

HOW TO MEDITATE

Normally when we pray we like to speak a lot but we don't like to listen. Prayer in itself is as necessary for our spiritual life as breathing is necessary for our bodily life. Our, spiritual life depends on God's grace, and He has, so to speak, given us the power to breathe it in prayer. Not to pray will have the same results for the life of the soul as not to breathe would have for the life of the body, that is sickness and death.

By example and word, Christ taught the necessity of prayer. Prayer means to be with God and sometimes speak with Him. The majority of people know only one kind of prayer called vocal prayer because we do it with our voices (i.e. standard prayers like Our Father, Hall Mary, or with words in the silence of our mind). These prayers are wonderful. We need to practice them. However they are not enough to nourish our soul. Sometimes, if we don't pay attention, we run the risk of saying prayers without praying.

The majority of people like to speak to God but very few speak **with** God. To speak with God implies that we also listen, not only speak. How can we listen to God? God speaks to us first of all through His Word which is the Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church (The teachings of Christ, writings of the Popes, of the Saints etc.). He also speaks to us through the events of our lives, through the people that we meet, through the circumstances, through the inspirations that He sends to us. We need to listen more. It is very hard for us to listen. But, besides vocal prayer we also need mental prayer. This is our way of listening to God. Mental prayer is also called meditation.

Meditation is simply reflecting on God's word with the help of the Holy Spirit. It is a very simple process that involves your mind, your heart (emotions and affections), and your will. Meditation does not mean that we are looking for visions or extraordinary insights. It is no different than paying attention to someone you care for. Anyone can do it. While meditation is not the only way to pray, thanks to teachings and experience of many saints, this is a simple method which seems to be particularly effective in helping people get started.

PREPARATION

- 1) **Recollect.** Take a minute or two to close your eyes and recall the presence of God within you. Let everything go from your day - your worries, tasks, timelines - just let your spirit rest in God's.
- 2) **Invite the Holy Spirit** to come and guide your time of prayer.
- 3) **Read** the chapter, paragraph, or Psalm containing a verse you would like to reflect on, and then re-read the verse alone.

BODY OF THE PRAYER

- 1) **Reflection** (involves your mind): Close your eyes and think about the words. This is reflection. You may find taking a few of the words at a time and mulling over them in your mind to be helpful. Reflection is when you focus your attention on a passage, idea, icon, etc. God will give you insights and experiences of Himself, but you need to participate by thinking about the passage, icon, or image of Jesus' life. You can meditate in a number of different ways. Sometimes the verse you are using will affect how you meditate. For example:
 - If you are using a verse from the Gospels, you can use imaginative meditation. You could imagine that you are there and that Jesus is speaking to you. You could imagine that you are Jesus, one of the disciples, or other characters in the story that are being healed, rebuked, forgiven, or welcomed.
 - You can also just think about the meaning of something that you read. You should learn about the context of the passage by reading the surrounding text and using footnotes in your Bible. You can think about parts of other prayers that you may have memorized or other passages you know that are related to the passage you have chosen.
 - You can think about how it applies to your life. For example, you might think of some sin in your life or someone else's sin has hurt you, and of how God can bring forgiveness and healing to that sin or injury.
- 2) **Affectional** prayer (involves your heart): While you are reflecting (thinking about these things) your heart may be inspired to talk to God about a particular aspect. As you focus on this aspect, your desires or affections are engaged. You may or may not experience some emotions, but your affections can always be engaged. These affections or desires are the more subtle parts of your heart that interpret what your mind has processed, inspire you to pray, and engage your soul to act. You can invoke these affections with or without feelings. If you experience feelings it is easier to identify an area the Holy Spirit is touching. If you do not have a particular feeling, you can still be aware that you are drawn to focus on a particular area. This movement to focus on something is what we call affection, or desire. When you find an area of focus spend some time talking to God about what your heart is experiencing. For instance, if you were meditating on a verse on Jesus' suffering and death and you think of a time that you suffered unjustly, that is a signal that you should pray about it you can talk it through with God and thank Jesus for suffering that same humiliation and rejection like you. You might ask Him to help you forgive those who did it to you by asking the Holy Spirit to help heal you, and to guide you in how to respond in a Christ-like manner to those who hurt you.
- 3) **Resolution** (involves your will): After you have thought about Christ and His words or actions, and your heart is on board - with or without emotions - you should now engage your will. Your ability to change, and grow in Christ-likeness comes from this part of the prayer. A will that is resolved to

do good is fortified by the Holy Spirit. You will want to make a precise and practical resolution in response to your experience in prayer. For example, if you experienced gratitude while meditating on the suffering and death of Christ, you might make this type of a resolution: “Lord, I resolve to spend more time thanking you when I pray and less time talking about what I think I need. Note that it is *precise*; it is attached to your time of prayer. It is *practical*; you are now resolving to never be unthankful again. Note, that resolutions are not promises or vows ... you do not sin if you do not keep the resolution (unless of course the matter about which you have resolved involves sin). They are rather serious intentions of the will to which you commit yourself.

CONCLUSION

- 1) **Thank God:** When you are through you can simply thank God.
- 2) **Entrust your. Resolution:** Ask Mary, a favorite or patron saint, or your guardian angel for help. You can entrust your resolution to them and ask them to pray for you to help you.
- 3) **Carry a Word for the Day:** Carry in your heart the word you felt God speaking to you in prayer. Throughout the day as you seek to be recollected, or mindful of God’s presence with you, return to that word as a cherished gift of encouragement, love, or challenge to growth.

In closing, meditation can be defined as a reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into practice with the assistance of grace.

Meditation has a double finality, one intellectual and the other affective and practical. The intellectual purpose is to arrive at firm convictions concerning some supernatural truth; hence the importance of the intellect in meditation. But one could acquire firm convictions by speculative study, and therefore this cannot be the principal finality of meditation nor that which makes meditation true prayer. The most important element in meditation is the act of love aroused in the will on the presentation of some supernatural truth by the intellect. As St. Teresa points out, meditation consists not so much in thinking a great deal, but in loving a great deal. When the will bursts forth with love, an intimate contact is established between the soul and God, and then it is that the soul can truly be said to be praying. To read something spiritual is merely a preparation for the arousal of love.

According to, theologians, one can recite vocal prayer and even go to Mass and still remain in mortal sin. But no one can meditate daily and remain in mortal sin. Vocal prayer and mortal sin sometimes go together (sad to say). Mental prayer and mortal sin cannot go together: either you will leave mental prayer or you will leave mortal sin. When you really reflect on the truth and you relate what you read with your life you can’t go on with your sinful conduct. You want to reform your behavior.

Mental prayer engages the mind with its thoughts, the will desires the truth, the heart falls in love with the truth. Mental prayer transforms the person so that he/she can reach the fullness of Christian life, that is Holiness. This is true and everlasting happiness.