For Personal Reflection

?

1. How important is prayer in my life?
2. Do I pray?
3. When do I pray?
4. Where do I pray?
5. How do I pray?
6. What method (or methods) of prayer do I experience as more fruitful or helpful to my attempts to live a devout life?
7. What method (or methods) of prayer do I experience as awkward, difficult or unsuitable for me?
8. Do I stick with one method of prayer, or do I use several? What kind or kinds? Why?
9. What new or untried method of prayer might I be willing to use in the future?

Further Reading

Introduction to the Devout Life: St. Francis de Sales.

Treatise on the Love of God. St. Francis de Sales.

Pulpit and Pew. A Study in Salesian Preaching. Arthur Kerns, MSFS: 1976.

De Sales
SPIRITUALITY SERVICES
"practical paths to holiness"

A Ministry of

OBLATES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES
V·J
TENUI DIMITTAM NEC
WILMINGTON–PHILADELPHIA

Visit us on the Internet:

www.oblates.org/dss

Email us:

dss@oblates.org

Volume 5 **Number 12**

Salesian Perspectives is a series of pamphlets published by De Sales Spirituality Services. The series offers practical approaches to holiness based on the lives and legacies of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane de Chantal. Subscription information is available by contacting De Sales Spirituality Services.

© 2005 by De Sales Spirituality Services. All rights reserved.

Three Ways...

Michael S. Murray, OSFS

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

...To Pray

A prayer life is essential for those who wish to live a life of devotion. Francis de Sales described prayer as "a stream of holy water that flows forth and makes the plants of our good desires grow green and flourish and quenches the passions that lie within our hearts." (Introduction to the Devout Life, Part II, Chapter 1)

"Francis was no stranger to the challenges of practicing mental prayer, meditation, contemplation or 'prayer of the heart.'"

What is prayer? In his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis wrote: "Prayer, generally speaking, comprehends all the acts of contemplation...a conference or conversation with God...a discussion with the divine majesty...an ascent or elevation of the mind to God. To the extent that prayer is a colloquy, discussion, or conversation of the soul with God, then by prayer we speak to God and God in turn speaks to us. We aspire to God and breathe in God; God reciprocally inspires us and breathes upon us." (Book VI, Chapter 1)

Of all the methods of prayer, Francis recommended "mental prayer, the prayer of the heart, and particularly that which centers on the life and passion of our Lord. By often turning your eyes on Christ in meditation, your whole soul will be filled with him. You will learn Christ's ways and form your actions after the pattern of his." (Introduction, Part II, Chapter 1)

Mental prayer. Meditation. Contemplation. Francis observed: "They might seem to be words from another world, so few people try to grasp their meaning." (Pulpit and Pew, page 191) For many of us, therein lies the rub: we are intimidated by and/or are discouraged in our attempts to practice mental prayer. We tell ourselves that we aren't good at it, we get too distracted or it requires too much time or effort.

And we stop praying.

Francis was no stranger to the challenges of practicing mental prayer, meditation, contemplation or "prayer of the heart." He also realized (from his own experience and the experience of others) that just as there are a variety of people and personalities, there is more than one way to pray.

He mentions three. (1) Vocal prayer, (2) mental prayer and (3) the prayer of life or good works.

"To the extent that prayer is a colloquy, discussion, or conversation of the soul with God, then by prayer we speak to God…"

"*Vocal* prayer consists in making use of a ready-made formula of words provided for us, trying to mean what we say." (Pulpit and Pew, page 180)

"*Mental* prayer involves beginning with a thought or feeling with meaning and then expressing it in some kind of formula, whether a standard one or something of our own. In many cases, there may be no need to even use words at all...It is the heart's love that holds the ear of God." (*Ibid*, pp. 180-181)

"The *prayer of life* is the prayer of our good deeds, a hidden prayer. The good deed treasured in poor peoples' hearts speaks for us to God." (*Ibid*, p. 181)

"Prayer is a stream of holy water that flows forth and makes the plants of our good desires grow green and flourish…"

Common to these (and other) forms of prayer is the simple — yet powerful — act of *asking*. "All prayer implies asking God for something: God's glory or our need. It is our duty to pray, for...although God has no need of our prayers, they are useful to us by keeping alive in us the sense of our obligations to God." (*Ibid*)

Prayer is to the soul what breathing is to the body: neither can continue or flourish without the other. But adapt your practice and type of prayer to the state, stage and circumstances of life in which you find yourself. Don't make prayer more complicated than it needs to be, while keeping it as important as it ought to be.

I once told my novice master that, much to my shame, I was convinced that I could not pray deeply. He told me: "When you cannot pray deeply, at least be a deep person...who prays."

However deep, shallow, long or short, remember to pray any way, all ways...each and every day.