

Mme Guyon, The short method of prayer

Chapter II. The method of prayer

There are two ways of introducing a soul into prayer, which should for some time be pursued; the one is Meditation, the other is Reading accompanied with Meditation.

Meditative Reading is the choosing some important practical or speculative truth, always preferring the practical, and proceeding thus: whatever truth you have chosen, read only a small portion of it. Meditation, which is the other method, is to be practised at an appropriated season, and not in the time of reading. I believe the best manner of meditating is as follows:—When, by an act of lively faith, you are placed in the Presence of God, recollect some truth wherein there is substance and food; pause gently and sweetly thereon, not to employ the reason, but merely to calm and fix the mind: for you must observe, that your principal exercise should ever be the Presence of God; your subject, therefore, should rather serve to stay the mind, than exercise the understanding.

When we are thus fully introverted, and warmly penetrated throughout with a living sense of the Divine Presence; when the senses are all recollected, and withdrawn from the circumference to the centre, and the soul is sweetly and silently employed on the truths we have read, not in reasoning, but in feeding thereon, and in animating the will by affection, rather than fatiguing the understanding by study; when, I say, the affections are in this state, which, however difficult it may appear at first, is, as I shall hereafter show, easily attainable; we must allow them sweetly to repose, and peacefully to drink in that of which they have tasted: for as a person may enjoy the flavour of the finest viand in mastication, yet receive no nourishment therefrom, if he does not cease the action and swallow the food; so, when our affections are enkindled, if we endeavour to stir them up yet more, we extinguish their flame, and the soul is deprived of its nourishment; we should, therefore, in stillness and repose, with respect, confidence and love, swallow the blessed food of which we have tasted: this method is, indeed, highly necessary, and will advance the soul farther in a short time, than any other in a course of years.

Chapter III. For those who cannot read

Those who have not learnt to read, are not, on that account, excluded from prayer; for the Great Book which teacheth all things, and which is legible as well internally as externally, is Jesus Christ Himself.

The method they should practice is this: They should first learn this fundamental truth, that “the kingdom of God is within them” (Luke xvii. 21), and that it is there, only it must be sought.

It is as incumbent on the Clergy, to instruct their parishioners in prayer, as in their catechism. It is true, they tell them the end of their creation; but should they not also give them sufficient instructions how they may attain it? They should be taught to begin by an act of profound adoration and abasement before God; and closing the corporeal eyes, endeavour to open those of the soul: they should then collect themselves inwardly, and, by a lively faith in God, as dwelling within them, pierce into the Divine Presence; not suffering the senses to wander abroad, but withholding them as much as may be in due subjection.