

12. March 2023

LENTEN ITINERARY

Day 19: "On prayer"

Yesterday we had talked about the importance of a regular rhythm of prayer. If this becomes a norm for us, we will also have built a refuge to protect us from the temptations of the world, which want to draw us away from what is essential and drag us towards what is superficial.

The life of prayer is also oriented towards spiritual growth. This means that communion with God grows and becomes more natural, familiar and fruitful. But it is necessary to do our part to cultivate the life of prayer, cooperating with God's grace. Often laziness is an obstacle, and sometimes even wrong thoughts arise, calling into question the meaning of prayer and the like...

In no way should we allow ourselves to be carried away by such thoughts (see in this context the lecture on "How to deal with thoughts":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CscWQp6bVSo>). So Prayer is like the spiritual air we breathe, so that the life of grace can unfold in us. Just as on a physiological level we do not question whether or not to breathe, but simply do it, so it must be with our decision for prayer: we simply do it.

However, we must keep in mind in this context the words of the Lord: *"This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me"* (Mk 7:6). This means that our prayer should not take on a mechanical or even magical character, but that the heart should always be present. In prayer we meet our beloved Father, we listen to Him, we talk to Him, we repeat the words of Sacred Scripture...

Even if we do not always have pleasant and pious feelings, we should never neglect prayer. Precisely when we find it difficult, we can show the Lord our faithfulness by spending time in prayer. We cannot rely too much on our feelings, which are so changeable, but must rely on God's grace and the decision of our own will.

Apart from the prescribed prayers, it is always important to cultivate personal prayer, i.e. prayer in which we simply open our hearts to the Lord, talk to Him, listen to Him and stay close to Him.

It is advisable to have a balance between the various forms of prayer. Here we can list the following:

- Vocal prayer*, which are the prescribed prayers and the many intentions we place before the Lord.

- Meditative prayer*, which includes meditation on Sacred Scripture and the Holy Rosary with interiorisation of the mysteries of salvation.

- Inner prayer*, such as the prayer of the heart, jaculatories or the invocation of the Name of the Lord.

- Liturgical prayer*, which includes participation in a worthily celebrated Holy Mass, as well as taking part in certain offices of the Church's Liturgy of the Hours: for example, Lauds or Vespers, or others that are shorter, such as Terce, Sext, Nona, Compline or even the Office to God the Father

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M30xBHq-jZU>).

Certainly, people who live in the world and have their duties to perform there cannot have a rhythm like that of monks, whose lifestyle is totally centred on prayer, in accordance with Saint Benedict's maxim: "Nothing should come before prayer". Often - especially if they are mothers of a large family - they will have to offer their service to the Lord as "active prayer". And yet it would be advisable to try to cultivate inner prayer, which can even continue to resonate in the heart in the midst of the various tasks. This prayer of the heart involves repeating over and over again a particular jaculatory prayer: "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner". Over time, it can become so internalised that the Holy Spirit continues to pray it within us even when we are not consciously doing so.

Not everyone will have the time to practise it systematically. But perhaps one can adopt the essence of the prayer of the heart and invoke - or even chant - over and over again the Name of Jesus in one's heart...

Whoever wants to know more about prayer can find many books on this subject. I have also written and spoken on this subject on several occasions.

In the meantime, we are almost halfway through our Lenten journey, which, by the way, will cover a total of 39 days, before we enter Holy Week.

For me it is important to repeatedly mention the different stages of this path, so that we internalise and follow each of these steps. That is why we end today's meditation with a reminder of the topics discussed so far:

- The call to conversion.
- Fasting.
- Doing everything with our eyes fixed on the Lord.
- serenity in adversity
- Rejection of temptations in the Name of the Lord.
- Works of mercy.
- The Word of God.
- Penance.
- Purification of the outer and inner temple.
- The fight against vices: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.
- The virtues, beginning with fortitude and prudence.
- A regular rhythm of prayer.