

Summary of *The Spiritual Life* by A. Tanqueray (243-250)

What is Prayer?

(Presupposes some knowledge of God and of oneself—i.e. I am dependant on God and need to relate to Him)

- 1) "An elevation of the soul to God" (St. John Damascene, qtd. In Tanqueray, 243.)
- 'elevation' means detaching from self-centered or worldly thoughts and focusing on God
- 2) "A familiar conversation with God" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *ibid.* 243)
- 3) Simply asking God for what we need.

Categories of Prayer:

- 1) Prayer of Worship—a response to reflecting on Who God is
 - a. Adoration—We acknowledge God to be supreme in our lives and our total need for Him
 - b. Thanksgiving—recognizing God is not only *Lord* of our lives but also the source of all our blessings—therefore "it is truly right and just" to give Him thanks "always and everywhere" (Preface of the Mass, ICEL)
 - i. "In all things give thanks, for this is the will of God" (1Thess 5:18)
 - ii. By reflecting on God's generosity to us, we come to give thanks more freely
 - c. Reparation—Recognizing God's goodness and our duty to use His gifts wisely, we realize that we often abuse his gifts by sinning. This is an injustice that requires reparation. This is done by:
 - i. "Acknowledgment of our faults
 - ii. Sincere sorrow for them
 - iii. Courageous acceptance of the trials God...may see fit to send us
 - iv. Offering of ourselves...in union" with Christ (Tanqueray, 246)
- 2) Prayer of Petition— Asking for what we need honors God because it recognizes His power and desire to give us what we need ("Ask and you shall receive").
 - a. It also is an act of humility because we acknowledge our *need* for help
 - i. We need *natural* help to sustain our lives
 - ii. We need *supernatural* help to guide us and give us the strength to do what is right.

[Why do we need to ask for things if God already knows what we need? God wants us to grow in our awareness of our needs—if we never had to ask for anything, we might be tempted to think we are self-sufficient.]

Forms of Prayer:

- 1) Mental—"interior act of the mind or heart...such as recollection, consideration, reasoning, self-examination, the loving thought of God, contemplation, a longing of the heart for God..."(248)
- 2) Vocal—Expressed not only in word, but *act*—using not only our heart but our *bodies* in prayer. Speaking prayers aloud as well as bodily gestures can increase devotion and intensify sentiments of the heart as well as build up others who hear or see them. (248)
- 3) Private-devotional prayer
- 4) Public-communal prayer "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am..." (Mt 18:20)

The Our Father as the Model of all Prayer

-Taught to us by Jesus when the disciples ask Him—"Teach us how to pray"

- 1) We address God firstly-- "Our Father who art in heaven"- and acknowledge God as One who loves us as adopted children and Who is all powerful.
- 2) Then we ask for everything we desire in order of importance:
 - a. God's glory—"Hallowed be thy name"—may His name be known by all and praised

- b. Heavenly justice and peace—"Thy Kingdom Come"
- c. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"—places confidence that if God's will is done, all will be glorious
- d. Then we ask for everything we need, both materially and spiritually—"Daily Bread"
- e. Then we ask God to remove from us all that could impede us from heaven—Sin, temptation and physical evil. "Forgive us our sins...lead us not into temptation...deliver us from evil."

How to Pray

Fr. Mark Bentz, STL

Summary of *Time for God*, by Jacques Philippe

-It's not about you!

-Prayer, even the desire to pray, is a gift from God that we can't do without His help

Therefore, any 'techniques' should be seen as a tool to help us pray, rather than seen as 'the secret' to praying or 'experiencing' God's presence—WE CAN'T MAKE OURSELVES EXPERIENCE GOD using techniques. *Everything is grace*, as St. Augustine tells us. Any method that *guarantees* an experience of God is *not* Christian.

Our 'method', therefore, is trying to create the *dispositions* in our hearts for prayer and deepen them. "God will do the rest" (13)

Fundamental dispositions:

1) Faith

- a. in God's presence and goodness to us
- b. that He will give us everything we need and more than we ask for

2) Perseverance and Fidelity

- a. Once we decide to pray, the first battle is staying faithful to regular prayer, come what may! Love is proven through fidelity—if we can't stay faithful to prayer, how can we say we truly love God? (17)

3) Purity of Intention

- a. Praying only to please God, not to feel good—if we are seeking ourselves and our own satisfaction, we will soon abandon prayer when it becomes dry.
 - i. It is like marriage—we will abandon it if we are only in it for our pleasure
- b. This is impossible to do by ourselves! All of us have some selfish motivations for praying at different times of our lives. The way to attain purity of heart is to ask God for it, humbly admitting your limitations. God will purify you gradually *if you persevere*. (19)

4) Humility—"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5)

- a. We have to be comfortable with our poverty—we will be distracted, bored, and painfully aware of our own weakness at times in prayer, but the humble are not discouraged by this. They simply offer their wretchedness to God, knowing that His power can overcome any obstacle.
- b. We can actually *rejoice* in our weakness, because it reminds us how much we depend on God for everything.

How to increase determination to persevere!

- 1) **Prayer is necessary to go to heaven!**—all the Saints pray! Especially those who worked with the poor—St. Vincent de Paul would pray 2-3 hours before beginning his day (24).

- a. Without prayer, holiness is *impossible*. We will not overcome our vices without it and the Sacraments will not have as great an effect as they should. Prayer fertilizes the ground of our souls.

Common objections to be overcome:

- 1) **“I don’t have time to pray”**—“No one ever starved because they didn’t have time to eat” (26)
We make time for what is important to us! We need to reorder our priorities
 - a. Mother Theresa said, “Everyone needs to pray one hour every day...if you are busy, pray two hours!”
 - b. We find that if we make time for God, there is enough time for the rest and we are more efficient
- 2) **“We should be serving others instead of praying all the time”**—As if they are mutually exclusive! Mother Theresa’s sisters and St. Vincent de Paul would say that without prayer, their activity is fruitless.
- 3) **“I make my work into a prayer”**—while it is true that we *should* pray always, even while working, the reality is that if we spend no dedicated prayer time, it is *unlikely* that we can be recollected constantly in our daily lives
- 4) **“I don’t want to force prayer—I only pray when I feel like it”**—this person will never pray! The desire to pray is *unreliable*. Also, Scripture says “Pray always” (Luke 18:1)
 - a. Our prayer must be inspired by *Truth* and not feeling. Whether I feel like it or not, God is worthy of my praise and I have a duty to pray. Feelings are a nice bonus when they come
 - b. Love is proven when there is no sensitive reward. It is not somehow ‘inauthentic’ to pray when we don’t feel like it, anymore than it is to do something nice for our spouse when we don’t ‘feel like it’. If husbands and wives only do things for each other when they ‘feel like it’, that marriage won’t last
- 5) **“I’m a sinner and I’m just getting worse, I should stop praying”**—This is false humility. The antidote is not stopping prayer, but throwing ourselves at the mercy of Jesus, humbly admitting that *I can’t make myself a saint*—only God can heal my sinfulness!
 - a. St. Teresa of Avila describes how the Devil uses this trick often because, “He knows...that whoever perseveres in mental prayer is lost to him, that all the falls he may cause them only help them, through God’s goodness, to spring back even higher in God’s service; so it matters to him a lot”

How to progress in prayer

- 1) Renounce self-will and do the will of God (39)
- 2) Desire holiness—otherwise prayer will be a superficial exercise

Mental Prayer—How to

- 1) **Set aside time**
- 2) **Put yourself in God’s presence—and Stay there!**
 - a. If you can do that, that’s the best thing there is!
 - b. Remember it is not primarily about what *you* do, but what God does *in you*.
 - c. “I am nothing but a block of wood; set fire to it!” (St. Francis de Sales, qtd. in *ibid* 52)
- 3) **Remember the primacy of love**
 - a. Acknowledge your poverty and let yourself be loved by God!

- b. Not an emotion, but commitment to trust God and give ourselves more fully to Him—any thoughts or considerations that lead us to this kind of love are to be encouraged in prayer
- 4) **Keep it simple**—Not about quantity of meditations, but quality. Prayer is simply a conversation with God—don't overcomplicate it, just love Him and let yourself be loved!
- 5) **Remain rooted in the humanity of Jesus**
 - a. Any meditations that lead us away from Jesus' physical humanity are not Christian! Jesus' humanity is the way to the Father!
 - b. The saints all have a very *Incarnational* spirituality—they focus on an aspect of the life of Jesus for their meditation, rather than 'emptying themselves' of all images like Eastern meditation
 - c. Don't seek ecstatic experience, seek Jesus! He is the source of all graces in prayer
- 6) **Remember that God dwells in you by the grace of Baptism**
 - a. God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. The soul "does not need to go up to heaven to speak to her eternal Father and enjoy his company, and...she does not have to shout to make herself heard by him...however softly we speak, he is so close to us that he can hear us; nor do we need wings to go in search of him, but merely to seek solitude and contemplate him within ourselves, without being surprised to find such a good Guest there. In all humility, let us speak to him as to a father, tell him our needs as we would tell our father, tell him about our sufferings and ask him to remedy them, while fully realizing that we are not worthy to be his children." (Living flame of love, qtd in *ibid* 64)
 - b. God dwells in the deepest place of our heart—if we go there to meet God, we will begin to live 'out of the deepest desire' rather than superficially chasing base pleasures—and that is true freedom.

Practical:

- 1) **Set aside time**-regular and short better than long and infrequent
- 2) **Find a place**-Quiet, preferably with sacred images or tabernacle
- 3) **Adopt a prayerful posture**-Stable, not uncomfortable, not too relaxed

Some things to try

- 1) **Lectio Divina**
- 2) **Jesus Prayer**
- 3) **Rosary**