

The Way of Perfection

Part 4: Prayer in General

Chapter 21 The Royal Road to Heaven

(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 21 Tells how important it is to begin the practice of prayer with great determination and to not pay any attention to obstacles set up by the devil.

Do not be **frightened** daughters, by the many things you need to consider in order to begin this **divine journey** (of prayer) 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.

2. To those who want to journey on this road and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from this water of life, 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 (...which allows us 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**.

You will hear some persons frequently making objections: ... **“it's better they stick to their sewing”**; ... **“the Our Father and the Hail Mary are sufficient.”**

3. I do agree with this last statement, Sisters. It is always good to **base your prayer** on prayers coming from the **mouth of the Lord** ... As I say, I am speaking to souls that cannot **recollect their minds** ... because they think some kind of **skill** is needed ...

So it seems to me now that I should proceed by setting down some **points** about the **beginning**, the **means** and the **end of prayer**. ... No one will be able to take from you these **books** (the **Our Father** and the **Hail Mary**) ... if you are eager to learn you won't need anything else provided you are **humble**. I have always been fond of the words of the

Gospels ... and found more **recollection** in them than in very **cleverly written books**...

I am not going to write a commentary... but I will mention some **thoughts** on the words of the **Our Father** ... When a master teaches something, he gets to love his disciple and is pleased if his pupil is satisfied with his teaching ... The **heavenly Master** will do the same with us.

5. Hence don't pay any attention to the **fears** they raise or to the **dangers** they paint for you. ... It would be a **pleasant world** if they would let you get the **treasure** in peace ... When you are about to **gain** the treasure ... by a **royal road** and **safe road**, the **road chosen** by our King, His elect and saints, they will tell you that there are many dangers and things to fear....

6. Oh, my daughters! There are more dangers for such persons ... How will one journey without a drop of this water on a road where there are so many **struggles**? ... When it is needed most they will not have it and will die of thirst. Whether we like it or not, my daughters, **we must all journey toward this fount** ... Don't let anyone **deceive** you by showing you a **road** other than that of **prayer**.

7. I am not talking about whether prayer should be **mental** or **vocal** for everyone. In your case, I think you need both. Such is the duty of religious. Should anyone tell you that prayer is **dangerous**, consider him a danger and run. There is danger in not having **humility** and the other **virtues**. But that the way of prayer be a danger ... it seems the devil invented these fears ... to cause those who practiced prayer to fall away.

8. How **blind** the world is. They fail to consider that the many who have fallen into **heresies** and **evils** did so because they didn't **practice prayer** but engaged in **distractions** ... The devil has caused fear in others about **virtuous things**. Those who take this refuge to be free ... are in fact running from good to be free from evil ... O my Lord defend Yourself! See how they understand Your words in reverse ... (Hold fast, daughters, for they cannot take the Our Father and the Hail Mary from you.)

9. There is one great blessing; you will always find some who will help you. This is a **characteristic** of the real servant of God to

whom his Majesty has given light concerning the true way. The desire not to give up grows in spite of fears ... God will **raise up someone to open the eyes** of the half-blind and tell them that the devil has placed a cloud in front of them to prevent them seeing the way ...

If there are **one or two** who fearlessly do what is **best**, the Lord at once begins to gradually win back lost ground.

10. Therefore, Sisters, give up **fears**; never pay attention in like matters to the crowd's opinion.

Behold, these are not times to believe everyone; believe only those who walk in conformity with **Christ's life**, try to preserve a **pure conscience, humility, and contempt** for all **worldly things**; believe firmly what Holy Mother Church holds, and you can be sure you will be walking along a good path.

Leave aside your fears when there is no reason to fear. If someone should raise these fears to you, **humbly** explain the path to him. Tell him your rule commands you to **pray unceasingly** ... and that you try to keep it.

If they tell you that prayer should be vocal ...

Ask then if in **vocal prayer** the **mind** and **heart** must be attentive to what you say. If they answer "yes" ... then they must then admit that you are forced to **practice mental prayer** and even experience **contemplation** if God should give it to you... amen