

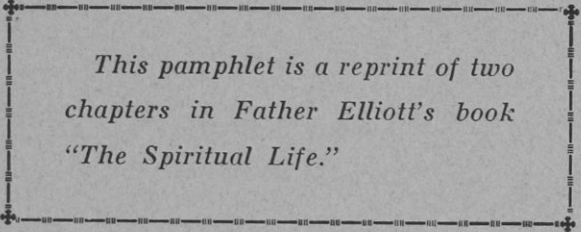
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PRAYER

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Paulist Mission Series

New York
THE PAULIST PRESS
401 West 59th Street



*This pamphlet is a reprint of two
chapters in Father Elliott's book
"The Spiritual Life."*

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By

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PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK, N. Y.

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PRAYER

I.

PRAYER IN GENERAL.



POOR laborer in the parish of Ars used to spend hours on his knees before the Blessed Sacrament, his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle, but his lips never moving. The Curé asked him one day: "What do you say to Our Lord all the time, my friend?" The simple soul replied: "I say just nothing at all; I only look at Him and He looks at me."

This is a grade of contemplation, indeed, but one which is not quite absent from ordinary vocal and meditative prayer when offered with fervor. Now the great difference between a high and a low level of attention in prayer is this same fervor—it is the difference between accepting a regimen of devotional exercises as it is cut and dried by custom, and the capability of arranging the same on one's own account according to the "perfect law of liberty."¹

Prayer is the soul's return stroke of grace. The heart drives the lung-cleansed blood throughout the body, and then sucks it back again to the lungs for fresh cleansing and enrichment, and renewed distribution. Grace projects God's love into our thoughts and affections, and prayer thankfully returns our thoughts

¹James 1. 25.



and affections back again into God's heart for renewal. Thus prayer is the reaction of our souls upon God in search of a renewal of the divine bounty. Hence the necessity of prayer, the obligation of it, the efficacy of it, the joy of it. Hence the expressions met in Scripture and in all spiritual teaching: Everything depends on prayer.

Prayer antedates all other offices of religion, and pervades them all, even the sacraments. It is related to salvation as a means indispensable to an end. It is the most universal of all helps to heaven.

How seldom do we realize this full dignity in our morning and evening devotions. Take from me the Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of Penance, the Humanity of Christ in that of the Eucharist, and I can yet be saved by prayer. Give me both those great sacraments every day, and, without the responsive stroke of prayer steadily driven towards heaven, their infinite gifts lodge on the soul's surface, soon to be shaken off by the jostling of the world.

God grants our prayers because of "Christ Jesus, that died, yea that is risen also again; Who is at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us."² Also because of the virtues we practice in making our petitions; confidence in His love, humility, patient waiting. Another and very singular reason is given by our Savior, our importunity,³ which plagues men into doing us a favor so that they be rid of us, and pleases God into granting it, because it is an appeal of love too peremptory for Him to resist.

²Rom. viii. 34.

³Luke xi. 5-10.

“For Thy own dear sake, dear Lord; for Thy heavenly Father’s sake; for Thy Blessed Mother’s sake, who is helping me with her prayers; and in memory of Thy bitter death.” Love’s blind persistence and absolute perseverance, its total disregard of personal deserving or of anything else but its painful necessity and God’s infinite goodness, this is prayer’s forlorn hope, and it never fails of success.

“Our Father Who art in heaven.” If we speak to one another of our God, we call Him our heavenly Father. If we pray together, the Son of God says: “Thus therefore shall you pray: Our Father Who art in heaven.”⁴ O God, how great, nay, how divine, is the privilege of prayer, and how dimly do men appreciate it. “There never was a father so much a Father as God,” says Tertullian. And what brother is so much a brother as He Who being God is yet Himself “the firstborn among many brethren,”⁵ and communicates to us His love for His Father from a heart similar to ours in all Its joys and sorrows.

The motives of prayer are graded by their disinterestedness. But, practically considered, the first of motives is penance for sin; for if sins be deeds, words and thoughts, atonement is principally made by words and thoughts in prayer. The penitent Psalmist knew it well: “My heart grew hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall flame out.”⁶ The prayer of penance was granted this supremacy; it outranked every other prayer in gaining our redemption. The great prayer of Christ was His Agony in the Garden, a flaming fire of sorrow. The Agony in the Garden

⁴Matt. vi. 9.

⁵Rom. viii. 29.

⁶Ps. xxxviii. 4.

is the world's act of contrition. "Sit you here," He said to His Apostles, "till I go yonder and pray . . . My soul is sorrowful even unto death."

The Lord has thus dignified purgative prayer because it is the most necessary, and indeed is an essential condition of every other kind of prayer; because it bolts hell's door, and when made perseveringly, blocks up the approach with eternal adamant; because it is our most precious offering to the Father, costing the Blood of His Son; because it is the most difficult even to begin, and when begun, to continue to the end; finally, because it ministers to us our sweetest joy, the inward assurance of reconciliation with heaven. We must spend our lives perfecting this prayer, as our Redeemer spent His.

How deep has been the wound of sin, since even its scar of half a century must be burnt and burnt again, to stop the oozing of its putrid recollections—burnt with scalding tears and fiery prayer of sorrow—to be succeeded with consolations of unspeakable solace. Of course we would not say that this penitential condition is always dominant in a perfect man, only that it is so at frequent intervals, and is always impending.

Men of science are deeply concerned with the study of heat and light as the ruling forces of nature, and both of these exist in the air. In like manner those who study divine knowledge and love, the ruling elements of supernatural life, tell us that these are in prayer, as heat and light are in the atmosphere. The warmth of the love of God thaws the ice of our

cowardice; and the brightness of God's countenance generates the hope of heaven's glory. But as there are tempests in the air, with black darkness and forked lightning, so in prayer there is the deepest gloom of the "obscure night," and "from the throne proceedeth lightning and voices and thunders."⁸ Nevertheless these hard pressures of majesty, and shocks of divinity in our more recollected prayer, are ever succeeded by the penetrating rays of divine peace.

Closeness of man to God here below cannot be without the painful protest of man's finiteness. "With the hearing of the ear I have heard Thee," cried Job, "but now my eye seeth Thee. Therefore I reprehend myself and do penance in dust and ashes."⁹ But immediately after his soul was flooded with golden waves of tenderness and joy, with the very perfection of confidence in that God Who had dealt so hardly with him. We are not all men of Job's simplicity and uprightness and absorption in the Divine Will; yet each of us is dealt with by God for the same end, namely, our entire sanctification, and by the same means, the strong impulses of grace provoking the responsive impulses of prayer. Has this no bearing on the devout reciting of our daily prayers? attentive spiritual reading? readiness to converse about spiritual things? good provision of prayer in preparation for the sacraments? and general recollection of life?

It is not our purpose to examine prayer that is wholly contemplative or even partly so. Yet St. Teresa tells us that many simple-minded persons say the

⁸Apoc. iv. 5.

⁹Job xlii. 5, 6.

Pater Noster in such spiritual wise, as to "enjoy pure contemplation without knowing it, and even to be raised to highest union with God."¹⁰ But the end we have in view is to key up our reader's appreciation of the worth of fervor in ordinary devotional exercises, especially in paying our debt of penance.

Joy must be religion's characteristic trait, though at intervals for God's best purpose it be obscured. "Justice and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost"¹¹ is an inspired definition of Christianity. Christians who honestly and fervently practice daily prayer, are gradually cleansed by its penitential workings from tendencies to grave sin, and in due time safeguarded from the frequency of even deliberate venial sins.

Prayer creates Christian character. Its constant practice soothes the ruffings of an irascible temper. It also overcomes the hard influence of a rude environment. St. Athanasius knew St. Anthony after he had been in the desert wilderness alone for thirty years, and he said that this long era of solitary prayer made the great hermit anything but a rude, sullen man; it endowed him rather "with a most obliging and sociable air."

Inward peace makes outward kindness. You behold the effects of prayerful habits in mingled gravity and gentleness of manner, the quick response of sympathy, the ready trustfulness of one's fellowmen. These and many other beautiful traits are seen in addition to the sublimer ones of love of God and charity to the poor.

"The prayer of faith shall save the sick man."¹²

¹⁰*Way of Perfection*, Stanbrook, xvii., 3.

¹¹Rom. xiv. 17.

¹²James v. 15.

Faith depends on prayer, a fact little appreciated. When religious truth becomes a matter of devout pondering, rather than of sharp examination and discussion, argumentation yields place to preception. The *Summa* of St. Thomas is to many a vast series of dry disputations; it was Father Hecker's meditation book. Cardinal Newman found the Nicene Creed the sublimest of poems. In acute doubt about articles of faith, the soul that seeks rest in arguments casts itself on a bed of nettles. The man that measures dialectic blades with the evil one, must have a subtle mind indeed. St. Francis de Sales, the safest guide for doubting spirits, thus advises a friend: "When tempted against Catholic doctrines have a great and longsuffering courage; do not lose it for mere noise, especially in temptations against the faith. Our enemy (the devil) is a great clatterer, do not trouble yourself at all about him; he cannot hurt you. I know that well. Mock at him and let him go."¹³

Which of us dare venture upon the spiritual hazards of a single day without watching at the gates of the Holy Spirit with morning prayer?¹⁴

Who dare work under the eye of God for a single day, and fail to take account of his work in the evening?

Who dare spend a precious day and not reckon up its wasted hours?—except a spendthrift or a reprobate.

The patriarch Isaac is praised, because he went forth into the fields, the day being now far spent, "to meditate."¹⁵ "Is any of you sad," asks the Apostle,

¹³Letters to Persons in the World, Mackey, p. 143.

¹⁴Prov. viii. 34.

¹⁵Gen. xxiv. 63.

"let him pray."¹⁶ The solace of a bereaved heart is in silent and solitary prayer, silent acts of submission to God's will, lonely, face to face conflict with grief. Witness Saul of Tarsus in his gloom—blind, helpless, drowned in shame. Yet God's words about him to Ananias foretold his deliverance: "Behold he prayeth."¹⁷ An immense comfort in affliction is also found in family prayers, and the common spiritual exercises of a community.

Many complain that their prayers are not heard. This can only be true of their begging for temporal favors. These are sometimes refused because the Lord commutes the temporal blessings into spiritual ones, especially the virtues of patience and fortitude. Or again, the Lord foresees injury, for many a child is spoiled by being petted. God will not spoil His generosity by indiscriminate giving, except to His enemies. The devil prayed leave to torment Job, once, twice, thrice, and in each case his prayer was immediately granted.¹⁸ The evil one prayed Our Lord to enter into a herd of swine, and his prayer was quickly granted.¹⁹ Yet once, twice, thrice, did St. Paul beseech the Lord to deliver him from a loathsome temptation, and he was refused each time, in order that divine grace might have freer play in him, and that his spiritual life "might be made perfect in infirmity."²⁰

No matter how often we are denied favors of this kind or that, the boon of eternal salvation is never denied to a soul with an established habit of prayer.

¹⁶James v. 13.

¹⁷Acts ix. 11.

¹⁸Job i. 11.

¹⁹Matt. viii. 31.

²⁰2 Cor. xii. 7-9.

Think of it, prayer is an interview, a conference with the Almighty God, in which we beg eternal happiness of Him; and forthwith He promises to grant our petition, and bestows upon us His Holy Spirit as "the pledge of our inheritance."²¹ Bear in mind our Savior's reproachful words: "If you then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your good Father in heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him."²²

Prayer is again defined as the elevation of the soul to God: and it always brings down "the good Spirit to me"—as my Physician, Almsgiver, Savior, Food, Companion. Man is created to fly upwards into God's pure atmosphere, as a bird is made to fly in the air. Our soul's characteristic trait is aspiration, by petition for better things, to the Giver of all good gifts.²³ Whosoever does not use this heavenly faculty represses it, for it must be used to keep it alive. One who says no prayer at all is like a bird whose wings are stripped of feathers; if he prays but infrequently, his wings are clipped.

"*Deo Gratias!*" was continually on St. Patrick's lips during his long missionary career. He was ever thanking God for His favors both sweet and bitter. It was his way, also, to say: "Thanks again!" to his people when he received any gift, or even the least attention, his habit of gratitude overflowing upon all whom he met.

No article of faith is more consoling than this, that love is the fulfillment of every law. It is just as true that the form of love called gratitude is the sol-

²¹Eph. i. 14.

²²Luke xi. 13.

²³James i. 17.

ace of every distress of conscience. However great the debt of sin, one act of love wipes out the whole terrible score. However hopelessly insolvent I may feel afterwards, I can quiet all forebodings of God's anger by loving thanksgiving for His favors. To devout souls, thanksgiving to God is not felt to be something of their own to be given or withheld as they please; it is a return of love demanded by justice.

"If a man will give the whole substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing."²⁴ Love does not play the huckster; it pays down the whole price demanded by the beloved, and pays it at once. We think this text applies to the commonest of all purchase prices paid by love in its barter with God for favors, namely, time—the time expended on prayer. All true Christians lavish time in devout exercises, just as gamblers lavish money in play.

We say of the man who gathers the means to pay a pressing debt, that, in his desperation, he begs, borrows, and steals the money. A really devout man greedily eyes his allotted occupations of the day; of one he begs a little space, of another he borrows fifteen minutes, of a third he steals the whole time; he is a brigand for "the prayer of God." A man of that kind feels qualms of conscience for neglecting even a little part of his usual devotions. One who is zealous but not devout, hustles prayer and its demands out of the path of his zeal, for "he has zeal without discretion." Have you special reasons for prayer, or powerful drawings to it? Then you must not huckster; be just, be generous, and expect marvelous results.

²⁴Cant. viii. 7.

II.

MENTAL PRAYER.

The very word meditation scares many. It seems to mean a complicated spirituality, a signal code by which one deals with God. Instead of being merely pious thoughtfulness, it is mistaken to be the threading of a mental labyrinth, the playing of a game of mental hide and seek. Yet it is not so; it is only obedience to the Apostle's injunction: "Think diligently upon Him that endured such opposition from sinners against Himself; that you be not wearied, fainting in your mind."²⁵

Here we have a master's definition of the holy art. When we think of divine things, not to learn, but to make ourselves love them, this is called meditating. Meditation is no other thing but an attentive thinking, voluntarily reiterated or entertained in the mind, in order to excite the will to holy salutary affections and resolution. It is not spoken prayer, but is its force. What the heart of a man is to his tongue, that is mental prayer to vocal prayer.

Now, such an exercise of mind calls for method (a word to frighten laggards with), yet the venerable Father de Andreis protests against meditation degenerating into "a mere exercise of the mind." Doubtless there is solid gain in working out a scheme of reasoning about holy things, and this is meditating methodically. But suppose one's mind is fagged out; or, as often happens, one has had no early training in

²⁵Heb. xii. 3.

systematic thought of any kind; or suppose one cannot thus think from native defect? What then?

Methodical treatment of devout truths is then impossible, and it is good, even necessary, freely to range about in one's memory for matter of thought, or to read a favorite book slowly, ending with some purposes of amendment, or as aspirations for improvement, or adoration of Christ and His Father. The weight of our pondering had best be brought practically to bear upon some particulars of our daily conduct. This go-as-you-please method St. Paul recommends: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, if any praise of discipline, think on these things."²⁶ Many a priest, for example, makes a good meditation worrying and praying over certain sinful parishioners, meanwhile mistaking such holy thoughts for distractions. Many parents meditate all their wakeful hours most efficaciously, mourning over dissipated sons or wayward daughters; as it is said of our Savior in the Garden: "Being in an agony, He prayed the longer"²⁷—and the harder.

There are many points of view as to method. Father Thomas of Jesus, speaking of the proper spirit for reading his book on our Savior's Passion, says: "That the mind may act with more freedom, and enter with more ease into those affections to which it finds itself moved, we have not thought proper to subject it to any particular order."²⁸

On the other hand, St. Ignatius was an inspired

²⁶Phil. iv. 8.

²⁷Luke xxii. 43.

²⁸*Sufferings of Jesus*, Introduction, iii.

master of strictly ordered meditation, and had well nigh all Christendom for his devoted pupils. Nevertheless he bids us drop our method and our points and our sequences, and instantly to follow any devout inner guidance whithersoever it may lead us.

Interior prayer transforms itself, if we may say so, into all the various phases of our minds; and its ways among men are as diverse as their multiform temperaments. There are souls who are not helped by a stated method, and some are even hindered. David, clad in King Saul's coat of mail, with his helmet of brass and his great sword, said to him: "I cannot go thus, for I am not used to it;"²⁹ so these undrilled spirits must go to their holy task with their shepherd's sling, and stones gathered from their soul's running brook. They are so formed by God. He leads them with sweet aspirations, or deep musings, or direct perceptions; methods only clog their thoughts. The holy expedients of prayer must not, therefore, be mistaken for its aim and purpose, nor be made an iron rule to be riveted on every spirit. At its best, method is methodical, not mechanical.

Meditation is closely related to holy reading. The latter exercise consists of reading much and thinking sometimes; the former of thinking much and reading sometimes. The sight of a familiar book is equal to the sight of God's altar in many a prayerful spirit.

Holy thinking is also closely joined to holy writing, which doubles the force of mental prayer by making it a written prayer also. Mental prayer thereby becomes an exceedingly deliberate vocal prayer, the

intervals all enriched with precious thoughts. We are, however, supposing that one is not writing things for himself and his good angel and God and the Holy Ghost. Newman used to say that he liked to meditate pen in hand.

We say of a crime of more than ordinary malice, that it was premeditated. Being planned beforehand, its wickedness was deeper. So the goodness of a good act deepens if planned beforehand, and the morning meditation should be premeditated over night. This makes surer the actual observance of the practice of mental prayer. "If I have remembered Thee upon my bed, I will meditate on Thee in the morning."³⁰ Our divine prayer-master, the Holy Ghost, teaches us thus: divine things the last thought before sleeping, the first thought on waking. A woman making a garment first cuts a pattern out of paper; then by this pattern she cuts the cloth before sewing it into shape. So we sketch and pattern our mental prayer at night, and fit it perfectly and finally to our souls in the morning.

During sleep the ferment of the mind, like yeast in a batch of dough, works to the enlargement of our thoughts. The Son of Sirach says of man that "the sleep of night changeth his knowledge."³¹ This unearned increment of holy wisdom is always of essential value. Not seldom it has an extraordinary influence upon us, "for God," says Cassian, "sometimes reveals in this repose of night, and as it were, sleep of the soul, mysteries which were formerly either obscure or entirely unknown." This nightly forecast of morning meditation is, perhaps, the best part of

³⁰Ps. lxi. 7.

³¹Ecclus. xl. 5.

every method taught in the schools of devout living. Method indeed. If Holy Wisdom has its own method, this is the beginning of it: "He that awaketh early to seek wisdom shall not labor, for he shall find her sitting at his door."³² As the involuntary muscles of the human system, the heart and the intestines, do their vital work all unconsciously to us, so the faculties of the mind work out conclusions and resuscitate memories in the quiet hours of sleep.

Our Savior uses the all unnoticed fructification of plants of the field as a comparison of the unconscious growth of the inner garden of grace: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the earth, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring, and grow up whilst he knoweth not."³³ He was Himself accustomed to pray in the early morning hours, bearing in His soul the living seed of the divine thoughts of the previous day: "And rising very early, going out, He went into a desert place and there He prayed. And Simon, and they that were with Him, followed after Him, and when they had found Him they said to Him: All seek for Thee."³⁴ All men sought Him whilst He sought His Father. This is the ideal of active beneficence. For if we seek God very early in a solitary place, then will men seek us, drawn to our solitude by God's attraction.

The good of meditation is in this: it is systematic thinking of God. Do this at set intervals, and frequently; and soon you will do it naturally and all the time. To think of divine things readily is close to entire perfection.

³²Wisd. vi. 15.

³³Mark iv. 26, 27.

³⁴Mark i. 35-37.

It is a blessed truth that one can acquire this habit by ordinary assiduity. Out of strict observance of daily meditation, grows habitual advertence to God. When the elder Tobias gave his dying message (as he thought it would be) to his well-loved son, he said: "And all the days of thy life have God in thy mind"³⁵—a legacy of daily mental prayer, a legacy "more precious than gold and the topaz."³⁶

Meditation is the soul's sincerest preaching to its dearest auditor—itsself. And until a man has expounded to himself the entire doctrine and life of Christ, he can have little hope of fully benefiting by it. The best preacher is one who starts his hearers preaching to themselves, and each of us can preach to himself by learning how to meditate.

It is not our purpose to treat elaborately of methods, for many books do that in all variety, the principal ones being the *Exercises of St. Ignatius* and the *Devout Life of St. Francis de Sales*. But as to the preliminary steps all agree that for daily meditation a stated time should be set apart; and that some short prayer should be offered up in the beginning to steady the mind and set it down to its work—avoiding overmuch ceremony. How much ceremony does a child use in going into its father's room? Scarcely any, unless it dreads a whipping; and even then very little if its father be like our heavenly Father, from Whose anger we can beg off with a few tears and a sincere promise. St. Ignatius' introductory prayer is of the briefest: "O God, may all the thoughts of my mind, all the affections of my heart, all the operations

³⁵Tob. iv. 6.

³⁶Ps. cxviii. 127.

of my soul, wholly and entirely redound to the glory of Thy divine majesty."³⁷ Surely this is the geography of the inner kingdom of God, the thoughts, affections, actions of my spirit. Let Him have them and He has all. In fact meditation is the filling of my nature's soil with the seed of holy truth and love, that it may bring forth in due time the sweet fruit of steadfast loyalty to Jesus Crucified.

In meditation the soul does not consider the divine life of Jesus at random, it focuses its attention upon some particular event, some wonderful act, some lofty teaching, until the heart is made one with His in this. The result is not a general impression, but that very special one our Master had in view—exactly that and all of that. One seeks, perhaps, to be inspired with the particular graces His hearers had at the time they heard Him, especially His Apostles; to acquire their frame of mind. Then this is bent to a practical end, to the amendment of a fault or the acquiring of a virtue which shall link us firmly to Him. Thus from the mind to the heart God's grace travels on the road of meditation. Thus, for example, from considering the First Word of Jesus from the Cross we learn to pardon enemies; or we gain inspiration for our confession from His prophecy of the last judgment.

In course of time and by daily practice of this holy thinking, Our Lord's influence permeates our deepest souls. By meditation the principles of religion are kept bright in our minds. In matters of policy we are wisely guided. Pure truth constantly

acting on a docile spirit, clears its vision and solidifies its sincerity. The difference between one who meditates daily and one who does not is essential; it is all the difference between gravity and lightness of character in spiritual matters.

Mental prayer is a powerful aid in the holy and supreme ordeal of life's battle with temptations. "Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee,"⁸⁸ that I may stand my ground in time of passion's assault; silently receive a blow whether of hand or tongue, "more concerned at his fault who hurts me than at my own injury;" easily give up work when sickness disables, or obedience commands; and just as easily set to work again when these conditions change. To be apt and facile for virtue both ordinarily and on sudden occasions, nay, to be true even unto the agony of death, requires a spirit well regulated by long-continued meditation on the maxims of Christ's Gospel. Mature convictions of the good and the true precedes vigilance and valor in resisting evil.

None the less the putting of mental prayer in the daily routine of religion in a place fixed and firm, involves no small exertion of courage. St. Christopher was a man of giant frame, and he used to carry pilgrims on his shoulders across a rapid stream to a holy shrine. One stormy night a little boy came along, and asked to be carried over to worship Christ at the midnight office. Christopher took Him upon his big shoulders with a smile. But as he entered the stream with Him he exclaimed: "Child, Thou art the heaviest

⁸⁸Ps. cxviii. 11.

load I ever bore, and I can scarcely endure Thy awful weight." The child answered: "Brother, hold fast of Me, do not let Me drop into the wild flood of waters." Christopher braced himself up and exerted his vast strength to the utmost, until he landed his small but strangely heavy burden in safety. As the child's feet touched the ground, He began to shine with heavenly lustre. Christopher sank upon his knees all amazed and troubled. Then the Boy reached up and put His arms around the big man's neck, and kissed him lovingly, saying: "Brother, thou shalt be called Christopher from henceforth, for thou hast carried Christ Himself, and He thanks thee for thy perseverance in the angry waves of the stream." So shall I win Christ's blessing if I bear Him through life's stormy waves in my heart's dearest thought. The grace of perseverance is given to steadfastness in daily meditation: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."³⁹

How sure am I of passing an innocent day, if God's words attend me amid the silence of dawn, if they speak to me forenoon, afternoon, and evening, until I hearken again, before retiring, to new voices from above in making my plan of the next day's meditation.

What downright guiltiness of act is there, which is not due to some vein of guilty thoughtlessness? Mental prayer forefends this by holy thoughtfulness. The least acquaintance with life shows that its evils are best explained by men's want of thought. From miserable moral mediocrity down to utter de-

³⁹Apoc. 11. 10.

pravity of life, our woe is due to want of serious reflection on things eternal. "With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart."⁴⁰

The great realities of life are not really known as such: "Justice, chastity, and the judgment to come."⁴¹ We sin because our eternally established relations to the Supreme Being are but transiently considered, and "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the charity of God, and the communication of the Holy Ghost"⁴² are upon men's lips as the prattle of unthinking children.

"Believe me," says St. Francis de Sales, "it is only taste which fails you, not sight: you see, but without satisfaction; you chew bread, but as it were tow, without taste or relish."⁴³ Christians do not penetrate to the meaning of their faith because they make no mental effort to do so. Those who are called to save men's souls are failures for the same reason. They live in the delusion that one can serve men better by work than by prayer. The contrary is the truth. The man who prays well, works well. If my work is above my ability I can level up to it by daily meditation, because I can always pray well. The essential element of success in prayer is good will and that alone, a quality cheap and abundant in every Christian soul.

We must bear in mind that mental prayer is mainly a preparation; it is a means admirably calculated to induce a state of mind spontaneously prayerful. St. Bridget says that "Meditation is the needle that should draw after it the golden thread of devout

⁴⁰Jer. xii. 11.

⁴¹Acts xxiv. 25.

⁴²2 Cor. xiii. 13.

⁴³*Letters to Persons in the World*, Mackey, p. 240.

aspirations." The prophet exclaims: "We are filled in the morning with Thy mercy, and we have rejoiced, and are delighted all our days."⁴⁴ The overflowing plenty of the morning's pious thoughts fills the emptiness of the whole day, whose "wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily."⁴⁵

Meditation thus generates recollection. A recollected soul is one whose ordinary state of mind is advertence to God. However his mind may be occupied, it is always preoccupied with the things of God. Now meditation, devoutly practised, provides the material for this frame of mind. The scenes of our Savior's Passion move across our mental vision; the maxims of His Gospel echo through the soul's atmosphere of love; the resolutions of a good life are registered over and over again; vice becomes more odious, and virtue more and more attractive. It is like the resonance of sweet chimes which fills the air with melody long after the stroke of the bell itself. St. Paul of the Cross used often to ask his disciples pleasantly: "Well, how are you getting on at home?" After a while they found out what the Saint meant—how are you enjoying the presence of God in your soul. Meditation in the morning peoples our interior home with God and His angels throughout the day.

No man is fit to deal with other men who has not learned how to deal with God in silence and solitude. In private prayer God reveals to us His all-sufficiency, and makes good His exclusive claim upon us, and upon those to whom we are to impart Him. God does not want works of zeal except they be done with pur-

⁴⁴Ps. lxxxix. 14.

⁴⁵Is. xxxv. 1.

ity of motive by men wholly disinterested, and actuated entirely by love for Him. Nor does He will us to save our fellowmen to the prejudice of our own spiritual advancement.

The offering of our thoughts to God is the most difficult of all our oblations, because they are the least under our control. Once, however, we are able to rule them, even with partial discipline, all else is easy in a life of immolation, for thought precedes all action. God prompts us by His loving inspirations, if we but present our minds before Him. He draws us to virtue by irresistible attractions; this is the favorite work of the Holy Ghost. To spend a holy half hour in marshaling our mental forces before God, is to obey His injunction to the ancient patriarch: "Walk before Me and be perfect."⁴⁶ He that walks interiorly before the eye of God may be trusted to walk openly before men, doing good at every step. Would that I were as conscious of God as I am of men! In rivalry of God men say: "Walk before us and be perfect." God would force me into His presence and I will not go. Yet often enough when men would rather not have me among them, I force myself upon them.

⁴⁶Gen. xvii. 1.

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