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MENTAL PRAYER

by

FRANCIS P. LEBUFFE, S.J.

THE QUEEN'S WORK

3742 West Pine

St. Louis 8, Mo.

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

LET'S TRY MENTAL PRAYER

FRANCIS P. LEBUFFE, S. J.

REASON FOR COURSE

For some years, to be precise since 1935, a course on Mental Prayer has been given in each of the Summer Schools of Catholic Action. The reason for this course was the repeated requests from young Sodalists to be told how they could "deepen their spiritual lives."

Knowing that, unless God gives most unusual graces, it is difficult to deepen one's spiritual life without mental prayer, this course was instituted.

It was a gratifying surprise when, at the Boston Summer School of Catholic Action in 1935, without any least persuasion nearly half of the entire students attended the first series of lectures on Mental Prayer and of these about fifty per cent were young people of college and high school level. Since that date the course has been listed for every Summer School of Catholic Action and the attendance has continued to be most gratifying.

The love of and desire for Mental Prayer as soon as it is taught is rather surprising. At the Chicago College Sodality Convention, July, 1934, one of the young ladies spoke up and said: "I don't get this stuff about mental prayer at all." That evening we held a special session on mental prayer. Someone suggested that the students themselves be asked to give their reactions to mental prayer. Then and there with complete spontaneity, a young man from the Marquette University Medical School gave a splendid, solid talk on what mental prayer meant to him. His talk left little to be said and the chairman turning to the young lady asked "What do you think of it now?" Instantly and emphatically came the answer: "I'm for it. I thought it was something way up in the clouds; and to be way up in the clouds is all right for priests and Sisters, but not for us young people. But I'm for it now." Then and there she began a bit of daily meditation and enjoyed it much, as she reported a year later.

First then, there is the desire, at least the latent desire, which needs only to be awakened. This has been evidenced vividly by the requests made in school after school throughout the country for talks on how to make Mental Prayer and by the interest shown in the annual "Mental Prayer Contest" conducted by Father J. Roger Lyons, S. J. of the Q.W. staff.

Moreover Sodalists have an obligation, first of all to deepen their spiritual lives, and secondly, to lead a life of prayer and to meditate.

The deepening of their spiritual lives is clearly set forth and insisted on in the very first rule.

"The Sodality . . . aims at fostering in its members an *ardent* devotion . . . it seeks to make . . . *good Catholics, sincerely bent on sanctifying themselves and zealous . . . to save and sanctify their neighbor and to defend the Church.*"

Sodalists are supposed to be "*Catholic plus,*" to be "*banner-men,*" "*shock-troopers*" of Christ.

Again they are supposed to lead a life of prayer and to meditate. Rules 7, 9, 12, 34, 36, and 43 deal with this aspect of the Sodalist's life, and Rule 34 says explicitly: "Let them devote at least a quarter of an hour to mental prayer." Frankly, in these days "a quarter of an hour" is a large order for young people, especially beginners. But they will try a three-minute dose and learn to love it. As one young lady said recently. "Father, sometime I start making a three-minute meditation and then I get a beautiful thought—and before I know it, I've gone seven minutes."

So we have the obligation, the need and the desire, three challenges to us to give to others, especially the young laity, the more solid food of the spiritual life. It is to second the efforts of youth and the leaders of youth that this pamphlet "Let's Try Mental Prayer" is offered.

I. WHAT IS PRAYER

1. The Baltimore Catechism defines prayer as "the lifting of the mind and heart to God, to adore Him, to thank Him for His benefits, to ask His forgiveness and to beg of Him all the graces we need whether for soul or body."

There are two parts to this definition:

- (a) What prayer *is*: "the lifting of the mind and heart to God";
- (b) The *purpose* of prayer:
 - (i) "to adore Him" . . . adoration;
 - (ii) "to thank Him" . . . thanksgiving;
 - (iii) "to ask His forgiveness" . . . satisfaction;
 - (iv) "to beg of Him" . . . petition.

Leaving aside the purposes of prayer, we have the traditional definition of prayer handed down through the centuries: "The lifting of the mind and heart to God."

2. This old definition hides many ideas:

- (a) Prayer is not an "unthinking act";
 - (i) If I mumble off prayers in my sleep or in a delirium I am not praying.
 - (ii) If I make a record of the Our Father, I do not pray every time the record is played. Neither is the "Our Father" of a parrot a prayer.

Travelers tell us of the Tibetan prayerwheels. At Lhasa is a broad road leading to the great temple and the pious Tibetans run along that road holding pinwheels on which prayers are written. If the prayer is written ten times and the wheel revolves

ten times per minute, the prayer is held to be said ten times ten or one hundred times per minute. The number of repetitions of the prayer times the revolutions gives the number of times the prayer is said. Hardly praying, is it?

(b) Prayer should be a volitional (fully free) act and hence should be said with "full knowledge, full deliberation and full consent."

N. B. (i) Only the fully free act is definitely human—since man alone possesses free will. Hence virtuous (good) acts *as well as* sinful (bad) acts are completely imputable, creditable to us (and therefore meritorious or demeritorious) only insofar as they are done with "full knowledge, full deliberation and full consent."

(ii) Unfortunately this analysis of a fully free act is associated in most minds with mortal sin.

(iii) A sheer temperamental goodness, e.g., a quiet disposition, is not of *moral* worth unless it be deliberately motivated. (Some people *cannot* get angry because of undeveloped glands!)

Analysis:

Let us further analyze the definition of prayer: "the lifting of the mind and heart to God":

(i) The *mind*—we think about God, we center our minds on Him, we try to understand Him and His revealed truths. It represents and calls for *intelligent* service—"intelligent," of course, according to one's grade of intelligence and mental development.

N. B. Distractions, wilfully entertained, are really impolitenesses to God. Suppose we carried on a conversation with a human friend the way we often pray to God! (See p. 10, n. 4)

(ii) The *heart*—by which we mean the will and the emotions. The will and the emotions are the *driving* agents of *all* our activity and so must be used when we want to act for God.

II. IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT PRAYER

Prayer may be divided into many kinds; but the first to be considered are Implicit and Explicit Prayer:

(a) Implicit or diffused prayer is a state of mental nearness to God, and is commonly called "recollection."

(b) Explicit, or actual, prayer is an actual lifting of the mind and heart to God by vocal or mental prayer.

III. IMPLICIT OR DIFFUSED PRAYER

This, as said above, is a state of mental nearness to God: our minds are so attuned to God that we instinctively think of Him, of His wishes, of His love, of His laws, etc., etc.

Such a state of mind is commonly called "recollection"; and if we have such a state of mind we are said to be "recollected."

Good Catholics in general and especially those who have been

educated in Catholic schools have much more of this state of mental nearness to God than they realize. Quite instinctively they check back on God's views, on God's wishes, in the various occurrences and incidents in life. The reason for this is that their minds have been filled with correct moral principles and their consciences have been well formed.

With regard to implicit or diffused prayer a few things are to be noted:

- (a) it is not acquired directly but is the result and outcome
 - (i) of our actual prayers;
 - (ii) of our attendance at Mass, Benediction, etc.:
 - (iii) of the sermons we hear;
 - (iv) of the spiritual books we read.

(b) hence diffused prayer is like diffused sunlight. During the day, there is only diffused sunlight in a room into which the sun is not shining directly; and on a cloudy day the only sunlight we have is diffused sunlight. Yet *all* diffused sunlight comes ultimately from the direct rays of the sun. So diffused prayer or recollection comes ultimately from our explicit prayer and is a result therefrom.

(c) a spirit of recollection i.e. the state of mental nearness to God can be helped much by

- (i) aspirations;
- (ii) by brief visits ("pop-calls") to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

N. B. Of course, each aspiration, each visit to the Blessed Sacrament is an *explicit* prayer.

(d) a state of mental nearness to God has nothing to do with a long face or a "holier-than-thou" look. It is a state of the *mind*, not of the face.

Certainly when one is in love with a human friend one doesn't put on a long face. If I want to gauge how much some one else is in love, all I have to do is to watch his or her face and eyes and see how they "light up" at even the thought of the loved one.

What logic is there then in putting on a long and solemn face when I am in love with God? Or going around "like a wet hen"? Or the last rose of summer six summers ago? Does it make sense? Is God the only loved One who is to make us gloomy?

So again—recollection is a state of the *mind*, not of the face.

With all reverence, I trust I can liken "diffused prayer" or "recollection" to a rubber-band holding God and myself together. If some work or pleasure engages me, I must give my attention to it; and God and I are held apart for the time being. I cannot teach class and keep thinking explicitly about God. While driving an auto, I had better keep my mind on the auto and the road, and not on God. But the rubber-band is there all the time, so that

when the work or pleasure ceases, God and I come *consciously* together again.

IV. THE ACT OF RE-COLLECTION

Before all formal or explicit prayer it is well to make an act of re-collection, i.e., we try to re-collect the scattered bits of our mind, which have been distracted (i.e. torn apart and aside) by many things. We want to have our mind a solid unit so as to concentrate it on God alone. Or we may put it another way: we "tidy up" our minds before asking God to enter, just as we tidy up a room before a worthy guest comes in.

This is a quite natural way of doing things. Just before we go into the presence of a person for whom we have a high esteem, we give ourselves "a last minute's touch": ladies take out their compacts and "freshen up" with rouge and powder and lipstick, putting each straying permanent wavelet into proper place; the gentlemen straighten their vests and coats and flick off any dust that may have gathered on their clothes.

So, too, before making an address, a speaker wants at least a few moments to gather his wits together. (Nothing is more deadly than to be sitting perfectly at ease at a banquet or lecture and, without a moment's warning, be called upon to "say a few words.")

So, too, before class, a teacher who wants any success in his work, makes a last minute preparation.

Put simply: it is just ordinary everyday psychology to re-collect our minds before using them for an important bit of work.

"Act of the Presence of God":

This act of re-collection is commonly called by spiritual writers an act of the presence of God, because by it we deliberately recall that we are actually at all times in God's presence but are about to be consciously and specially in His presence during the time of prayer. It is an attempt to *jolt* ourselves into the realization of God's presence that is peculiarly proper to the time of prayer.

Liturgical Acts of Re-collection:

In her liturgy the Church gives us many examples of acts of re-collection: the use of the Sign of the Cross before all prayers; the priests' prayers at the foot of the altar before beginning the Mass itself; the "Let us pray" call before many of the prayers in the Mass, etc.

Varying the Act:

Since we so easily become the victims of habit and thus dull the stimulating prick of any thing we do repeatedly, we shall find that the act of re-collection will become a matter of routine and hence meaningless. Therefore it is well to vary the act of re-collection:

(a) Day-by-Day:

On Sunday we can put ourselves in the presence of the Holy Trinity;

On Monday—of God the Father;

On Tuesday—of God the Son;

On Wednesday—of God the Holy Ghost;

On Thursday—of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament;

On Friday—of Christ in His Passion;

On Saturday—of Our Blessed Mother.

One can readily see that these suggestions admit of almost indefinite variation.

(b) Season-by-Season:

We may follow the turn of the liturgy of the Church and change our act of re-collection according to the ecclesiastical year:

In Advent, each day change to some different aspect of Christ's coming;

In Lent—to some different aspect of His Passion;

In Eastertide—to some different aspect of His Risen Life on Earth;

During Pentecost and its octave—to some different aspect of the Holy Ghost and His relation to the Church and individual souls;

During the post-Pentecostal days—to some different phase of Christ's life on earth or in Heaven; or use the day-by-day scheme.

Length of Act of Re-collection:

The time spent in making the act of the presence of God will always be rather short. Still it will vary in length:

(a) it will be quite short—"a split second" for our briefer prayers, e.g., morning and evening prayers, grace before and after meals, the Angelus, etc.

(b) it will be a quarter to a half minute for longer periods of prayer, e.g., for Mass, for a long meditation, for Benediction, etc., etc.

Some one may ask: "Why a longer and shorter act of re-collection?"

The reason is that if our prayer is to be short, it will not be difficult to hold our mind on God if we have made even a lightning-fast act of re-collection. However, if our prayer is to be a long one then we must fasten the bits of our mind very closely together if they are to "stay put" during the longer period.

We may take a homely example from bundles. For a small or light bundle, light cord is sufficient; but for a large or heavy bundle twine or rope is required.

Summary:

The act of re-collection is "the pause that refreshes." If we make use of it, we shall find that our prayers are remarkably stimulated and refreshed.

V. EXPLICIT OR ACTUAL PRAYER

We have divided prayer into implicit and explicit prayer. Having considered implicit prayer (or recollection) we now consider explicit prayer.

Explicit (or actual) prayer is the actual, here-and-now lifting of our minds and hearts to God. I, here and now, give a certain definite amount of time, long or short, to talking to God (vocal prayer) or to thinking about Him and His truths (mental prayer).

This can be done anywhere: on my knees, in church or in the privacy of my room: walking along the street or in a bus, auto or train. For instance: I can say my beads anywhere and can be actually lifting my mind and heart to God even though my external attitude doesn't show it at all. A priest friend of mine once met a top New York detective just outside the Grand Central Station casually leaning against a street-lamp.

"Hello, Father!"

"Hello, what are *you* doing here?"

"We're expecting a group of out-of-town gangsters in on the trains today—and I am waiting for them. Move around to my right and look at my right hand in my coat pocket; I'll show you my gun."

The priest did so. The gun was a rosary. "I'm at the third Joyful Mystery now." No passerby would have thought that nonchalant fellow was praying!

Kinds of Actual Prayer.

Explicit or actual prayer is divided into vocal and mental prayer:

Vocal prayer is the lifting of our minds and hearts to God by means of *words*.

Mental prayer is the lifting of our minds and hearts to God by means of *thought*.

N. B. 1. Of course back of all words must be thought, else it is useless mumbling; and along with most ordinary thinking there will be words in the mind. Hence it is the dominant stress, the primary manner of approach to God, which helps to differentiate vocal from mental prayer along these lines.

2. Again when we say that mental prayer is "the lifting of our minds and hearts to God by means of *thought*," we are speaking of ordinary mental prayer and not of the higher forms of mystical prayer.

VI. VOCAL PRAYER

In vocal prayer we may:

1. Use a set formula.

The great traditional formulas should be used and should be very dear to all of us: the Our Father was taught us by Christ Himself; the first part of the Hail Mary is the actual words of the Gospel; the Creed, the Confiteor, etc., are sanctioned by time-honored usage, etc., etc.

2. We just chat with God, using our own words.

We should talk out to God *just as we feel*. (Cf. "Blurt it Out to God," *The Queen's Work*, May, 1942, or "My Changeless Friend," twenty-seventh Series.)

This informal, just-as-I-feel chatting with God is to be strongly recommended. The prayer of a British child which Father Lyons is wont to quote is a fine example in kind: "Please God, take care of yourself because if anything happened to you, we'd be sunk." Or Father Lord's story of the First Communicant's artless thanksgiving: "I thanked Jesus for coming to me, I prayed for mama and papa and auntie and uncle—and then I said my ABC's for Him." Truly "for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

3. Sometimes if we are just too tired to say our usual vocal prayers well, it would be wise to say a few short ones decently and then tell God we are too tired for the rest. This is certainly better than to mumble through long prayers half-conscious. And isn't that the way we act with those we love best?

But here we can "take time by the forelock" and say our longer prayers ahead of time. A hard-headed business man told me that he had never in all his busy life—and it was busy—missed his daily beads. "If I had a long meeting or the opera ahead of me at night, I said my beads before I went out. If I was out hunting, I got up before the others and walked up and down the country road saying them."

4. Gerald Vann, O. P. ("*Of His Fullness*," Chapter XVII, "Prayer," p. 108), makes a good point: "And it is useful to remember that distractions themselves should be turned into prayer. The things that distract us are often things which are weighing upon our minds: the difficulties we shall have to face, the sorrows or the joys which fill our thoughts; and it is wise in such cases not to do violence to the mind by trying, probably unsuccessfully, to expel such preoccupations; but to admit them, lay them in spirit before God, speak to God about them, and so turn them into prayer instead of a distraction from prayer; and then, their insistence temporarily satisfied, and blessed, turn quietly aside to other thoughts. A similar policy may be justified even when it is pure distraction, the errant thought, the buzzing of a fly, or the sound of a gramophone, that is the question. All the passing thoughts that come to us are either of beauty or of ugliness; and they can without violence be made the instruments of thanksgiving or of sorrow; and will be far more readily superseded if they have been allowed to enter fully into the consciousness for a moment, than if we attempt anxiously and noisily to expel them."

But remember—*always* first make an *earnest* attempt to get rid of the distraction. Then and then only, if it won't go, call God's attention to it.

5. Again we may find ourselves so numb from pain or worry that we cannot formulate any words. Then it is a real prayer

just to kneel in the chapel tongue-tied, or silently grasp our crucifix. Our Lord will understand our silence, or the pressure of our grasp on the crucifix.

N. B. Of course, this is no excuse for laziness. I don't fool myself when I "lay down on the job" of praying as I should.

VII. ATTENTION AT VOCAL PRAYER

How can we have our minds and hearts lifted to God in vocal prayer? And how can we pay attention to what we are doing?

We might just as well admit that all of us find difficulty in this, for we are easily "distracted," i.e., drawn away from the thought of our prayers.

First we may pay attention to the enunciation and pronunciation of our prayers, i.e., see whether we are really saying the words we ought to say and in a decent way. It is quite remarkable how many slips are made in ordinary prayers. (Like the youngster who said "St. Mitchell the dark angel.") Or we begin to telescope words and mash one into the other.

N. B. It can be readily seen that this manner of holding our minds down to our prayers can be used only rarely. Certainly to pay attention to the enunciation and pronunciation of the Hail Mary fifty-three times in the beads would be difficult and unnatural.

Secondly we may keep our minds centered on the thought-content, i.e., the meaning of the words we say. This again can help us only occasionally, for our attention will sag if we try to pay attention to the meaning of the words of the Hail Mary fifty-three times in the one recitation of the beads.

Thirdly, the most effective way to hold down our minds while praying vocally is to neglect the words themselves and center our thoughts on God, Our Blessed Mother, the Saints, etc.

1. Herein we use words merely as a means of approach to God, not paying attention to their inner meaning. We are using a consecrated formula, hallowed by tradition (e.g. Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.) with the meaning of which we are very familiar, and with which, we say it reverently, God is familiar. It is like two old friends humming together a melody that brings back sweetest memories.

2. This is not un-natural, as we have just indicated. This is made even clearer if we think of how we use words in our daily relations. Certainly we think nothing about the inner meaning of "Good Morning!" "How do you do!" We never expect a person to tell how he is, or to dispute our salutation when the morning is not "good" but rainy. Moreover in a musical comedy or an opera it is largely the music and not the words that count.

3. To gain the Dominican indulgences one *must* meditate on the mystery commemorated in that particular decade. This, of itself, involves the neglect of the concentration on the words.

VIII. HOW TO VITALIZE OUR VOCAL PRAYERS

As philosophers say—but in much more learned terms—you don't get a kick out of things you are used to. So it is, that when we recite prayers frequently they run off our lips (and minds) like water off a duck's back. Take the beads for instance. We frequently begin them with the best intentions in the world and with much attention—and then before we know it, we find ourselves at the end of the fifth decade! Hence three methods are suggested for vitalizing our beads. (See N. B. at end of No. 2, which follows.)

1. In saying the "Hail Mary" insert each time after the name "Jesus" a thought from the mystery:

1st Joyful: "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus, whose mother you became."

1st Sorrowful: "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus, who was in agony."

1st Glorious: "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus, who rose from the dead."

N. B. This can be varied a great deal, and thus our attention can be continually stimulated.

2. By making a like insertion after the Holy Name but **progressing** in the mystery:

(a) for the first Joyful Mystery we may say:

first Hail Mary—Jesus, Who sent His angel to you.

second Hail Mary—Jesus, whose angel saluted you.

third Hail Mary—Jesus, whose angel frightened you.

fourth Hail Mary—Jesus, whose angel you questioned.

fifth Hail Mary—Jesus, whose angel answered your question.

sixth Hail Mary—Jesus, whose mother you consented to be.

seventh Hail Mary—Jesus, whose mother you became.

eighth Hail Mary—Jesus, who preserved your virginity.

ninth Hail Mary—Jesus, whom you carried nine long months.

tenth Hail Mary—Jesus, who owed His whole earthly existence to you.

(b) for the first Sorrowful Mystery:

1. Jesus, who went with His Apostles to the Garden.

2. Jesus, who left eight at the entrance.

3. Jesus, who took Peter, James and John within.

4. Jesus, who told His Apostles to pray.

5. Jesus, who withdrew to pray.

6. Jesus, who sought comfort from His Apostles.

7. Jesus, who prayed that the chalice might pass.

8. Jesus, who fell into an agony.

9. Jesus, whose sweat became as blood.

10. Jesus, who was comforted by an angel.

N. B. It can be objected that the insertion of such phrases will cause us to lose the indulgences.

1. That is true if we put them in *vocally* since Canon 934 states that if any additions, omissions or changes whatsoever be made in

an indulgenced prayer the indulgences are completely lost. (See Bouscaren "Canon Law Digest," Canon 934, p. 236.)

2. But the indulgences would not be lost if we just *thought* of the phrases.

3. Again it is much better to center our attention on saying our prayers well than on gaining the indulgences. Indulgences are to be cherished and sought, but don't become "bookkeepers" with God!

"The Rosary Crusade" by a Dominican Father (New York: Holy Name Headquarters, 141 E. 65th St., price 10c) is excellent. Also "Heart of the Rosary" by F. P. Donnelly, S. J. (Ozone Park, N. Y.: Catholic Literary Guild, \$1.)

3. By making "distractions" help us. If we are praying in public (i.e. on the street or in an auto or train) we apply the mystery to each and everything we see.

Suppose it is Monday and I am supposed to think about the Joyful Mysteries. I keep my eyes wide open and see everything, thinking the while as I say the first decade:

God became man for the driver of this bus . . .

God became man for all these passengers—I wonder how many realize it . . .

God became man for that colored man—am I helping him to know that? . . .

God became man for that Jew, equally as well as for me. Can I be anti-Semitic? Etc., etc.

Or the Fifth Sorrowful:

Christ died for the "dandy" over there, who doesn't seem to have a thought but for pleasure . . .

Christ died for the one who made that beautiful dress in the window . . .

Christ died for the girl who is going to wear that "latest creation" in shoes . . .

Christ died for that tottering old lady—I hope she's ready to meet Him. Etc., etc.

In this way we make those things that would otherwise be distractions an actual stimulus to us spiritually. Some have used this with startling effect. By so doing, we beat the devil (and our imagination) at his own game.

N. B. We can "use" distractions in the same way in our meditations, examens, etc.

IX. MENTAL PRAYER

We have defined mental prayer, or meditation, as the "lifting of the mind and heart to God by means of *thought*."

We may put this simple definition in another simple way and say that mental prayer is "thinking about the things of God in the presence of God and applying them to ourselves."

Let's analyze this definition in each of its parts:

(a) **"thinking about the things of God"**

We do a lot of thinking about many things—persons, things, situations, problems. (See an excellent exposition in Gallwey's *Watches of the Passion*, Vol. I, pp. 9-13.) Thus we may be "meditating" on a problem which is not religious e.g., what dress I shall buy, how I am to pay my debts. Such a "meditation" would not be mental prayer. For this, we must think about "the things of God," i.e., God Himself, His revealed truths, our souls and their relation to Him, the saints as concrete models of His truths, etc., etc.

(b) **"in the presence of God."**

We may think about "the things of God" in a merely speculative way as a philosopher or theologian, in much the same way that a scientist would study physics or chemistry.

But when we make mental prayer we "think of the things of God *in the presence of God.*" Why? Because it is a prayer, i.e., "a lifting of the mind and heart to God." We come *consciously* into His presence (we are always in His presence since He is everywhere) and we remain there *consciously* while thinking about the truths He has deigned to reveal to us about Himself and about ourselves.

(c) **"applying them to ourselves."**

Just as we can day-dream about anyone else or anything else, so we can day-dream about God, with no least profit to ourselves or influence on our lives.

Hence the third part of the definition: "applying them to ourselves." The purpose of meditation is to bring us nearer to God by making our lives more conformed to His standards. In meditation we look on the model God has proposed to us: we see what it is, what it demands of us; then we turn and look at ourselves and see how far we have reproduced the model in our own lives and what we must do to become more like to it. We are fashioning our lives as a sculptor rough-hews a statue and then retouches and retouches it. Just as the artist must never lose sight of his model, neither must we. Indeed, we need never be anxious about our model since God and Christ and Our Blessed Mother and the saints are always willing to "sit."

(Read Hawthorne's *The Great Stone Face* and make the necessary application to our own souls and God.)

N. B. If we may use a rather homely comparison: in mental prayer we "chew the cud." This "cud" has come from sermons, religion classes, Sodality meetings, spiritual books, etc., etc.

To put it differently, in mental prayer we do not talk to God by means of words, but our minds dwell on the things of God: on what God is; on what God has done and said; on His law; on His Incarnation and earthly life; on my soul; on what He wants me to do; on the future life; on the saints and how they served God, etc., etc. And all the time that my mind is thinking about God, my will, too, is centered on Him and I am checking up my life against His law and

I am planning how I may square that life better with His law in the future.

Mental prayer is not difficult. We all do a lot of thinking about other people and other things. I "meditate" about people I see in the cars and on the streets; I "meditate" about my exams and about my money problems; I "meditate" about the World War and the peace that is to follow; I "meditate" even about the next party or show or "prom" or outing. I do a lot of *thinking* about many things and about many people and I *plan accordingly*. "Think it over" is a remark frequently on our lips. And mental prayer is just "thinking it over" with God. Not very hard, is it?

Before explaining a few kinds of meditation or mental prayer, let us consider three things that are strongly to be recommended: (a) a colloquy; (b) resolutions; (c) a *positive* approach.

X. COLLOQUY OR CHAT

We should try always to end our mental prayer with a colloquy or chat with God, Our Lord, Our Blessed Mother, etc.

(a) We *chat* over the matter of our meditation, telling how it has affected us, how we feel about it, how we have failed or succeeded in the past, asking grace for the future, etc.

(b) We chat *just as we feel*. If we are thoroughly disgusted and discouraged, we tell Our Lord so. If we think His ideals too high, we tell Him so. If we are spiritually happy and are eager to do all we can for Him, we tell Him so. "If I feel like pulling out somebody's hair," I tell Him so—and soon He will make me realize that there is good reason why He might want to pull my hair. Utter familiarity is the keynote of this "chatting" with Our Lord. Yet this kind of familiarity is never irreverent. Prayer has been well defined as "reverent intimacy with God."

In his "Spiritual Exercises," or "Book of Retreats" St. Ignatius speaks frequently of the colloquy and insists much on it:

a. In the Meditation on the "Three Sins":

"The colloquy is made, properly speaking, as one friend speaks to another, or a servant to his master, now asking for some grace, now accusing himself of some wrong done, again making known his affairs and seeking counsel in them."

b. In the Contemplation of the Last Supper:

"In the colloquies we ought to reason and petition according to the subject-matter, i.e., according as I find myself tempted or consoled, and according as I desire to have one virtue or another; or according as I want to dispose myself to one side or the other; according as I wish to grieve or rejoice at that which I have contemplated; finally asking for those things which I most earnestly desire with regard to any definite matters."

Briefly: talk with God the way I feel after meditating, in a simple, childlike way.

XI. RESOLUTIONS

If possible, make a *definite resolution*. I shall never get very far in conquest of self or in the practice of virtue unless I make very definite and explicit resolutions. A general resolution "to be good" or "to imitate Our Lord" will not get us very far. Definite resolutions are quite necessary when we first start to deepen our spiritual life for there is then much need to correct definite faults and to practice even elementary virtue.

But remember that a resolution here and now is *not* always required for a good mental prayer. The main immediate purpose of mental prayer is to fill our minds with God and the things of God, with at least a general and implicit application to and check-up with our own lives.

If we meditate well, resolutions (or, to put it better, improvement of life) will inevitably follow.

In mental prayer we create a mental atmosphere, a set of convictions, a hierarchy or gradation of values, i. e., we decide that some things are good, others better, others best; and the will by its nature is drawn to follow the accepted standards of the mind.

XII. THE POSITIVE APPROACH

Our approach to God in mental prayer, as it should be in our whole spiritual life, should be the positive approach of love. Holiness will attract us and even the basic demands of decent living will cease to be mere irksome restraints only when we *love* God. Yet far too often it is the negative approach of fear or of the avoidance of sin that dominates the life of Catholics.

Yet psychologically, fears cramp the soul; and prohibitions and restraints have no power to inspire us to sainthood. Just watch children who obey parents or teacher only out of fear. The minute teacher or parent is out of sight, it is an easy bet to guess what happens. Thus fear, we may rightly say, is the unusual, the abnormal condition of mind. If it becomes normal, a warped personality results. This holds true in everyday life and in our relation with God.

Hence, *to be normal*, we must *love* God.

Love is thrilling, expansive, drives us on to heroic deeds. (Read St. Paul's words in 1 Cor. 13 and also Sr. Mary Agnes' fine little meditation books, *St. Paul's Hymn to Charity*, *Practical Charity*, etc.)

And it is our love that God is asking for all the time. If He holds out motives of fear, it is only to restrain those to whom His love does not appeal.

a. Old Testament.

Even in the Old Testament (the "Law of Fear"), God's approach was positive. We select only a few texts out of hundreds.

Deut. 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength."

Cant. 8:6-7: "Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames. Many waters cannot quench charity (love), neither can floods drown it; if a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing."

Jeremias 2:1-2: "And the word of the Lord came to me saying: Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus saith the Lord: I have remembered thee, pitying thy youth, and the love of the espousals, when thou followest me in the desert, in a land that is not sown."

Again, Jeremias 3:1: "It is commonly said: If a man put away his wife, and she go away from him, and marry another man, shall he return to her any more? . . . But thou hast prostituted thyself to many lovers; nevertheless return to me, saith the Lord, and I will receive thee."

b. New Testament.

The whole thought of the New Testament (the "Law of Love") is one of *life* and *love*:

a. Christ's whole teaching may be summed up in His words (St. Luke 10:27): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength and with thy whole mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."

b. The theme of St. John's Gospel may be expressed in Christ's words: "I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly," (10:10).

c. St. Paul opens nearly every letter with the salutation: "Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

St. Paul tells us repeatedly that we are *children* of God (Rom. 8:14, Gal. 3:26; Eph. 5:8, etc.); "members of God's household (Eph. 2:9).

d. St. John's refrain in his letters was: *love* God, *love* one another.

XIII. ACTUAL TEACHING OF MENTAL PRAYER

A few simple hints, gathered from experience, may prove helpful:

1. Don't tell students or older Sodalists to make meditation but make it out loud for and with them. Tell them to close their eyes; and then start right in to pray with them.

2. Give as few rules as possible. When we learned to walk mother did not give us a lengthy discourse on all the muscles we were going to use. Even to this day most of us are blissfully ignorant of the anatomy of walking.

3. Identify yourself with your audience, i.e., meditate out loud as though you were one of the boys, one of the girls, etc. Always use the pronoun "I," not "you."

4. Meditate in terms of *their* lives by thinking in terms of class, home, dance, movies, etc.

5. Be simple, utterly simple.

6. Always end with a real "heart-to-heart" chat with our Lord.
7. Begin with three minutes each time. Do *not* try a longer period until they have learned to love it and *ask for it*.
8. As soon as possible let the Sodalists make the meditation themselves. It would be advisable to have the one who is going to lead the mental prayer to *write* it out in advance, at least for a while.

XIV. MEDITATION

We shall now proceed to give samples of various types of mental prayer.

We shall use the words "meditation," "contemplation" in the sense of St. Ignatius Loyola. We note this because there is a wide variety of meanings given to these words. The first is a "meditation," understanding that by meditation we mean thinking about some general principle, some general truth of the spiritual life, in the presence of God and applying it to ourselves. Thus we "meditate" on the end of man, on sin, on death, on Hell, etc.

N. B. It is wiser not to give much of an explanation of the difference between the various kinds of mental prayer. Just make them. We may take to heart here what á Kempis says: "It is better to know how to make an act of contrition than how to define it."

Death:

Let us take a simple meditation on death. Pause momentarily at the dots . . .

Act of re-collection—O my God, help me to spend this time of prayer with You.

One of these days I am going to die . . . that is certain . . . Nothing is more certain . . . I may avoid sickness . . . poverty . . . disgrace . . . but I cannot avoid death . . . One day I shall be placed in the coffin . . . brought to the church . . . laid in the grave . . . covered over with dirt . . . then left alone . . . I can picture that for everyone else . . . can I for myself? . . .

When shall this be? . . . I don't know. Maybe today . . . maybe tomorrow . . . maybe years from now . . . But I am nearer death now than I have ever been before . . . nearer than when I got up this morning . . . nearer than when I left home . . . nearer than when I began this meditation . . .

Should this frighten me? . . . No—because death means going *home* . . . And I am always glad to go home . . . death is the short, dark tunnel I must go through to get home. . . .

Only one thing should make me fear death—mortal sin . . . because then I could not go home. . . .

Dear Jesus, one day I must die. Honestly I fear death but I should not, for it means coming *home* to you. Let me remember that always. And please give me grace to be always ready to come home to you, even at a moment's notice. And so keep me far, very far from all mortal sin, because that would keep me away from you forever.

The End of Man:

Act of re-collection—Dear Jesus, help me to spend this time of prayer entirely with You.

I find myself alive . . . a few years ago I was not alive . . . a few years hence I shall be in my grave . . .

Why am I here? . . . surely not to make money . . . not to become famous . . . if so, few men attain their end . . . not just to have pleasure since I am more than an animal . . .

Why am I here? . . . to know, love and serve God, and by so doing save my soul . . . that means doing *what* I ought to do . . . *when* I ought to do it . . . *how* I ought to do it . . . and *why*, i.e., because God wants me . . .

But do I? . . . at home? . . . in school? . . . at play? . . . at the movie? . . . out with the girl or boy I like? . . .

I don't have to worry about saving my soul if I always do what and when and how and why . . .

Suppose I had dropped dead at that last dance . . . suppose I were to die now . . . suppose I had been killed on my last auto ride . . .

Dear Jesus, You have been good enough to let me know just how I should live in order to pass the final "exam" of the Particular and General Judgment. Usually it's not so hard to be good and to please You, though at times it does become a bit difficult. I don't want to disappoint You by failing in my last exam because that would be to disappoint You for all eternity. So help me always and everywhere to do what and when and how and why I ought. You will, won't You?

XV. CONTEMPLATION

Contemplation (from the Latin, *contemplare*—to look at) consists in re-enacting a scene in the life of Our Lord, of the Blessed Virgin, of the Saints. It is a literal **re-living** of these scenes.

We do not think of a scene of Our Lord's life as something that happened 1900 years ago, but we re-enact the whole scene again, **taking part** in it ourselves, at least as spectators. Sts. Bonaventure, Ignatius and others tell us to make a contemplation "just as though I were present."

(St. Bonaventure's "Life of Christ" and Archbishop Goodier's books on the life of Our Lord are splendid examples of this "just-as-thought-I-were-present" attitude.)

When beginning a contemplation on a scene in the life of Christ, it is advisable to begin with a prayer to Our Lord "that I may know You more clearly, love You more dearly, and imitate You more nearly in the lessons You teach me here." We beg for a **vitalizing** knowledge of Christ. This is the "knowledge" (Greek, *epignosis*) of which St. Paul speaks so frequently, e.g. Ephesians 1:17, 4:13; Philippians 1:9, etc.

Nativity:

Let us make a simple contemplation on the Birth at Bethlehem, pausing momentarily at the dots . . .

Act of re-collection—Dear Jesus, help me to spend these few moments alone with You at Bethlehem.

It's just after midnight of Christmas Eve . . . I'm walking down the road from Bethlehem after a hard day's work. . . . I suddenly see light coming from under the ill-fitting door of a stable which is usually vacant. . . . I knock, and a young man answers with a cheerful: "Come in, what can I do for you?" . . . "Nothing, thank you—are you strangers?" . . . "Yes, from Nazareth. But just come in, will you? . . . Let me shut the door, the night air is cool and Mary, my wife, has just given birth to her Child. . . . There It is and there she is . . ."

I look and walk over . . . What! the Babe in a manger and the mother kneeling in prayer at Its side. . . . Mary looks up. "Isn't He beautiful! . . . and doesn't He look like me! . . . He ought to, for I am His only earthly parent. . . . I am the Virgin Mother and He is your Saviour, your God. . . . Don't you remember how Isaias foretold it to our fathers? . . . Don't you think you ought to kneel down and adore your Saviour? . . ."

"My God!" I find myself on my knees adoring with Mary. . . . God has come to save me. . . . God is a Baby to win my love. . . .

Joseph touches me on the shoulder: "Do you mind leaving now? . . . It's after midnight now, and we are tired . . . Come back tomorrow, will you?" . . .

As Joseph latches the door behind me, I wonder what really counts . . . worldly possessions . . . honor . . . fame . . . none of those at the crib . . . the one thing is to be near God . . . and to be like God . . . and to save my soul . . . is that what really counts with me **now?** . . .

Dear Jesus, I thank You for coming and for teaching me the value of my soul and the lack of lasting value of anything else in this world. You came to win my love. I want to give it to You entirely from now on. That is my Christmas gift to You. Take it, will You please? And Mother Mary, I thank you from my heart for giving me Jesus.

Cana:

Or, again, we may make a contemplation on the Marriage Feast at Cana.

Act of re-collection—Dear Lord, I want to spend this time of prayer with You alone.

Dear Jesus, help me to know You more clearly, love You more dearly and imitate You more nearly in the lessons You would teach me here.

It's a very happy marriage feast . . . a fine day . . . many friends . . . we have been having a happy time . . . Our Lord is there, I

see Him talk now with this group, and now with that. . . . He puts no damper on the fun . . .

But there's a flurry among the servants. . . . Something has gone wrong. . . . Hurried talking. . . . I see Mary go over to the group of servants . . . they talk with her. . . . She quiets them . . . and goes straight to Our Lord . . . "Son, they have no wine." . . . He says with a teasing smile "Is that our concern, Mother?" . . . She looks knowingly at Him . . . and goes back to the servants: "Do whatever He tells you . . . remember **whatever** He tells you" . . .

I'm puzzled and turn to find Our Lord walking over to the servants: "Fill the jars with water . . . now, draw . . . and give to the master of ceremonies." . . . I'm more puzzled . . . I walk over . . . the water has become wine! . . .

Christ's first miracle performed so that the fun of a marriage feast would not be spoiled. . . . He wants me to have pleasure . . . if it's proper. . . . Would I want Him with me always? . . . at a dance? . . . at a movie? . . . down at the beach? . . . when I am alone with another in an auto? . . . He'd be very happy to be there—unless . . .

Dear Jesus, I thank You for the miracle at Cana. You've taught me much by that, for I see clearly that You want me to have pleasures and that You will bless me and them. That's fine! Just help me never to take any pleasures that You would not bless.

N. B. One may make a contemplation on death, Hell, Heaven, by paying a mental visit to one's own deathbed or funeral, or "dropping in" on the damned in Hell or the blessed in Heaven.

XVI. "FIRST METHOD OF PRAYER"

Another simple form of mental prayer is an extended self-examination without any attempt at an exact counting. St. Ignatius calls this "the First Method of Prayer."

N. B. We use the titles "First," "Second" "Third" Method of Prayer, as St. Ignatius Loyola did, though these methods were in use long before him.

I may take each of the Ten Commandments, consider what it means, how it should be observed, how I have observed it in a *general* way. In like manner, I may consider each Commandment of the Church and the duties of my state of life.

Third Commandment:

For an example, let me make a meditation on the Third Commandment:

Act of re-collection: My God, I am entering into Your presence for this time of prayer. Please help me to make it well.

Remember that thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath day.

God wants us to keep Sunday—the Christian Sabbath—holy . . . it is a day of rest even as He "rested" after the six days of creation . . . it is to be kept holy for Him by abstinence from servile work in acknowledgment of all His gifts of creation to me . . . it is to be kept holy, too, because of Christ's Resurrection whereby He completed our redemption . . . and the Catholic way of keeping Sunday holy is

by hearing Mass . . . by being on time, being present when the priest comes into the sanctuary . . . by prayerful union with the Holy Sacrifice . . . by an actual re-offering of Christ to His Heavenly Father . . . by an *integral* participation through the reception of Holy Communion . . . by not leaving before the priest has left the sanctuary. . . .

How have I "kept the Sabbath"? . . . do I make it just a day full of pleasure? . . . of work? . . . or maybe of just loafing? . . .

Have I heard Mass the way I should? . . . devoutly . . . reverently . . . with my missal or in any other fruitful way . . . or has my mind wandered? . . . have my eyes gazed around on the latest styles, or to find whether friends were present? . . . was I present before the priest came out of the sacristy? . . . did I receive Holy Communion? . . . did I pay any attention to Our Lord when He was my guest? . . .

Dear Jesus, I'm sorry for the way I have behaved myself on many a Sunday. I'm afraid people would hardly know it was "the Lord's day" from watching me and my actions because I made it so completely *my* day. I have gone to Mass but so often I have been there only bodily; and after Mass I scarcely thought of You during the whole long day. I'm sorry. Please forgive me, and help me to do better every Sunday from now on.

I can use this same method of prayer in dwelling on the great gifts God has given me, i.e., my mind, my will, my memory, my five senses: what they mean, why they were given to me, how I should use and have used them.

Free Will

For example, let's make a meditation on my free will:

Act of re-collection—Dear Jesus, help me to spend this time of prayer entirely in Your presence with great profit for my soul.

God has given me the highest of all my natural gifts, my free will . . . because it is a will, it has the power of going after things and of clutching those things to itself . . . but it does not do that blindly and forcedly as animals do . . . it has the power of free choice . . . a precious power but a dreadful one . . . for by it I have the power to choose good or to choose evil . . . to yield to sinful attractions or to practice virtue . . . to serve God or to refuse to obey His law . . . to save my soul or to damn it eternally . . . a precious, priceless gift, but a dreadful one. . . .

First of all, do I appreciate that gift? . . . have I ever really thanked God for it? . . . am I intimately conscious that it is one of the chief ways I differ from animals? . . .

How have I used my free will? . . . wilfully at times to do "my own sweet will" though what I did I knew was against the will of God? . . . it may be that I have never revolted defiantly against Him by mortal sin . . . but who could count all the little rebellions . . . the petty self-assertions . . . the childish petulancies . . . the deliberate graspings of forbidden pleasures . . . the stubborn refusals to let go things God did not want me to have . . . how often I have stamped my foot with childish insolence. . . .

And how much good have I really done? . . . some, yes, it would be untrue to say I had not . . . but just how much, compared with all I might have done . . . what about my prayers, morning and evening, before and after meals, the Angelus? . . . what about thoughtfulness of others? . . . what about kind thoughts and words and deeds? . . . what about more faith and hope and confidence in God? . . . what about more resignation? . . .

Dear God, You gave me my free will to make it freely Yours. But I haven't. I have made it mostly mine doing "my own sweet will" in so many, many ways. No, I haven't defied You in big things—and that was due to Your own strong grace which You gave me. But give me much grace now to stop my childish disobediences and to make my free will wholly and always Yours. That is why You gave it to me.

In like manner I can meditate on the seven capital sins, the eight Beatitudes, the gifts and fruits of the Holy Ghost, the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, my vows of marriage or of religious life, etc., etc.

XVII. "SECOND METHOD OF PRAYER"

This is a searching analysis of the meaning of our customary vocal prayers. It has been well called "a meditated prayer." St. Ignatius writes:

"The Second Method of Prayer is that the person, kneeling or seated, according to the greater disposition in which he finds himself and as more devotion accompanies him, keeping the eyes closed or fixed on one place, without moving them hither or thither, says "**Father**" and continues to think over this word so long as he finds meanings, comparisons, relish and consolation in considerations pertaining to this word. And let him act in the same way with each word of the Our Father, or of any other prayer which he wants to say in this way."

To put this briefly and in outline:

A. Stay on word or phrase **so long as I find anything to think about**. Only then, pass on to next word or phrase.

B. Finish off the rest of the prayer vocally. (Not necessary.)

C. Short colloquy to the person to whom the vocal prayer is addressed. This should always end the period of mental prayer; and we should freely chat **during** the whole period of prayer.

D. Begin the next day by reciting the prayer vocally up to the word or phrase upon which I had been meditating.

E. **Any** vocal prayer can be meditated upon thus: Hail Mary, Creed, Confiteor, Prayers of the Mass, Litanies, etc.

This method of prayer is the one we have used constantly in the "Mental Prayer" formerly published in *The Queen's Work* and now sent out through the *Leaders' Service*. It is, therefore, quite probably familiar to our readers. However, we shall give a brief example on the opening words of the hymn "Come all ye faithful."

Come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, to Jesus, to Jesus in Bethlehem.

Act of re-collection—Dear Jesus, help me to spend these few moments of meditation near Your crib profitably.

Come:

because Jesus, the Infant, invites me . . .

because Mary, His and our Mother, beckons me . . .

because I, myself, want to be close to Him . . .

All Ye Faithful:

those who know Him well, and those who know Him but slightly . . .

those who love Him much, and those who give Him only a little of their love . . .

those who serve Him diligently, and those who do only what they must . . .

because He became man for you and so is one in nature with you . . .

because you were purchased by His Blood and thus belong to Him . . .

because you are a member of His Mystical Body and thus a part of Him . . .

Joyful and Triumphant:

gloom and longfacedness do not become a follower of Christ . . .
but joy and a sense of triumph—

because God's mercy has triumphed over His justice . . .

because He has become man to redeem us . . .

because He has conquered sin and death . . .

because "He has on His garments and on His thigh a name written 'King of kings and Lord of lords'" (Apoc. 19:16) . . .
that is why we wish each other a "Merry Christmas," merry in the freedom of God's children, merry at the thought of Heaven, which our Victor-King has won for us . . .

To Jesus, to Jesus—

who loved us so that He became man for us . . .

who has stood for all our sins and all of our slights . . .

who is meek and humble of heart and so most endearing . . .

who lies before us a little Babe to prove we have nothing to fear from Him . . .

In Bethlehem:

in a stable . . . in a manger . . . without a home . . .

in Bethlehem, where all is lowly, all quite commonplace, that none of us may ever feel out of place . . .

in Bethlehem, the "house of bread"—

for He is to nourish our souls with His truth and His grace . . .
for He is to give us Himself to be the food and life of our
souls . . .

Dear Jesus, I gladly come to You with great joy and triumph in my heart. The one thing in the world that should make me sad is sin and You have conquered that, and I, too, can conquer it by Your all-powerful grace. So I have every reason to be joyful and triumphant, and as I kneel beside Your manger-crib I thank You from my heart for making life so different for me from what it would have been if You had not come. The one Christmas gift I give You is myself and the one Christmas gift I ask of You is You.

N. B. It is very profitable to use the Sacred Scriptures thus, especially the Gospels, **beginning** with St. Luke, or better still, use "*The Life of Christ*" by A. J. Maas, S. J., (Herder) where the four Gospels are woven into one.

The reader is referred to the two sets of booklets wherein this Second Method is used: *Let Us Pray* series wherein our ordinary vocal prayers are meditated on; *As It is Written* series wherein the Gospels are thus treated. In the pamphlets *Pondering In Our Hearts*, I, II, and III, many favorite aspirations and texts of Scripture are used. (All these are published by *The Queen's Work*.)

XVIII. "THIRD METHOD OF PRAYER"

This is a "breath-by-breath" analysis of the meaning of our vocal prayers. St. Ignatius calls this a prayer "by rhythm." He writes:

"The Third Method of Prayer is that with each breath or with each respiration one prays mentally, saying one word of the Our Father, or of another prayer which one recites, so that only one word is said between one breath and another; and while the time from one breath to another lasts, attention should be paid chiefly to the meaning of the word in question or to the person to whom the prayer is said, or to his own baseness, or to the difference between such greatness and his own smallness. And in the same form and manner he will proceed in the other words of the Our Father, and the other prayers."

Besides our ordinary vocal prayers we may use this method in meditating on the Sacred Scriptures, on the prayers of the Mass, etc., etc.

N. B. 1. This is an excellent method of praying when we are very tired.

2. This method is really a manner of praying which holds a middle place between vocal and mental prayer, combining as it does elements of both.

XIX. MEDITATIVE READING

Father Lindworsky, S. J., in his excellent book *The Psychology of Asceticism* (pp. 61-62), draws particular attention to a quite neglected way of lifting our mind and heart to God.

Whether we care to admit it or not, very many find mental prayer of any considerable length rather difficult. This is very apt to be

the case in the beginning when at the threshold of the life of inner prayer. As we have said, in mental prayer we "chew the cud." What if we have no "cud" to chew, i.e., no stock of spiritual ideas, little knowledge of the spiritual life, a scant acquaintance with the life of Our Lord? In such a case we have nothing to chew on.

We do not by any means intend to convey the thought that one must be **learned** in order to meditate. Far from it. But he must have some ideas to develop, some thoughts to unfold, some principles to delve into, some knowledge of what Christ actually did and said.

Nor do we deny that God may of His own good pleasure grant an unusual gift of meditation to any soul no matter how unlettered or how uninstructed. That God does at times grant such a gift is clear from the lives of holy people.

But taking the ordinary run of men and women as we find them—and especially the ordinary run of young people—they need a good deal of "spoon-feeding" in the early stages of their spiritual development and, certainly, not least in their attempt to meditate.

Hence—meditative reading, i.e., the prayerful, **reflective** reading of a **solidly religious** book. For this method we may note:

1. Be sure that the book is really worthwhile and suited to one's needs.

2. Read it sentence by sentence, or paragraph by paragraph. Then close the book, trying to understand and drive deep into our souls what we have read.

3. *Frequently* chat out the matter with Our Lord, asking Him to help us understand what we have read and to put it into practice.

4. To mention one or two such worthwhile books: Father Maas' *Life of Christ*; Fouard's *Life of Christ*; Tanquerey's *Spiritual Life*, Rodriguez' *Christian Perfection*. For young people even these might be a little too advanced and so a careful selection should be made of "meaty" books suited to their age and mental development.

XX. THE NEED OF PRAYER IN GENERAL

We learned in our earliest days: "Prayer is necessary to salvation, and without it no one having the use of reason can be saved" (*Baltimore Catechism*).

The reason why prayer is necessary is that we must:

- A. **Adore** God as our Creator and Sovereign Master. (adoration)

- B. **Thank** Him as our Supreme Benefactor to whom we owe our life in its beginning and at every moment, and all that we have in life. (thanksgiving)

- C. Ask His forgiveness. (satisfaction)

- D. Ask His help in all our needs and trials. (petition)

Reason and Revelation:

All this is true, both from reason and from revelation:

A. As creatures we are God's handiwork and belong to Him. Even though God had never given us our present higher supernatural destiny, as His **creatures** we should have found it necessary to pray.

B. But we are not now mere creatures; we are adopted **children**. God has elevated, lifted us up to a destiny, the face-to-face-vision of Himself, which requires sanctifying and actual grace, to none of which we have any least claim. The securing of these graces depend, through God's decision, in great part on prayer.

The teaching of theologians may be summed up succinctly: "No prayer, no grace." God can (and does at times) give efficacious grace despite the lack of prayer, but that is not His ordinary way of acting.

Certainly, if we want those **special** graces from God with the aid of which we shall **certainly** do good acts and avoid evil ones, we must pray. (Such actual graces are called "efficacious" graces.)

(Cf. "Let's Look at Sanctifying Grace" by F. P. LeBuffe, S. J., Queen's Work; "With the Help of Thy Grace," J. V. Matthews, S. J., Newman Book Shop.)

Proof from the Bible:

Our Lord insisted on the need of prayer:

St. Matthew 7:7-8: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened."

St. Matthew 26:41: "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

St. Mark 13:32-33: "But of that day or hour no one knows. . . . Take heed, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time is."

St. Luke 21:36: "Watch, then, praying at all times that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to be, and to stand before the Son of Man."

(Read also: St. Luke 18:1-8. Ephesians 6:18.)

The Catechism of the Council of Trent (Pt. 6, Ch. 1, N. 3) puts the need of prayer thus: "Prayer is the 'indispensable' instrument given us by God in order to obtain what we desire: there are things, in fact, impossible to obtain without the aid of prayer."

All that has been said so far pertains to prayer in general. Next we shall consider the need of **mental** prayer.

XXI. THE NEED OF MENTAL PRAYER

In the last section the need of prayer in general was indicated. The question now concerns the need of **mental** prayer as distinct from vocal prayer.

A. From Revelation:

In many places in the Bible the need of **thinking** about God and all that pertains to God is insisted on.

1. The Old Testament:

One of the most beautiful descriptions of the worth of meditation is given in Psalm 1:1-3 (Lattey's translation):

Blessed the man

That hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stood in the way of sinners,

Nor sat in the company of scorners;
Rather his delight is in the law of Jehovah.

And on his law doth he meditate day and night.

Wherefore he is like a tree

Planted by water-courses,

Which yieldeth its fruit in due season,

And the leaf thereof fadeth not:

And whatsoever he doth, he maketh to prosper.

Psalm 118 (the longest of all the Psalms) is filled with exquisite references to meditation, notably, verses 24, 92, 97, 99, 143, 174.

Two of the best known O.T. references are:

Deut. 6:6-9: "And the words which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt tell them to thy children, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house; and walking on thy journey; sleeping and rising. And thou shalt bind them as a sign on thy hand, and they shall be and shall move between thy eyes. And thou shalt write them in the entry and on the doors of thy house."

Jeremias 12:11: "With desolation is all the land made desolate because there is none that considereth in his heart."

2. The New Testament:

Our Blessed Mother . . .

1. When saluted by the angel "kept pondering what manner of greeting this should be." (Luke 1:29)

2. When the shepherds came and went, "Mary kept in mind all their words, pondering them in her heart." (id. 2:19)

3. When Jesus returned to Nazareth after the loss in the temple, "his mother kept all these things carefully in her heart." (id. 2:51)
The Apostles . . .

1. The first Novena was made immediately after the Ascension at Our Lord's own bidding: "All there with one mind continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." (Acts 1:14)

2. St. Paul made a long retreat in Arabia shortly after his conversion (Gal. 1:17). Fouard (*St. Peter*, Ch. VII, pp. 124-125) says: "We do not know the length of this sojourn in Arabia . . . It may be that this retreat was prolonged for the greater part of the three years that elapsed between the conversion of the Apostle and his escape from Damascus."

3. St. Paul continually prays that the early Christians gain that "inner knowledge and relish for" the things of God, which is expressed by the Greek word he uses "epignosis"—not merely

"gnosis," knowledge, but "epi-gnosis," inner, special knowledge, which comes normally only from meditation on the things of God. He says explicitly to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:13:15), "Until I come, be diligent in reading, in exhortation, in teaching . . . Meditate on these things, give thyself entirely to them that thy progress may be manifest to all."

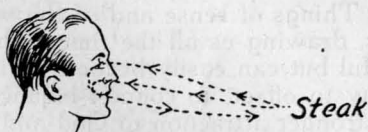
XXII. THE NEED OF MENTAL PRAYER

B. From Reason:

Independently of God's revelation, the need of mental prayer, of "thinking about the things of God in the presence of God and applying them to ourselves" is clearly indicated by reason itself.

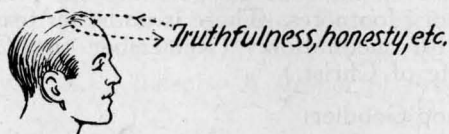
1. Things of sense, i.e., what I see and taste and hear and touch and smell, make an immediate appeal to me; I am directly, immediately and automatically attracted by them.

Put a juicy, sizzling T-bone steak in front of me—it attracts me at once—there is no need for me to do any thinking about it. Put a "tall, cool drink" before me on a blazing hot day—I reach for it instinctively—I need to make no reflection on its value to me. So it is with all the visible, tangible things around about me. Let us illustrate this with a graph:



The moment I see and smell the steak, I am drawn to it.

2. But the "higher things," the "higher values" in human life cannot be seen or touched or heard. Yet they should and must attract us if we are to lead decent human lives. We should be truthful and honest and loyal and patriotic. Yet, we can never see or hear truthfulness or honesty or loyalty or patriotism. How are they to appeal to us? Not through the senses (i.e., eyes or ears, etc.), for they are supra-sensible, but only by *thinking* about them. If they do not attract us, draw us to themselves, we shall never be truthful, honest, etc. But they cannot attract us, unless they come into our minds, unless we *think* about them. Hence another graph:

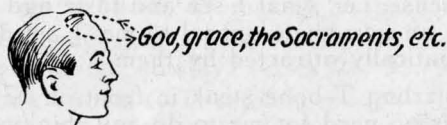


They enter our *minds*—we see their value—they attract us.

N. B. One of the principle objects of education is to teach us the *value* of these "higher things" in life. If we do not know and appreciate their value, their worth, they cannot appeal to us.

Hence, just to be decent human beings, we must do a lot of "meditating" a lot of thinking with ourselves on the *value to us* of these higher, finer things.

3. But God wants us to know now not only supra-sensible things, but *super-natural* things: Himself, Heaven, Hell, grace, the Sacraments, Our Blessed Mother, the Saints, etc. Certainly we cannot see or touch or hear these. They can come to us and appeal to us *only* through our minds, *only* by thinking about them. I cannot see God, or Heaven, or grace, or Our Blessed Mother. Yet, if I am to lead a holy life, I must be convinced of their value, otherwise they will not attract me. And if *they* do not attract me, there is no way to offset the downward appeal of the things of the senses all around me. Hence another graph:



God and all super-natural things must enter through our minds—we see their value in themselves *and* for us—they attract us.

Thus, it is clear that unless we *think* about God and holy things we simply cannot expect to be attracted to holy living or to deepen our spiritual lives. Things of sense and of the world are appealing to us, attracting us, drawing us all the time. These attractions are not necessarily sinful but can easily become so if yielded to all the time. The only way to offset, to counter-balance their appeal and attraction, is by a stronger attraction to God and holy things. This, as we have said, can come only by *thinking*.

Simply: "Thinking about the things of God in the presence of God and applying them to ourselves" is psychologically necessary for holy living, i.e., is demanded by the very make-up of our minds and wills.

XXIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

This list is merely suggestive. It does not claim to give "the best." It merely suggests *some* good simple books.

A. Books of Meditation:

Maas, A. J., S. J.—*The Life of Christ*. In this book Father Maas has woven the four Gospels into one and given a wealth of explanatory footnotes. There is no better text of the Gospels than this for meditation. (Remember the Gospels are the *inspired* Life of Christ.)

Archbishop Goodier:

Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Kenedy).

Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Kenedy).

The Risen Jesus (Kenedy).

Some Hints on Prayers (Burns, Oakes and Washbourne).

Points for Meditation (Burns, Oakes and Washbourne).

Daniel A. Lord, S. J.:

How to Pray the Mass.

A Novena to Mary Immaculate.

The Months With Mary.

Visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Thanksgiving After Holy Communion.

(All published by The Queen's Work.)

Sister Mary Agnes, S.N.D.:

St. Paul's Hymn of Charity (Kenedy).

Practical Charity (Kenedy).

The Bond of Perfection (Pustet).

J. M. McSorley, C.S.P.:

Think and Pray (Longmans).

Sister Helen Madeleine, S.N.D.:

With Heart and Mind (Benziger).

Strength Through Prayer (Benziger).

Peace Through Prayer (Spiritual Book Associates).

F. P. LeBuffe, S. J.:

Let Us Pray Series:

1. *Anima Christi.*

2. *Our Father—Hail Mary.*

3. *Litany of Our Lady.*

4. *Creed—Confiteor.*

5. *Prayers for the Dying.*

As It Is Written Series:

1. *Christmas.*

2. *Annunciation—Visitation.*

3. *Infancy—Hidden Life.*

(All published by The Queen's Work, 15c each, 2 for 25c)

Pondering in Our Hearts I, II, and III (The Queen's Work).

My Changeless Friend—27 books (Mess. of S.H., N.Y. 28).

Reproaches of Good Friday (America Press, N.Y. 17).

Come Aside and Rest Awhile (The Queen's Work).

B. On the Doctrine of Mental Prayer:

McQuade, S. J.—*Scaffoldings of Prayer* (Loyola Press, 25c).

Lonergan—*Meditation* (America Press, 5c).

Harkins—*Run Your Own Movies* (America Press, 10c).

McSorley, C.S.P., Joseph—*A Primer of Prayer* (Longmans, Green).

Leen, C.S.Sp., Edward—*Progress Through Mental Prayer* (Sheed & Ward).

Tanqueray, S.S., A.—*The Spiritual Life*, Pt. I, Ch. V. pp. 243-256 (Desclée).

