
Prayer

Even being inclined to an attitude of prayer is beneficial

I believe that profit often meets and joins the person who prays as he ought or who makes every effort to do so as far as he is able. First, the person who composes his mind for prayer is inevitably profited in some way. Through his very disposition for prayer he adorns himself so as to present himself to God and to speak to Him in person as to someone who looks upon him and is present. For just as various impressions and memories of the various things of which they are the memories defile the thoughts that arise under such impressions, in the same way we must believe that remembering God is profitable... if this happens frequently, those who have given themselves over to prayer with great constancy know by experience how many sins it prevents and how many virtuous actions it brings about. For if our remembering and considering a highly respected man who has prospered by wisdom urges us on to rival him and often thwarts impulses to a baser course of life, how much more will remembering God, the Father of the universe, along with prayer to Him, profit those who have persuaded themselves that they stand beside Him present and listening and are speaking with God?¹

Contemplation effects a transformation of the soul

What David says is, "To you have I lifted up my eyes, you who dwell in heaven" (Ps. 123:1) and "To you, O God, have I lifted up my soul" (Ps. 25:1). For the eyes of the mind are lifted up from their preoccupation with earthly things and from their being filled with the impression of material things. And they are so exalted that they peer beyond the created order and arrive at the sheer contemplation of God and at conversing with Him reverently and suitably as He listens. How would things so great fail to profit those eyes that gaze at the glory of the Lord with unveiled face and that are being changed into His likeness from glory to glory (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18)? For then they partake of some divine and intelligible radiance. This is demonstrated by the verse "The light of your countenance, O Lord, has been signed upon us" (Ps. 4:6). And the soul is lifted up and following the Spirit is separated from the body. Not only does it follow the Spirit, it even comes to be in Him. This is demonstrated by the verse "To you have I lifted up my soul," since it is by putting away its existence that the soul becomes spiritual.²

Spoken prayer is part of our constant prayer

He prays "constantly" (deeds of virtue or fulfilling the commandments are included as part of prayer) who unites prayer with the deeds required and right deeds with prayer. For the only way we can accept the command to "pray constantly" (1 Thess. 5:17) as referring to a real possibility is by saying that the entire life of the saint taken as a whole is a single great prayer. What is customarily called prayer is, then, a part of this prayer.³

¹ *On Prayer* 8.2 (pp.97-8)

² *On Prayer* 9.2 (p.99)

³ *On Prayer* 12.2 (p.104)