

Vocal Prayer

St. Francis recommended the devout saying of the 'Our Father' and the Creed, especially after the meditation:

"Not striving to say so many words so much as seeking to say a few with your whole heart. One 'Our Father' said devoutly is worth more than many hurried prayers"

St. Francis also approved of the Rosary **"when rightly used"** but stressed that what he termed mental prayer **"always take the chief place"**. In fact, he recommended that if a person was in the process of saying vocal prayers but the heart was interiorly drawn to mental prayer:



"Do not resist it but calmly let your mind fall that way, without it troubling you that you have not finished your vocal prayers"

The only exception St Francis made was that those who had a vocational obligation to say the Divine Office must complete it.

St Francis stressed the importance before all prayer, vocal or meditative, of making **an act of the Presence of God**.

The Morning Offering

The Morning Offering was recognised as an especially important prelude to the day for two reasons:

1. The secular world is very demanding in terms of **time**, and certainly in terms of placing **obstacles** to the adoption of a rigid pattern of prayer. Therefore, everything a person does during the day can act as formal prayer if offered to God beforehand.
2. Everyday life presents a great variety of temptations and it is necessary to prepare adequately for these. Every Lay person is urged **to anticipate** what might happen to them throughout the day, make a firm resolution to avoid sin, and **plan a strategy** to cope with any foreseen problems e.g. meeting particular people.

Our Catholic Faith Prayer and Spirituality 2010-2011

21. St Francis De Sales
- A Spirituality for Lay People



1. What do you think is the best way for Lay people to place God in the forefront of their lives while pursuing a living in a busy secular world?
2. What did St Francis mean by saying the most important factor in a person's prayer life is 'the quality of their heart'?
3. Do you agree that 'mental prayer' takes precedence over vocal prayer, even the Rosary?

‘Introduction to the Devout Life’

St. Francis De Sales (d. 1622) was profoundly concerned that Lay people came to recognise that valid forms of spirituality were available for them to follow.



His book ‘Introduction to the Devout Life’ was the first one written on prayer and spirituality for Lay people. Before St. Francis, the tendency was to consider formal spiritualities as the preserve of the Clerical or Religious. In his book, he taught about a wide range of spiritual matters e.g. the sacraments, virtue, the development of good habits, but in the second part of it he concentrated on methods of prayer, that could be routinely undertaken by Lay people who could not be expected to pray in the same way as those in Religious Orders.

In addition, St. Francis recognised that as people’s lifestyles differ, there should be a **choice** of spiritualities to match a person’s vocation in life. But, even more than that, he realised that just as a person grows and develops from childhood to young adulthood, through to mature adulthood, and then into old age, so there should be **variations** in spirituality to parallel such growth.

St. Francis also addressed the prevalent view that the prayer-life of a Religious is in some way ‘deeper’ and better than that of a Lay person as it is more formally structured and intense, and the latter can not adopt such a demanding spirituality because it would hinder his secular vocation. For St. Francis this way of judging the value of any spirituality is a great error:



“The devotion which is true hinders nothing, but on the contrary it perfects everything. That which runs counter to the rightful vocation of any one is, you may be sure, a spurious devotion”.

The Essence of a Genuine Spirituality

For St. Francis, what is most crucial at all stages of human and spiritual growth is not **the nature** of specific prayers in themselves, not the different **ways** we can pray e.g. fasting, singing, meditating, and not even **how** prayers are said.

By far the most important factor is the quality of a **person’s heart** and love of God, whether they have genuine **humility** and are devout in the **true** sense rather than superficially. St. Francis asks what is the point of regular fasting if there is bitterness in your heart against other people, or even against God for how you perceive you have been treated in life? What is the point of regular vocal or interior prayer, or attending liturgical prayer like the Mass, if there is anger within you, especially if you receive Holy Communion? A proper disposition and attitude makes everyone, whether Clerical, Religious or Lay, **totally equal** in God’s sight.



St. Francis’ Lay Spirituality

Meditation

St Francis’ emphasis for Lay people was on **mental prayer**, which is what he called **meditation**. He was especially insistent on the value of praying/ meditating before the **Blessed Sacrament**. If this was not possible, he urged everyone to find one hour at the beginning of each day to think about Jesus’ **life and death**:

“Neither could we here below contemplate the Godhead were it not united to the Sacred Humanity of our Saviour, whose life and death are the best, sweetest and most profitable subjects that we can possibly select for meditation .. If you contemplate him frequently in meditation he will fill your whole soul”

Examination of Conscience

Everyone is urged to make a full examination of conscience at the end of each day, to express remorse, and make a sincere act of contrition.