

In order to facilitate the development of true prayer, take these steps: 1. Keep a prayer rule according to the blessing of your spiritual father. 2. Before you pray, in your free time become familiar with the prayers in your rule, fully take in each word and feel and understand it, so that you will know in advance what should be in your soul as you read. 3. You must struggle to keep your attention focused on the words of your prayer, knowing in advance that your mind will wander. When your mind does wander during prayer, bring it back again. Each and every time that you read a prayer while your thoughts are wandering (and consequently you read it without attention) then do not fail to read it again. Even if your mind wanders several times in the same place, read it again and again until you read it all the way through with understanding and feeling.

Finally, when you finish your prayers, do not immediately go off to any sort of work, but remain and think at least a little while about what you have just finished and what lies before you.

The LENTEN RETREAT will be April 13th
[Please plan ahead](#)

THE NEXT MONTHLY RETREAT IS FEBRUARY 9th 10:00 AM

CELEBRANT: N/A

OFFICIANT: DEACON STEPHEN

CANTOR: SUB DEACON THOMAS

READER: BENEDICT GERARD

MEDITATION: BISHOP ANTHONY

MAIN COURSE: SAMIA HABIB

DRINK: BENEDICT GIRARD

BREAD: FR. DN. STEPHEN & MARY HOLLEY

SNACK: BISHOP ANTHONY

DESSERT: JOSEPH BROWN

FRUIT: BEN SANDOVAL

ON THE COVER: SAINT MARK



ORTHODOX OBLATES
OF
SAINT BENEDICT
JANUARY 2013



This Meditation is taken from a homily on prayer written by Theophan The Recluse, November 21, 1864.
Given by Sub Deacon Lazarus at the January Monthly Retreat.

The Lord has the kindness to call our hearts our temple, where we enter mentally and stand before Him. The work of prayer is the first work of our Christian life. If in everyday affairs the saying: “live and learn” is true, then so much more it applies to prayer, which never stops and has no limit.

Let me recall a wise custom of the ancient Holy Fathers: when greeting each other, they did not ask about health or anything else, but rather about prayer, saying “how is your prayer?” The activity of prayer was considered by them to be a sign of the spiritual life, and they called it the breath of the spirit. If the body has breath, it lives; if breathing stops, life comes to an end. So it is with the spirit. If there is prayer, the soul lives; without pray, there is no spiritual life.

However, not every act of prayer is prayer. Standing at home before your icons, or in a church, and venerating them is not yet prayer, but the “equipment” of prayer. Reading prayers either by heart or from a book or hearing someone else read them is not yet prayer, but only a tool or method for obtaining and awakening prayer. Prayer itself is the piercing of our hearts by pious feelings towards God, one after another—feeling of humility, submission, gratitude, doxology, forgiveness, heart-felt prostration, brokenness, conformity to the will of God, etc. All of our efforts should be directed so that during our prayers so that during our prayers, these feelings and feelings like them should fill our souls, so that the heart would not be empty when our lips are reading the prayers, or when our ears hear and the body bows in prostration, but that there would be some qualitative feeling, some striving toward God. When these feelings are present, our praying is prayer, and when they are absent, it is not yet prayer.

It would seem that nothing should be simpler and more natural for us than prayer and our hearts striving for God. But in fact it is not always like this for everyone. One must awaken and strengthen a prayerful spirit in oneself, that is one must bring up a prayerful spirit.

The first means to this end is to read or hear prayers. Pray as you should, and you will awaken and strengthen the ascent of your heart to God and you will come into the spirit of prayer.

I will give here three very simple instructions:

1. Always begin praying with at least a little preparation;
2. Do not pray carelessly, but with attention and feeling;
3. Do not go on to ordinary work immediately after prayer.

Even if prayer is common for us, it demands preparation. What is more common for those who can read and write than reading and writing? However, sitting down to read or write, we do not immediately begin, but we calm ourselves before beginning, at least to the point the we can read or write in a peaceful state. Even more so preparation for the work of prayer is necessary before praying, especially when what we have been doing before praying is of a totally different nature from prayer.

Thus going to pray in the morning or evening, stand for a moment, or sit, or walk, and strive in this time to focus your thoughts, casting off from them all earthly activities and objects. Then call to mind the One to whom you are praying, who He is and who you are, as you begin your prayerful petition to Him. From this awaken in your soul the feelings of humility and reverent awe of standing before God in your heart. As you stand piously before God, all this preparation may seem small and insignificant, but it is not small in meaning. This is the beginning of prayer and a good beginning is half the work.

Pay attention to every word, and let the sense of each word enter your heart; understand what you are reading and feel what you are understanding. No rules are necessary. These two— understanding and feeling— have the effect of making fitting and fruitful. For example you read: “cleanse us from every stain” – feel your stain, desire cleanliness, ask it of the Lord with hope. You read: “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” — forgive all in your soul, and have forgiving everyone everything in your heart, ask for forgiveness for yourself from the Lord. If you read each verse of your prayers in this way, then you will be truly praying.