

**MENTAL PRAYER
OF SIMPLE ATTENTION IN
ST. JOHN BAPTIST DE LA SALLE
AND COMTEMPLATION IN
ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS
(2/3)**

Brother Victor Gil.

8. The second part of mental prayer (176).

8.1. Mental prayer on a Mystery.

We can now apply our attention in mental prayer to a mystery of religion. This begins by becoming absorbed in the mystery's meaning, just by taking a **simple look** - "simple regard", is the expression used by De La Salle - a simple look at it in faith, in other words with **simple attention**, or by means of various reflections on the mystery.

In making one's act of faith on the mystery, one can concentrate on making a series of reflections on that mystery (204), by a few short reflections continued over a longer period (204), or by simple attention (204).

Concentrating on the mystery by **simple attention**, which is also called **contemplation**, consists in remaining mentally very respectful, by observing the mystery with a living faith, which makes one's mind and will ready silently to adore with love, thankfulness and with a tremendous desire to be united to Our Lord in the mystery concerned, and to acquire some of its philosophy and benefits.

One will remain in this state for a longer or shorter time, according to one's inclination. **One must be careful not to shorten this period of simple attention by making special acts according to one's different feelings, since it is unnecessary to divide it up in this way.**

One's interior attitude can be maintained in a simple and implicit way, which means without saying very much, and without making distinct and varied acts for the purpose. One's attitude must be alive and fervent, and be helped by words coming every so often from the heart, according to one's need or as one feels drawn to practising the virtues mentioned before. (210).

These three different ways of making mental prayer on a mystery and of applying oneself to the presence of God, can be linked to the three states of spiritual life: prayer through reasoning and considerations, which is for beginners; occasional reflections continued over a period of time, which is for the proficient; then simple attention which is for experts (212).

8.2 Meditation on a virtue (247)

In the second part of mental prayer one can alternatively concentrate on some particular virtue and take it as the subject of mental prayer. Above all it is necessary to be fully convinced that the virtue one is going to deal with is necessary; this can be achieved in the following ways.

Firstly it can be achieved through a sentiment of faith, by thinking of a passage of Scripture containing a reference to the virtue in question. For example, to acquire humility, one might meditate on James chapter four: "God resists the proud and gives his grace to the humble". One then remains for a time in a respectful attitude, fixing one's attention on the virtue mentioned in the text (251).

The second way is to make reflections on the virtue...

After making an act of faith in the virtue, one can continue with reasoning and a **series of reflections** following one another; or by **short reflections** founded on faith and supported by a Scripture quotation: this can carry on for quite some time; or one can pay **simple attention** to Our Lord, picturing him as he taught the virtue, in the same way as explained above for the first part of mental prayer.

One can concentrate on the chosen virtue by simple attention as follows: whilst thinking of Jesus Christ, one sees him teaching the virtue orally and by his own example. One does this by simply adoring him without **reasoning and philosophising**, but with simple attention, and with as much respect and affection as is possible, and by remaining in this attitude for as much time as one can manage and as one considers suitable. (268, 269).

The consequences of this kind of mental prayer are: a gentle inclination to practise the virtue; the acquisition of a supernatural personal conviction concerning the virtue, so that one is glad to practise it. This helps to overcome the natural difficulties arising against its practice and a willingness to grasp at the chance to practise it and to take satisfaction in it.

One can use any of these three ways in mental prayer, according to one's inclination. (268, 269).

8.3 Meditation on a teaching.

De La Salle uses the word "maxim" when referring to something being taught. When one meditates on a teaching or maxim, one has first of all to concentrate one's mind on the need and usefulness of the maxim. For this, one needs faith, which comes about by recalling the part of Scripture where the teaching - maxim - is announced.(296).

One can make the act of faith on the teaching by continuous reflections or by simple attention in the way explained above. (306).

9. Some practical points about the acts of mental prayer. (326)

This part of mental prayer has 9 acts, like the first and second parts. The great number of acts can be rather distracting, that is why De La Salle gives advice on how to use the examples of the acts he offers, of which those on simple attention are the ones that interest us just now (326).

To avoid all these acts one can make just one act which implicitly contains the ideas of all the others, that is **without separating them into different oral and defined acts**; one puts oneself in God's presence, with a **simple gaze - simple regard** - of faith in his presence, mentally adoring his tremendous greatness, thanking him for his help, staying humble, remaining regretful and sorrowful for one's sins. One concentrates on one's need of Our Lord's merits, and prays for them whilst remaining united with him. One wants to be encouraged by his divine spirit and one asks Our Lord's help whole-heartedly and in a very simple way.

This is an easy method of procedure for anyone who really concentrates on the interior life, who keeps thinking about God, who does not keep looking all over the place and

remains interiorly calm, who is not always chatting, who gets on with his own duties and who is always obedient. (327).

10. To sum up.

In describing his method of mental prayer, De La Salle finds time to speak about what other authors call meditation. He attempts to avoid the word contemplation as a description of the mental prayer of the experts; he calls it mental prayer of simple attention or simple gaze or "regard". He wants one to make quick progress in reaching this simple kind of mental prayer, for it is in this, that God contacts a person directly and where grace produces its greatest benefits. Faith is a sure guide, with Scripture as its constant reference point. This mental prayer of simple attention contains teaching similar to what St. John of the Cross says about contemplation. De La Salle might have read the works of St. John of the Cross or learnt about them indirectly. To help in this hypothesis let us take a look at what St. John of the Cross says about contemplation.

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