

THE AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE AND THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS PRESENT

The Heart of Prayer

A Study with
Bishop Andrew Cozzens

Detail from *Saint Catherine of Siena Receiving the Stigmata*, Beccafumi / Getty Museum Open Content Program

PRAYER OF THE HEART

SESSION 4

Opening Prayer

O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD you know it altogether. You beset me behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

—*Psalm 139:1–5, RSV-2CE*

Study Goals

Prayer happens within our hearts. Throughout Sacred Scripture, the “heart” is frequently referenced as the place of encounter with the Lord. This is not our physical heart, but the “heart” is a representation of the “place of choice,” our center, and the deepest reality of who we are. It is within our hearts that we choose life or death. St. Thomas Aquinas referred to this part of the person—the heart—as “the will” and recognized our will as the place in which we choose to love.

This intimate connection between the heart and love means that to purify the heart is to purify what we love. When we become “pure of heart,” our loves are well-ordered; we love God above all things, and, thus, we deepen our relationship with God. All the knowledge in the world will not lead to intimacy with Jesus if we do not also purify our hearts.

As we grow, we experience interior movements of the heart. God speaks to us through these interior movements, and, by becoming attentive to these movements, we can begin to discern spiritual realities in our lives. There are two significant movements in our spiritual life: spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. These we must understand so that we can properly respond to each movement. To respond requires a healing of our “affect,” or the emotional movements of our hearts, so we can properly understand how God is speaking to us, free of the disordered lenses we often have in our affective movements. These lenses focus on what others think of us, as well as carry unforgiveness or lie about who we are. We become free of these disordered lenses through prayer, which focuses our hearts on what is true, good, and beautiful while meditating on the Lord.

Scripture

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.



Children at Prayer, Antoine Édouard Joseph Moulinet /
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Discuss

1. Consider a time you experienced an interior or affective movement in each of the three categories Bishop Cozzens discussed: transitory non-spiritual movements, deep non-spiritual movements, and spiritual movements. What were those experiences like, and what were some of the differences between each?
2. When have you experienced spiritual consolation? Describe that experience and the impact it had on drawing you closer to God.
3. Purifying the affective movements of our hearts requires healing at the psychological level, and Bishop Cozzens reflects on three specific areas for healing: attachment to what others think of me, carrying unforgiveness, and believing lies about ourselves. Which of these three resonated the most with you, and what might you resolve to do to experience healing in this area?

Memory Verse

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”

—Ezekiel 36:26–27

Closing Prayer

Holy Spirit, teach us how to pray and purify our hearts so that we may become more attentive to your presence in our lives. Give us joy in spiritual consolation and resolve in spiritual desolation so that we may never cease to draw closer to Jesus Christ in all things. We make this prayer in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Detail from *Annunciation*, Veronese/
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Challenge

This week, prior to praying through one of the two options below, spend fifteen to twenty minutes in silence and contemplation, attentive to the interior movements of your heart during that time. This can be done in your Eucharistic Adoration chapel or in a prayer area at your home. Immediately after your time of silence, choose one of the following passages to pray through and journal or reflect on the associated questions:

Option 1: Matthew 15:10–20

Imagine yourself in the crowd as Jesus speaks. What is your reaction to his words? Do you feel offended? Challenged? Inspired? What is the state of your heart as you listen to Jesus speak? Complete these sentences:

- I thought . . .
- I felt . . .
- I desired . . .
- I sensed in my body . . .

Speak to Jesus for a few minutes about what you felt and what you desire; ask for the grace to obtain a purity of heart.

Option 2: Romans 5:1–8

Imagine yourself reading St. Paul's letter with other members of the early Church. As you listen to the words, what are the affective movements of your heart? What thoughts and emotions do they provoke in you? Complete these sentences:

- I thought . . .
- I felt . . .
- I desired . . .
- I sensed in my body . . .

Write down what struck you most and then speak to Jesus about what happened and what you desire.

Notes

