

12. Devotional and Liturgical Prayers

A simple way of praying that is available to anyone is to repeat prayers composed by other people. However, since prayer must come from the heart it is important to find prayers that speak to our heart, prayers that we can make our own and that we can pray honestly and attentively. Repeating prepared prayers can appear simple, but Teresa assures us that such prayers can take a person into the most intimate contemplation.

While you are repeating some vocal prayer, it is possible for the Lord to grant you perfect contemplation ... You are enkindled in love without understanding how. You know that you are rejoicing in the one you love, but you do not know how. You are well aware that this is not a joy which you can attain through understanding. You embrace it without understanding how, but you do understand that it is a blessing you are receiving ... This is perfect contemplation ... In contemplation we can do nothing. God does everything. The work is God's alone and far transcends human nature (*The Way of Perfection* 25).

If you find that this way of praying appeals to you, you will find encouragement from Saint Therese of Lisieux who writes:

Sometimes when I am in such a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me, I say very slowly the 'Our Father' or the 'Hail Mary', and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself and wonderfully refresh me (*Story of a Soul*, chapter 11).

While any prayer can be helpful, there is, of course, a special place here for the prayer given us by Jesus himself: the 'Our Father'(see Matthew 6:9-13). Much of Teresa's *Way of Perfection* is devoted to showing what a rich prayer this is. Included among her many pieces of advice is the following:

If you are to recite the *Our Father* well, one thing is necessary: you must not leave the side of the Master who taught it to you (*Way of Perfection* 24).

Praying the *Our Father* in this way with Jesus can help us to focus our mind and heart on the movement of Jesus' Spirit drawing us into his prayer.

Liturgical Prayer

Knowing how helpful prepared prayers can be, the Church offers us prayers that help us, as a community, celebrate the Mass and the various sacraments. We are also invited to join our Christian brothers and sisters in offering morning and evening prayer as well as prayer for other times of the day. This is sometimes called the Prayer of the Hours or the Divine Office. It is a structured form of prayer, which includes hymns, psalms, Scripture readings and prayers of petition. In promulgating the new form of the Divine Office in 1970, Pope Paul VI wrote:

Christian prayer is primarily the prayer of the entire community of humankind joined to Christ himself. Each individual has his or her part in this prayer which is common to the one Body, and it thus becomes the voice of the Beloved Spouse of Christ, putting into words the wishes and desires of the whole Christian people and making intercession for the necessities common to all humankind. It obtains its unity from the heart of Christ himself. Our Redeemer, as he himself had entered into life through his prayer and sacrifice, wished that this should not cease throughout the ages in his Mystical Body, the Church, and so the official Prayer of the Church is at the same time the very prayer which Christ himself together with his Body addresses to

the Father. Thus, when the Divine Office is said, our voices re-echo in Christ and his voice in us.

In his commentary on the writings of Teresa, Father Marie-Eugène writes:

Liturgical prayer, like every other prayer, is to be vivified by interior prayer. If the external movement that it imposes, the art that it cultivates, the sustained attention that it requires, should hinder or even destroy the contemplation that it is meant to serve, the devotion that it should stimulate, or the interior spirit that it wants to express, it would be mere external worship that God could not accept, according to the words of Scripture: 'These people honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me' (Isaiah 29:13, quoted by Jesus in Mark 7:6). The beginner must learn to pray with the Church, to enter into the majestic beauty of her ceremonies, to penetrate their symbolism and delight in her liturgical texts. We must above all seek in liturgical prayer the movements of the soul of Christ in the Church, listening to the movements of his Spirit of Love, and so learn in the school of Jesus Christ our Master his daily intimate and silent prayer (*I want to see God* page 191).