

THE AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE AND THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS PRESENT

The Heart of Prayer

A Study with
Bishop Andrew Cozzens

St. Dominic by Angelico /
Restored Traditions

PRAYER OF THE HEART

SESSION 6

Opening Prayer

Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him, bless his name! For the LORD is good, his mercy endures for ever, and this faithfulness to all generations.

—*Psalm 100:2–5*

Study Goals

The goal of prayer is to hear the voice of the Lord and to follow it. In order to do this, God has given the soul spiritual senses, just as the body has physical senses. These spiritual senses allow us to contemplate God deeply and enable us to “see,” “hear,” “taste,” “touch,” and “breathe in the fragrance” of God (St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 121–26). Our imagination is the faculty God created within us that allows us to tap into these spiritual senses. However, it is important to make a distinction in prayer between real imagination and fantasy. Authentic spiritual imagination communicates truth, whereas fantasy seeks selfish consolation. An imagination filled with false images can prevent us from living in the truth and using the senses of the soul fully. For this reason, we need to invite God to heal our imagination through prayer. As we grow in our journey of prayer, these spiritual senses become important in navigating spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation and can enable us to practice discernment of spirits. The discernment of spirits allows us to become aware of these spiritual movements, understand them, and take action accordingly. We can then respond appropriately in prayer and draw closer to God in both states of spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation.

Scripture

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.



*The Transfiguration, Fra Angelico /
Restored Traditions*

Discuss

1. Read through Psalm 139. As you do, what interior movements do you notice? Share what stands out to you from the Scripture passage itself as well as what affective movements you experienced when praying through it.
2. Think about when you've used your imagination in prayer. What makes the use of your imagination easy for you, and when is it difficult?
3. Have you ever experienced non-spiritual consolation or non-spiritual desolation leading to spiritual consolation or spiritual desolation? Describe the experience and how it impacted your prayer.
4. Desolation is permitted by God but is a difficult spiritual state that requires the appropriate response. Why do you think God permits spiritual desolation in your life? Have you ever experienced this? How did that time impact your faith and relationship with God?

Memory Verse

“Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”

—Psalm 103:1–2

Closing Prayer

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together! I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. . . When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivers him out of them all. . . The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

—*Psalm 34:1–4, 17–19, 22*



*King David Playing the Harp, Gerard van Honthorst /
Restored Traditions*

Challenge

During prayer this week, use your imagination as you visualize a moment in the Gospels. There are two suggestions below that involve physical senses; be mindful of how you experience these narratives using your spiritual senses. If possible, spend this prayer time in your parish's Eucharistic Adoration chapel or shortly after attending Mass.

Option 1: Luke 8:40–56

Imagine yourself in this narrative. Which person are you? A member of the crowd? Jairus? The woman? Complete the following sentences:

- I see . . .
- I feel . . .
- I hear . . .
- I sensed in my body . . .

Spend time journaling and speaking to the Lord about why these details stood out to you, mindful of any affective movements you experience. Ask Jesus to help you understand yourself and your relationship with him through this Scripture reading. What does this encourage you to do?

Option 2: Matthew 17:1–8

Put yourself in the place of one of the three apostles that Jesus takes with him to pray. Imagine the scene from that point of view. Create details in your imagination about what the environment looks like, what Jesus looks like, and what Moses and Elijah look like. Complete these sentences:

- I see . . .
- I feel . . .
- I hear . . .
- I sensed in my body . . .

What other spiritual sense does this awaken as you enter the scene? Are you experiencing any spiritual consolation in this moment? Speak to the Lord about what you are experiencing.

