

Monday in the Second Week: The Necessity and Method of Prayer

Summary of the Morrow's Meditation

As the gospel, by representing Our Lord transfigured whilst He was at prayer, reveals to us thereby that prayer is the means whereby to bring down on us all the graces of Heaven, we will meditate tomorrow: first, on the necessity of prayer; second, on the conditions for performing it well. We will then make the resolution: first, to be very exact in preparing our subject for meditation, both in the evening and the morning, and always to begin the day with this exercise; second, to maintain within ourselves during the day the good thoughts and the good sentiments of the morning's meditation. Our spiritual nosegay shall be the words of the Gospel: "*Whilst He prayed the shape of His countenance was altered*" (Luke IX:29).

Meditation for the Morning

Let us adore Jesus Christ at prayer upon Thabor. What a recollected and fervent prayer! What a beautiful spectacle in the light of heaven and of earth! Whilst He was absorbed in God, His face became as shining as the sun, and His garments as white as snow. Let us thank our divine Saviour for having revealed to us the value of prayer, to give us a love for it and to teach us to practise it.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

All the saints are unanimous in telling us that meditation is essential to salvation (Luke XI:1); that a day without prayer is a lost day; that without prayer faith languishes, together with the appreciation and the sentiment of Christian truths and of our divine mysteries. He who does not meditate upon God and upon His infinite loving kindnesses is cold and indifferent towards Him; he who does not reflect upon his duties does not any longer feel the importance of them: he neglects them, or accomplishes them badly. Without meditation no prayer can be well performed. It is impossible, says St Teresa, to recite even the *Pater* properly; habit, routine, and wandering thoughts reduce the prayer to a simple movement of the lips, in which the heart takes no part. "*My heart is withered*" says David, "*because I forgot to eat my bread*" (Ps. CI:5). Without meditation there is no longer any recollection, any humility, any love, any virtue, says St Bonaventure. Lastly, like to the soldier without any weapons, exposed to all the assaults of the enemy, we are defenceless against the devil, against the world, against our own heart. With prayer, on the contrary, faith becomes every day more lively; we appreciate God and heavenly things, as well as the nothingness of the world and the greatness of eternal graces; we see our faults and our defects, together with the remedies necessary to apply to them; the fire of the passions is extinguished and gives place to holy love. It is in meditation that the sacred fire is kindled (Ps. XXXVIII:4), and the whole life is changed and renewed (Luke IX:29). Formerly we were frivolous; we did not reflect; we were pusillanimous and devoid of energy, irascible, attached to ourselves and our own senses; by means of meditation we become serious, recollected, courageous and fervent, gentle and modest, humble and without pretension. It was all this which inspired St Augustine with those beautiful words: "*To know how to pray well is to know how to live well.*" Is this the idea we have of prayer?

CONDITIONS REQUISITE FOR THE RIGHT PERFORMANCE OF PRAYER

There are three principal ones: the habit of recollection, the detachment of the heart, the pacification of the passions. First, the habit of recollection. The mind which is essentially dissipated is incapable of prayer; accustomed to fix itself upon nothing, to fly without ceasing from one object to another, it follows its customary habit in meditation. In vain God speaks to it—it does not listen to Him; or, if it listen to Him, it does not reflect upon what He says, and lets its thoughts wander to other things. It is only in the silence of the recollected soul that God speaks, that His voice is heard, that the soul meditates upon it, that it appreciates it and profits by it (I Imit. xx:6). Second, detachment of the heart is necessary. The heart which has attachments takes possession of the spirit, carries it away captive, and tyrannises over it. It desires to reflect upon God and upon its salvation, but attachments to other things pre-occupy and absorb the mind.

It cannot any longer occupy itself except with the things to which it clings; it is a cloud which prevents the light of God from being seen; it is a noise which hinders it from hearing His voice. It desires to rise towards heaven, but the soul is attached to the earth; it may indeed agitate and torment itself, but it is impossible for it to take its flight. The soul which is detached, on the contrary, free from all ties, rises easily to God, converses with Him, and remains united to Him. Third, the pacification of the passions is necessary. As long as the heart is possessed by any passion which it will not renounce, it will be ill at ease, troubled, and incapable of fixing itself upon God. It will be like the sick man devoured by fever, and, unable to sleep, he turns ceaselessly from side to side, and to be obliged to remain in the same position is unbearable to him. He, then, who desires to succeed in meditation and to make progress in it, must labour every day to master his passions until he has extinguished them. It will be only then that he will enter into that tranquillity of the soul which allows of sustained reflection and of an enduring union with God. Let us examine whether we have fulfilled the three conditions necessary for succeeding in meditation.

Resolutions and spiritual nosegay as above.