

“Spiritual Theology” by Jordan Aumann, OP

Study Questions - Chapter Twelve

by Mr. George H. Bercaw, O.P.

St. Cecilia Chapter of the Dominican Laity (Nashville, Tn)

-Grades of Prayer-

References: CCC / Scripture

Part IV; Section One: Christian Prayer Part IV; Section Two: The Lord’s Prayer	Refer to any Scriptural Concordance or Bible Index for specific references to prayer.
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Additional References:

“Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church” by Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell, O.P. Robin Maas is Associate Professor of Christian Education at Wesley Theological Seminary. Fr. O’Donnell is Associate Professor of Spiritual Theology and Liturgics at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.D. This book discusses the many “spiritualities;” including Catholic Religious Orders and Mainline Protestant Denominations. The Spirituality of the Early Church as well as more contemporary forms is presented in the book.
Other modern-day authors to look for include: George A. Mahoney, Henri Nouwen, and Thomas H. Greene. Henri Nouwen is a favorite among Protestant clergy.

“Those who aspire to sanctity by giving themselves completely to the active life while neglecting the life of prayer may just as well forget about Christian perfection. Experience proves that there is absolutely nothing that can supply for the life of prayer, not even the daily reception of the Eucharist. There are many persons who receive Communion every day, yet their spiritual life is mediocre and lukewarm.” -

Questions

1. We are indebted to St. Teresa of Avila for the clearest and best classification of the grades of prayer. These grades are:
 - a. vocal prayer
St. Thomas gives three reasons why vocal prayer is suitable: (1) it arouses interior devotion; (2) it gives homage to God with our body as well as our mind and heart; and (3) it gives expression to the spiritual sentiments that flood the soul in prayer.... leads to the higher forms of prayer: discursive meditation and affective prayer.
 - b. Meditation
Discursive meditation can be defined as a reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into

practice with the assistance of grace. The distinguishing note of meditation is that it is a discursive type of prayer, and therefore attention is absolutely indispensable.

- c. *As soon as we cease to reason or discourse, we cease to meditate.* We may have given way to distraction, deliberately turned our mind to something else, or passed on to affective prayer or contemplation, but *without discursus there is no meditation*

- d. affective prayer

There is no specific difference between affective prayer and meditation, as there is between meditation and contemplation; it is merely a simplified meditation in which love predominates

- e. prayer of simplicity

- f. *It is a form of ascetical prayer that is extremely simplified.* The discursus formerly used in meditation has now been transformed into a simple intellectual gaze; the affections that were experienced in affective prayer have been unified into a simple loving attention to God. *The prayer is ascetical, meaning that the soul is able to attain to this type of prayer by its own efforts with the help of ordinary grace, but often it is the transition point to mystical prayer.*

- g. infused contemplation

contemplation is a distinctive type of knowled.... supernatural contemplation is an experimental knowledge of God.... Infused contemplation is not a charism or "gratia gratis data" but a grade of prayer made possible by the operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given to all souls with sanctifying grace

- h. prayer of quiet

The prayer of quiet is a type of mystical prayer in which the intimate awareness of God's presence captivates the will and fills the soul arid body with ineffable sweetness and delight

- i. prayer of union

The prayer of union is that grade of mystical prayer in which all the internal faculties are gradually captivated and occupied with God...The intensity of the mystical experience caused by the prayer of union is indescribable. It is superior beyond compare to that of the preceding grade, to the point that the body itself is affected by the working of God in the soul. Without being entirely captivated, the external senses become almost helpless and inoperative. *The soul experiences divine reality with such intensity that it could easily fall into ecstasy*

- j. prayer of conforming union,

The prayer of union, as we have seen, unites the soul intimately with God and is, in a sense, the last grade of mystical prayer, although it admits of degrees of intensity. St. Teresa treats of the prayer of union in the last three mansions of *The Interior Castle* and assigns the types of this prayer as follows: fifth mansions, the prayer of union; sixth mansions, spiritual betrothal; seventh mansions, spiritual marriage. But

she likewise explains *that these three are generically the same prayer; the difference lies in the degree to which God unites the soul to himself*

- k. prayer of transforming union.

The last grade of prayer is the transforming union, identified by many mystics as the spiritual marriage. It constitutes the seventh mansions of The Interior Castle of St. Teresa and is the highest degree of perfection that one can attain in this life

2. The first four grades of prayer belong to the predominantly ascetical stage of the spiritual life; the remaining five grades are infused prayer and belong to the mystical phase of the spiritual life. Compare the following stages of prayer:
- Ascetic stage –This stage of prayer is largely dependent upon actual grace; therefore, our activity.
 - Mystical stage –This stage involves infused contemplation and the movement of the Holy Spirit in our prayer life. It is beyond our ability to bring it about.
3. What are the two requirements for vocal prayer?
- Attention*
 - Devotion*
4. Fr. Aumann states that “As soon as we cease to reason or discourse, we cease to meditate. We may have given way to distraction, deliberately turned our mind to something else, or passed on to affective prayer or contemplation, but *without discursus there is no meditation.*” Why is this so? How does this relate to our Dominican Charism?
- Discursive meditation can be defined as a reasoned application of the mind to some supernatural truth in order to penetrate its meaning, love it, and carry it into practice with the assistance of grace.... Speak Lord, for your servant is listening!*
5. Reflect upon the following statement from the text: “Those who aspire to sanctity by giving themselves completely to the active life while neglecting the life of prayer may just as well forget about Christian perfection. Experience proves that there is absolutely nothing that can supply for the life of prayer, not even the daily reception of the Eucharist. There are many persons who receive Communion every day, yet their spiritual life is mediocre and lukewarm.”
6. How is the following statement from the text related to the Dominican Charism of Contemplation: “Discursive meditation and spiritual reading play an important part

in the practice of affective prayer; they supply the material that stimulates the activity of the will.

7. In what way do you see *Study, Contemplation, and Prayer* as being related to each other?

8. In what way is *Contemplation* a distinctive type of knowledge?

Contemplation is a distinctive type of knowledge. It is an experimental knowledge in the sense that it calls into play the affective powers of the individual. Contemplation is, therefore, an operation in which one experiences the happy blending of the cognitive and the affective powers in an activity providing great delight. The knowledge involved is not discursive but intuitive; the movement of love is not toward the possession of the object loved but one of surrender to the object loved. Perhaps the best example of natural contemplation is found in the aesthetic experience of the beautiful

9. Explain the following: *“Supernatural contemplation is an experimental knowledge of God.”*

When we speak of contemplation as a grade of mystical prayer, we restrict the word to signify the loving knowledge of God that is experienced through the operation of the gifts of wisdom and understanding, presupposing, of course, faith informed by charity.

10. What are the characteristics of *Infused Contemplation*?

a. *An experience of the presence of God*

b. *The invasion of the soul by the supernatural*

c. *. Impossibility of producing the mystical experience by one's efforts*

d. *In contemplation the soul is more passive than active*

e. *The experimental knowledge of God enjoyed during contemplation is not clear and distinct but obscure and confused*

f. *Infused contemplation gives full security and assurance to the soul that it is under the action of God.*

g. *Infused contemplation gives the soul moral certitude that it is in the state of grace*

11. Fr. Aumann notes that *“The intensity of the mystical experience caused by the prayer of union is indescribable..... The soul experiences divine reality with such intensity that it could easily fall into ecstasy.”* What are some of the signs associated with this type of prayer?

- a. *The mystical union admits of variations and fluctuations*
- b. *mystical experience frequently causes reactions in the body.*
- c. *Mystical prayer often produces, a suspension or binding of the faculties.....
Mystical activity tends to exclude everything that is alien to it, especially the operations that proceed from the effort of the subject*
- d. *nfused contemplation causes a great impulse for the practice of virtue..... One of the marvelous facts of mystical experience is that a contemplative soul sometimes finds that it instantaneously possesses a degree of perfection in a certain virtue it has not been able to attain over a long period of time in spite of its efforts*

12. Reflect upon the following statement and seek its personal meaning in your spiritual life: *“The highest perfection consists not in interior favors or in great raptures or in visions or in the spirit of prophecy, but in the bringing of our wills so closely into conformity with the will of God that, as soon as we realize he wills anything, we desire it ourselves with all our might, and take the bitter with the sweet, knowing that to be His Majesty's will.”*

IN BRIEF

2590 “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (St. John Damascene, *De fide orth.* 3, 24: PG 94, 1089C).

2591 God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man.

2592 The prayer of Abraham and Jacob is presented as a battle of faith marked by trust in God’s faithfulness and by certitude in the victory promised to perseverance.

2593 The prayer of Moses responds to the living God’s initiative for the salvation of his people. It foreshadows the prayer of intercession of the unique mediator, Christ Jesus.

2594 The prayer of the People of God flourished in the shadow of the dwelling place of God’s presence on earth, the ark of the covenant and the Temple, under the guidance of their shepherds, especially King David, and of the prophets.

2595 The prophets summoned the people to conversion of heart and, while zealously seeking the face of God, like Elijah, they interceded for the people.

2596 The Psalms constitute the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament. They present two inseparable qualities: the personal, and the communal. They extend to all dimensions of history, recalling God's promises already fulfilled and looking for the coming of the Messiah.

2597 Prayed and fulfilled in Christ, the Psalms are an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church. They are suitable for men of every condition and time.¹

IN BRIEF

2620 Jesus' filial prayer is the perfect model of prayer in the New Testament. Often done in solitude and in secret, the prayer of Jesus involves a loving adherence to the will of the Father even to the Cross and an absolute confidence in being heard.

2621 In his teaching, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with a purified heart, with lively and persevering faith, with filial boldness. He calls them to vigilance and invites them to present their petitions to God in his name. Jesus Christ himself answers prayers addressed to him.

2622 The prayers of the Virgin Mary, in her Fiat and Magnificat, are characterized by the generous offering of her whole being in faith.²

IN BRIEF

2644 The Holy Spirit who teaches the Church and recalls to her all that Jesus said also instructs her in the life of prayer, inspiring new expressions of the same basic forms of prayer: blessing, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

2645 Because God blesses the human heart, it can in return bless him who is the source of every blessing.

2646 Forgiveness, the quest for the Kingdom, and every true need are objects of the prayer of petition.

2647 Prayer of intercession consists in asking on behalf of another. It knows no boundaries and extends to one's enemies.

2648 Every joy and suffering, every event and need can become the matter for thanksgiving which, sharing in that of Christ, should fill one's whole life: "Give thanks in all circumstances" (*1 Thess 5:18*).

2649 Prayer of praise is entirely disinterested and rises to God, lauds him, and gives him glory for his own sake, quite beyond what he has done, but simply because HE IS.³

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (623). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

² Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (630–631). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

IN BRIEF

- 2661** By a living transmission—Tradition—the Holy Spirit in the Church teaches the children of God to pray.
- 2662** The Word of God, the liturgy of the Church, and the v⁴

IN BRIEF

- 2680** Prayer is primarily addressed to the Father; it can also be directed toward Jesus, particularly by the invocation of his holy name: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners.”
- 2681** “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’, except by the Holy Spirit” (*1 Cor* 12:3). The Church invites us to invoke the Holy Spirit as the interior Teacher of Christian prayer.
- 2682** Because of Mary’s singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray in communion with the Virgin Mary, to magnify with her the great things the Lord has done for⁵

IN BRIEF

- 2692** In prayer, the pilgrim Church is associated with that of the saints, whose intercession she asks.
- 2693** The different schools of Christian spirituality share in the living tradition of prayer and are precious guides for the spiritual life.
- 2694** The Christian family is the first place for education in prayer.
- 2695** Ordained ministers, the consecrated life, catechesis, prayer groups, and “spiritual direction” ensure assistance within the Church in the practice of prayer.

³ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (636). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

⁴ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (639). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

⁵ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (644). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

2696 The most appropriate places for prayer are personal or family oratories, monasteries, places of pilgrimage, and above all the church, which is the proper place for liturgical prayer for the parish community and the privileged place for Eucharistic adoration.⁶

IN BRIEF

2720 The Church invites the faithful to regular prayer: daily prayers, the Liturgy of the Hours, Sunday Eucharist, the feasts of the liturgical year.

2721 The Christian tradition comprises three major expressions of the life of prayer: vocal prayer, meditation, and contemplative prayer. They have in common the recollection of the heart.

2722 Vocal prayer, founded on the union of body and soul in human nature, associates the body with the interior prayer of the heart, following Christ's example of praying to his Father and teaching the Our Father to his disciples.

2723 Meditation is a prayerful quest engaging thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. Its goal is to make our own in faith the subject considered, by confronting it with the reality of our own life.

2724 Contemplative prayer is the simple expression of the mystery of prayer. It is a gaze of faith fixed on Jesus, an attentiveness to the Word of God, a silent love. It achieves real union with the prayer of Christ to the extent that it makes us share in his mystery.⁷

IN BRIEF

2752 Prayer presupposes an effort, a fight against ourselves and the wiles of the Tempter. The battle of prayer is inseparable from the necessary "spiritual battle" to act habitually according to the Spirit of Christ: we pray as we live, because we live as we pray.

2753 In the battle of prayer we must confront erroneous conceptions of prayer, various currents of thought, and our own experience of failure. We must respond with humility, trust, and perseverance to these temptations which cast doubt on the usefulness or even the possibility of prayer.

2754 The principal difficulties in the practice of prayer are distraction and dryness. The remedy lies in faith, conversion, and vigilance of heart.

⁶ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (647). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

⁷ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (652–653). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

- 2755** Two frequent temptations threaten prayer: lack of faith and acedia—a form of depression stemming from lax ascetical practice that leads to discouragement.
- 2756** Filial trust is put to the test when we feel that our prayer is not always heard. The Gospel invites us to ask ourselves about the conformity of our prayer to the desire of the Spirit.
- 2757** “Pray constantly” (*1 Thess 5:17*). It is always possible to pray. It is even a vital necessity. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable.
- 2758** The prayer of the hour of Jesus, rightly called the “priestly prayer” (cf. *Jn 17*), sums up the whole economy of creation and salvation. It fulfills the great petitions of the Our Father.⁸

⁸ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed.) (660). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.