



PREPARATION FOR PRAYER

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I often come back to the subject of prayer because it is so fundamental in the religious life and all depends on it. Today, I want to speak about the preparation for prayer; that is, the dispositions necessary for prayer and for a life of recollection and prayer.

The first disposition is detachment from earthly things. You are detached, you will say, but how often our minds go back to these things! You came here for a life of meditation, contemplation and union with God, but that will never be possible if you continue to live in the things you left behind: family, friends... I don't mean that we shouldn't pray for them, and for all those who need our prayers. But remember what Our Lord said to St Catherine when she was praying for her father: "Think of me" my daughter and I will take care of your family." Do the same; think of God and God will take care of those you love. In thinking about them, what good do you do them?

The imagination was given to us so we could create an idea of God; so we can see the Creator in the beauty given us in nature. Imagine that you are like the flower of the field, which lasts just a day but which will be born into an eternal springtime. If our imagination holds us in earthly things, affections and memories, it does us harm and a prayer life is not possible.

Why did the hermits take distance from so many things? It wasn't just to be alone. They would have been very unhappy if they had carried into their solitude the memory of all they had left behind. They were supposed to leave all of the past at the door and strip themselves of all that was earthly. I knew a Trappist superior who, with few resources, had to feed three hundred people every day. It was a cause of worry for him and rightly so. But, when he went to the chapel, he paused at the door for a moment and said: "Get behind me, all of that," and left his concerns outside. Entering the church, he was occupied only with God. His concerns were legitimate but we have to make a distinction.

I don't mean that we just walk off and leave our legitimate concerns... When we are at work, we have to be occupied with them. But the grand affair of your life is to be united to God. Don't keep going back to the things you have left. They will separate you from God and will keep you from recollection and prayer.

The second important disposition for prayer is to watch over what's going on inside, our interior movements. I mean our little passions, jealousies, fears, impatience, sulking, etc. If a person gets carried away often by her "movements" of character, it's difficult that she be calm enough for her soul to be united to God and dependent on Our Lord. Our Lord and our Lady were models of gentleness and peace. All Jesus' thoughts and words gave glory to God. When you let yourself get carried away by little things, when you give in to those first movements, you do not depend on Our Lord and give glory to God. Watch over those first reactions that are not from the Spirit of God. They make prayer hard.

Avoid also the disposition that leads you to make up stories. People who don't have a

lot to do, interiorly compose little stories, tell themselves tales. Some people were born writers or poets and they haven't had an opportunity to develop their talent. So they use it interiorly and take pleasure in it. There are authors who live in their books, see their characters acting, make them talk etc. That's an obstacle to prayer. You have to give up interior amusements or there will be no spirit of prayer.

This is especially true with movements of the heart, because, if our attachments are too great or we give in to contrary sentiments, the soul is troubled. We are not calm enough to give ourselves to God, and we are not in the disposition to love God above all things and our neighbor for love of God. If you give in to antipathies, you are not in the love that God asks of us in order to be with us, love by which all creatures, those you like and those for whom you do not feel affection, are seen in the heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ. That's where we can look at them, find them and be with them, without being separated from God.

You know the saying of Saint Francis de Sales: "When you want to drink at a spring, if you take away your cup, it will be empty. But if you leave it so the spring can fill it, it will always be full." If we leave our hearts with Jesus, they will always be full of good things; they will never be empty of his love, nor of sincere love for our neighbor. But if we just follow our inclinations and feelings, everything will spoil; we'll react excessively and be led hither and yon.

I would also tell you, watch over your judgments. What is the great fruit of prayer? It is, as Our Lord asked of us, that we be like a branch on the vine. *I am the vine and you are the branches; if the branch does not remain attached to the vine, it will dry up and will be thrown in the fire; but whoever remains in me and I in him, will bear much fruit* (John 15, 5-6). A branch attached to the vine lives from the sap of the vine, it does not just live its own life. The branch that has been cut off soon dries up and is good only for the fire. The aim of prayer is to be united to Our Lord Jesus Christ, to have our life in him, to be rooted in him, to know that he is in the depths of our heart, to let ourselves be guided, penetrated by this life which is Jesus-Christ, not by our own life. –We have natural sap in us which is not worth much; we have divine sap which is Jesus Christ, received in Baptism, the sacraments. Our minds and thoughts should be filled with this sap, with thoughts of faith, of submission to the will of Our Lord and his Spirit. Let our judgments be inspired by the divine sap and let everything in us be submissive to the Spirit of our Lord.

I guarantee you that if your thoughts are of God, if you fill your imagination with good and holy things that incline your heart towards God, if your heart dwells in the love of God and neighbor, if you don't let yourself get carried away by the movements of character, if you watch over your feelings and reactions and keep yourself in dependence on Jesus Christ in your thoughts affections and even your character, Our Lord will help you when you go to prayer and you will make great progress if not this year, then next year....

There is your greatest good: to find Our Lord, know that he is there. Give yourself to Him, love Him, and adore Him. He will become your all and you can say with St Francis of Assisi: "My God and my all," because you have left the rest aside and wanted only Him... This is the disposition we had when we entered the convent: to find Our Lord Jesus Christ - and we find him through prayer.
