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The Teaching of
LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB on

Meditation & Christian Prayer

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Edited by Peter Ng

The Seven Teachings of Jesus on Prayer



Jesus was a teacher of contemplation. We see this very clearly in his teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in St Matthew's Gospel.

1. *Be careful not to make a show of your religion before men; if you do, no reward awaits you in your Father's house in heaven. (Matt 6:1)*

HUMILITY Prayer must not be merely outward. It is not about looking holy or winning other people's admiration.

2. *When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers standing up in synagogue and at the street corners for everyone to see them. I tell you this: they have their reward already. But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place; and your Father who sees what is secret will reward you. (Matt 6:5-6)*

INTERIORITY Prayer must be interior. The 'secret place' is a metaphor for the heart.

3. *In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. Do not imitate them. (Matt 6:7-8)*

SILENCE In prayer we must not 'babble on'. More words do not make God hear us better. Prayer is not about quantity – 'prayers', but about quality – 'attention'.

4. *Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Matt 6:8)*

TRUST Prayer is not about asking God for things, because he 'knows what we need before we ask him'.

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5. *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where it grows rusty and moth-eaten, and thieves break into and steal it. Store up treasure in heaven where there is no moth and no rust to spoil it, no thieves to break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be so. (Matt 6:19-21)*

SPIRITUALITY We must give priority to the spiritual treasures of the Kingdom rather than material well-being.

6. *I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes. Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow and reap and store in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You are worth more than the birds! And why be anxious about clothes? Consider how the lilies grow in the fields; they do not work, they do not spin; and yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his splendour was not attired like one of these. But if that is how God clothes the grass in the fields, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown on the stove, will he not all the more clothe you? How little faith you have! No, do not ask anxiously: What are we to eat? What are we to drink? What shall we wear? All these are things for the heathen to run after, not for you, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. (Matt 6:25-32)*

PEACE We must learn to stop worrying about the future and to trust in God. Anxiety is not conducive to prayer. Anxiety makes us too self-centred and prevents us from realizing the gift of love already deposited in our heart.

7. *Set your mind on God's Kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. (Matt 6:33)*

ATTENTION Prayer is about 'setting the mind on God's Kingdom first.' In other words, be attentive and mindful of the one thing necessary.

THE SEVEN TEACHINGS OF JESUS ON PRAYER can be summarized as:
 humility, silence, trust,
 attention, interiority,
 spirituality, peace

These are the qualities of meditation. And so, when we meditate, we put into practice the teaching of Jesus on how to pray.

Laurence Freeman OSB, *Christian Meditation: Your Daily Practice*



The Wheel of Prayer



Prayer is the movement of our life, our journey, towards God.

A good symbol of prayer is the Wheel because it suggests movement, turning our whole life towards God.

There are many forms of prayer. We pray in different ways, at different times, and according to how we feel. Each of us has our own preferred ways of prayer.

The spokes of the wheel could represent these different forms of prayer – the Eucharist, the sacraments, the prayer of Scripture, petitionary and intercessory prayer, charismatic prayer, devotions, the rosary, etc.

But

what makes all these different forms of prayer Christian is that they should be centred in Christ. All these different spokes, all these different forms of prayer, converge in the hub, in the centre of the wheel. What do we find at the centre? In Christian terms, we find the prayer of Christ, the mind of Christ. The spokes are the forms or expressions of prayer which fit into the hub of the wheel where we find the prayer of Jesus himself.

In this understanding of prayer, all forms of prayer flow into and out of the spirit of Jesus worshipping God on behalf of creation. His prayer is his communion of love with the Father in the Holy Spirit, and his love for the world. Therefore our own forms of prayer are less important than his prayer. His prayer contains and completes all forms of prayer.

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St Paul says: “I live no longer, but Christ lives in me.”

This is a great expression of the relationship of the Christian to the person of Christ. In other words, we move beyond and out of our own little ego-world and we move into the spirit, into the mind, into the person of Christ. There we find our own identity completed and expanded.

We could paraphrase St Paul and say: “I pray no longer but Christ prays in me.”

This means that

our prayers are like little prayers flowing into the great ocean of the prayer of Christ.

How do we find our way to the hub of the wheel?

In the tradition of the early Christian monks, and in our tradition taught by John Main, we find a very simple method, a very simple form of the prayer of the heart.

It is the form of the mantra.

We take a single word or a short phrase, sacred in our faith, and we repeat this word or phrase continually in the mind and the heart. We listen to the word as we say it; we pay attention to it.

We allow the word to guide us through our thoughts, concerns, anxieties, distractions. And to lead us gently along the path of silence and simplicity to that stillness that we find at the centre of our being.

At the hub of the wheel, at the centre of prayer, you find stillness. Without the stillness of the hub, the wheel *cannot* turn. Without stillness at the centre, there could be no movement or growth at the circumference. The quality of our activity – of our busy, active lives – depends on the stillness we find at the centre. Meditation is the work of finding and becoming one with this stillness. “Be still and know that I am God”. (Ps 46:10)

The more deeply we enter into the prayer of Christ, into the silence and stillness at the centre of our being, we find that the other forms of prayer at other times become enriched. Our reading of *Scripture*, our prayer in community, our celebration of the sacraments, all these different forms of prayer, are transformed, and deepened, and the spiritual meaning of them is enhanced by our practice of meditation.



Laurence Freeman OSB, *The Inner Pilgrimage: The Journey of Meditation*