attitude of freely giving a gift. I am giving God my time without expecting anything in return. I do this simply because I love him and he has given me everything. We need to discover that it is God, himself, who directs our prayer. God gives because he is not stingy. Yet he gives on his terms. He gives when and how he chooses to give. We are not to demand anything of him.</p> <p>My attitude is a welcoming one so that when God gives me a grace or an answer to prayer, I can simply thank him and not tell myself that I deserved the gift. I strive to adopt an attitude of gratitude. It is only then that I am able to receive; otherwise the relationship is weighed down and on the wrong track.</p>
26	Fruits of Prayer	<p>What are the fruits of prayer? How can we know if we are on the right path? How can we know if we are on the wrong path? ... if we are making any progress? ... if we are stagnating? ... or even if we are turning our backs on God?</p> <p>Often, we attempt to evaluate our time of prayer by telling ourselves that: “It was great!” “It was not so great!” “My heart was on fire!” This judgmental approach is like taking the temperature of our prayer time. This method goes nowhere. It is a dead end.</p> <p>No, it is more complicated than that. It is more subtle. We need to determine if our relationship with God is good. We need to ask ourselves if we were listening attentively. We evaluate if we were in a conversion dynamic. In other words, we ask ourselves if our love for those around us is increasing? If we are more prone to love others around us, it is certainly a sign that our prayer is going well. If on other hand, we emerge from prayer disgruntled and in a bad mood, there is certainly something in both in our prayer and in our relationship with God that needs attention. These are little signs that can help us to develop a long lasting life of prayer.</p>

27	Live in God's Presence	<p>Today is the eve of Christmas. This evening is Christmas night. It is the night of the birth of Christ. God comes to meet us; the presence of God in man's midst. This leads us to today's theme which is living in God's presence.</p> <p>We have underlined throughout Advent the importance of taking time daily to pray. This only makes sense if we aim at being united with God all the time. In other words, there is not a time of prayer where we accomplish our duty and check off that box. We then put God aside and move on to something else, however simple or unimportant that something else may be.</p> <p>No, the goal of making a time of prayer, be it in the morning, the evening or during the day, is really about making my life a prayer. It is about making prayer the common denominator of my life that gives meaning to all the experiences in my life. It is up to me to make my life a prayer, to become aware of God's presence in all I do throughout the day.</p> <p>There was a wonderful Carmelite friar in the 17th Century, his name was Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. He would say that he experienced his greatest moments of union with God when he was breaking eggs to make an omelet. He was aware of God's presence while carrying out the humblest of tasks. It is up to us to discover God in our daily lives and to become aware of his presence.</p>
28	God is Born within Us	<p>We have arrived at the conclusion of this school of prayer. Today is Christmas. God is born. Today a Savior is born. He is not only our Savior but our Hope as well. He comes to illuminate our hearts and show us the path to follow. We can now follow in his footsteps.</p> <p>Let's take a closer look at his birth. Let us contemplate this newborn who was born into the humblest of all possible conditions. He was born in a stable and laid in a manger.</p> <p>We are not to remain on the periphery of this scene that took place two thousand years ago. It concerns us directly today. His birth touches the deepest part of us. For not only was he born into our humanity but he was also born within us. We welcome his birth in our hearts. His birth meets us in our humanity where God is born within us.</p> <p>I leave you then to meditate on these words during the week of Christmas: God who is born within us.</p>

