

Mental Prayer, or Daily Meditation

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“Mental prayer is nothing else than an INTIMATE FRIENDSHIP, a frequent heart-to-heart CONVERSATION with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved” St. Teresa of Avila (*Life*, viii).

ACTS – Adoration –adore him, praise him
Contrition –sorrow, tell him what you are sorry for, your sins, how you intend to do better
Thanksgiving –thank him for his many blessings to you, even thank him for your crosses
Supplication –petition, requests, intercession, ask him for what you need, and for what others need, prayer in the classical sense

An Apologetic for daily Mental Prayer:

Man's perfection consists in: union with God
The measure of earthly man's perfection is: Charity (St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II q180a1);
Love is the bond of perfection (Col 3:14)

Contemplation is the greatest means to growth in charity

Contemplation and action

Contemplation is our highest activity -it focuses our highest faculties (intellect and will) on the highest object (God)
Contemplation precedes action -we pursue in action that which our intellect has grasped as good for us
Contemplation will endure in heaven: The Beatific Vision; Love abides (I Cor 13:8;13)

The loving gaze of contemplation will be our activity in heaven (St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II q180 a4)

Those in the active apostolate thus need a way to become: “Contemplatives in the midst of the world” (St. Josemaria Escriva)

A distinct daily time for mental prayer enables:
contemplation in midst of the worldly activity
a spirit of recollection even outside of the monastery
the will to be turned to the Lord, the same Lord who the intellect contemplates

Contemplation fosters love (St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* II-II q180 a1)

The will moves the intellect to contemplate a truth

The intellect contemplates this truth

When the intellect grasps a truth it experiences delight

This delight is experienced in the will

And so the will increases in its love for the truth contemplated

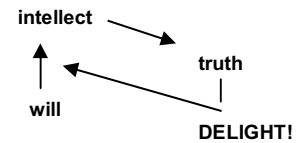
This holds for all truth, and all contemplation

It holds especially for God, since the delight is greater

e.g. a married man carries a photo of his wife. Gazing on the photo gives him joy, and increases his love for her.

This refers to contemplation in the broad sense: the intellect's simple grasp of an object, in a single gaze

Contemplation is the aim and highest form of mental prayer.



In our basic (non-mystical) contemplation:

The intellect ponders God and things as they relate to God:

the reason reasons about things, the imagination imagines things, the memory recalls things,
all as they relate to God.

The will also relates to such objects.

It experiences affections towards them –doing so in prayer in as much as they relate to God.

Affections –these are what are called forth from the will/heart

Topic

Mental prayer is often called ‘Daily Meditation’ because there is a topic we choose each day to meditate on.

Choose a different topic each day -don't just sit there empty-headed!

Choose topics that interest and inflame you - topics that will help you to pray

Use books with short dense chapters designed to aid prayer –do not use books that are academic/apologetic/catechetical

Note: Christian Meditation is **NOT the emptying of the mind** practiced by Eastern religions and semi-Buddhist Jesuits

Christian meditation proposes Christ to the intellect, that the will may love him –It fills the mind rather than empties it

St Teresa of Avila was very empathic about this point: “...however spiritual you are, you must not flee so completely from corporeal things as to think that meditation on the most Sacred Humanity can actually harm you” (*Interior Castle*, vii).

Method

A method helps guide our thoughts and affections in our mental prayer; It prevents our prayer decaying into wandering distractions

It helps develops this inter-play between the will and the intellect

The methods of St. Teresa, St. Alphonsus, and St. Sulpice, focus more on the **understanding** as a predominant operation of the intellect

e.g. considering the **significance** of the Gospel event

The method of St. Ignatius focuses more on the intellect's operation of the **imagination**

e.g. **picturing** a Gospel scene in our thoughts

-both methods enable the intellect to contemplate something that can then fire up the will in affections.

Example Death as topic

Source from *Imitation of Christ* chapter 23. A short text with much to think about for 30 minutes.

I read the text the night before. So I go to bed with it on my mind.

Before I start my 30 minutes I read my brief text again.

I **prepare** by calling God to mind etc

I **think** for 10 minutes about death. This thinking takes the form of a conversation with God.

‘Death is a consequence of the Fall, of sin. All men die, and their earthly goods are then worthless. What we take with us is our good deeds. The virtuous man of faith does not need to fear death.’

I end this by doing a self-examination about the topic: ‘I will die. Lord, I don't like to think about this

Then I make acts of the **will**.

‘I know that death is not a disaster if I have faith etc. Lord I trust in you, so I am not afraid to die. Lord I resolve to live my life every minute as if I might be ready to die.’ etc

Conclusion –I apologise to God for my many wandering distracted thoughts.

I **Summarise** my thoughts about what I have been praying about. –e.g. ‘Remember that thou art dust’

I **Resolve** In general: to think more often about my mortality

Specifically: to make my nightly examination of conscience (tonight) a better preparation for death

I **Sum up** with a verse ‘Remember man that thou art dust and to dust you shall return’ and call this line to mind during the day.

Method outline

A summary of the methods of St. Teresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and St. Sulpice.

Drawn from: Peter Thomas Rohrbach 'Conversation With Christ' (Rockford, Illinois: TAN books, 1980 reprint);
Dom. Vitalis Lehodey 'The Ways of Mental Prayer' (Rockford, Illinois: TAN books, 1982 reprint);

Previously: Choose and read your topic the night before
Re-read the topic before you start your 30 minutes

(a) Preparation –about 5 minutes

Call to mind the fact that God is present
e.g. in the tabernacle, sustaining the air we breath, or, use a picture of the Sacred Heart *etc*
Make an opening prayer to God, a prayer of faith that he exists and is here
Pray that he will guide your thoughts and make the time of prayer fruitful
Ask your guardian angel to help you

If we do not prepare properly then our whole time of prayer time will usually decay into mental wanderings because we have not first focussed ourselves on God.

Given that mental prayer enables us to be contemplatives in the midst of the world (having an awareness of his presence in our daily lives) some might rank the preparation as the most important part of our mental prayer.

Opening Prayer: 'My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I ask you for pardon of my sins and grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph, my Father and Lord, my Guardian Angel intercede for me.'

(b) The Body of the Meditation

(i) The **Consideration** –about 10 minutes

–we consider some topic in our intellect/mind.

We apply our **understanding** to attempt to fathom it,
we use our **memory** to help recall what relates to it,
and we use our **imagination** to help picture what it is like.

This needs to take a suitable chunk of time, maybe 10 minutes, for the beginner this will be the longer part of the meditation.
The **aim** of our thinking is to prepare our mind so that we have **enough to talk to God about**, and don't just end in distractions.
The consideration can, ideally, also be a conversation with God. Talking to God about how important a topic is. But we are considering it in the abstract, in general, not yet considering it as it applies to **me**.

(ii) The **Conversation** –about 10 minutes

–we then talk to God about what we have been considering.

Make a **Self-examination**: talk to God about how we stand with respect to the topic,
e.g. topic: humility, 'Lord, I know I'm not humble, especially...'

We engage our will in acts like love, gratitude, confidence, sorrow, humility *etc*, all the affections that are called up in our heart by the topic we are considering.

ACTS: Adoration Contrition Thanksgiving Supplication

Petitions make up a large part of this conversation.

e.g. topic: humility, 'Lord, make me more humble, especially in...'

Petitions cause us to link our desires with our prayer, and our desires with our intellect, with what we have been contemplating. Thus both the will and intellect are involved in affective prayer.

This is mental prayer strictly understood:

"Mental prayer is nothing else than an intimate friendship, a frequent heart-to-heart conversation with Him by whom we know ourselves to be loved" (St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, viii)

Consideration –understand the topic you are going to talk to God about

Conversation –what is called forth from your HEART in response to what you have been considering with your intellect

(c) Conclusion

Examination: talk to God about how you have prayed this 30 minutes:

e.g. well, badly, in a distracted manner, OK with the consideration but not the conversation *etc*.

Make **RESOLUTIONS** that follow up on your conversation with Christ

"The principle fruit of mental prayer consists in making a good resolution" (St. Vincent de Paul)

Without resolutions it is difficult for our prayer to impact on the rest of our life.

Without resolutions our pious affections in prayer remain little more than vague sentiments.

Make a **general** resolution, and a **specific** one –be realistic, don't make these too grand!

E.g. General: I resolve to pursue humility, Specific: I will be humble today by doing...

A Motto. Sum up your thoughts with a sentence you will carry with you for the rest of the day.

Repeat this motto to yourself, and plan when in the day you will remind yourself of this motto.

This helps integrate your prayer into the rest of the day.

It is often called the 'spiritual nosegay', a nosegay being a sweet smelling little thing that you carry around a sniff occasionally.

Concluding Prayer: 'I give you thanks, my God, for the good resolutions, affections and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, Saint Joseph, my Father and Lord, my Guardian Angel intercede for me.'

Distractions

–there is fruit to our mental prayer even if we are distracted

Distractions are normal –The mind cannot long be held aloft in divine thoughts (St. Thomas Aquinas)

Do not violently try to fight the distraction –this can make it even more distracting!

Rather, gently bring your mind back to the topic you were praying and meditating about. Return to the method:

Briefly remind yourself of God's presence, recall your topic, return to considerations and conversation.

When the mind wanders: return to the method, briefly running through:

(a) call God's presence to mind; (b i) consider the topic briefly again; (b ii) continue talking to God about the topic.

return to your use of reasoning in meditation until you spark off another affection in your heart

Journaling

It follows that 'journaling' is not mental prayer. We do not find 'journaling' recommended or practiced by the saints. They spent their mental prayer time in conversation and contemplation. Journaling would be a different function. Those saint who did write down their locutions, or an autobiography, did so in obedience to their superiors. Not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of those who would read their writings.

Note: when you have a conversation with someone you do not write down the conversation as you talk. This would be odd! **It would interfere with the spontaneous nature of conversation.** Similarly with our mental prayer –this is not the time for journaling.

Mental Prayer Guide

Select and read your topic the night before
Re-read it before you start.

(a) Preparation 5 minutes

Call to mind God's presence.
Ask his help to pray well.

(b) The Body of the Meditation

(i) Consideration –intellect 10 minutes

Consider the topic in your intellect.
Apply your understanding, reasoning,
memory, imagination to the topic.
Talk to God about the topic *in general*,
not just as it applies to you.

(ii) Conversation –will/heart 10 minutes

Talk to God about the topic, but as it
relates to *you*. This includes listening!

Self-examination and petitions.

Engage your will in acts of love,
thanks, confidence, sorrow, humility
etc., i.e. all the affections that are
called up in your heart by the topic.
This is mental prayer strictly speaking.

(c) Conclusion 5 minutes

Examination –of how you've prayed.

Resolution - **general and specific.**

Motto - Sum up your thoughts with a
phrase to repeat during the day.

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