

Prayer 2



Therese of Lisieux

‘Prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.’

Teresa of Avila

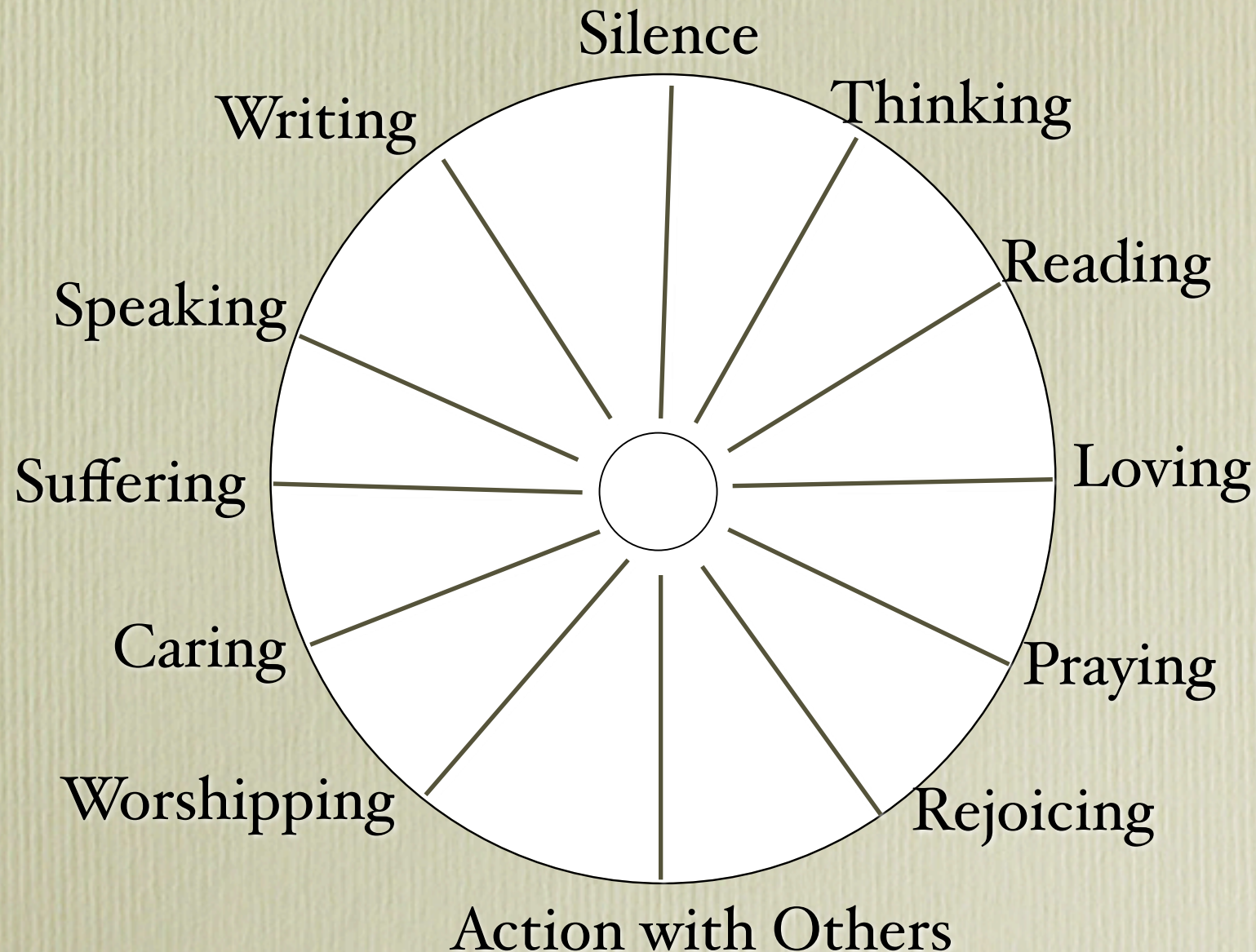
‘Prayer is an intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with the One who we know loves us.’

‘Look at Him. He never takes his eyes off you.’

John of the Cross

‘The language which God hears best is silent love.’

Any experience can nurture prayer
and be nurtured by it



While the journey of prayer encompasses every dimension of our lives, the interior dimension is the key: the inner journey to our own heart and so to the Heart of God – the journey of prayer in which Heart speaks to heart.

We are called to love God ‘with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

(Mark 12:30, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5).

Catechism n. 2559

‘Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought”(Romans 8:26) are we ready to receive fully the gift of prayer.’

Sharing in the prayer of Jesus' heart

To believe in Jesus is to share in Jesus' communion. To believe in Jesus is to be drawn into a communion of love with Jesus and with his Father and with the Spirit, their bond of love. It is our Christian belief that the risen Jesus, in eternal communion with his Father, has given us the gift of his Spirit, and, in this way, has made his home in our soul:

‘If you love me, my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home in you’(John 15:21).



In prayer we are drawn into divine communion by being drawn into Jesus' own prayer. It is Jesus' Spirit who has been poured into our hearts, and it is this Spirit who invites us to be a holy place in which Jesus can continue his prayer.



Just as the Christian life is not a matter of living like Jesus so much as allowing Jesus to live again in us, so Christian prayer is not a matter of modelling our prayer on that of Jesus so much as joining our heart to the heart of Jesus and allowing his Spirit to pray to the Father in us. Jesus did not ask us to become another vine, modelled on him. He asked us to be his branches and to remain attached to him.

A heart open to holiness

John of the Cross

‘O most beautiful of creatures, so anxious to know the whereabouts of the One you love so that you may seek him and be united to him, know that you yourself are his dwelling place, his secret chamber, the place where he lies hidden.

Rejoice and be glad, for all you ever wanted, all you ever hoped for, is so close as to be within you. You cannot be without Him.’

John of the Cross

‘Come then O beautiful soul! Since you know that the Beloved whom you desire lives hidden within your heart, strive to be yourself truly hidden with him, and you will embrace him within and experience him with loving affection.’

‘God says to the soul ‘I am yours and for you. I am delighted to be what I am, so as to be yours and to give myself to you.’

Augustine

‘Return to the heart!

Why are you running away from yourselves?

Why are you getting lost, outside yourselves,
entering on deserted ways?

You are wandering aimlessly. Come back!

Where to? To the Lord!

It can be done without delay!

Return immediately to your heart!

Augustine

Exiled from your own self you wander outside.
You fail to know yourself,
you who want to know
the source of your existence.
Come back! Return to the heart ...
See there what you can learn about God,
for the image of God is there.
In your inner self dwells Christ.
In your inner self you are being renewed
after God's image.'

Beginning to pray

Teresa of Avila

‘Each of us has a soul, but, since we do not prize our souls as creatures made in the image of God should, we do not understand the deep secrets that lie in them.’

‘The soul is a paradise where the Lord says he finds his delight.’

‘In its centre very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.’

Teresa of Avila

‘Let us exert ourselves, for the love of the Lord.
Let us abandon our reason and our fears into his hands.
Let us forget this natural weakness
that can take up so much of our attention ...
Care only about moving quickly so as to see the Lord.’

Devotional Prayers

Therese of Lisieux

‘Sometimes when I am in a state of spiritual dryness that not a single good thought occurs to me, I say very slowly the ‘Our Father’ or the ‘Hail Mary’, and these prayers suffice to take me out of myself and wonderfully refresh me.’

Teresa of Avila

‘If you are to recite the Our Father well, one thing is necessary: you must not leave the side of the Master who taught it to you.’

Teresa of Avila

‘While you are repeating some vocal prayer, it is possible for the Lord to grant you perfect contemplation ...

You are enkindled in love without understanding how.

You know that you are rejoicing in the one you love, but you do not know how.

You are well aware that this is not a joy which you can attain through understanding. You embrace it without understanding how, but you do understand that it is a blessing you are receiving ... This is perfect contemplation ... In contemplation we can do nothing. God does everything. The work is God’s alone and far transcends human nature.’

‘Christian prayer is primarily the prayer of the entire community of humankind joined to Christ himself.

Each individual has his or her part in this prayer which is common to the one Body, and it thus becomes the voice of the Beloved Spouse of Christ, putting into words the wishes and desires of the whole Christian people and making intercession for the necessities common to all humankind.

It obtains its unity from the heart of Christ himself.

Pope Paul VI

Our Redeemer, as he himself had entered into life
through his prayer and sacrifice,
wished that this should not cease
throughout the ages
in his Mystical Body, the Church,
and so the official Prayer of the Church
is at the same time the very prayer
which Christ himself together with his Body
addresses to the Father ...
Our voices re-echo in Christ and his voice in us.'

Fr Marie-Eugène OCD

‘Liturgical prayer, like every other prayer,
is to be enlivened by interior prayer.

If the external movement that it imposes,
the art that it cultivates,
the sustained attention that it requires,
should hinder or even destroy the contemplation that it
is meant to serve,

the devotion that it should stimulate,
or the interior spirit that it wants to express,
it would be mere external worship that God could not
accept, according to the words of Scripture (Mark 7:6):

‘These people honour me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me.’

Fr Marie-Eugène OCD

The beginner must learn to pray with the Church,
to enter into the majestic beauty of her ceremonies,
to penetrate their symbolism
and delight in her liturgical texts.

We must above all seek in liturgical prayer
the movements of the soul of Christ in the Church,
listening to the movements of his Spirit of Love,
and so learn in the school of Jesus Christ our Master
his daily intimate and silent prayer.'

Prayer Reflecting on one's Life

- Place myself in God's presence. What do I feel grateful for today?
- Ask Jesus to let me see my day through his eyes.
- Ask Jesus to show me now what he was trying to show me during the day: the good and the bad.
- Delay on anything that stands out, expressing gratitude or sorrow.
- Pray to be more attentive and sensitive to God's inspiration.
- Conclude with an act of longing and love.

Gospel Meditation

It is good to have read the passage before the time set aside for the meditation (perhaps the night before). At the time of the first reading ask God's Spirit to inspire you to ask for the grace that God wants to offer you in your prayer. It may be the grace to realise more deeply what Jesus has done for you. It may be the grace to see where you are like the people in the gospel scene and to plead with Jesus for his healing love. It may be to have the courage to do something that you know God is calling you to do. When you come to the time that you have set aside for meditation, recall this desire and ask God earnestly to give you this grace.

Gospel Meditation

Now go through the scene slowly, using your imagination to enter into it, seeking to enter into the heart of each of the people in the scene, especially into the heart of Jesus. Pray to be open to the wonder of the way in which God is revealing God's presence and God's love in the scene, especially, of course, in Jesus. When your heart is moved to speak to Jesus, allow it to do so, for it is this conversation and loving communion that primarily constitutes prayer.

A simple form of imaginative exercise consists of three steps.

- Focus on a scene from the Gospels: look at Jesus and allow your heart to go out to him in wonder and loving adoration.
- Place yourself in the scene and unite yourself to him in communion.
- Listen to him as he asks you to love others as he loves you, and ask him to guide you to do to others as you have experienced him doing to you.

‘Care only about moving quickly so as to see the Lord’(Teresa).

Prayer of Presence

Teresa of Avila

‘I am not asking you to do anything more than look at him. Who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul towards the Lord? He never takes his eyes off you.’

‘It is good to reflect for a time ... but we should not always weary ourselves in seeking these reflections, but just remain there in his presence ... Keep him company. Talk with him. Pray to him. Delight in him.’

Prayer of Presence Teresa of Avila

‘Speak with Him as with a Father, a Brother, a Lord and a Spouse ... He will teach you what you must do to please Him ... Remember how important it is for you to understand this truth – that the Lord is within us and that we should be there with Him ... The fire of Divine Love is the more readily enkindled in those who pray in this way; for they are so near the fire that, however small the blaze that has been fanned by the understanding, when no hindrance comes from outside, they remain alone with their God and are ready to become enkindled.’

Longing for God

‘O Lord, all my longing is known to you;
my sighing is not hidden from you’(Psalm 38:9).

‘As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?’(Psalm
42:1).

‘O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts
for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and
weary land where there is no water.’(Psalm 63:1)

Longing for God

‘When you search for me, you will find me;
if you seek me with all your heart,
I will let you find me, says the Lord’(Jeremiah 29:13).

‘Jesus thirsts; his asking arises
from the depths of God’s desire for us ...
God thirsts that we might thirst for God’(Catechism n. 2561).

Ruth Burrows

‘Prayer is self-surrender to God at every moment; the reality of our prayer will be the reality of our self-surrender, not how we feel, what we experience, the lights we get and so forth. Prayer is necessarily hard because self-surrender is hard’(To Believe in Jesus page 85).

‘True prayer is a giving of self to God,
an opening of the self to God,
not a seeking to feel God and God’s action.’

‘Prayer is our saying Yes to God who is bending to us,
offering us love, inviting us to intimate friendship.’

James McAuley (1917-1976) on prayer
(from A Letter to John Dryden)

Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,
Cast flame upon the earth: raise up contemplatives
Among us, men who walk within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land:
Distracted men that sow their hopes in sand
Will sometimes feel an evanescent sense
Of questioning, they do not know from whence.
Prayer has an influence we cannot mark,
It works unseen like radium in the dark.

‘More than all else attend to your heart
for from it flow the springs of life’(Proverbs 4:23).

Service

- We find that we are able to provide a loving environment for others. This is healing for them and for us
- Others need my love

‘Jesus took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me” (Mark 9:36-37)

Service

‘I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you gave me clothing,
I was sick and you took care of me,
I was in prison and you visited me’(Matthew 25:35-36).

‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in
remembrance of me.’(Luke 22:19)

‘Love one another as I have loved you’(John 15:12).

‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’(John 14:6).

truth - knowing him

life - loving him

way - serving him

John Henry Newman

‘Dear Jesus,
Help me spread Your fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood me with Your Spirit and Life.
Penetrate and possess my being so utterly
that all my life may be only a radiance of Yours.
Shine through me and be so in me
that every person I come in contact with
may feel Your presence in my soul.’