

Madame Guyon (1648-1717), *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer*

Prayer is the application of the heart to God, and the internal exercise of love. S. Paul hath enjoined us to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. v 17), and our Lord saith, “I say unto you all, watch and pray” (Mark xiii. 33, 37): all therefore may, and all ought to practice prayer. All who are desirous of prayer may easily pray, enabled by those ordinary graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit which are common to all men. Prayer is the effusion of the heart in the Presence of God.

Prayer is the guide to perfection and the sovereign good; it delivers us from every vice, and obtains us every virtue; for the one great means to become perfect, is to walk in the presence of God: He Himself hath said, “walk in my presence and be ye perfect” (Gen. xvii.5,1). It is by prayer alone, that we are brought into this presence, and maintained in it without interruption.

You must then learn a species of prayer, which may be exercised at all times [and by all sorts of people]; it cannot, therefore, be the prayer of the head, but of the heart; not a prayer of the understanding alone, which is so limited in its operations that it can have but one object at one time; but the prayer of the heart is not interrupted by the exercises of reason: indeed nothing can interrupt this prayer, but irregular and disordered affections: and when once we have tasted of God, and the sweetness of His love, we shall find it impossible to relish aught but Himself.

There are two ways of introducing a soul into prayer, which should for some time be pursued; the one is Meditation, the other is Reading accompanied with Meditation. Meditative Reading is the choosing some important practical or speculative truth, always preferring the practical, and proceeding thus: whatever truth you have chosen, read only a small portion of it, endeavoring to taste and digest it, to extract the essence and substance thereof, and proceed no farther while any savour or relish remains in the passage: when this subsides, take up your book again and proceed as before, seldom reading more than half a page at a time, for it is not the quantity that is read, but the manner of reading, that yields us profit.

Meditation, which is the other method, is to be practiced at an appropriated season, and not in the time of reading. I believe the best manner of meditating is as follows:—When, by an act of lively faith, you are placed in the Presence of God, recollect some truth wherein there is substance and food; pause gently and sweetly thereon, not to employ the reason, but merely to calm and fix the mind: for you must observe, that your principal exercise should ever be the Presence of God; your subject, therefore, should rather serve to stay the mind, than exercise the understanding.

From this procedure, it will necessarily follow, that the lively faith in a God immediately present in our inmost soul, will produce an eager and vehement pressing inwardly into ourselves, and a restraining all our senses from wandering abroad: this serves to extricate us speedily from numberless distractions, to remove us far from external objects, and to bring us nigh unto our God, Who is only to be found in our inmost centre, which is the Holy of Holies wherein He dwelleth.

When the Divine Presence is granted us, and we gradually relish silence and repose, this experimental feeling and taste of the Presence of God introduces the soul into the second degree of prayer.

First, as soon as the soul by faith places itself in the Presence of God, and becomes recollected before Him, let it remain thus for a little time in a profound and respectful silence. I would warmly recommend it to all, never to finish prayer, without remaining some little time after in a respectful silence. It is also of the greatest importance for the soul to go to prayer with courage, and such a pure and disinterested love, as seeks nothing from God, but the ability to please Him, and to do His will: for a servant who only proportions his diligence to his hope of reward, renders himself unworthy of all reward.

Abandonment is a matter of the greatest importance in our process; it is the key to the inner court; so that whosoever knoweth truly how to abandon himself, soon becomes perfect: we must, therefore, continue steadfast and immovable therein, nor listen to the voice of natural reason. Great faith produces great abandonment: we must confide in God “hoping against hope” ([Rom. iv. 18](#)). Abandonment is the casting off of all selfish care, that we may be altogether at the Divine Disposal. All Christians are exhorted to this resignation. Our abandonment then should be as fully applied to external as internal things, giving up all our concerns into the hands of God, forgetting ourselves, and thinking only of Him; by which the heart will remain always disengaged, free, and at peace.

Now, when the soul, by its efforts to abandon outward objects, and gather itself inwards, is brought into the influence of this central tendency, without any other exertion, it falls gradually by the weight of Divine Love into its proper centre; and the more passive and tranquil it remains, and the freer from self-motion and self-exertion, the more rapidly it advances, because the energy of the central attractive virtue is unobstructed and has full liberty for action.

Thus doth the soul ascend unto God, by giving up self to the destroying and annihilating power of Divine Love: this, indeed, is a most essential and necessary sacrifice in the Christian religion, and that alone by which we pay true homage to the sovereignty of God. By the destruction of the existence of self within us, we truly acknowledge the supreme existence of our God; now it is by the giving up of our own life, that we give place for His coming; and “in dying to ourselves, He liveth and abideth in us.” We should, indeed, surrender our whole being unto Christ Jesus: and cease to live any longer in ourselves, that He may become our life; “that being dead, our life may be hid with Christ in God” ([Col. iii. 3](#)). “Pass ye into me,” saith God, “all ye who earnestly seek after me” ([Eccles. xxiv. 16](#)). But how is it we pass into God? We leave and forsake ourselves, that we may be lost in Him; and this can be effected only by annihilation; which being the true prayer of adoration, renders unto God alone, all “Blessing, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever” ([Rev. v. 13](#)). This is the prayer of truth; “It is worshipping God in spirit and in truth” ([John iv. 23](#)). The soul advanced thus far hath no need of any other preparation than its quietude: for now the Presence of God, which is the great effect, or rather continuation of Prayer, begins to be infused, and almost without intermission.

There are but these two truths, the All, and the Nothing; everything else is falsehood. We can pay due honour to the All of God, only in our own annihilation, which is no sooner accomplished, than He, who never suffers a void in nature, instantly fills us with Himself. Did we but know the virtue and the blessings which the soul derives from this prayer, we should willingly be employed therein without ceasing. Love is the weight which sinks them into God, wherein they descend with inconceivable rapidity from one profound depth to another.