



"INTRODUCTION TO THE DEVOUT LIFE" St Francis de Sales (1567 - 1622)

A Description of Mental Prayer & How to Meditate

PREPARATION - "the action of the imagination"

- i) Place yourself consciously in the presence of God by using ONE of these methods "briefly and simply".
 - a) Recall that God is everywhere, and all around us -"just as the birds, wherever they fly, always encounter the air, so, wherever we go, or wherever we are, we find God present".
 - b) Recall that God is already and always present in a very special way in our hearts.
 - c) Think of Christ looking down on you from heaven (see Song of Songs 2:9 & Acts 7:54-60).
 - d) Think of Christ as you might think of a close friend (what they might say or do in a certain situation).
- ii) Invoke the assistance of God, and his saints and angels, that, although we are unworthy to be in his presence, we may yet "serve him well and adore him in this meditation".
- iii) The final preparation is "to represent to the imagination the scene of the mystery upon which the meditation is made". Its purpose is "to confine our spirit within the mystery so that it may not range hither and thither, just as we confine a bird within a cage, or as we put jesses on a hawk so that it may remain upon the fist".

CONSIDERATIONS - "the action of the understanding"

This is the heart of meditation where we reflect on/think about a passage from the bible or one of the mysteries of God (e.g. creation, redemption from sin, the love of God, the purpose of life, the gifts God has given to us, the certainty of death, the life of heaven). It is a mental activity like studying but its purpose is different: not "to become learned, or to write or to argue" but "to stir up our affection towards God and divine things".

AFFECTIONS & RESOLUTIONS

- i) Thinking evokes feelings.
 - ii) Feelings should lead to actions.
- "You must not dwell upon these general affections to such an extent that you omit to convert them into special and particular resolutions for your correction and amendment" (unlike the Unforgiving Servant - Matthew 18:23-35).

CONCLUSION

- i) Thank God for the thoughts he has given you, and for any affections and resolutions they have led to.
- ii) Offer your affections and resolutions to him.
- iii) Ask God to bless your affection and resolutions "so that we may be able faithfully to put them into practice". Petition him also for the needs of the world, and end with the Lord's Prayer.
- iv) Take a "spiritual nosegay": "Those who have been walking in a beautiful garden do not leave it willingly without taking away with them four or five flowers, in order to inhale their perfume and carry them about during the day: even so, when we have considered some mystery in meditation, we should choose one or two or three points in which we have found most relish, and which are specially proper to our advancement, in order to remember them

throughout the day, and to inhale their perfume spiritually".

- v) Come out of your meditation slowly and gently "with so much gentleness and tranquillity that the spirit be not disturbed thereby".

[P.S. "It may happen to you sometimes that immediately after the preparation you will find your affection stirred up towards God: then you must give it the reins, without trying to follow the method which I have given you".]