

# A Praying Heart



# What is Prayer?

- Therese of Lisieux writes: 'For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy' (Story of a Soul)
- Teresa of Avila speaks of prayer as: 'intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with the One who we know loves us'(Life 8.5).
- 'Look at Him', she writes, 'He never takes his eyes off you'(Way of Perfection 26.3).
- John of the Cross reminds us that 'the language which God hears best is silent love'(Maxims on Love 53).

- Beauty of those who are caught up in the divine
- and express their experience in art
- especially the art of loving
- Experience of love is a sacred encounter
- Being attentive to this encounter = prayer
- Expect prayer to engage us in love-communion

## An Obedient (Listening) Heart

‘The whole aim of any person who is beginning prayer – and don’t forget this because it is very important – should be to prepare yourself with determination and every possible effort to bring your will into conformity with God’s will. The greatest perfection attainable along the spiritual path lies in this conformity. ... In perfect conformity to God’s will lies all our good’(Teresa, Interior Castle II. I. 8).

‘The soul remains under his touch like a lyre, and all His gifts to it are like so many strings which vibrate to sing, day and night, the praise of His glory’(Elizabeth of the Trinity, Last Retreat).

## Jesus' obedience

'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work'(John 4:34).

'I seek to do not my own will but the will of him who sent me'(John 5:30).

'The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him'(John 8:28-29).

## Disciple's obedience

'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven'(Matthew 7:21).

'Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'(Matthew 12:49-50).

## A Loving Heart

‘It is a dreadful thing to be beset by so many dangers and to be alone ... For this reason I would advise those who practise prayer, especially at first, to cultivate the friendship and company of others of similar interest ... Since people find comfort in the conversation and human sympathy of ordinary friendships even when these are not of the best kind, I do not know why those who are beginning to love and serve God in earnest should not be allowed to discuss their joys and trials with others - and people who practise prayer have plenty of both’(Teresa Life 7.20).

## A Free Heart

John of the Cross (Ascent I.II.4) reminds us that a bird cannot fly if its leg is tied, however thin the thread that secures it. Even the slightest attachment must be broken.

‘Prayer is self-surrender to God at every moment; the reality of our prayer will be the reality of our self-surrender, not how we feel, what we experience, the lights we get and so forth. Prayer is necessarily hard because self-surrender is hard’(Ruth Burrows To Believe in Jesus page 85).

‘You should not bear being attached to anything, whether it be to the practise of meditation, or to anything, whether sensory or spiritual, which delights you, or any way of thinking. You should be very free regarding everything, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction upon which you may want to lean would impede and disquiet you, and make noise in the profound silence of your senses and spirit, which you possess for the sake of this deep and delicate listening.’(John of the Cross, Living Flame 3.34).

## Father Pedro Arrupé SJ

More than ever, I now find myself in the hands of God.

This is what I have wanted all my life, from my youth.

And this is still what I want.

But now there is a difference;

the initiative is entirely with God.

It is indeed a profound spiritual experience

to know and feel myself so totally in his hands,

in the hands of this God who has taken hold of me.

## A Humble Heart

‘There are three things which are very important in helping us to preserve peace, both inward and outward. One of these is love for each other; the second, detachment from created things; the third, true humility, which is the most important of the three and embraces all the rest.’(Terese Way 4.4)

## Teresa of Avila

‘Humility, however deep it be, neither disquiets nor disturbs the soul; it is accompanied by peace, joy and tranquillity.

Although we are distressed by our sinfulness ...

this distress is accompanied by an interior peace and joy of which we should not like to be deprived.

Far from disturbing or depressing the soul,

it enlarges it and makes it fit to serve God better.

The other kind of distress only disturbs and upsets the mind and troubles the soul, so grievous is it ...

When you find yourselves in this state,

cease thinking, so far as you can, of your own wretchedness,

and think of the mercy of God

and of God’s love and his sufferings for us’ (Way of Perfection 39).



## Jesus gives us his heart

- ‘I have revealed you to them and will continue to do so, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them’(John 17:26).



- ‘I am in the Father and you are in me and I in you’(John 14:20).
- ‘I pray that they will be one as we are one, with me in them and you in me’(John 17:21).
- ‘I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already’(Luke 12:49).



In Rublev's icon, Jesus is in the centre. He is looking to his Father who is on his right, ever ready to carry out his Father's will, and always in communion with his Father.

The Father is looking towards the Spirit who is on Jesus' left.

The Spirit, ever ready to carry out the Father's will is looking at the Eucharistic gifts on the table. The one looking at the icon is invited to join them at the table.

Through the gift of the Spirit we are invited to pray with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me'(Galatians 2:20).

This transformation is a gradual process, as Paul tells us: 'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit'(2Corinthians 3:18).

## A Heart open to Holiness

‘The soul is God’s most beautiful creation. So then, soul, so anxious to know the whereabouts of the One you love so that you may seek Him and be united to Him, know that you yourself are His dwelling place, his secret chamber, the place where he lies hidden. Rejoice and be glad, for all you ever wanted, all you ever hoped for, is so close as to be within you. You cannot be without Him.’

(John of the Cross Spiritual Canticle 1.7).

## A Silent Heart

‘Our greatest need is to be silent before this great God with the appetite and with the tongue, for the only language the hears is the silent language of love.’(John of the Cross, 22nd November 1587).

‘Activism takes cover under numerous and often noble excuses: necessities of life, urgent duties of one’s state, fear lest a certain milieu win and dissipate people, joys to be had in generous action which opens up and enlarges one’s power, the aridity and apparently useless abjection of prayer, and above all a great pity for those around us whose misery is a constant appeal to our Christian charity.’

(Fr Marie-Eugène OCD, I want to see God, page 420).

Let those, then, who are singularly active, who think they can win the world with their preaching and exterior works, observe here that they would profit the Church and please God much more, not to mention the good example they would give, were they to spend at least half of this time with God in prayer, even though they may not have reached a prayer as sublime as this. They would then certainly accomplish more, and with less labour, by one work than they otherwise would by a thousand. For through their prayer they would merit this result, and themselves be spiritually strengthened. Without prayer they would do a great deal of hammering but accomplish little, and sometimes nothing, and even at times cause harm.' (John of the Cross Spiritual Canticle Stanza 29,3).

## A Believing Heart

Faith being the only proximate and proportionate means for attaining to God in our progress towards divine union, we must not prefer any natural light to it, nor any supernatural gift however elevated in may be. This utter detachment from all created goods constitutes the whole of contemplative asceticism. Thus faith and hope are purified, and perfect union with God is realised according to the measure of our grace'(Marie-Eugène OCD I want to see God, page 547-548).