

Theory 3

JOURNEY OF THE SOUL

Stages of Prayer and Virtue

1. What is prayer?

- a. Prayer is friendship with God (CCC 2558)
- b. Teresa of Avila, Mental prayer...is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; its means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us. CCC 2709
- c. What does friendship take? Time
 - i. Talking – sharing
 - ii. Listening, understanding, loving
 - iii. Just being together
- d. This corresponds to the three major expressions of prayer (CCC 2699):
 - i. Vocal prayer
 - ii. Meditation
 - iii. Contemplation

2. Teresa describes the Journey to the Interior Mansion of the Soul where Jesus dwells

1. Vocal prayer and Meditation – 1st Teresian Mansion
2. Affective prayer – 2nd Mansion
3. Prayer of simplicity – 3rd Mansion
 - a. The Dark Night of the Senses
4. Infused contemplation – 4th Mansion
5. Prayer of quiet and of union – 5th Mansion
6. Prayer of conforming union – 6th Mansion
 - a. The Dark Night of the Spirit
7. Prayer of transforming union – 7th Mansion

3. Progress in union with God is measured by

- Growth in Love of God, Love of others, and Love of self

1st Mansion

- This is the initial stage of conversion
- We are just beginning to pray
 - that is very good because most people never begin.
- But you have no idea what a mess you are.

- We are being eaten alive by our vices and we don't realize it
- But at least we are beginning to pray.
 - If you persevere in prayer
 - you will become a saint.
- Even though, right now you are almost lost.

2nd Mansion

- We enter the 2nd Mansion when we really commit to Daily Mental Prayer and a Resolution
- Then we begin to realize the trouble we have with vice and sin.
 - Still, you haven't made the changes yet that you need to make.
 - But you are starting to see more clearly
 - Like when the sun breaks through a window and reveals all the dirt and dog hair everywhere.
 - You realize – I've got to change everything
 - but you have not yet resolved
 - to remove the near occasions of sin.

3rd Mansion

- This is where we become way more disciplined in:
 - A life of prayer and frequenting the Sacraments
 - Working hard to love others
 - Avoiding the near occasions of sin rigorously
 - Growing in your attachment to God and a detachment from lesser things by
 - Voluntary self-denial
 - Accepting what we can't change
- We must persevere in these until God grants infused prayer – contemplation

4th Mansion

- This the beginning of Infused Prayer or Contemplation
- We begin to delight in the experience of God
- God begins to take over and do the work of our prayer and our continued growth in virtue

5th Mansion

- The experience of God and its corresponding delight sets you free from your attachment to worldly things.
- That's why the lizards and serpents can't even get in the door.
- That's why it is called the Prayer of Quiet
- Your worldly desires are becoming quiet.

6th Mansion

- We are freed from earthly delights but the great danger is that we become attached to spiritual delights or consolations.
- So, God must purify us from all attachment to these in the Dark Night of the Spirit

7th Mansion

Transforming Union, Spiritual Marriage

Virtuous Cycle

This point is – as our prayer deepens, we become a better person, more virtuous; and as we become more virtuous, our prayer deepens – prayer and moral goodness affect each other for the good – it's a virtuous cycle.

4. Vocal Prayer

- a. Through his Word, God speaks to man. By words, mental or vocal we speak to God CCC 2700
- b. Vocal Prayer is speaking to God silently or out loud
- c. Examples of vocal prayer: Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Prayers of the Mass, Liturgy of hours – Divine Office, or simply speaking to God from the heart
- d. Vocal prayer is an essential element of the Christian life (CCC 2701) because talking, communicating is always essential to a relationship.
- e. What is the danger of this type of prayer?
- f. It can become mechanical
 - i. Just saying the words without thinking of the person we are speaking to.
 - ii. Teresa of Avila insists that vocal prayer doesn't count as prayer if you are not *trying* to pay attention to the Lord with whom you are speaking.
- g. A relationship involves both talking and listening
 - i. People often say, "God never speaks to me."
 - ii. The question is: Do we ever stop talking and listen?
 - iii. Jesus said to St Faustina,
 - iv. Oh if souls would only want to listen to My voice when I am speaking in the depths of their hearts they would reach the peak of holiness in a short time. (*Diary*, 584)

5. Definition of Meditation or Mental Prayer

- a. Mental prayer is to turn your attention to God and *think* about what He has said or done;
 - i. To understand the supernatural truth;
 - ii. Love God for this truth;
 - iii. Apply this truth to your life;
 - iv. Form a resolution based on this truth that we will put into practice.

- b. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 2, 14, 2) says the Purpose of Mental Prayer is
 - i. “the acquisition of knowledge and love of God.”
 - ii. “Through many particular acts - this loving knowledge of God reaches the point at which a habit is formed in the soul.”

6. Three simple steps for Mental prayer:

Mental prayer – Discursive Meditation – means to listen to God by –

1. Read or listen to something from the Word of God

- a. The Word of God is comprised of
 - i. Scripture,
 - ii. Tradition (the writings of the Saints)
 - iii. Magisterium (the teaching of the Church).
- b. As soon as something strikes you – stop reading.

2. Reflect or think about what struck you.

- a. Try to understand it;
- b. Love God for this truth;
- c. Apply it to our lives by asking:
 - i. Am I living this or not?
 - ii. If not, what is preventing me?
 - iii. Pride, vanity, envy, sloth, anger, greed, gluttony, lust, etc.
 - iv. Practically, what am I going to do about it?
 - 1. This leads us to form a resolution – a gameplan for the day

3. Resolution

- a. Choose something practical and concrete to do that day based on your meditation
- b. The resolution is the key to mental prayer.
 - i. If we practice a resolution flowing from our meditation every day we will change and become a better person.
 - ii. If we don’t practice a resolution, then not only will we not remain the same, we will get worse – because unchecked vice makes a person worse, not better.

The importance of a resolution:

St. Francis de Sales writes:

“The most important thing of all is that you cling firmly to the resolutions you have taken in meditation so as to practice them carefully. That is the great fruit of meditation, without which it is often not only useless but harmful. Why so? Because the virtues upon which we have meditated but not practiced sometimes puff us up so much in mind and heart that we think we are already what we are resolved to be which no doubt is the case if our resolutions are solid and ardent. But when, on the contrary, they are not practiced, they are useless and dangerous.”

(*Introduction to the Devout Life*, II Chap 8)

- c. Examples of a resolution:
 - i. Today I will listen more than I speak
 - ii. I will not gossip today
 - iii. I complain too much,
 - iv. Today I will practice thanking God ahead of time for working everything for good
 - v. I am anxious - today I will replace that feeling of Anxiety with an Act of Trust in God

7. Signs that it is time to move on from Meditation to the Prayer of Simplicity

- a. John of the Cross teaches us once a person has reached a general loving knowledge of God and self by means mental prayer
 - i. Then we begin to desire to spend time with Jesus and Mary
 - 1. Without talking or reading,
 - 2. Without the effort to grow in knowledge or figure things (discursive meditation)
 - 3. But simply to remain alone with God in silence (*Ascent*, 2, 14, 2-3)
- b. John of the Cross describes this as
 - i. “An inclination to remain alone and in quietude...If those in whom this occurs, know how to remain quiet they will soon in that unconcern and idleness delicately experience the interior nourishment.”
- c. Teresa tells us to continue mental prayer until you lose the desire to read and acquire more knowledge. (*Life of St. Teresa of Avila*, 14)
 - i. Then just be with God in calm, quiet and stillness. Cf (*Life*, 12:2,5)

8. The Dark Night of the Senses is the transition to Infused Prayer or Contemplation

- a. The Dark Night accomplishes two things in us:
 - i. Purifies the soul of Disordered Desires and Attachments
 - 1. These block God from entering more fully
 - 2. Pride, vanity envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, lust
- b. Strengthens the soul to share more fully in the divine life
 - i. We could not handle His divine life if God didn't prepare us
 - ii. It would be like pouring new wine into old wineskins.

9. Contemplation

- a. John of the Cross says
 - i. Contemplation is nothing but a hidden, peaceful and loving inflow of God. If it is given room, it will inflame the spirit with love.
 - ii. Contemplation is a direct intimate experience of the presence of God
 - iii. Contemplation is not something that can be achieved by human effort

- iv. Contemplation is a gift from God when the soul is ready
 - v. Contemplation is infused because the soul receives it passively, just as one receives sunlight by doing no more than opening the shutters (*Dark Night of the Soul*, 1,10,6)
 - vi. In contemplation Jesus comes to us in a way that we can experience Him.
 - 1. We really get to do as the Scriptures say,
 - 2. “We taste and see how good the Lord is”
- b. How do I know this experience of Jesus is possible in this life?
- i. Because the saints have experienced;
 - 1. They tell us it is for everyone who
 - 2. wants it, is determined, who commits to daily meditation and a resolution and perseveres.
 - ii. Jesus came frequently to St. Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, St. Faustyna and countless others
 - iii. Generally, Jesus came alone and talked with Catherine as one friend to another, so much so that they would say the Psalms together, walking up and down her little room.
 - iv. Isn't this amazing! This testimony of Catherine make me want this experience of Jesus.
 - v. And that is precisely the point – to desire or want God above all else – that is the essential quality we need to foster.

10. How do we make room for God?

- a. We get ready for the gift of infused prayer primarily by three things:
 - i. Receive Jesus as often as possible in the Sacraments.
 - ii. Fidelity to daily meditation and a resolution which helps us overcome vice and grow in virtue
 - iii. Persevere
- b. Teresa of Avila said: I am certain that all who do not stop on the way will drink this living water.
- c. Teresa writes: I often thought that St. Peter didn't lose anything when he threw himself into the sea, even though he grew frightened afterward. These first acts of determination are very important...we are not to be toads that will be satisfied with catching and eating little lizards...we have set our minds and hearts on possessing God!