

St. Alphonsus Liguori's Method of Mental Prayer

a. The Time and Place

It can be done almost anywhere --- at home, at work, walking, when traveling, etc. Solitude of heart is the essential condition, not necessarily solitude of place. As he himself said: "Deserts and caves are not absolutely necessary." The most suitable time seems to be early morning before one gets wrapped up in the day's affairs or evening time, when the daily chores are over.

b. The Actual Process

1. Preparation: Kneeling is the traditional posture but, he says, any position, sitting, lying down, etc., is acceptable as long as it does not lead to distraction.

Next comes a brief spiritual recollection of oneself best done by the three acts of faith, hope, love, humility, contrition, and a petition for light. The practice of the fixed gaze on the Divine Within comes in here.

2. Meditation: If done privately, this begins with a brief reading. Scripture should be the primary reading or some spiritual book. Alphonsus points out that St. Teresa of Avila used a book for seventeen years. When a group meets for prayer, this reading is done in common.

3. Praying: For Alphonsus, the affections are the heart of prayer. In *The Great Means* he writes:

It should be remembered that the advantage of mental prayer consists not so much in the meditations as in making of affections, petition, and resolutions. These are the three fruits of meditations. As St. Teresa of Avila notes: "The progress of a soul does not consist in thinking much about God, but in loving him ardently, and this love is acquired by resolving to do a great deal for him." The act of love is the great chain, the golden chain that binds us to God. (*Great Means II*)

Petitions: With Alphonsus, petitionary prayer is primary; we ask for God's graces but most of all we ask continually for an increase of love. Petitioning for material blessings are not excluded, of course, but they must remain secondary and must be made with perfect conformity to God's will.

Resolutions: These begin at the wind-down point of prayer. They should be concrete and particular; e.g., to avoid one's predominant fault this day, to accept contradictions from another, to renew one's vows, to curb a specific appetite, etc.

4. Conclusion: The conclusion, for Liguori, consists of three acts; namely, thanksgiving for the lights received, a solid proposal to carry out the resolutions just made, and thirdly, a petition for the grace necessary to be faithful today. Liguori had the habit of adding three brief prayer acts at this final point: a brief prayer for the conversion of sinners, one for the souls in purgatory, and a quick reminder to Mary to intercede for us, for sinners, and for the souls in purgatory.

I have culled this brief schema on the manner of making mental prayer from *The Great Means*, Part II, pages 229-260 in the paperback Grimm edition.

Taken from: *Alphonsus Liguori-The Redeeming Love of Christ selected spiritual writings* edited and introduced by Joseph Oppitz, C.S.S.R. @1992 New City Press, New York