

Oremus Lecture Talk #6: Discernment in Prayer

February 9, 2025, Sts. Anne and Joachim Catholic Church

Jeremiah 29:11-14 (English Standard Version): For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

1. Summary of previous lectures

- a. “As the body cannot live without nourishment, so our soul cannot stay spiritually alive without prayer.” -St. Augustine
- b. Mission: Fall in love with God
- c. Week 4: Relational Prayer (ARRR)
 - i. Acknowledge God’s presence, or what I’m thinking, feeling, or desiring
 - ii. Relate what I’m acknowledging in the passage with someone in prayer, for example it could be the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, Mary, another saint
 - iii. Receive from the Lord, could be a voice, a thought, Scripture passage, memory
 - iv. Respond to the Lord, act in some way as a consequence of the prayer
- d. Week 5: Spiritual Senses in Prayer
 - i. Main goal, use our imagination and memory to place ourselves in a scene in Scriptures
 1. “Meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion, and desire. This mobilization of faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart, and strengthen our will to follow Christ. Christian prayer tries above all to meditate on the mysteries of Christ, as in *Lectio Divina* or the rosary. This form of prayerful reflection is of great value, but Christian prayer should go further: to the knowledge of the love of the Lord Jesus, to union with him.” (CCC 2708)
 - ii. Our physical senses can correspond to the spiritual senses, using imagination to see, hear, taste, touch, and feel.
 - iii. Example: Jesus walks on the water from Matthew 14:22ff

2. Week 6: Discernment in Prayer

- a. Practical question: To whom am I listening?
 - i. God? Myself? The evil one?
 - ii. Thoughts, memories, emotions
 - iii. Is it consistent with Scriptures, the Magisterium (the teaching office of the Bishops), Jesus?
 - iv. Any private prayer must be consistent with what has been publicly revealed to the Church by Jesus.
- b. St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Discernment of Spirits
 - i. God wants to win souls, but so does the evil one.
 - ii. To a soul bound in consistent mortal sin, the evil one wants to keep the soul there by tempting the soul with apparent pleasures and delights, while the good spirit pokes and prods and stings their consciousness to draw them to change.
 1. Evil one wants you to remain in sin.
 2. Good spirit wants to draw us out of sin.
 - iii. To a soul moving towards the Lord in the process of conversion, the evil one wants to remind, bite, sadden, place obstacles trying to pull them backwards, while the good spirit blesses with consolation and strength to draw them deeper into the mystery of God.

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1. Evil one wants you to miss the sins of the past, a sorrow or sadness for what disordered pleasures you could be pursuing instead of God.
 2. The Lord draws us closer to him with consolation and peace.
 - iv. Messiness of our thoughts yet we bring our messiness to the Lord.
 - v. Pay attention to the course of our thoughts...
 1. Beginning, middle and end are good, probably from God
 2. If any part (beginning, middle, or end) leaves us distracted, or fearful, or lack of peace, it might not be from God.
 - vi. One way to see sin is to lose our union with God
 1. Even “Leave me Lord, for I am a sinful man” can result in union, much like it did with Peter who followed the Lord’s invitation.
 2. Why would we ever want to leave our union with God?
 - vii. Sin and our relationship with the Lord
 1. Brooding over past sins is much different than bringing sins to the Lord to heal.
3. Housekeeping
- a. Much of this week we pray with Psalm 51, a penitential psalm after King David commits adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah
 - b. Week 7: Distraction in Prayer
4. Homework
- a. Pray with the following passages, one a day
 - i. Day 1: Psalm 51
 - ii. Day 2: Psalm 6
 - iii. Day 3: Luke 15:11-16
 - iv. Day 4: Romans 7:11-19
 - v. Day 5: John 8:1-11
 - vi. Day 6: Psalm 51
 - vii. Day 7: Psalm 51
 - b. With the prayer, answer the questions:
 - i. The “strongest” thought or feeling during my prayer was...
 - ii. My heart “rested” when...
 - iii. I sensed the Lord was telling me...
 - iv. I ended the prayer wanting...
5. Additional Resources
- a. *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide for Everyday Living*. Timothy Gallagher. Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005