



28. February 2026  
LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT  
Day 11: “Joy, prayer, and gratitude”

In today's reading (1 Thessalonians 5:14–23), we hear St. Paul's instructions to the community of Thessalonica on how they should live so that God's peace may reign among them and so that their whole being may be kept blameless “*at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” (v. 23) Today we will focus on three of the various exhortations that the Apostle addresses to the Thessalonians:

- “*Rejoice always*” (v. 16).
- “*Pray constantly*” (v. 17).
- “*Give thanks in all circumstances*” (v. 18).

***“Rejoice always.”***

Certainly, this is not a sentimental joy. However beautiful that may be, it can quickly fade and be replaced by other feelings. St. Paul must instead be referring to a spiritual joy: joy in God. By remembering every day that God loves us, we can find deep and lasting joy—especially when we realize that He does not withdraw His love even when we are weak and fall short of what we had set out to do. God has said an irrevocable “yes” to our lives, with which we can face the various “no’s” we encounter within and outside ourselves.

The joy of God fills our soul when we discover His wisdom in our lives and in the lives of others. There are countless reasons to rejoice in God: the depth of His Word, the beauty of His creation, His loving omnipotence, which is even capable of making use of evil... In short, it is simply joy in God, our Father, because He is who He is.

The source of this joy is activated when we think of God frequently—more than anything else—and when we go through our earthly life with our eyes fixed on Him and holding His hand. The following exhortation from the Apostle will help us make this a reality.

***“Pray constantly.”***

Prayer is the key to remaining in constant union with God. We know that if we neglect prayer, grace will become less and less effective in us. If we abandon it completely, it is

likely that faith will soon die in us and that other substitutes will begin to dominate our lives. Conversely, if we pray a lot and our whole life is permeated with prayer, God's grace will unfold more and more abundantly in us. Without a doubt, it must be sincere prayer, in which we lift up our hearts to God and do not simply recite certain formulas mechanically, without true interior participation.

Now, how can we understand the exhortation to pray "without ceasing"? Seen from the outside, it seems that only hermits in the desert could meet such a demand. However, it is a matter of converting our whole life, in its various aspects, into a prayer pleasing to God. St. Anthony the Abbot, a desert father, gave this advice: *"Wherever you go, always keep God in mind."*

Whatever we do, we can offer it to God and thus relate every area of our life to Him, as the Apostle to the Gentiles teaches us in another passage: *"Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* (Phil 4:6). *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men"* (1 Tim 2:1).

Another great help in fulfilling the exhortation to "pray constantly" is the so-called "prayer of the heart," discovered by the Desert Fathers as a way to always have the Name of the Lord on our lips and in our hearts. The classic ejaculatory prayer that is usually repeated over and over again is: *"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."* To learn more about the prayer of the heart, we recommend listening to the following lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8NmWQ1W0Ks>.

The point is that, in every way possible, we remain in union with the Lord and allow Him to permeate our lives more deeply, so that prayer becomes our life: in adoration, in thanksgiving, in intercession, in silent presence before the Lord, in mystical contemplation (if God grants it to us), and in the offering of all our actions, consciously performing them for the glory of God.

In short, in this way, God's life can penetrate us and make our lives immensely fruitful.

***"Give thanks in all circumstances."***

With this attitude, our lives become a beacon, and we begin to discover and become aware of all that God has given us. Even on a purely human level, grateful people bring joy and beauty into our lives. It is pleasant to be with them. But how much more does our life shine when we give thanks to the Lord and praise Him as the source of all good!

With this attitude, we can win people over and transmit a ray of God's light to them. And how happy the Lord will be that we recognize His goodness!

To conclude this meditation, I leave you with some words from St. Anthony the Abbot, in which he explains with great simplicity how the devil wants to rob us of our inner peace and, with it, prevent us from being grateful:

*“The devil wants to overwhelm and worry us with things from the past that cannot be changed (and that have already been forgiven) and torment us with fears about the future. But this prevents us from being grateful for God's guidance in the present.”*

This, in turn, has the consequence that joy in God cannot properly dwell in our hearts and that prayer becomes burdened with unnecessary worries.

As the flower of today's meditation, let us try to acquire joy in God, seek prayer, and turn our hearts into a garden of gratitude.

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**Meditation on the reading of the day:** <https://en.elijamission.net/2021/02/27/>

**Meditation on the Gospel of the day:** <https://en.elijamission.net/2024/06/18/>