

Guide to Mental Prayer



Prayer is with God. It is a conversation that strengthens the

accept – and carry out – God’s will for our lives. Prayer ought to renew us from within. When it is authentic, prayer influences the way we think, how we feel, and the decisions we make in our daily lives.

Preparation for Prayer

Preparing your soul for mental prayer is not something we can accomplish by our own efforts. We need God’s help in order to pray. And thus we must always begin our prayer by invoking the assistance of the Holy Spirit – the “sweet guest of the soul” who dwells within us. In fact, without the Holy Spirit, nothing lasting or solid can be attained in the work of our growth in holiness.

essentially a dialogue personal, heart to heart enlightens the soul, will, and enables us to

Then it is good to consider what we are about to do and with whom we are going to speak. In prayer we meet the One who made us and who knows us perfectly; the One who neither deceives nor can be deceived; the Father who loves us infinitely more than we love ourselves.

A good next step is to renew our faith in God, express our love for him, rekindle our confidence in his promises, and thank him for all of his gifts. We need to recognize who we really are before him – fragile creatures in need of redemption.

Now we are ready to ask God for the particular gift we hope to receive as a “fruit” or result of our prayer. Sometimes this fruit is something particular and concrete, such as the strength to overcome a particular weakness or the patience to practice a certain virtue. Other times it can be something deeper; for example, that inner change of heart which is necessary to follow Christ more closely.

It is important to remember that authentic prayer engages everything we are: our intellect and our will, our feelings and affections, our interests and desires. The Lord wishes to transform our entire being with his grace. Thus, prayer is much more than “thinking” about God and spiritual things.

Forms of Mental Prayer

Prayer normally takes two essential forms.

The first form or type is known as "discursive-affective" prayer. The goal of this type of prayer is to reflect on an idea or fundamental principle so as to understand it more deeply and make it your own. It is not simply a mental exercise, but rather a reflection from the heart on the mystery of your own life, done in the light of faith and from God's perspective. This type of prayer can lead you to a deeper understanding, which will lead you to a greater desire to become one with God. This culminates in a conversion of heart, which is the decision to live in accordance with the truth you have considered in God's light.

Another form of mental prayer is "contemplation." Contemplation involves taking a mystery or an event in the life of Christ or the Blessed Virgin, or in salvation history. You place yourself in this event by observing the people, listening to their words, and considering their actions. Then you meditate on the implications for your own life, by allowing the movement of grace to stir your heart and move your will towards giving yourself and imitating what you have contemplated.

Finally, prayer may involve all of the above elements: discursive, affective and contemplative.

Listening in Prayer

Nevertheless, it is not enough to reflect or contemplate. If prayer is a dialogue with God, then over time we need to learn to listen to God. We need to speak with Him and allow Him to mold us into the image of His Son. And to accomplish this we must approach Him full of faith and love.

Habit of Prayer

The fruitfulness of prayer depends primarily on God's action, but it also requires our cooperation. Therefore, we do well to make an honest effort in prayer and in acquiring the habit of daily prayer. This requires learning to set aside and overcome the difficulties we face in prayer: distractions, tiredness and negative feelings – which we suffer especially in times of temptation and dryness. It is greatly helped by having a set time for prayer each day.