

Prayer 101.2 // St. Mary Parish // Selected quotes

Prayer as interior communion

Teresa of Avila: *Prayer... is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us* (Teresa of Avila, Life 8.5).

Hosea 2:14: "Therefore I will allure her. I will lead her into the desert, and there speak to her heart."

"God Himself is the center of our solitude: before speaking to us of love, He speaks to us of the desert. If we do not hearken to His voice when He calls, He will never speak to our heart" (Dom Andre, II, 13).

Matthew 6:5-8: "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

St. Teresa of Avila: "we need no wings to go in search of God, but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us."

On silence

Ultimate aim of deep prayer = silence. "Whoever multiplies words, even though he recounts what is admirable, knows that he is empty within... Silence, like a sun, will enlighten you in God and will free you from the illusions of spiritual ignorance. Silence will unite you to God Himself" – Isaac of Nineveh.

"In the early stages... we may find silence a burden; however, if we are faithful, there will gradually be born within us of our silence itself something that will draw us on to still greater silence" (Carthusian Statutes).

"If we allow our prayer to be permeated by a tranquil repose, this will in turn bring us, as if by its own weight, to the profound silence where God awaits us... This is our destination: a prayer that is itself silence; not speculation about silence, but precisely the cessation of all thought, so that our heart may be free from thought and no longer filled with anything but God" (Dom Andre, II, 16).

"Real prayer begins when we no longer know that we are praying." –attributed to St. Anthony

Recollection

“...purity of heart can only exist at the moment of prayer if we have sought it all our life long. There is a strict connection between my heart at the moment of prayer, and what it is during the other activities of my day. The quality of prayer, its capacity to penetrate the heart of God, comes from the way I know how to keep my heart alert, and to hold it always oriented toward its end during all the lesser activities, which are less recollected” (Dom Andre, I, 17).

“Interior recollection can only be acquired through the imposition of harsh restrictions in the matter of what comes to us from the outside, whether news of current events or books giving us the latest slants. It is all too easy to say ‘I don’t find this a hindrance; I can assimilate it without it harming my prayer.’ In fact, however, the transparency called for in a heart entirely surrendered to God is incomparably more demanding” (Dom Andre, II, 15).

“The heart becomes transparent enough to reveal God, only when all outside commotion has been removed” (Dom Andre, III, 12).

Augustine: *“Nihil laboriosius quam non laborare* (there is no harder work than not working).

“There is nothing so difficult as to leave our need for activity without any apparent outlet” (Dom Andre, II, 15).

The heart

“The heart is not only the destination of a long descent, it is just as much the place from which gushes a hidden spring whose waters bear within them eternal life” (Dom Andre, III, 10).

“Deeper than man himself, there is a vibrant movement within his heart that comes from God” (Dom Andre, III, 10).

“The passing of prayer from the level of the mind, i.e. of ideas and images, to that of the inmost heart, demands in fact a real conversion, a willingness to strip oneself of illusory goods and to be rich only with the poverty of Christ. A prayer in which we are quite aware of what we are doing, in which we think we are plucking the fruits of our own efforts, remains in our reach; one who would descend into his heart must renounce these transitory riches, denude himself of everything in order to hear ‘what God may speak within’” (Dom Andre, III.13).

Finally - keep it simple: “Since He is always with me, prayer, the heart to heart exchange, should never end... I think that we must be so simple with God!” *St. Therese of Lisieux*

A Method for Meditative Prayer

St. Francis de Sales – *Introduction to the Devout Life*, 2nd Part, 1-8

1. **Before Prayer:** slow down for a moment *before* beginning - slow your pace and your breathing.
2. **Recollection:** ‘re-collect’ yourself. Your mind and heart are scattered by all of the places and things you are involved in. Collect yourself from all of these places and involvements. Draw all of yourself back into your own heart. Then, turn your whole heart, your whole self, “re-collected,” to God with a peaceful smile. Repeat this movement as often as necessary when prayer becomes scattered or when your thoughts during prayer return to worldly concerns.
3. **Beginning Prayer:** “Begin all your prayers, whether mental or vocal, in the presence of God. Keep to this rule without any exception and you will quickly see how helpful it will be.” Place yourself in His presence and invoke His assistance – a prostration of the soul with “*most profound reverence.*”

Simple statement to always begin prayer:

“Lord, I gently place myself in your presence, and I ask you to inspire me.”
Say this as many times as your mind wanders to return yourself to His presence.

4. **Structure of Prayer:** choose to meditate on a mystery from Scripture to help keep your mind from processing too many things at once. Allow the subject to be surrounded by silence and peace by letting other thoughts drift away from your attention. Turn the subject over in your heart, allowing the Lord to draw you into the mystery according to His Will. Sometimes, when drawn by God, you may choose simple emptiness and silence in His presence as a subject or direction of prayer.
5. **Distractions:** often we drift from the subject of meditation and become distracted. Getting angry at distractions pulls us further away from contemplation. When a distracting thought arises, try one of the following:
 - a. Move it softly to the side & say “Lord, I gently place myself in your presence. I ask you to inspire me.”
 - b. Offer that thought up to the Lord in smiling patience and ask Him to remove it from your mind.
 - c. Allow the thought to pass through your mind without giving it attention. See it coming, don’t reflect on it, and let it pass through.
6. **Concluding Prayer:** conclude your prayer in gratitude. Even if you have spent the whole time without consolation, you have spent time with Christ. Give thanks to God for His gifts and Mercy. Offer yourself completely to Him.
7. **Spiritual Bouquet:** “People who have been walking about in a beautiful garden do not like to leave without gathering in their hands four or five flowers to smell and keep for the rest of the day. In the same way, when our soul has carefully considered by meditation a certain mystery we should select one, two, or three points that we liked best and that are most adapted to our improvement, think frequently about them, and smell them spiritually during the rest of the day.”

On conduct after prayer: “After finishing your mental prayer, watch against disturbing your heart lest you spill the balm that it has received through prayer. I mean that if possible you must keep silence for a little while and gently transfer your heart from prayer to other duties. Preserve as long as you can the feelings and affections you have received. A man who has been given a precious liquid in a porcelain vase to carry home walks carefully, does not look from side to side, but looks now straight ahead for fear of stumbling against a stone or making a false step and now at the vase to see that it doesn’t spill. You must do the same thing after you finish your meditation. Don’t let anything distract you but simply look straight ahead. In other words, if you meet anyone with whom you have to talk, nothing can be done about it and you must adapt yourself to the situation. However, you must keep watch on your heart, so that as little of the liquor of holy prayer as possible is spilt out.” St. Francis de Sales also notes that, “since both prayer and your other duties are in conformity with God’s will, you must pass from one to the other with a devout and humble mind.”