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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Let us review some writings of the Great Doctor of Prayer; St. Alphonsus Maria.

This part taken from: MEDITATIONS AND READINGS for every day of the year.

MENTAL PRAYER

I. Its Importance

In the first place, Mental Prayer is necessary in order that we may have light on the journey we are making towards eternity. The Eternal Truths are spiritual things which are not seen with the eyes of the body, but only in the mind by consideration. He that does not meditate does not see them; therefore he walks with difficulty on the way of Salvation. And further, he who does not meditate does not know his defects, and therefore, says St. Bernard, does not detest them. So also, he does not see the danger to Salvation in which he is, and therefore does not think of avoiding it. God enlightens us in Meditation. Come ye to him and be enlightened. (Ps. xxxiii., 6). In Meditation God speaks to us and makes us know what we are to avoid and what we are to do. I will lead her into solitude and I will speak to her heart. (Osee, ii, 14). St. Bernard says that Meditation regulates our affections, directs our actions and corrects our defects.

In the second place, without Mental Prayer we have no strength to resist temptation and practice virtue. St. Teresa used to say that when a man leaves off Mental Prayer, the devil has no need of carrying him to hell, for he throws himself into it of his own accord. And the reason is, that without Meditation there is no prayer. God is most willing to give us His graces; but St. Gregory says that before giving them He desires to be asked, and, as it were, compelled to give them through our prayers. But without Meditation there is no light: we walk in darkness, and walking in darkness, we do not see the danger we are in, we do not make use of the means to avoid it, or pray to God to help us, and so we are lost. Cardinal Bellarmine declared it to be morally impossible for a Christian who does not meditate to persevere in the grace of God; whereas he who makes his Meditation every day can scarcely fall into sin - and if unhappily he should fall occasionally, by continuing his prayer he will return immediately to God. It was said by a servant of God that "*Mental Prayer and mortal sin cannot exist together.*"

And further, Meditation is the blessed furnace in which souls are inflamed with divine love. In my meditation a fire shall flame out, says the Psalmist. (Ps. xxviii., 4). St. Catherine of Bologna said: "*Meditation is that bond which binds the soul to God.*" In

Meditation the soul, retiring to converse alone with God, is raised above itself. He shall sit solitary and hold his peace (Lam. ii., 28), says the Prophet Jeremias. When the soul sits solitary, that is, remains alone in Meditation to consider how worthy God is of love, and how great is the love He bears to it, it will then relish the sweetness of God and fill its mind with holy thoughts. There it will detach itself from earthly affections; there it will conceive great desires to become holy, and finally resolve to give itself wholly to God. And where have the Saints made those generous resolutions which have lifted them up to a sublime degree of perfection, if not in Mental Prayer? St. Aloysius Gonzaga used to say that “*no one will ever attain a high degree of perfection who is not given to much Mental Prayer.*”

Let us, then, devout ourselves to it, and not neglect it on account of any weariness that we may experience: the weariness which we endure for God will be abundantly recompensed by Him.

Resolve, then to make every day, either in the morning or in the evening - but it is better in the morning - half an hour's Meditation.

I beg you never leave off Mental Prayer, which you should practice at least once a day, although you may be in great aridity and feel great weariness in performing it. If you do not discontinue it you will certainly be saved.

II. Its end and object.

In order to practice Mental Prayer, or Meditation, well, and to make it truly profitable to the soul, we must clearly ascertain the ends for which we make it.

1. We must meditate in order to unite ourselves more completely to God. It is not so much good thoughts in the intelligence, as good acts of the will, or holy desires, that unite us to God; and such are the acts that we perform in Meditation, acts of humility, of confidence, self-sacrifice, resignation, and especially of love and of repentance for our sins. St. Teresa says: “*Acts of love are those that keep the soul inflamed with holy love.*”

2. We must meditate in order to obtain from God, by prayer, the graces that are necessary in order to enable us to advance on the way of salvation, to avoid sin, and to take the means that will lead us to perfection. The best fruit, then, that comes from Meditation is the exercise of prayer. Almighty God, ordinarily speaking, does not give grace to any but to those who pray. St. Gregory writes: “*God desires to be entreated, He desires to be constrained, He desires to be, as it were, conquered by importunity.*” At times, in order to obtain graces of special value, it is not enough simply to pray; we must pray urgently, and, as it were, compel God, by our prayers, to give them. It is true that at all times the Lord is ready to hear us; but at the time of Meditation, when we are most truly in converse with God, He is most bountiful in giving us His aid.

Above all, we must apply ourselves to Meditation, in order to obtain perseverance and the holy love of God. Final perseverance is not a single grace, but a chain of graces, to

which must correspond the chain of our prayers; if we cease to pray, God will cease to give us His help, and we shall perish.

He who does not practice Meditation will find the greatest difficulty in persevering in grace till death. Palafox, in his Notes on St. Teresa's Letters writes thus: "*How will the Lord give us perseverance if we do not ask it? And how shall we ask for it without Meditation? Without Meditation there is no communion with God.*"

III. Its place and time.

We can meditate in every place, at home or elsewhere, even when walking or working. How many are there who, not being able to do otherwise, raise their hearts to God and apply their minds to mental Prayer without for this purpose leaving their occupations, their work, or meditate even when traveling. He who seeks God will find Him everywhere and at all times.

The essential condition of converse with God is solitude of the heart, without which prayer would be worthless, and, as St. Gregory says: "*it would profit us little or nothing to be with the body in a solitary place, while the heart is full of worldly thoughts and affections.*" But to enjoy solitude of the heart, which consists in being disengaged from worldly thoughts and affections, deserts and caves are not, of course, necessary. Those who from necessity are obliged to converse with the world, whenever their hearts are free from worldly attachments, even in the public streets, in places of resort, and public assemblies, can possess a solitude of heart and continue united with God. All occupations we undertake in order to fulfill the Divine Will have no power to disturb the solitude of the heart. St. Catherine of Sienna truly found God in the midst of the household labors in which her parents kept her employed in order to draw her from devotional exercises; for in the midst of these affairs she preserved a place of retirement in her heart, which she called her cell, and there ceased not to converse with God alone.

However, when we can, we should retire to a solitary place to make our Meditation. Our Lord has said: "When thou shalt pray, enter thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret." St. Bernard says that silence and the absence of all noise almost force the soul to think of the goods of Heaven.

But at all times and in all places we can pray; it is enough for us to raise the mind to God, and to make good acts, for in this consists Mental Prayer.

With regard to the time to be spent in Mental Prayer, the rule of the Saints was, to devote to it all the hours that were not necessary for the occupations of human life. St. Francis Borgia employed in Meditation eight hours in the day. St. Philip Neri was accustomed to spend the entire night in prayer.

I counsel you to give at least two hours a day to Mental Prayer. It is certain that a half hour's Meditation would not be sufficient to attain a high degree of perfection; for beginners, however, this would be sufficient.

Mental Prayer is tedious to those who are attached to the world, but not to those who love God only.

Ah! conversation with God is not painful or tedious to those who truly love Him.

His conversation has no bitterness, His company produces not tediousness, but joy and gladness. (Wis. viii., 16). “*Mental Prayer*,” says St. John Climacus, “*is nothing else than a familiar conversation and union with God.*” St. Chrysostom says: “*In prayer the soul converses with God, and God with the soul.*” No, the life of holy persons who love prayer, and fly from earthly amusements, is not a life of bitterness. If you do not believe me, Taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Try it, and you shall see how sweet the Lord is to those who leave all things in order to converse with Him alone.

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