

“Lord, I don’t know how to pray”

If you really want to be a penitent soul - both penitent and cheerful - you must above all stick to your daily periods of prayer, which should be fervent, generous and not cut short. And you must make sure that those minutes of prayer are not done only when you feel the need, but at fixed times, whenever it is possible. Don't neglect these details. If you subject yourself to this daily worship of God, I can assure you that you will be always happy. (Furrow, 994)

February 19

When I see how some people set about the life of piety, which is the way a Christian should approach his Lord, and I find them presenting such an unattractive picture, all theory and formulas, plagued with soulless chanting, better suited to anonymity than to a personal, one to One, conversation with God Our Father (genuine vocal prayer is never anonymous), then I am reminded of Our Lord's words: 'When you are at prayer, do not use many phrases, like the heathens, who think to make themselves heard by their eloquence. You are not to be like them; your heavenly Father knows well what your needs are before you ask him.' A Father of the Church comments on this passage as follows: 'I understand from this that Christ is telling us to avoid long prayers, not long as

regards time but as regards the endless multiplicity of words... For Our Lord himself set us the example of the widow who, by dint of supplication, conquered the resistance of the unjust judge; and the other example of the inconsiderate individual who arrives late at night and who, through insistence more than friendship, gets his friend out of bed (cf Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8). With these two examples, he is telling us to ask constantly, not by composing endless prayers, but rather telling him of our needs with simplicity.'

In any case, if on beginning your meditation you don't succeed in concentrating your attention so as to be able to talk with God; if you feel dry and your mind seems incapable of expressing a single idea, or your affections remain dull, my advice is that you try to do what I have always tried to do on such occasions: put

yourselves in the presence of your Father and tell him this much at least: 'Lord, I don't know how to pray. I can't think of anything to tell you.' You can be sure that at that very moment you have already begun to pray. (Friends of God, 145)

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