

The Way of Perfection

Part 4: Prayer in General

Chapter 24 Vocal & Mental Prayer

(summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 24 How vocal prayer must be recited with perfection, and mental prayer joined with it.

Let us once again speak to those souls who cannot **recollect** or tie their minds down in **mental prayer** or engage in **reflection** ... In fact, many persons are terrified by the term “**mental prayer**” or “**contemplation.**” ... Not everyone walks by the same path.

2. How should you pray **vocally**? It is only right that you should understand what you are saying ... I will only speak of those prayers we are obliged as Christians to recite (such as, the **Our Father** and the **Hail Mary**)...

What I would like us to do, daughters, is to refuse to be satisfied with merely pronouncing the words. For when I say, “**I believe,**” it seems ... I should know and understand what I believe.

When I say, ‘**Our Father,**’ it will be an **act of love** to understand who this Father of ours is and who the Master is who taught us this prayer.

3. ... God never allows us to forget the Master who taught us this prayer with so much love and a desire that it benefit us. He wants us to remember Him often when we say the prayer ...

4. Regarding **vocal** prayer ... His Majesty teaches ... that it is to be **recited in solitude.** This is what He always did when He prayed ... and it was for our instruction ...

One **cannot speak** simultaneously to **God and to the world** ...

5. For anyone afflicted with **distractions** ... he should just pray as best he can; or even not pray but occupy himself in other works of virtue ...

For those who understand that we must not speak to God and to the world at the same time, we can strive to be **alone** ... and **understand** to whom we are speaking and the answer the Lord makes to our petitions ... Even though we do not hear Him, He speaks

well to the **heart** when we beseech Him from the heart. **Consider** that He taught this prayer to each one of us and that He is showing it to us.

The teacher is never very far from the pupil ... He is very **close**...It is good for you to recite the Our Father well, and remain at the side of the Master who taught this prayer to you.

6. You will say that doing so involves reflection and that you only want to pray vocally. There are also impatient people who seek to avoid all suffering. Since these individuals do not have the **habit**, it is hard for them to recollect their minds in the beginning. To avoid a little fatigue, they say that they can only pray vocally.

You are right in saying that vocal prayer is now in fact **mental prayer**. But I don’t know how **vocal prayer** can be **separated** from **mental prayer** if vocal prayer is to be recited well with an **understanding to whom we are speaking**. It is even an obligation to pray with attention ...

The best remedy is to strive to **center the mind upon the one to whom the words are being addressed**. Be patient and strive to make a **habit** out of something that is so necessary (if you are to be good nuns, and even pray as good Christians, in my opinion.)
Amen