

THE AUGUSTINE INSTITUTE AND THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS PRESENT

The Heart of Prayer

A Study with
Bishop Andrew Cozzens

*St. Catherine of Alexandria in Prison, Veronese /
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY*

GROWING IN SIMPLICITY AND AWARENESS

SESSION

7

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, and bring to our memory all of the times and places we have felt, heard, and seen God moving in our prayer. Bring us an awareness of your goodness, your mercy, and a desire to repent of anything that prevents us from deeper union and intimacy with you. Guide us today in our reflection in prayer that we may desire whatever is your will, nothing more and nothing less. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Study Goals

Repetition in prayer is not just a way of praying, but a way of living that continually revisits the places where the Lord is moving in our lives, recognizing there is always more the Lord wishes for us to receive. As we grow in prayer, our prayer also grows in simplicity; learning the art of repetition is vital in growing in both simplicity and depth in prayer.

The more deeply we move into prayer, the greater intimacy and union with God we can experience. This deepening awareness in our prayer also creates a greater awareness of our sinfulness. This can bring about discouragement, but we must remember that discouragement is not from God. Rather, we must take our awareness of sin into the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive God's grace.

We also can begin to make a distinction between deliberate and non-deliberate sins and, through this awareness, understand how to continue growing in our spiritual life. There are three categories of deliberate sin: (a) knowing what is right and wrong, but not caring; (b) wanting at some level to overcome sin, but at a still deeper level not willing to change; and (c) wishing to change but not yet being able to. In order to overcome sin, at any level, we must take the advice of Saint John Henry Newman to watch and pray, noticing when we find ourselves in a near occasion of sin and praying for the grace to overcome sin. Our weakness is a place where God can work powerfully, if we are open to his will and allow it.

Scripture

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your merciful love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in your sight. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.



Woman Kneeling in Prayer, George Henry Boughton / Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Discuss

1. Where have you experienced a place of consolation or desolation in prayer over the past several weeks? What more might God wish for you to receive from that place?
2. Saint John Paul II wrote about God's mercy, "Those who come to know God in this way, who 'see' Him in this way, can live only in a state of being continually converted to Him" (*Dives in misericordia*, no. 13). What do you think Saint John Paul II is saying here? How do you see this lived out in your walk of faith?
3. God can use our weakness and even our failures to help us learn humility, compassion, and perseverance. When have you experienced God's grace through your weakness or even a failure?

Memory Verse

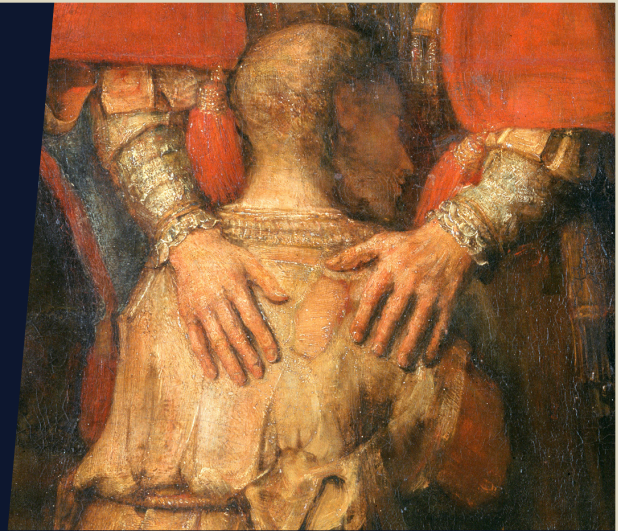
"But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

—Ephesians 2:4–7

Closing Prayer

Take a moment to call to mind areas where you've fallen short of God's call to holiness, sinned, and need forgiveness and mercy.

I confess, to Almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned; in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do—through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore, I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord, our God.



Detail from *Return of the Prodigal Son*, Rembrandt /
Restored Traditions

Review

This week, we are going to return to the Scripture passages we've prayed through so far in this course. Choose one of the passages below that resonated with you previously, either by causing a movement of consolation or desolation, and then return to it in prayer today. Ask God what more he wishes to reveal to you in this passage as you pray.

- Matthew 11:25–30
- Matthew 3:13–17
- Mark 10:46–52
- Isaiah 43:1–7
- Matthew 15:10–20
- Romans 5:1–8
- Luke 8:40–56
- Matthew 17:1–8

After prayerfully imagining yourself in the scene set by the passage, complete the following sentences:

- I thought . . .
- I felt . . .
- I desired . . .
- I sensed in my body . . .
- I feel God calling me to reflect more deeply upon . . .

Notes

Handwriting practice lines with a large, faint watermark of a flame and a diamond shape in the background.