

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, VII

It has many advantages by the light and strength it imparts to the soul:

1. It keeps sin far from us and saves us from hell.
2. It preserves us from lukewarmness, or cures us of it.
3. It is the common source of all virtues. It is the shortest way of arriving at perfection, and the most efficacious means of persevering in our vocations.

Now is this prayer hard? Fr. Simler answers that no, it is easy, since meditation is necessary for everyone, and only easy things can be performed by everyone. To do mental prayer one simply calls to mind (always with God's grace) some good thoughts, making acts of faith or hope or charity in our minds, with confidence and humility, repentance and firm purpose of amendment, of petition, etc. This is not rocket science as they say. Anyone can do these things.

But there are difficulties aren't there? Very much so:

1. From the devil, who struggles mightily to keep us from this holy exercise.
2. From spiritual sloth, which deters us from efforts which must be renewed, as it were, every day.
3. From discouragement, which we experience in finding ourselves always combating numerous faults and defects, combined with a false persuasion that we cannot correct ourselves of them.

4. From our sins, which pull our mind, heart and will away from God and from prayer. It is not possible to persevere in mental prayer and at the same time to persist in sin, especially not in mortal sin.

To accomplish mental prayer then, we simply need a sincere will to earnestly apply ourselves to it, and constantly beg this grace of God. This takes us back to Fr. Doyle's comment. "I assert fearlessly that if only we all prayed enough and I mean by that a constant, steady, unflagging stream of aspirations, petitions, etc., from the heart there is not one, no matter how imperfect, careless or even sinful, who would not become a saint and a big one."

So is it really hard to keep asking God for grace all through the day? No. This is easy to do. Anyone can do it. We just have to want it.

With that being said, let's look at some things in more detail. Mental prayer is even more effective when we set aside a time to be with God. This is very important to learn – to go to Him with nothing – no book, no rosary, no pictures; just us and Him. *Cor ad cor loquitur* as Cardinal Newman put it; Heart speaks to heart.

This time should have at least three elements:

1. The preparation.
2. The body of mental prayer.
3. The conclusion.

"I assert fearlessly that if only we all prayed enough and I mean by that a constant, steady, unflagging stream of aspirations, petitions, etc., from the heart there is not one, no matter how imperfect, careless or even sinful, who would not become a saint and a big one." Fr. William Doyle, S.J.

This stream of prayer would be in itself a great means for purity. I suppose I could just end with that! But in the ordinary growth of the soul from impurity to purity, more is needed.

Not to be contentious with a priest as great as Fr. Doyle, but if you have sinned, then in one way you can't pray. Take a child. If a child has done something really wrong and he knows it, then if you try to give him a hug he won't accept it. He draws away. But if he admits he did something wrong, and he is forgiven, then they can receive the hug. This is similar with all of us. We can't be friends with God – not until we have confessed. We are not able to receive the love of God.

To receive it again means especially to enter into prayer; the kind of prayer where we connect what we have done wrong to the passion and death of Our Lord. When we can see that what we have done has directly resulted in His suffering, and we are sorry for what it did to Him, then we are on our way to real contrition for sin, which can break utterly the power of impurity.

But in what way can we make the connection? The answer, in a word, is by

mental prayer. Read the following quote, then read it again and let it sink in (and this is for any Catholic, not just those struggling to be pure) "The devil knows that he has lost the soul that perseveringly practices mental prayer." St. Teresa of Avila wrote that. It is absolutely true. I'll go even a bit farther and say impurity is not possible with the habit of mental prayer. The two cannot exist in the soul simultaneously. Given the importance of mental prayer – especially as it is connected to purity – I need to write some things about it.

I'll be using a handy little pamphlet by Fr. Joseph Simler, called *Catechism of Mental Prayer*. It has all the basics, so if you want to read the whole thing I recommend it wholeheartedly.

We know that prayer is the deliberate elevation of the soul to God to render Him homage, and this elevation is done by thinking of God, loving Him and conversing with Him. When this is done without any particular formula, or memorized vocal prayers say, then we call it mental prayer, also called meditation.

How necessary is this prayer? We must admit that every Christian is obliged to pray, but it is impossible to pray well without reflecting on what we say. Without meditation then, we do not know what we want, and everything can be done out of mere routine. By degrees, this leads to thoughtlessness, spiritual blindness, and insensibility.