19 November 2026
ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
Part IV
"A Look at Prayer"

Fundamental Reflections

Prayer is a great gift from God and the soul of the spiritual life. It gives us the opportunity to enter into an ever-deeper relationship with God even in this earthly life. Neglecting prayer would very quickly lead to the withering of our spiritual life, and we would become increasingly unable to resist the power of temptation. If, as we considered yesterday, we cultivate loving obedience to God, then prayer is a constant, living exchange with God. It is so important that the Apostle to the Gentiles even exhorts us: *"Pray constantly."* (1 Thess. 5:17)

All the diverse forms of prayer share a common goal: God is to be glorified, and the human person is to be transformed by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, until the face of Jesus shines ever more brightly within him and he is deeply united with God. This serves both his own sanctification and the sanctification of the world, for through the power of the Holy Spirit, the person who prays is driven to serve, in his own way, the spread of the Kingdom of God.

A simple way to enter the world of prayer is to realize that God's relationship with humanity is a relationship of love. The reason for our existence is God's love, which is directed toward us. We encounter His constant striving and courtship to make us human beings ever more receptive to this love.

From the human perspective, prayer is our response to His love. It begins the *"great conversation"* with God, as St. Teresa of Ávila, an outstanding teacher of prayer, calls it. It is kindled within us by the Holy Spirit. Scripture testifies:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. 27 And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because[c] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom 8:26–27)

Prayer is a work of the Holy Spirit, and we respond to this work. It involves a profound encounter between the human person and the innermost being of God. In other words: it is a meeting of hearts and an encounter in love.

We come to understand that it is precisely in the presence of God that we can respond—without fear or scruples, without false justifications or illusions, and without any performance-based preconditions—to the conversation of love that God began with us long ago and will never end.

All the various forms of prayer we encounter on our journey only attain their full value when they are spoken from the heart.

Yet, in our weakness, we will need a path to follow until our heart is fully set ablaze with love, for we are not always—and not in every area—fully awakened as persons. Much of us is still in a state of spiritual slumber. Yet it is precisely prayer that is capable of awakening our innermost being as human beings. Only when a person encounters unconditional love, entrusts himself to it, and responds to it, can he let go and entrust himself—with both his bright and his still-dark sides—entirely to this love—God Himself. He is able to free himself from the stranglehold of life—that stranglehold through which he strives in vain to secure the affirmation of his own life and thereby places himself in dependence on other people and external circumstances.

Prayer enables God, through His Spirit, to work within us in such a way that the inner attitudes and resistances that still stand in the way of His will can be overcome.

Collection and Silence

It is not without reason that spiritual teachers draw our attention to the fact that deepening our prayer life requires collection and silence. People all too easily become absorbed in the external activities of life, which weakens their ability to concentrate on intellectual or spiritual matters. Since prayer is essentially about listening and receiving, it is important, with God's help, to organize one's own thoughts and feelings and thus direct one's attention to God and the words of Sacred Scripture.

Careful preparation for prayer is therefore not "switching off," but rather attuning oneself and focusing. Nor is it "passivity," but rather a calm, concentrated activity.

Repeating certain prayer words, as in the Rosary, the Jesus Prayer, and similar spiritual exercises, serves this inner recollection and concentration. In doing so, the soul attunes itself to "the One," and the mind learns to focus as exclusively as possible on prayer.

Aids to Contemplation

To increase one's inner capacity for recollection and to attune oneself to contemplation—that is, to "inner prayer"—a prayer in which God increasingly becomes the Giver and the human being the receiver and listener—it is helpful to consciously use natural circumstances as means of recollection. Thus, a piece of music, God's creation, or any other edifying event can help focus our senses. We respond meaningfully when we allow this focus to take place and surrender ourselves to the impression the Lord has placed in our souls. Our ability to be moved and shaped is, at its deepest level, oriented toward God. When we open ourselves, the beauty and message of the moment shape us, and we foster a contemplative attitude—that is, a loving, receptive attitude. This sense of being moved takes on greater significance when it arises from love for the person of Jesus, from the Word of God, from the Holy Eucharist, from the liturgy, or simply from an encounter with God's love as it manifests itself in countless ways. It awakens a sense of wonder within us, and it is precisely this capacity that makes us receptive to God's mysterious workings even in our daily lives and heightens our awareness of His presence.

Meditation on the reading of the day in the Novus Ordo:
https://en.elijamission.net/the-lamb-is-worthy-3/