

## **Preparation for Prayer**

by Saint Theophan The Recluse (from Letter 48)

Do this also. Prepare yourself to stand properly before God --don't just jump into prayer after gossiping and gadding about or doing house chores. Schedule the time and rouse the urge to pray precisely at that hour. Another opportunity may not come.

Don't forget to re-establish your sense of spiritual need. Bring your need for God to the front of your mind, then begin to draw your mind into your heart by organizing your thoughts into prayer and calling forth your desire to find their fulfillment in God.

When the heart is conscious and feels the need for prayer, then the attentive heart itself will not let your thoughts slide to other matters. It will force you to cry out to the Lord in your prayers. Most of all, be aware of your own helplessness: were it not for God, you would be lost. If someone who is doomed to disaster were to stand before the one person who, with a glance, could save him, would he look here and there for his salvation? No, he would fall down before him and beg mercy. So it will be, when you approach Him in prayer with an awareness of all-encompassing peril and the knowledge that no one can save you but God.

All of us have this little sin hanging about us: Though we make painstaking preparations for every other task (no matter how trivial), we do not prepare for prayer. We take up our prayer with flighty thoughts, willy-nilly, and rush to get it over with, as if it were an incidental, though unavoidable, bother --- and not the center of our life, as it should be. Without preparation, how can there be a gathering of thought and feeling in prayer? Without preparation, prayer proceeds shakily instead of firmly.

No, you must determine to deny yourself this little sin and under no circumstance allow yourself to come to prayer with your heart and mind unprepared, your thoughts and feelings scattered in a dozen different directions. Such a careless attitude toward prayer is a crime, a serious one --- a capital one. Consider prayer the central labor of your life and hold it in the center of your heart. Address it in its rightful role, not as a secondary function!

Toil! God will be your helper. Take care to fulfill your prayer rule. If you begin to fulfill it, soon, very soon, you will see the fruits of your labor. Strive to experience the sweetness of pure prayer. Once experienced, pure prayer will draw you on and enliven your spiritual life, beckoning you to more attentive, more difficult, and ever-deepening prayer.

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