

Prayer of the Heart

There often comes a time in the spiritual life when the pleasant feelings of devotion that once accompanied one's relation with God dry up, leaving many fearful that they have lost their spirituality and love of God. But, as all honeymoons sooner or later come to an end, so also there comes a time when God withdraws His sensible consolations from a soul. He does this that we may come to love Him for Himself and not for His gifts. This should not discourage us, for if something is worth having, it is worth suffering for. We find this also in human relationships, for if love is to deepen and endure it must be founded upon a sacrificial love, *a total giving of oneself to the beloved*.

Souls who have persevered in prayer are frequently led by God to a simpler kind of prayer. They begin to feel a strange repugnance for vocal prayer and a bewildering inability to meditate. But they feel a mysterious contentment in remaining alone with God and being lovingly attentive to His Presence in faith, without any particular thoughts about Him. A mother lovingly gazing upon her new-born child does not need to express her love by reciting a formula or saying within herself, "I love this child very much." Yet, she ardently loves, without saying anything, *merely by loving*. If this child could penetrate its mother's heart, would it not see all her tenderness for it? But God *does* penetrate to the depths of our soul, and finds our prayer in the intention of our heart. And so those who are attracted to this silent prayer must come to understand, that far from being a waste of time, the very silence itself is an act of great love for God and of great benefit for souls, both living and dead. Such loving silence is supremely eloquent to the ear of God.

The main difficulty is for the soul to give up its elementary or textbook notions of prayer. Such simple prayer will be unintelligible to those who do not think they are praying unless they are constantly moving their lips in vocal prayer, or piling thought upon thought in meditation. In like manner, the intellectually proud and those who have sharpened their minds on their own stony hearts, reject this type of prayer as beneath them, because in simple prayer thoughts are subordinated to pure love. All their controversial theology is of no assistance, for Our Lord desires them to embrace Him with their wills and hearts. But perhaps their religion and their spirituality tends to be just theory. They have not learned how to pray because they have not learned how to love. Not from books does one learn how to pray, but by praying. Not from books does one learn how to love God, but by loving Him. Such as these must humble themselves and beg Our Lord to teach them how to pray – to teach them how to love. □