

Explorers in Prayer – Lesson Six Handout

The Place of Contemplation in Prayer

“Prayer makes your heart bigger, until it is capable of containing the gift of God himself.”
Mother Teresa – *In My Own Words*

Contemplative prayer is the form of prayer which is most exclusively for the purpose of deepening of our love relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In contemplative prayer there is no wish list that we are bringing to God, just a simple desire for awareness of God’s presence, and for the opening up of our human heart towards God in love, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Contemplative prayer is very different to any other form of prayer as it is a prayer without words. It is heart to heart prayer – hence it is known as the ‘prayer of the heart’. Its purpose is not to gain some sort of ecstatic experience, but to bring about a transformation of the human heart. Through it we grow in compassion, both for God and for others.

Contemplative prayer begins with learning to be attentive to God (mindful), and less distracted by things around us. For most people this means learning to enjoy silence; firstly externally, and then internally.

James W. Skehan - *Place Me With Your Son* - page 10.

“Notice how sharp is the hearing and the sense of touch of the blind person. Having lost the faculty of seeing, such a person has been forced to develop other faculties of perception. Something similar happens in the mystical world. If we could go mentally blind, so to speak, or if we could blindfold our mind while we are communicating with God, we would be forced to develop some other faculty for communicating with him - that faculty which, according to a number of mystics, is already straining to move out to him anyway if it were given a chance to develop - the heart.

If you would communicate with God through this heart that the mystics speak of, you must first silence the mind. Awareness meditations, such as those in Sadhana*, are an excellent way to attain to this silence of spirit. Even in your prayer time try gently to reduce the amount of thinking that you do and pray more with the heart. St Teresa of Avila used to say, “The important thing is not to think much but to love much.” So do a lot of loving during your time of prayer. And God will guide you even though it will be through a period of trial and error.”

* A book written by a Jesuit Spiritual Director called Anthony De Mello

Robert Llewellyn - *Prayer and Contemplation* - pages 45-46

“Before we go further we ought to make it clear that this silence of which we are speaking is not the silence of blankness or idleness, which has nothing to do with the drawing of the Holy Spirit. There are two images we might use to describe it. Think of a sentry on duty, an image of silence as alertness or awareness; or think of two people who love one another deeply, an image of silence as understanding and perception and harmony. We all know how different silences can be. There can be an idle silence or an embarrassed silence - better than either of these is conversation, in which we try to develop an awareness of one another’s needs and interests. But that is only a stage (just as discursive meditation is only a stage), and sooner or later there will be a breakthrough and long periods can then pass, perhaps before the fire of a winters evening, when each is supported by the silent

presence of the other and conversation is superfluous or, rather, both are free to let it come or go at will. That is the picture of contemplative Silence.”

Individual Exercise: Each day think of one person that you love and hold a picture of them in your imagination. Gently pray prayers of blessing on them and feel the love you have for them. After a while remember that this person is a gift from God to you and feel the love of gratitude to Him for this person. You can try thinking of a different person each day or keep thinking of the same person.

This can be a very difficult exercise for people to do. An alternative could be to set yourself the task of helping some person in need each day and try to see Jesus in that person; and so to love them as you would love Jesus.

Question for reflection: **What does spiritual maturity look like?**

Read chapters 12 & 14 of the course book.

Prayer Triplet Exercise: Spend half an hour in silence. Begin by one person praying that God will increase the love you each have for Him. Try to focus on your heart and the feelings you have for God. From the silence speak out very brief prayers such as ‘have mercy’; ‘thank you father’; ‘you are holy’...whatever you feel moved to say. Mostly, maintain the silence and try to feel and enjoy God’s presence.