

Perseverance in Prayer



A dictionary would define perseverance in these or similar words: a steady persistence in activity, purpose, or a state in spite of difficulties. Isn't it then reassuring to know that a great saint and mystic, such as St Teresa of Avila herself, struggled in prayer until she was 41 years of age? Because she also suffered with health problems which weakened her bodily, she gave up on prayer rationalizing her health as an excuse.

Distractions were no stranger to Teresa. Her very temperament shows in her writings as she jumps around from one topic to another leaving the thread of her original thought hanging while she moves on to another lengthy discourse before she eventually returns to what she was saying previously.

The time we spend in prayer is not about our success at it; it is rather about our relationship with Him who loves us. Teresa cautions us not to use "force" to obtain a spirit of recollection but instead to "be gentle" with ourselves. Listening is essential during this stage of our spiritual development. Many voices will vie for our attention: our own inner voice, the voice of the world, the voice of the Tempter, and the voice of God. To sift out God's voice in this cacophony of voices we need to be determined in our resolutions for good.

Some practical ways of doing this is to set a reasonable length of time for prayer, one we can better achieve. It may be less than what we had hoped to do but as time goes on and we find ourselves looking forward to those moments, we can always increase the length of time that we spend in prayer. We do not want to set an unreasonable goal that will turn us into clock watchers or cause us to grit our teeth until the time we allotted to prayer is over. It is in this Mansion that we come to know more about God and deepen our friendship with Him. This is the Room for a hard work-out; it is not the Mansion for consolations.

In our persevering prayer we gradually become more conscious of God's Presence.... We are filled with gratitude for the infinite mercy God showers on us. It is in this second mansion that one really learns to pray, but we cannot learn unless we are willing to labor and not return to a former state simply because it required less toil or because we become disheartened. What will make the difference? It depends on what we want most: the things the world holds out to us or intimate union with God. Where does our treasure lie? How much do we desire God? How much are we willing to sacrifice?

Will your mind still wander? Undoubtedly! Do not become anxious. Return your focus to Him and if needed, read some brief passage from Scripture or a devotional prayer and continue to soak in His Presence. But above all, do not use excuses to abandon or omit your prayer time or shorten it. With perseverance God will give you blessings beyond your expectations.

Let us remember Teresa's prayer:

Let nothing trouble you,

Let nothing make you afraid.

All things pass away.

God never changes.

Patience obtains everything.

God alone is enough.

Sister Mary Colombiere O.C.D. - UCA