

## **ADAPTED FROM DOM EUGENE BOYLAN...**

THE PRAYER OF STUPIDITY IS A KIND OF PRAYER THAT EVENTUALLY OVERTAKES ANYONE WHO FAITHFULLY PERSEVERES IN THE PRACTICE OF QUIET DEEP DAILY PRAYER.

IT CONSISTS OF A SORT OF GENERAL AWARENESS OF GOD, WITH A VAGUE AND MORE OR LESS INDISCRIMINATE MOVEMENT OF THE WILL TOWARDS HIM. THE SOUL IS IN WHAT WE MIGHT CALL A PRAYERFUL ATTITUDE, WHICH MAY OR MAY NOT RECEIVE A SPECIFIC DIRECTION OR DETERMINATION THROUGH PARTICULAR ACTS OF MIND OR WILL.

IT IS A KIND OF PRAYER THAT IS FAMILIAR TO MANY WHO PERHAPS HAVE NOT RECOGNIZED IT AS PRAYER AT ALL. THEY CONSIDER IT A FAILURE TO PRAY, FOR WHICH THEY FEEL MORE OR LESS BLAMEWORTHY—OR PERHAPS AN INOFFENSIVE WAY OF PUTTING IN THE TIME ALLOTTED TO MENTAL PRAYER BY RULE OR CUSTOM... “CHECKING THE BOX,” SO TO SPEAK.

NEVERTHELESS, IT IS REALLY PRAYER. IT MAY BE IMPERFECT, FULL OF DISTRACTIONS—MANY OF THEM WILLFUL... ASCRIBABLE TO SLOTH OR NEGLIGENCE, BARELY WORTHY OF THE NAME OF PRAYER; BUT ON THE OTHER HAND IT MAY, WITHOUT LOSING ITS VAGUE AND AMORPHOUS CHARACTER, BE VERY PLEASING TO GOD AND SANCTIFYING TO THE SOUL.

FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF MANY PRIESTS—PERHAPS OF MOST—THAT THE POWER OF MEDITATING AND ACQUIRING AND TURNING OVER SPIRITUAL IDEAS IN THE MIND AND USING THEM TO ENKINDLE THEIR WILLS GREW AND INCREASED IN THE FOR SOME TIME, BUT DID NOT CONTINUE TO GROW.

ON THE CONTRARY, OVER TIME, THESE SPIRITUAL IDEAS... “LIGHTS” ABOUT JESUS’ LIFE OR ABOUT ETERNAL TRUTHS CAME LESS AND LESS FREQUENTLY IN TIMES OF PRAYER.

AND MORE AND MORE, DURING TIMES OF PRAYER WHEN ONE SOUGHT TO BE ALONE WITH GOD, THE MIND SEEMS TO RELAPSE INTO DULLNESS—INTO AN UNCOUTH AND STUPID SILENCE BROKEN BY A FEW HALF-FORMED ACTS WITH A MULTITUDE OF DISTRACTIONS. HERE LUCIFER ALL TOO FREQUENTLY PULLS A PARISH PRIEST AWAY FROM THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER, ENCOURAGING HIM TO SPEND HIS PRECIOUS TIME IN MORE USEFUL AND PRODUCTIVE PURSUITS.

WHEN A PRIEST GIVES UP HIS DAILY TIME DEDICATED TO CHRIST IN QUIET CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER, HIS PROGRESS ALONG THE WAY OF PERFECTION IS ARRESTED; THE BEST HE CAN HOPE TO BE IS MEDIOCRE. HE WILL GO ABOUT HIS DUTIES FOR YEARS... OR DECADES WITHOUT KNOWING THE ABIDING PEACE AND JOY THAT CHRIST LONGS TO GIVE HIM.

TO AVOID THIS SAD “DETOUR” IT IS NECESSARY TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE APPARENT “FAILURE” AT PRAYER THAT WE ARE HERE CONSIDERING IS OFTEN A SIGN OF PROGRESS IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE—AN **INVITATION** TO ADVANCE IN PRAYER. OFTEN IT IS THE CASE THAT A MAN HAS BEEN LED BY GOD AND GRACE UP THE INITIAL STEEP SLOPE OF THE WAY OF BEGINNERS TO THE BRINK OF THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SENSES. HERE GOD SHIFTS HIS STRATEGY... [AND THE DEVIL HIS]...

IT IS ONLY NATURAL... OR RATHER, **SUPERNATURAL**, THAT AS WE ADVANCE ALONG THE WAY OF PERFECTION WE BECOME MORE PROFOUNDLY... EXPERIENTIALLY AWARE OF OUR SINFULNESS... OUR WEAKNESS... OUR HELPLESSNESS. HERE THE DEVIL SEEKS TO CONFOUND US WITH DISCOURAGEMENT, AND OFTEN WE SUCCUMB. WE GIVE UP OUR DAILY CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER.

WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT AT THIS POINT IN OUR JOURNEY ALONG THE WAY OF PERFECTION OUR LOSS OF CONSOLATION IN PRAYER “FEELINGS OF ABANDONMENT” ARE THE RESULT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKING PROGRESS IN BURNING AWAY OUR PRIDE. IF WE ARE OPEN TO HIS PROMPTINGS, HERE WE MAY COME TO “LOVE OUR OWN ABJECTION,” AS ST. FRANCIS DESALES PUTS IT. AS THE VIRTUE OF HOPE IS PERFECTED IN OUR SOULS, WE LEARN TO TRUST COMPLETELY IN HIM... AND LESS IN OURSELVES OR IN OUR METHODOLOGIES. IN HUMILIATION, WE ARE **TRULY** HUMBLED. WE ARE READY TO BE LED FURTHER.

AND IF WE HOLD ON TO OUR QUIET TIME IN PRAYER, WE RECOGNIZE THAT GOD IS “MOVING MORE DEEPLY INTO THE SOUL” IN HIS EFFORTS. HIS WORK IN THE “DEEPER REALMS” OF OUR SPIRIT ARE LESS TANGIBLE AND SENSIBLE THAN IN THE “MANSIONS” AT THE SURFACE OF THE SOUL. IN THIS THE VIRTUES OF FAITH AND HOPE ARE PERFECTED.

WHEN ONE STEPS BACK TO CONSIDER THE OVERVIEW OF ALL OF THIS, IT MAKES MORE SENSE. IN THE EARLIER STAGES OF PRAYER, AS LONG AS THE PERSON TO WHOM WE ARE SPEAKING IS VIVIDLY PORTRAYED IN OUR IMAGINATION—IN OUR OWN TERMS, SO TO SPEAK—IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TALK FREELY AND EARNESTLY WITH HIM. BUT WHEN CREATURES AND IDEAS OF OUR OWN DEVISING BEGIN TO HOLD US BACK, GOD WITHHOLDS CONSOLATION, AND IT IS THEN THAT GOD IS ABLE MORE PROFOUNDLY

TO MANIFEST HIMSELF IN OUR MINDS AND HEARTS. IN THE FACE OF THIS DIVINE INITIATIVE, WHAT ADEQUATE SPEECH IS LEFT FOR US? IS NOT SILENCE HIS FITTING PRAISE?

... BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD!

INDEED, LOOKING BACK ONE OFTEN SUSPECTS THAT MUCH OF THE FERVOR AND FACILITY WHICH SOME SOULS EXPERIENCE IN THEIR SPIRITUAL EXERCISES IS THE RESULT OF FINDING THEMSELVES RATHER THAN GOD. SUCH FACILE FERVOR DECREASES AS ONE PROGRESSES ALONG THE ROAD WHICH JOHN THE BAPTIST SUMMARIZED AS DECREASE OF SELF AND INCREASE OF CHRIST.

WHEN WE ALLOW GOD TO LEAD US ON...AS WE "GROW LESSER" AND ARE HUMBLD IN THE SIGHT OF GOD, WE ARE CONTENT TO ENDURE AND EMBRACE THE DULLNESS AND THE DRYNESS WE ENCOUNTER IN PRAYER. THE PROPER PRESCRIPTION FOR A SOUL WHOSE PRAYER IS 'STUPID' IS PERSISTENCE, PATIENCE, AND ABANDONMENT.

WE MUST BE CONTENT TO BE BEGGARS BEFORE GOD, TO REALIZE OUR SPIRITUAL POVERTY IS OUR MOST VALUABLE TITLE TO GOD'S BOUNTY; WE MUST EMBRACE SUCH POVERTY GLADLY, RELYING ON THE MERCIFUL COMPASSION OF GOD, WHO IS HIMSELF OUR FATHER, OUR SAVIOR, AND THE ABIDING COMPANION BURNING IN THE DEEPEST REALMS OF OUR SOUL.