

MEDITATION MADE EASY

ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

METHOD OF MENTAL PRAYER

"Before prayer prepare thy soul; and be not as a man that tempteth God."—Eccl. xviii.

PREPARATORY PRAYER

O My God, I firmly believe that I am in Thy presence. How canst Thou suffer in Thy sight one who has so often offended Thee ? But I know that in Thy infinite goodness Thou dost invite and even command me to come to Thee. Behold me then at Thy feet. I will look up with confidence into Thy Divine face and ask Thee, Who art my Master, to teach me to understand the truth I am about to consider and to give me the grace to profit by it. Say a 'Hail Mary,' to Our Blessed Lady, adding St. Joseph

O my good Angel Guardian and Holy Patrons pray for me.

MEDITATION

FIRST of all, read for a short time, from a meditation book, some subject which you find helps you to pray. Read just sufficient so as to get a point to think about, such as for instance the striking words of our Lord: "What doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"

If you find the points of the public meditation does not help you, then take for your consideration. that subject which as a rule helps your devotion, e.g., the Passion, Blessed Sacrament, Sacred Heart, one of the Eternal Truths, or Perfections of God.

CONSIDERATION

MEDITATE for a while on the thought you will have taken for your consideration; that is, think for a short time what it means, what lessons it teaches you, and see how you stand in regard to this matter. Then, as soon as you feel you can speak to God, pass on to acts, affections, and petitions.

AFFECTIONS

These are short acts of:—

FAITH, HOPE, LOVE, HUMILITY, SORROW, PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT, ADORATION, PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING.

The most important of these acts are those of Love and Sorrow for Sin.

The act of love is the golden chain, which binds the soul to God. You should try to make as many acts of the love of God as you can.

These affections may be made in any order you wish. Begin with those acts which you find flow naturally from your consideration.

PETITIONS

ST. Alphonsus points out that the great fruit of mental prayer is that the soul realises its need of God's help in order to lead a good life. Hence it should ask God for those graces which the subject of meditation suggests.

There should be petitions for the increase of Faith, Hope, Charity, Humility, Sorrow, etc.

Earnestly ask God for Humility, Confidence, the Pardon of your Sins, Perseverance, and a happy Death. These petitions may be made in any order and can be united to the affections, e.g., "My God I love Thee, but increase my love."

RESOLUTIONS

These are of two kinds, GENERAL and PARTICULAR.

The general resolutions always remain the same, but the particular resolution can be changed.

1. GENERAL RESOLUTION.—To serve God and do all to please Him. Religious should also resolve to imitate Jesus Christ by their Recollection, Regularity and Resignation.

2. PARTICULAR RESOLUTION.—To avoid some deliberate sin, or to practise some virtue, as charity in word. For tepid souls, the first resolution must be to give up deliberate venial sin.

3. Religious should make their particular resolution the subject of their Particular Examen. They should also, after making their resolutions, renew their vows; for, adds the Saint, "this renovation is most pleasing to God."

CONCLUSION

THE: affections and petitions should occupy most of the time of mental prayer. In a half-hour's meditation give about three minutes to the Resolutions and Conclusion.

1. Thank God for the light He has given you.

2. Renew your purpose to fulfil your resolutions with God's help.

3. Recommend to God the Holy Souls in Purgatory, all poor sinners, and the Holy Father's Intentions, saying for them the "Our Father" and "Hail Mary."

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

"Before prayer prepare thy soul; and be not as a man that tempteth God." -Eccl. xviii.

1. The remote preparation for meditation is a good life. For success in mental prayer, the soul must have a sincere desire to serve God generously. Any deliberate sin spoils friendship with God. In the proximate preparation, three short acts should be made.

(a.) An act of faith in the presence of God.

(b) An act of humility and sorrow for sin.

(c) Petition for light.

2. Most of the difficulties about meditation arise from a misunderstanding as to what it is. The word "meditation" is misleading. Strictly speaking, it means thinking, reflecting, and reasoning. Hence, many falsely conclude that most of the meditation time must be spent in exercising their imagination. St. Alphonsus therefore, prefers to call it mental prayer, because the best meditation is made when the consideration is short, and the affections and petitions abound.

3. The progress of the soul does not consist in thinking much of God, but in loving Him ardently. Colloquy, that in speaking to God from one's heart, is the essential part of meditation. This spontaneous prayer, which comes after reflection, may be made with or without words.

4. Just as you apply the needle again when the thread is drawn out, so the consideration of another point should be made as often as you feel you have nothing more to say to God.

5. Always use the affections and petitions which you feel animated to make. Do not imagine you must keep a precise order. Constantly ask God's grace, which by the light of the meditation you find you need. "Ask and you shall receive" says Our Divine Lord. Supposing that without much consideration, you feel an affectionate remembrance of God, do not stop this loving contemplation to make other acts. If again, your soul is united to God by supernatural recollection, you should not then labour to perform any other acts than those to which you feel yourself drawn to make to him.

6. If you are unwell and find it is hard to meditate even for a short time, it is sufficient to have the good will and say: "My Jesus, mercy. Lord, have mercy on me." Never give up mental prayer on account of aridity. As a statue gives pleasure to its owner, so the willing presence of a soul before God, gives Him pleasure. It is by aridities and temptations that God proves His lovers.

7. If for half an hour you read a meditation book most of the time, this is spiritual reading. If during this time you think and reason, this is study. But if you think a little and then pray, this is mental prayer.

8. Indulgences —Plenary, once a month on the usual conditions, to the faithful who make mental prayer devoutly for half an hour, or at least a quarter of an hour a day. Seven Years and Seven Quarantines, every time one teaches or learns how to make mental prayer.—*Benedict XIV. Dec. 16, 1746.*

EXTRACTS FROM ST. ALPHONSUS' BOOK ON MENTAL PRAYER

Moral Necessity of Mental Prayer for Salvation

THE eternal truths are all spiritual, and cannot be seen by the eyes of the body but only by the eyes of the mind, that is, by thought and consideration. Now he who does not make mental prayer, does not see these truths, and consequently does not see the importance of eternal salvation, nor the means he should use in order to obtain it. This is why so many souls are lost: they neglect to consider the great business of their salvation and what they should do in order to be saved: "With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart." Jer. XII, 11. On the other hand, Holy Scripture says, that he who keeps before his mind the truths of faith, namely, death, judgment, the happy or unhappy eternity that awaits him, will never fall into sin: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin." Ecclus VII, 40.

He who makes mental prayer instantly sees his defects and the dangers of perdition to which he is exposed, and seeing them, he will take to heart the remedies to be used. David, by meditating on eternity, was excited to virtue, to sorrow, and to penance for his sins: "I thought upon the days of old: and I had in my mind the eternal years . . . and I was exercised, and I swept my spirit." Ps. LII, G.

Mental prayer acts on the human heart as fire acts on iron. When the iron is cold, it is difficult to work; but placed in a fire it becomes soft, and the smith can, without difficulty, give it any form he chooses. To observe the divine precepts and counsels, it is necessary to have a heart which is docile, ready to receive heavenly inspirations, and prompt to carry them into effect. Now man becomes easily moved and docile under the influence of grace—which he receives in mental prayer: there, by the contemplation of the divine goodness, man finds his heart warmed, softened and ready to obey the divine voice. On the other hand, without mental prayer the soul remains hard, obstinate, disobedient, and thus shall be lost: "A hard heart shall fare evil at the last; and he that loveth danger shall perish in it." Eccl. III, 27.

Without prayer of petition on our part, God does not give us His help, and without divine help we cannot observe the commandments. From this absolute necessity of prayer of petition, arises the moral necessity of mental prayer. For he who neglects mental prayer, and is distracted by the cares of this world, will know but little of his spiritual needs, little of the danger in which he is of losing his soul, little of the means to overcome temptations; he will know but little even of the necessity in which we are all to ask God for His grace; and thus he will give up the practice of prayer, and neglecting prayer he will certainly be lost.

Pray, pray, pray, never cease to pray; If you pray you will certainly be saved: If you do not pray you will certainly be lost.

The End for which we make Mental Prayer

FIRST of all, we make mental prayer that we may unite ourselves more closely with God. This union is not so much the effect of good thoughts in the mind as of good acts of the will, or holy affections.

Secondly, we make mental prayer to obtain from God the graces we need in advance in the way of salvation, and especially to obtain divine light in order to avoid sin and make use of the means which lead to perfection. The principal fruit of meditation is the exercise of prayer of petition.

Thirdly, we ought to make mental prayer not for the sake of spiritual consolation, but, as a primary end, to learn of God what He wishes us to do. It is true, that God is wont to console souls whom He loves, in the time of meditation; but these delights do not last all through one's life: on the contrary, holy souls for the most part experience much dryness of spirit in mental prayer. Happy is he who does not leave off meditation in the time of desolation.

PRAYER OF ST. ALPHONSUS

MY Jesus, Thou hast loved me in the midst of pain; and in the midst of pain I wish to love Thee. Thou hast reserved nothing for Thyself. Thou hast given Thy blood and Thy life to gain my love; and shall I continue as hitherto to love Thee so little? No, my Redeemer, it shall not be so, my ingratitude is already sufficiently great. To Thee I consecrate my whole heart. Thou alone deservest all my love. Thee alone do I wish to love. My God, since Thou wishest that I be entirely Thine, give me strength to serve Thee as Thou deservest during the remainder of my life.

Pardon my tepidity and my infidelity. How often have I omitted mental prayer in order to indulge my caprice! Alas how often, when it was in my power to remain with Thee in order to please Thee, have I not spent my time with creatures offending Thee! Oh, that so many lost years would return! But since this is not possible, O my beloved Lord, I now at least consecrate to Thee all the time that remains to me. I love Thee, O my Jesus! I love Thee, O Sovereign Good! Thou art and ever shall be the only love of my soul.

O Mother of fair love, O Mary, obtain for me the grace to love thy divine Son, and to spend the remainder of my life in His love. Thou obtainest from Jesus all that thou desirest; from thee do I hope to obtain this gift.

ASPIRATIONS OF ST. ALPHONSUS

My Jesus, Thou alone art sufficient for me.

O loving Heart of Jesus, inflame this poor heart of mine.

Before I die, make me all Thine own.

Eternal Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, have pity on me.

My God, I desire Thee alone.

I desire only Thee, and I desire all that Thou desirest.

Grant that when I first behold Thee, my Jesus, I may behold Thee appeased.

Rather let me die, than offend Thee more.

I should be too ungrateful to Thee, my God, if after so many graces I were to love Thee but little.

Grant me to know the immensity of Thy goodness, that I may indeed love Thee.

O eternal God, I hope to love Thee for all eternity.

Oh, That I had always loved Thee ! Oh, that I had died rather than have offended Thee.

I give Thee my will, my liberty, dispose of me as Thou pleasest.

May my only pleasure be to please Thee

Thou art Omnipotent; make me holy.

My Jesus, when shall I begin to love Thee, as Thou hast loved me?

Thou hast loved me without reserve; I wish to love Thee without reserve.

My Jesus, grant that I may die, saying, I love Thee, I love Thee.

SAYINGS OF ST. ALPHONSUS

The first means to love Jesus Christ, is mental prayer.

Mental prayer is a familiar conversation and union with God.

It consists not so much in thinking as in making affections, petitions and resolutions.

If God does not bestow His graces upon us, the fault is ours; it is because we do not ask them of Him. All mental prayer should consist in acts and petitions.

It is impossible for him who perseveres in mental prayer to continue in sin.

Remember that the devil labours hard to disturb us in the time of meditation, in order to make us abandon it. Let him who omits mental prayer on account of distractions be persuaded that he gives delight to the devil.

In going to meditation never propose to yourself your own pleasure and satisfaction, but only to please God, and to learn what He wishes you to do.

Many say the Rosary, the Office, and perform works of devotion; yet still continue in sin. But mental prayer and sin cannot exist together.

It is morally impossible for a religious who is not a lover of mental prayer, to be a good religious. Mental prayer is the blessed furnace in which souls are inflamed with the love of God: All the saints have become saints by mental prayer.
