

On Gaining and Keeping Purity, VIII

and you'll be as stymied in prayer as after the electronic amusements.

3. Attachment to sin. With attachment comes attention. When we are attached to a sin, we think about it, ponder it, remember it, or even plan to do it. Any of those expressions of attachment will interfere with the attempt to meditate.

4. Slavery to the senses. Needing the best foods, or just the right condiments for food; needing the constant comfort of moderate temperature, curiosity about strange or violent acts which may be found on the internet...all suchlike habituate the intellect and the will to take the back seat and let the senses do the driving. When we try to pray afterwards, the senses will revolt and demand their former place. Saying NO to the senses to show them who's boss, is part of the preparation for prayer.

5. Slavery to the passions. Similar to slavery of the senses, if anger or fear or joy or sadness become excessive and disordered, these passions will interfere greatly with any serious attempt at meditation. To restore reason to its proper place, so that anger doesn't call the shots but right reason does, takes work to be sure, but is indispensable for mental prayer.

But what is the nature of the work that must be done to remove these obstacles? There are four principally:

1. Recollection and silence. Practicing recollection (remembering to withdraw from worldly distraction, trying to keep quiet) is hard at first. It takes practice. But with practice the great gain for mental prayer is astounding.

2. Purity of heart, which is the strong desire to abstain from any sin committed with full deliberation.

3. Exterior and interior mortifications. An example of interior mortification would be mortifying the imagination or the memory, so as to prevent distraction and daydreaming. An exterior one might be sitting up straight at all times, since slouching can interfere with prayer.

4. Lastly for the remote preparation for mental prayer is spiritual reading. When we have the habit of spiritual reading (10 minutes a day, or ten pages, or some measurement that is realistic and achievable in accord with our state in life), then we will steadily build up a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom that we can draw from in times of prayer. For example, we can certainly meditate on the Crowning of Thorns without very much information, and have a fruitful time of prayer. But if we knew more about the circumstances of it (e.g., how the Crown was put on, how long the thorns are, an idea of how many thorns there were, etc.) then even more fruit can come of it.

"Help yourself during this troubled period by reading holy books. This reading provides excellent food for the soul and conduces to great progress along the path of perfection. By no means is it inferior to what we obtain through prayer and holy meditation. In prayer and meditation it is ourselves who speak to the Lord, while in holy reading it is God who speaks to us. Before beginning to read, raise your mind to the Lord and implore Him to guide your mind Himself, to speak to your heart and move your will." St. Padre Pio

Continuing with the subject of mental prayer – which is essential for the gaining and keeping of purity – there is a form of it which is easy, in the sense that anyone, be he uneducated or very young, can do it.

Pere Guy de Larigaudie, O.P. put it this way. "Learn to chat with God. While mowing down the heads of wild carrots, chewing on a blade of grass, shaving in the morning, we can very simply and untiringly repeat to God that we love Him. And that is well worth all the torrents of tears that have ever been shed in books of piety...Speak thus to your God with a song. And speak to Him also while dancing with joy in the sunshine, on the beach, or skiing in the snow. Always have God close to you as a companion to whom you entrust yourself." Love keeps the mind alert and makes it express itself inwardly with the Savior more and more often, with increasing spontaneity, with ever-increasing fervor.

But for a more formal mental prayer (and this is not so easy), preparation is necessary. By a more formal prayer I mean meditation on a particular subject for a particular amount of time.

Think that there are certain things which need to be done before every audience. It would be foolish to saunter into the White House for a meeting with the Vice President say, and have little or no idea what you were going to say, or even what you wanted. You would be wasting his time and yours. Of course if someone really tried to

meditate and the whole time was a big struggle just to enter into the presence of God, then that is a different thing altogether, and quite worthwhile.

There are three kinds of preparation for mental prayer: remote (sometimes called habitual by some authors), proximate and immediate. What is remote preparation?

First, it consists in removing the obstacles in our daily life that prevent us from meditating well, thus disposing ourselves favorably for the holy exercise of prayer. The chief obstacles are as follows:

1. Dissipation. This can happen with inordinate recreation. For example, watching too much television, or playing too many video games or surfing the internet, etc. These things do not recreate in the sense of renewing energy, but dissipate what energy we have. They tend to make us more tired than when we started them. Doing these things once in a while (like an occasional movie) doesn't necessarily dissipate, but on the other hand it is almost impossible to meditate with those graphic images roaring through the memory, having the emotions all stirred up to boot.

2. Faults against silence. This should be simple for us to grasp. If we engage in gossip willingly for example, this will interfere greatly with any serious attempt at meditation. Yapping about politics or sports might be fun and diverting, but try to meditate afterwards