

“Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” (Jn 14:23) That is the promise Jesus makes to each of us. That is the most important thing to know in life. It is the Main Thing. It’s literally true that God is inside of you and wants to become completely one with you. That is the purpose of everything in the Christian life. That is especially the purpose of prayer.

Remember my 20 minutes of daily, silent, solitary prayer I’m always urging you to pray? John 14:23 is the point of those 20+ minutes; so you can become one with God – even in this life on earth. Vocal prayers, memorized prayers, prayers asking God for help and blessings – these are good and necessary for a Christian. But they aren’t enough to make Jesus’ promise in John 14:23 come true in your soul. That takes meditation and contemplation. Those two types of prayer are the subject of this homily – the most important secret for literally becoming a saint. (And I base this homily upon the words of Fr. Thomas Dubay and recommend his book, Prayer Primer: Igniting a Fire Within.)

What is meditation? What should you be doing in your 20+ minutes of quiet prayer? Meditation is prayerful reflection on important facts and questions about our life and God – and an inner conversation with the Lord about these things. Questions like: Who am I? Who is Jesus? Why am I here? What is my destiny? What shall I do about it? Meditation uses our human reason, thinking and imagination to begin an intimate, prayerful conversation with God. So it takes work from us – just like any conversation we’re in. But meditation is not just scripture study or reading. It is being in the presence of and speaking with a Person, Jesus Christ. It is the early stage of intimacy with Him.

So how does one meditate as a Christian? Start by choosing, with a firm determination, a daily prayer time. This is hard to do because we’re all so busy, but without this resolve a serious prayer life won’t happen. And you won’t fulfill the purpose of your life. Isn’t that a sad thought? If our love of Jesus is to grow we have to spend quality time with Him. You know that is how all love works. That is why Jesus spent long hours, sometimes all night, alone with the Father in prayer. That is why Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount to go to the quiet of our room to pray (Mt 6:6-7.)

Once you are alone and quiet with Jesus take a minute to gather your thoughts and remember that Jesus is already present in your soul – if you’re in the state of grace. If you’re not, then confession is a necessary beginning for a serious prayer life. Remember John 14:23, “Whoever loves me will keep my word . . . and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.” Everything I say about prayer assumes one is first keeping the commandments and being generous and loving toward God and neighbor.

Once you have gathered yourself for a minute, provide some input. Read a few lines from the Gospels, just a scene or two; or a few lines from a spiritual book, or the life of a saint. Then use your mind and imagination to think over what you have read, applying it to your own life, have a conversation with Jesus about it. Sit with it. End by making some small resolution for the day, and then just thank Jesus for the time together. And relax. Don’t worry if you’re “doing it right.” Just be faithful to the discipline day after day. Form a habit.

As we meditate more, our human efforts will become more simpler and easier. But remember, this interpersonal intimacy will grow only if we remain generous and unselfish with God. Meditation is not magic or a mere technique. It is a relationship with a real Person – Jesus. If we knowingly hurt Him by our actions the relationship suffers. Jesus does not force Himself on us. He waits for an invitation in the form of our loving desire for Him expressed in both charity and prayer.

What happens next? If we are faithful to Jesus’ word and our meditation over months or years (God alone knows how long), eventually something new will happen: that is, infused contemplation. “Infused” means “poured in.” Contemplation is God pouring His very life (grace) into your souls. This infused contemplation comes in two forms – a brief, delightful, peaceful experience; or a dry, desiring of God. We do not produce either of them. They are not our work, as meditation is. They are given by

God. We can prepare ourselves for them by being faithful to our meditation, but we cannot produce or extend these experiences of contemplation. They are God's gifts and He gives as He wills.

At the beginning of infused contemplation the experience is easily missed because we keep trying to meditate when God wants us to stop – and receive prayer from Him, rather than producing it through our minds. If, after a significant time meditating (God alone knows how long, months or years), you feel your fervor for the spiritual life continuing to grow, and the virtues are still growing (which happens if one is seriously meditating), but meditating becomes increasingly impossible, you can't put two thoughts in a row, then try stopping. Sit during prayer time and do nothing but pay attention to God. Perhaps He is trying to pour His life into you through contemplation. And if you then experience a peaceful attentiveness that leaves one still, not wanting to move, then be still. Stay there until the peace leaves and give thanks.

When contemplation comes in the dry, unfeeling form, it can seem like no prayer at all. But the mere desire for God is a contact with Him. And it purifies us. At the beginning both kinds of experiences of contemplation are delicate and brief, easily missed. But if one's generosity in living the spiritual life of loving God and neighbor continue to grow, then these experiences also grow and deepen. As God told one saint, "Make yourself a capacity and I will make myself a torrent."

If you continue your fidelity to prayer and living the Christian life with radical charity, then those moments of infused contemplation also grow, and one's whole spiritual life blossoms. God is dwelling more fully in you. You can do what you once couldn't. You become humble, loving, patient, courageous in ways you never were before, because God lives in you. That is how one becomes a saint – by letting God direct and fill one's life. And this level of holiness is meant for each of you here today. That is the adventure of the Christian life -- Jesus' promise, "Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."