

# First Lecture - Prayer and Stages of Spiritual Life

**PRAYER:** The elevation of the mind and heart to God in praise of his glory; a petition made to God for some desired good, or in thanksgiving for a good received, or in intercession for others before God. Through prayer the Christian experiences a communion with God through Christ in the Church (CCC 2559–2565).

Mind - Reason - Intellect - Soul

Heart - Emotion - Affectivity - Body

Music = Rhythm + Melody

Human = Body + Soul

Love = Emotion + Activity

Prayer = Heart + Mind

St. John of the Cross (b. 1542 d. 1591)

Educated by Jesuits. Joined Carmelites. Developed a desire to join the Carthusians.

After meeting St. Teresa of Jesus he joined the project of reforming Carmelites.

Greatest poet of the Spanish language. First psychologist, doctor of the Church, teacher of spiritual life.

## Stage 1: Purgative (beginners)

active purification - leave SIN  
- Confession  
- 10 Commandments  
prayer - Silence, Vocal Prayer-Meditation  
signs - Growing TRUST

**Dark Night (SENSES)** God seems far away (e.g. mother and child) passive

## Stage 2: Illuminative (proficient)

active purification - venial SINS  
- perfection of virtues  
prayer - Meditation - Contemplation  
signs - Deepening of love for God

**Dark Night (SPIRIT)** Seeming loss of faith (e.g. Log of wood, Mother Teresa)

## Stage 3: Unitive (perfect)

Perfect Union. Holiness. Contemplation.

## II. Meditation

**2705** Meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life, in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking. The required attentiveness is difficult to sustain. We are usually helped by books, and Christians do not want for them: the Sacred Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, holy icons, liturgical texts of the day or season, writings of the spiritual fathers, works of spirituality, the great book of creation, and that of history—the page on which the “today” of God is written. (158; 127)

**2706** To meditate on what we read helps us to make it our own by confronting it with ourselves. Here, another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality. To the extent that we are humble and faithful, we discover in meditation the movements that stir the heart and we are able to discern them. It is a question of acting truthfully in order to come into the light: “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

**2707** There are as many and varied methods of meditation as there are spiritual masters. Christians owe it to themselves to develop the desire to meditate regularly, lest they come to resemble the three first kinds of soil in the parable of the sower. But a method is only a guide; the important thing is to advance, with the Holy Spirit, along the one way of prayer: Christ Jesus. (2690; 2664)

**2708** 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. (516; 2678)

*Nothing is equal to prayer...For it is impossible for the one who prays eagerly and invokes god ceaselessly ever to sin. (St. John Chrysostom)*