

### *What about Contemplative Prayer?*

Contemplative prayer is not too hard for the ordinary practicing Catholic. Many are already in the beginning stages of contemplation without knowing it. Perhaps they may have such mystical union for a few minutes when they go to Holy Communion. It may sometimes involve nice emotions, but it is not the feelings that count.

Some non-Christian religious writers use the words contemplation and meditation in different ways. For most Catholic writers meditative prayer involves active thoughts and images. Contemplative prayer, on the other hand, is deep silence that ignores any thoughts, words, or images. It moves on the faithful assumption that God will find us and we just let Him love us. The saints consider this the highest form of prayer. Contemplative prayer allows God's love to change us to become more and more like Jesus. Catholic mystics tell us some form of contemplative union with God is necessary for any real growth in our Christian life.

Does this mean we can discontinue our ordinary prayer? No, of course not. We very much also need to talk to God, participate in Liturgy, listen to God, and meditate on His mysteries. Without these we would find little support for contemplative union with Jesus.

Eucharistic adoration or just quiet times before the tabernacle, are good ways to begin. Most begin their prayer with a few minutes of ordinary prayer of words. Next they may listen and meditate on a great truth of God, or a passage of Scripture. Others begin by repeating the name Jesus or a scripture verse over and over until it echoes in their mind and finally fades in silence. They learn to ignore distractions rather than fight them.

Angels do not use words or even images to talk to each other. They simply love and allow their minds to know.

Contemplative prayer can often console us. It can bring emotional satisfaction and great joy, but it is not about feelings. Mother Theresa of Calcutta Prayed faithfully for many years without any consolation, but it was exactly in this dryness that Our Lord worked so deeply in her inner being.

This dryness is not so pleasant. It has caused many spiritual Want-to-bes to become spiritual drop-outs.

Contemplation comes by simple quiet openness. Quietly ignoring all distractions it waits for God in wordless reverent silence. It is not a quest for feelings or holy experiences. It centers on Jesus and not on us. We simply loose ourselves in the quiet presence of God.

There is little expertise involved in this kind of deep prayer. We could memorize all the spiritual classics and still not reach contemplation. Many spend a lifetime complicating contemplation and never finding it. This may sometimes be because of spiritual pride. God is not interested in spiritual operators. He loves us humble and simple folk.

Try it. You'll like it—most of the time, and you'll be glad you faithfully kept at it.