

Classics

Beginning The Journey Of Prayer

Why we should be determined to give regular time to God

By Teresa of Avila



Don't be frightened by the many things you need to consider in order to begin this divine journey [of prayer], which is the royal road to Heaven. A great treasure is gained by traveling this road; no wonder we have to pay what seems to us a high price. The time will come when you will understand how trifling everything is next to so precious a reward.

To those who want to journey on this road and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from the water of life, I say that how they are to begin is very important—in fact, all important. They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses.

There are so many reasons why it is extremely important to begin with great determination that I would have to go on at much length if I mentioned them all. I want to mention only two or three.

Why Bother?

What bride is there who, in receiving many valuable jewels from her bridegroom, will refuse to give him even a ring—not because of what it is worth, for everything belongs to him, but to give it as a pledge that she will be his until death? Does the Lord deserve less, that we should mock Him by giving and then taking back the trifle that we give Him?

But this little bit of time that we resolve to give Him, which we [would otherwise] spend on ourselves and on someone who will not thank us for it, let us give to Him, since we desire to do so, with our thoughts free of other things and unoccupied by them. And let us be wholly determined not to take it back from Him. I should consider the time of prayer as not belonging to me, and think that He can ask it of me in justice [even] when I do not want to give it wholly to Him.

Another reason for beginning with determination is that the devil will not then have so free a hand to tempt. He's extremely afraid of determined souls, for he has experienced the great harm they do to him. And all the harm he plans to do them turns out to their benefit and to that of others as well; and he comes out with a loss. But we should not be careless or trust in this fact,

for we are dealing with traitors [Satan's allies], and they don't dare attack so often those who are well prepared; they are very cowardly.

But if the devil should see carelessness, he would do great harm. And if he knows that someone is changeable and unstable in being good and not strongly determined to persevere, he will keep after him day and night; he will cause fears and never-ending obstacles.

The other reason for beginning with determination—and it is very much to the point—is that the person who does so struggles more courageously. He knows that, come what may, he will not turn back. As in the case of one who is in a battle, he knows that if he is conquered, [the enemy] won't spare him his life, and that if he doesn't die in battle he will die afterwards [anyway]. He struggles with greater determination and wants to fight like a desperado, and he doesn't fear the blows so much, because he is convinced of how important victory is, and that for him, to conquer is to live.

Riches Will Be Ours

It's also necessary to begin with the assurance that if we don't let ourselves be conquered, we will obtain our goal; this without a doubt, for no matter how small the gain, we will end up being very rich. Don't be afraid that the Lord will leave you to die of thirst, for He calls us to drink from [His] fount. I would like to say this many times, for the devil intimidates persons who don't yet fully know the goodness of the Lord through experience, even though they know it through faith. But it is a great thing to have experienced the friendship and favor He shows toward those who journey on this road and how He takes care of almost all the expenses.

I'm not surprised that those who have not experienced this [reward of prayer] want the assurance of some gain for themselves. Well, you already know there is the hundredfold [reward] even in this life (Matthew 19:29) and that the Lord says, "Ask, and you will receive" (Luke 11:9). If you don't believe His Majesty [King Jesus] in the sections of His gospel that insure this gain, it will be of little benefit for me to break my head in trying to tell you about it.

Nevertheless, I say that should anyone have some doubt [about receiving the rewards of prayer], little would be lost in trying the journey of prayer, for this journey brings with it the following good: More is given than is asked for, beyond what we could desire.

Adapted from The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. II, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez. Copyright 1980 by Washington Province of Discalced Carmelites, ICS Publications, 2131 Lincoln Road, N.E., Washington, DC 20002.

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TERESA OF AVILA (1515–82) was a Spanish Carmelite nun who served the Church of her day as teacher and reformer. Her writings mapped out little-known territories in prayer that have aided many in discovering new depths in their walk with God. This excerpt was adapted from *The Way of Perfection* (1569), a book of wise counsel for the women in the monasteries she founded.