

# CATHOLIC EXPERIENCE ~ PRAYER

In the sense formulated by Pope St. Gregory the Great, God must be invited to take full possession of the soul. It is not in the manner of God to impose Himself upon us. Self-will, with its hundred and one subterfuges and false motives, must be rejected – it has to be crushed. Prayer is **not** to be resorted to as a means of promoting either self-esteem or a sense of security. Prayer is not to be used as a means of contributing to self. Prayer is simply a means – and the most direct means – of giving honor and glory to God. Prayer must focus our full attention on God – and away from self. When God’s glory is accounted by the soul as being of greater importance than its own advancement, indeed more important than anything else in the world, then it may be supposed that the Holy Spirit will take over that soul’s entire direction and order its religious life accordingly. Then it may be supposed also that in actual practice prayer will tend towards an ever-increasing simplicity and humility.

*“Not in a multitude of words, but in purity of heart,”* are St. Benedict’s words of warning. Not only will outward and verbal discourse in unusual and lengthy private devotions cease to attract the soul, but the more inward wandering activity produced by the faculties of the soul will give place to an exercise of greater tranquility, simplicity, and unity. The soul will begin to operate more fully under the influence of the love that it has for God. The prayer of **faith** will replace the prayer of feelings, of imaginations, of affections, of doing. Doing holy things will be replaced by **being** holy. This is surely the kind of prayer which St. Benedict, who knew how to pray, meant when he wrote of “purity of heart” and “purity of intention” centuries before any “systems” had been invented to deal with prayer. During St. Benedict’s time, prayer was still an uncharted land, its soil yielding “wild” fruits. St. Benedict drew up the blueprint for prayer, and his teaching has influenced all religious observance since his time.

Lack of sufficient understanding and instruction at the present time has brought about the formation of imprudent systems of prayer, to the detriment of those under the direction of private opinion. St. Benedict was a man of contemplation. Anything that caused distraction was snuffed out of existence. His initiation and formation began as far back as the period spent in solitude at Subiaco. Each of his miracles was preceded by time spent in prayer – not in prayers!

The flexibility of Benedictine spirituality is nowhere shown better than in St. Benedict’s instruction on the length of time to pray. The whole matter depends upon the “inspiration of divine grace.” One is not to feel inferior if grace does not prompt him to spend much time in protracted devotions, nor is he who believes that he is being called to