

Oremus Lecture Talk #7: Dealing with Distractions

February 16, 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 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
- d. Week 6: Discernment in Prayer
 - i. Practical question: To whom am I listening? God? Myself? The evil one?
 1. Consistent with Scriptures, Magisterium (the teaching office of the bishops), Jesus?
 - ii. St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Discernment of Spirits, if we are going from sin to sin, the good spirit prompts by poking and prodding to shake us out of our complacency with sin; if we are moving towards the Lord, the good spirit blesses us with consolation and peace.

2. Distraction in Prayer

- a. “In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us erroneous notions of prayer. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity, others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with all the other things they have to do: they “don’t have the time.” Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone.” (CCC 2726)
 - i. Not merely psychological activity.
 - ii. Not merely external words.
 - iii. Not incompatible with all of our daily activities.
- b. Challenges
 - i. Finding time to pray
 - ii. Being able to quiet our soul to pray
 - iii. Pains of conversion
- c. “We must also face the fact that certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of ‘this present world’ can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant. For example, some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our

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conscious and unconscious lives. Others overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless. Still others exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful; whereas prayer, the ‘love of beauty’ (philokalia), is caught up in the glory of the living and true God. Finally, some see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.” (CCC 2727)

- d. “The habitual difficulty in prayer is distraction. It can affect words and their meaning in vocal prayer; it can concern, more profoundly, him to whom we are praying, in vocal prayer (liturgical or personal), meditation, and contemplative prayer. To set about hunting down distractions would be to fall into their trap, when all that is necessary is to turn back to our heart: for a distraction reveals to us what we are attached to, and this humble awareness before the Lord should awaken our preferential love for him and lead us resolutely to offer him our heart to be purified. Therein lies the battle, the choice of which master to serve.” (CCC 2729)
 - i. Notice distraction, turn eyes back onto Jesus.
 - ii. Silence vs noise in the day
 - iii. Some distraction may be a prompting from the Lord
 1. Worries, marriage, mortgage, illness, reminders of our sinfulness; all these could be invitations from Jesus to bring to prayer.
 2. God may very well want to talk about it.
 - e. Dryness in prayer is an opportunity to cling more strongly to the Lord in faith.
 - f. “Finally, our battle [of prayer] has to confront what we experience as failure in prayer: discouragement during periods of dryness; sadness that, because we have ‘great possessions,’ we have not given all to the Lord; disappointment over not being heard according to our own will; wounded pride, stiffened by the indignity that is ours as sinners; our resistance to the idea that prayer is a free and unmerited gift; and so forth. The conclusion is always the same: what good does it do to pray? To overcome these obstacles, we must battle to gain humility, trust, and perseverance.” (CCC 2728)
3. Housekeeping
 - a. Week 8: Desolation and Consolation, (the location is the Christ the King room, which is above the parish office on the opposite side of the gathering space)
 4. Homework
 - a. Pray with the following passages, one a day. Pay attention to the instructions in the workbook for the different types of prayer to be used.
 - i. Day 1: Luke 15:11-24
 - ii. Day 2: Luke 7:36-50
 - iii. Day 3: Ezekiel 36:23-29
 - iv. Day 4: 1 Peter 2:21-25
 - v. Day 5: Psalm 118
 - vi. Day 6: John 21:15-19
 - vii. Day 7: Review the prayer of the previous week.
 - 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...