

Prayer: Finding Intimacy with God

Session 6: *Resolutio*: Putting Love into Action

HOME STUDY: our program is on FORMED: www.formed.org – Sign-up then Login.

To sign-up for a FORMED account, use our SJN Parish subscription code: FPVD8M (all CAPS); set email & password.

- Locate our Study Program, “Lectio: Prayer”, one of these ways: 1) type “Lectio: Prayer” in the Search field then click on the result, or 2) click on the *Study tab*; then on *Bible Studies*; click on “Lectio: Prayer”.
- After arriving at “Lectio: Prayer”, scroll down, scroll to the right & select ‘Session 6’ (30 mins)

★ Prayer

Heavenly Father,
grant that our encounter with you in prayer may always lead us to greater love
and more faithful service of you and our neighbor.
may we always seek to grow in virtue and be transformed by your love.
we ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

★ Introduction

“Faith in action is love, an love in action is service. By transforming that faith into living acts of love, we put ourselves in contact with God Himself, with Jesus our Lord.” These wise words from St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and point us toward our final step, *resolutio*. After encountering God in prayer, and especially sharing in his gaze of love in contemplation, our prayer should naturally lead us to a resolution to love God and our neighbor better. We’ll take a closer look at how making a resolution to act in love is necessary in order for our prayer to bear fruit in our lives.

★ An Encounter with God – an Outline of the Video Discussion on FORMED:

I. The Vineyard of *Lectio Divina*

- Lectio* – Plucking the grapes (words, images, etc.) from the vine
- Meditatio* – Squeezing out the juice (meaning) – if we stop here, we just have grape juice
- Oratio* – Fermentation (conversation bubbles up)
- Contemplatio* – Aging and enjoying of the wine; “O taste and see that the Lord is good!” (Psalm 34:8)
- We can’t get “instant” wine; so too, we can’t expect instant contemplation
- Song of Songs uses images of wine and wine-making; love like fine wine, takes cultivation and has depth to it

II. A Fifth Step – *Resolutio*

- Resolutio* – A practical resolution to put our prayer into action
- “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22)
- St. Francis de Sales warns that without resolution, we become like Pharisees
- Without resolutions, it is easy to imagine ourselves holier than we really are

III. Practical Resolutions

- Act on things God brings to you during prayer
- Make a specific resolution instead of a general one; it needs to be small and particular
- Resolution doesn’t need to “match” meditation exactly; rather, we encounter God in prayer and our resolution is a way of doing good in response to that encounter
- “Action... moves the believer to make his or her life a gift to others in charity” (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87)
- St. Teresa of Avila (Interior Castle) on practical application: good works are the aim of prayer, and prayer strengthens us for service
- Prayer is a means to loving and serving God better; but the litmus test is how we love and serve others

IV. What to Use for Prayer

- The Church gives us a plan for our prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours
- Books of the Bible – in particular, psalms and gospels

✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.

1 Importance of a Resolution “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” – James 1:22

The inclusion of resolution after Guigo’s four rungs is not so much an addition as it is the transition from our conversation in prayer back into our active lives. Per Saint James, we must hear the Word of God and put it into action. “If we do not, we risk deceiving ourselves” (James 1:22). St. Francis de Sales explains the risk of deception in more detail in his instructions on prayer in his Introduction to the Devout Life. See supplemental pages for “Exercise 1”. He uses strong language, “harmful”, “hollow”, and “dangerous”. This is not to scare us away from prayer but rather to remind us that we can’t afford not to pray! But we must be careful not to fall into the trap of merely thinking about holiness and virtue without diligently striving to achieve them. Much like watching the Olympics, well-trained athletes make sporting activities look easy and can delude us into thinking we too can easily do the same sports. Only after we begin do we realize how much work went into the “easy” athletic performance. So, too, is the work of the spiritual life. Resolution in prayer is the safeguard that allows our prayer to bear real fruit in our lives.

When Jesus prays in the garden of Gethsemane before his trial and crucifixion, he pours out his heart in *oratio*: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me,” and, from that conversation with the Father, Jesus resolves to faithfully follow his Father’s will: “nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39). The prayer and resolution made, strengthen and sustain Jesus to make the sacrifice of his Pass on the rock of Calvary.

- ✦ What does our Lord’s model of prayer in Gethsemane teach us about the importance of *resolutio*? [While Jesus had the advantage of his divine nature to help him follow through on his resolutions, his divine nature didn’t lessen the suffering he experienced as a result of his faithfulness to that resolution.]
- ✦ Spend time in *lectio divina*, reflecting on St. James’ exhortation to put our prayer into action using the passage from James 1:19-25

2 Action as the Fruit of Prayer. “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” – Matthew 25:40

Prayer is not an end in an of itself. Our goal is not prayer itself, our goal is love. Prayer is a means to that end; therefore, prayer is ordered toward action. “We do well also to remember that the process of *lectio divina* is not concluded until it arrives at action (action), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.” (Pope Benedict XVI (*Verbum Domini*, 87). Mary models this truth for us: after her conversation with God through his messenger the angel Gabriel, she immediately goes “with haste” to visit her elderly kinswoman, Elizabeth, and stays for three months serving and helping Elizabeth in the last months of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. Mary shows us that the love of God experienced in prayer should overflow in love and service of others.

- ✦ If prayer is a means to an end, does that make it more or less important? Why?

Prayer, if not followed by action, has the potential to make us puffed up with pride over virtues we have merely meditated on an not yet mastered. Prayer that leads to action has the power to transform our lives. Service is both the fruit, and the evidence, of prayer. How can we say that we are truly encountering God, who is Love, in prayer if we then fail to love the people around us? See James 2:14–17.

- ✦ How does the relationship between faith and works, as described by St. James, shed light on the relationship between prayer and action?
- ✦ Consider St. Teresa of Avila’s thoughts on the end and aim of prayer (supplemental pages, “Exercise 2”)
- ✦ Use *lectio divina* to reflect on how Jesus himself emphasizes the importance of action as the fruit of our prayer using Matthew 25:31–40

3 *Lectio*: Over All These Put on Love. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you” – Colossians 3:5a

Every dialogue with Go in prayer is a face-to-face encounter with Love. This encounter is meant to transform us more and more into the image of Love. In his Letter to the Colossians 3:1–17, St. Paul gives a fervent exhortation detailing how to live out this transformation.

- ✦ What does St. Paul contrast in the first section of this passage (verses 1 – 5)?
- ✦ What are we to take off or get rid of (“put to death”), and what are we to “put on”?
- ✦ In the last section of this passage there is a repetition of the command “let” (verses 15 and 16). What are we to let Christ give us? What are these gifts supposed to accomplish in us?

✦ Being Open to God This Week: Focus on One Item This Week ✦

Referenced Scriptures are on the pages that follow.

4 Particular vs. General “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” – 1 John 4:11

“For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen” 1 John 4:20. Our love of God must be lived out in a tangible way in relation to those around us. Sometimes this is easy, but we all experience times when choosing to love and serve someone else in particular ways is difficult or even painful. *Resolutio* is especially important for these difficult situations. The easiest path to success for putting our prayer into action is to make our resolutions small and particular. Instead of the general resolution to “save money”, we could commit to more concrete actions (homemade lunch vs. restaurant, etc.) Many things may tempt us away from acting on small, focused resolutions in prayer. But we need to remember that just as the ladder of prayer is most easily and successfully climbed one rung at a time, the life of virtue is obtained by adding one small act upon another, habitually. Another temptation is feeling we need to perfectly relate our resolution to our *lectio* and *meditatio* and thus find ourselves unable to arrive at a specific resolution. But any resolution to grow in love is a direct response to our encounter with God in prayer. Read 1 John 4:7– 2; 20–21

- ✦ Consider all steps: *lectio* (what do you note?), *meditatio* (reflect on the meaning), *oratio* (journal your conversation with God), *contemplatio* (simply rest in God’s presence) and *resolutio* (what small thing can you do today to put your prayer into action?)

5 Truth and Beauty. “I was a stranger and you welcomed me” – Matthew 25:35b

Domenico Ghirlandaio was a Florentine Renaissance painter and one of the most accomplished fresco artists of his generation. Ghirlandaio often depicted contemporary figures in the midst of religious narratives, and thus many of his works provide a light into the daily life, dress, and activities of fifteenth-century life. In addition to his extensive work in Florence, he was among those called to Rome to assist with the Sistine Chapel, where he painted the fresco of the Vocation of the Apostles. Ghirlandaio, likely with the help of apprentices in his large and productive workshop (in which Michelangelo was apprenticed and taught early on), produced a series of frescoes in the Oratory of San Martino for the lay confraternity of the Buonomini.



Clothing the naked / Scala / Art Resource, NY

Look up Matthew 25:31–46. What are the works of mercy that Jesus describes?

The confraternity of the Buonomini was founded in 1442 and dedicated to helping the poor, especially needy families who had fallen on hard times. This institution continues its charitable work today. Numerous confraternities existed in medieval society; some focused on devotional aspects (singing of lauds, etc.) and some on charitable works (hospitals, serving the poor, etc.), while others focused on providing devotional and social services for particular artisan groups. (continued on supplemental pages, “Exercise 5”)



Visiting the Sick / Scala / Art Resource, NY



Giving Drink to the Thirsty and Food to the Hungry / Scala / Art Resource, NY

References Supporting Exercise 1:

St. Francis de Sales – Introduction to the Devout Life

“Above all things, my daughter, strive when your meditation is ended to retain the thoughts and resolutions you have made as your earnest practice throughout the day. This is the real fruit of meditation, without which it is apt to be unprofitable, if not actually harmful—inasmuch as to dwell upon virtues without practicing them lends to puff us up with unrealities, until we begin to fancy ourselves all that we have meditated upon and resolved to be; which is all very well if our resolutions are earnest and substantial, but on the contrary hollow and dangerous if they are not put in practice. You must then diligently endeavor to carry out your resolutions, and seek for all opportunities, great or small. For instance, if your resolution was to win over those who oppose you by gentleness, seek through the day any occasion of meeting such persons kindly, and if none offers, strive to speak well of them, and pray for them.”

James 1:19–25

Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

References Supporting Exercise 2:

James 2:14–17

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has not works, is dead.

St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, Seventh Mansion, Chapter 4

“This is the end and aim of prayer, my daughters; this is the reason of the spiritual marriage whose children are always good works. Works are the unmistakable sign which shows these favors come from God, as I told you. It will do me little good to be deeply recollected when alone, making acts of the virtues, planning and promising to do wonders in God’s service, if afterwards, when occasion offers, I do just the opposite.... This, my sisters, is what I would have us strive for—to offer our petitions and to practice prayer, not for our own enjoyment but to gain strength to serve God.”

Matthew 25:31–40

When the Son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’

References Supporting Exercise 3:

Colossians 3:1–17

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Continue on next page)

References Supporting Exercise 3 -- continued:

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his practices and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And over all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

References Supporting Exercise 4:

1 John 4:7-12; 20-21

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God,. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

...

If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.

References Supporting Exercise 5:

Matthew 25:31-46

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Truth & Beauty continued

Such lay religious associations were encouraged by the friars and provided a forum for increased attention to moral reform and living a life modeled on the example of Jesus Christ. With this emphasis, those confraternities that focused on charitable works, such as the Buonomini, understood the giving of alms not only as an expression of concern for their neighbor's welfare but also as an expression of piety, a way in which to live a life of charity in imitation of Christ. Ghirlandaio's *Works of Mercy* frescoes are located in the confraternity's main oratory room, in the ten lunettes formed as the walls meet the arched ceiling. Of the ten total frescoes in the oratory, six present the Buonomini actively engaged in the seven Corporeal Works of Mercy, three of which are represented here in our reflection. The artist's use of perspective allows the activities presented in the frescoes to inhabit their own rooms with arched ceilings to match the oratory room. In the fresco that incorporates both the works of feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty, a man pours wine into a woman's flask, while behind her, children are handed round loaves of bread. Behind them we can make out a mound of similar loaves of bread ready for distribution—

(continued on next page)

References Supporting Exercise 5 -- continued:

a staple of the Buonomini charitable works was a weekly distribution of bread to those they were assisting. In the fresco showing the work of clothing the naked, a man and woman, possibly husband and wife, are shown in a humble pose, while a young child reaches up for new clothes. Behind them, other men stand behind a *banco* or counter (more typically used for monetary transactions or currency exchange); here they distribute clothes for those without means. In both frescoes we see adults and children, which recalls the Buonomini's emphasis on supporting families with children, especially families in which the head of the household or another member was sick, or families in which a mother was widowed or abandoned by her husband, thus making it difficult for them to provide for themselves. In all the frescoes we see the Buonomini dressed in the traditional cloaks and hoods/hats of fifteenth-century Florentine citizens.

These frescoes not only imaged the works that the Buonomini were doing, they were a constant reminder of Jesus' call upon any who would follow him. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus' ministry begins with his Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus not only directs his disciples to "give to him who begs from you" (Matthew 5:42), but where he also assumes his disciples will do so, thus continuing "*when* you give alms" (Matthew 6:3-4, emphasis added) and where he exhorts them to lay up "treasures in heaven" rather than on earth (Matthew 6:19-20). Jesus ends his teaching ministry on this same note (see Matthew 25:31-46), with the gathering of the nations and the separation of the goats and sheep, with the separation criterion being what one did for those who were hungry, thirsty, naked, homeless, and in prison. Between these two sermons, Jesus witnessed a life of deep prayer and continual service and care for others, both corporeally (curing the sick, feeding the multitude) and spiritually (forgiving sins, instructing those who followed him, bearing insult, injury, and death). As disciples, the Buonomini heard Jesus' words in the gospels and imitated him, serving those in need around them. As his disciples today, Jesus also calls each of us to a life of intimate conversation and prayer with him, and, by his grace, a life of active service of others.