

Fact of FAITH

Contemplative Prayer

by Fr. Larry Rice

In the Catholic tradition, we have many kinds of prayer. We have liturgical prayer, which follows a set ritual and is prayed communally. Then, we have personal or private prayer, which has often been divided into prayers of praise, thanksgiving, contrition, and supplication. These prayers acknowledge God's greatness, express our thanks for all God has done for us, express our sorrow for our sins, and ask God for what we need.

But throughout our history, Catholics have also engaged in contemplative prayer. This sort of prayer or meditation is much less about saying things to God, and is more about listening to what God is saying to us. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in its section on contemplative prayer, quotes St. Teresa who wrote, "Contemplative prayer in my opinion, is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." In its sixteen paragraphs on contemplative prayer, the *Catechism* eloquently describes aspects of this kind of prayer, calling it a "gift," a "gaze of faith fixed on Jesus," "hearing the Word of God," and an experience of *silence* (CCC, nos. 2709–2724).

What the *Catechism* doesn't describe is how to do it. For that information, I'd recommend the writings of those who have excelled at this kind of prayer, specifically saints like John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Liseaux, and Julian of Norwich. Contemporary expressions of contemplative prayer include methods like scripture prayer and eucharistic adoration.

Prayer is the essential communication of the Christian life, and contemplative prayer challenges us to make sure that we're not just speaking to God, but actively listening to God's speaking to us.

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