



MEDITATIONS...for this first week of Lent

Meditation

Here we go again! Another Lenten season, Fat Tuesday is here and Lent begins, and our crying and whining like a 3-year old begins again. I can't help but wonder if our Lord ever says... I wish these kids would start growing up, they've been this way for X plus years now, when are they going to understand that I cannot give them more until they are ready... when are they going to see that is why I created a season of Lent, why there are Church Fathers and Saints, when will they call upon them to learn how to...**Make time for God?**

There were many workers in St. Basil's congregation, and he knew how much they had to sacrifice just to come to church. But he promises them that their sacrifice of time will have a rich reward.

I know that many craftsmen who work in mechanical trades are crowding around me. A day's work is hardly enough for them to earn a living. So I must shorten my sermon, so that I won't keep them away from their work too long.

What shall I say to them? The time you lend to God is not lost. He will return it to you with large interest. Whatever difficulties may trouble you, the Lord will scatter them. To those who have preferred spiritual welfare, he will give health of body, sharpness of mind, success in business, and unbroken prosperity.

And even if our efforts don't realize our hopes in this life, the teachings of the Holy Spirit are nevertheless a rich treasure for ages to come.

So deliver your heart from the cares of this life and pay close attention to my words. What good will it do you to be here if you are here in body but your heart is worrying about your earthly treasure?
St. Basil, Hexameron, 3.1

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER.... How can I make more time for God, even when I'm so busy with everyday work?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Father, let your Son reign in my heart, so that I may no longer be a slave to the attacks of earthly desires*

Meditation

Well now that we have finally started to make time for God let us take another small step, how about we...**Clean out our heart before we pray?**

The Egyptian abbot Isaac gave St. John Cassian some practical advice on praying: Before you start, get rid of all the things in your mind that will distract you from your prayers.

To be able to offer our prayer with that earnestness and purity with which it ought to be offered, first, all anxiety about carnal things must be entirely got rid of. Next, we must leave no room for not just the care but even the recollection of any business affairs, and likewise must also lay aside all back biting, vain and incessant chattering, and buffoonery. Anger above all and disturbing depression must be entirely destroyed, and the deadly taint of carnal lust and covetousness be torn up by the roots.

Then there must be laid the secure foundations of a deep humility, which may be able to support a tower that shall reach the sky; and next the spiritual structure of the virtues must be built up upon them, and the soul kept

free from all conversation and from roving thoughts, so that thus it may little by little begin to rise to the contemplation of God and to spiritual insight.

Whatever our mind has been thinking of before the hour of prayer that thought is sure to occur to us while we are praying-for the mind in prayer is formed by its previous condition. When we are applying ourselves to prayer, the images of the same actions and words and thoughts as in our previous condition will dance before our eyes. They will make us angry or gloomy, or recall our former lust and business, or make us shake with foolish laughter at some silly joke, or smile at some action, or fly back to our previous conversation.

So if we do not want anything to haunt us while we are praying, we should be careful before our prayer to exclude it from the shrine of our heart. St. John Cassian, *Coriferences*, 9.3

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER... Do distracting thoughts sometimes break in when I pray? How can I prepare myself better beforehand?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Father, let me approach you in prayer with a good conscience, and cleanse my heart from every kind of pollution.*

Meditation

At last ready to take another step closer in prayer and spending a little bit more time with God, So what do I need to do next...**Be reconciled before you pray**, well isn't that the same as cleaning out hearts??? No there are differences.

In writing an instruction book for monks, St. John Cassian amplifies the Gospel's advice; if you go to pray and remember that anyone has anything against you, even unjustly, drop your prayer and run to be reconciled with your brother: This applies equally well to all within and outside the Church as well.

Because we often spurn the brethren who are injured and saddened, and despise them, and say that they were not hurt by any fault of ours.

Because of that, the Healer of souls, who knows all secrets, wishing to root out completely all opportunities of anger from our hearts, not only commands us to forgive if we have been wronged, and to be reconciled with our brothers, and keep no recollection of wrong or injuries against them, but he also gives a similar commandment, that if we are aware that they have anything against us, whether justly or unjustly, we should leave our gift-that is, postpone our prayers-and hasten first to offer satisfaction to them. Then, when our brother has been cured, we may bring the offering of our prayers without blemish.

For the common Lord of all does not care so much for our homage that he would want to lose in one what he gains in another, through displeasure being allowed to reign in us. He suffers some loss for anyone's loss, because he desires and looks for the salvation of all his servants in one and the same way. And therefore our prayer will lose its effect, if our brother has anything against us, just as much as if we were cherishing feelings of bitterness against him in a swelling and wrathful spirit.

St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 8.14

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER... Does anyone I know have a grudge or complaint against me? What can I do to be reconciled with that person--even if it takes some effort?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Lord, while I try to pursue what is good, shield me with your strong hand, and keep me from sin with your mighty arm.*

Meditation

Now we are ready to pray and spend with God and we are ready go down the road of prayer, are is there something else to do, like maybe... **Watch for distractions when you pray!**

It's far too easy to get distracted when we're trying to pray. St. Augustine was a great observer of nature, and one if the foremost scientists of his day-but he warns us not to let curiosity distract us from more important things.

Our curiosity is tempted every day in the most minute and contemptible thugs. And who can count how many times we succumb? How often, when people are telling idle tales, do we begin by tolerating them (we don't want to offend the weak), and gradually end up listening willingly?

These days I don't go to the races to see a dog chasing a hare. But if I happen to pass such a pursuit in the fields, it may possibly distract me from serious thought. I don't turn my horse aside to watch it, but I do turn my mind toward it.

And unless you, God, show me my weakness and quickly warn me, either to rise to you from some reflection on the sight itself, or just to despise it completely and pass It by, I-fool that I am-am absorbed by it.

When I'm sitting at home, why am I often distracted by a lizard catching flies, or a spider trapping them in her web? When our hearts are made a vessel for such things, and hold crowds of these abundant distractions, then our prayers are often interrupted and disturbed by them. While we turn our voices to your ears in your presence, such an important matter is broken off by who knows what idle thoughts.

St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.35

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER ...Do I let the distractions of everyday life keep me from concentrating on my prayers? How could I find even just a few minutes every day to give my whole mind over to God?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Lord, grant that I may stand before you in prayer to implore your forgiveness for all my sins.*

Meditation

Look for quiet when you pray.

St. Basil tells us that a quiet heart will help us overcome our passions and our temptations. We have to break our bad habits and start new good habits, and a little solitude will help a lot.

We must work to have a quiet mind. You can't see an object right in front of you if your eye is moving restlessly up and down and sideways; you have to look at it directly. In the same way, your mind can't understand the truth if it's distracted by a thousand worldly cares.

A man who isn't married yet is harassed by frenzied longings, rebellious impulses, hopeless heartaches; a man who has found his mate is surrounded by his own storm of cares. A man with no children longs for children; a man with children worries about their education. You worry about your wife, your house, a downturn in your business. Every day that comes on darkens your soul in its own way, and night after night picks up where the day's worries left off, and cheats your mind with dreams to latch your daily worries.

One way to escape all this is to separate from the whole world. I don't mean a physical separation, but cutting off your soul's sympathy with the body so that your heart can be ready to receive every impression of God's

teaching. We prepare the heart by unlearning the prejudices we pick up in evil conversation-like wiping a slate clean before you write on it.

Solitude is extremely useful for this purpose, it quiets our passions and gives our principals a chance to cut them out of our soul. Just as animals are easier to control when you pet them, lust and anger, fear and sorrow-deadly enemies of the soul-are easier to bring under the control of reason after they've been calmed by doing nothing, where there isn't constant stimulation. Find a place like ours, away from dealings with other people, so that you won't have outside interruptions breaking in on your prayers.

-St. Basil, *Letter 2*, 2

IN GODS PRESENCE, CONSIDER...When I try to pray, am I often distracted by other people, or by my own mind thinking about other things? Where could I find a quiet place to sit and meditate for a while?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Lord, help me see that this world is only temporary, and that the joy of heaven is my true future. Help me remember that this life is short, and the life to come lasts forever.*

Meditation

Lord I know that I should look for quiet when I pray, but you have made it clear that I should **Expect Satan's attack when I pray.**

Satan knows how much we gain by praying, says St. John Chrysostom, so that's when he attacks us the most. We need to be on our guard and not let in the stray thoughts the devil suggests.

We talked yesterday about the power of prayer. I pointed out how the devil, that deceiver, lies in wait when we pray. For he sees how much we gain from prayer, so that's when he attacks us the most, to break down our defenses and send us home empty-handed.

Earnest prayer is a light to the understanding and the soul-an inextinguishable and perpetual light. For that reason, he throws countless trash-heaps of ideas into our minds, things we would never have imagined, putting them all together at the very moment when we're praying and raining them down on our souls.

Just as a wind rushing in from the opposite direction will put out the flame of a lamp as it's being lighted, the devil, when he sees us lighting the flame of prayer, blows on it from every direction with gusts of countless thoughts, and doesn't stop until he has put out the light.

But we should do just what you do when you're lighting a lamp. What do you do? You put your finger over the hole in the lamp and keep the wind out. As long as the devil attacks from outside, we can stand up to him. But if we have opened the doors of our minds to him, and let the Enemy in, then we can't hold him off even a little bit. He puts out our memory on all sides, and then, like a smoking lamp, we speak only empty words. St. John Chrysostom, *Homily Against Publishing the Errors of the Brethren*, 5

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER...When I pray, is my mind really concentrated on the prayer, or do I allow myself to be distracted?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Father, I put all my faith in your saving help. Protect me from the violence of the Enemy, and keep me safe from Satan's attacks.*

Meditation

We must always remember that...**In prayer, quality counts more than quantity.**

Palladius of Galatia tells the story of an ascetic who was dismayed to learn that there was a woman who prayed even more than he did. The wise Macarius answered him that the number of the prayers wasn't the problem: it was whether he was praying with a pure heart.

There is a mountain in Egypt called Pherme, which borders on the great desert of Scete. On this mountain dwell some five hundred men, devotees of asceticism.

One of them, a man named Paul, had this manner of life: He touched no work and no business, nor did he receive anything from anyone beyond what he ate. But his work and his asceticism consisted in ceaseless prayer. He had three hundred set prayers, and he collected the same number of pebbles and kept them in his lap and threw out of his lap one pebble at each prayer.

He went to speak with Macarius, the one known as "the Citizen." "Father Macarius," he said, "I am afflicted."

He said, "In a certain village there lives a virgin who has lived the ascetic life for thirty years. They have told me of her that except on Saturday and Sunday she never eats. But all the while dragging out the long weeks and eating at intervals of five days she makes seven hundred prayers. And when I learned this I despaired of myself because I could not make more than three hundred."

The holy Macarius answered him: "I am now sixty years old; I make a hundred set prayers and produce my food by my own work, and speak to the brethren when they need me, and my reason does not condemn me as having neglected my duty. But if you say three hundred and are condemned by your conscience, you are clearly not praying them with purity, or else you could pray more and do not."

Palladius of Galatia, *Lausiac History*, 20.1-3

IN GOD'S PRESENCE, CONSIDER ...What is my conscience telling me about my prayer life?

CLOSING PRAYER: *Lord, sanctify me completely in soul, body, and spirit, so that I may pray to you along with your Holy disciples and Apostles*

Deacon Hicks