THE DAILY BREAD

The Fiat of the Beloved



The Conversation

Catholic Prayer

A FORMATION BOOK BY

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The Everyday Apostle

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What Catholic Prayer Really Is

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INTRODUCTION

Prayer Is Meant to Be Alive

Prayer is the oxygen of the spiritual life, and yet many Catholic women are mildly suffocated. They pray, in the sense of saying prayers, often for everyone else's needs before their own, often at the end of a day when there is nothing left, often with half their attention somewhere else, and their prayer has become a routine they maintain without really expecting much from it. They do the prayers, but they are not sure they are praying, in the deeper sense of communicating with a Person who loves them and is waiting to be found. And so prayer, which is meant to be the living conversation at the center of a woman's relationship with God, becomes instead a duty performed, a box checked, a performance kept up without much life in it.

This book is about recovering what prayer is meant to be, a living relationship rather than a performance. It will show that prayer is not a performance to be gotten right but a conversation with a Person who loves her; what the great movements of prayer are and why the Church prays as she prays; the richness of the Catholic prayer tradition, the vocal prayers, meditation, and contemplation, and the many forms that are so many doors into the same relationship; and the particular gift of feminine prayer, the way women are especially equipped for deep encounter with God. The aim is not to pile on more prayers but to help a woman pray in the fuller sense, to move from maintaining a routine to living the conversation prayer is meant to be.

Pray without ceasing. — 1 Thessalonians 5:17

The Scripture calls a woman to pray without ceasing, which is possible only if prayer is not a performance she keeps up but a living relationship woven through her life, a continual communion with the God who loves her. This book will help her toward that: seeing prayer as a relationship, not a performance; understanding the great movements of prayer and why the Church prays them; praying the vocal prayers of the Church; entering meditation and mental prayer; resting in contemplation; finding among the many forms of prayer the doors that fit her; and receiving the particular gift of feminine prayer. Prayer is meant to be alive, a real conversation with the God who waits to be found, and this book is here to help a woman find Him there.

CHAPTER ONE

Not a Performance

Prayer Is a Relationship

The single most important thing to understand about prayer is that it is not a performance to be gotten right but a relationship to be lived, a real communication with a Person who loves a woman and waits to be found, so that prayer is at its heart a conversation and not a ritual performed. Understanding prayer as a relationship rather than a performance transforms a woman's whole approach to it, freeing her from the pressure to pray perfectly and opening her to the living communion with God that prayer truly is.

When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. — Matthew 6:6

Communicating With a Person

Prayer is communication with a Person, a real exchange between a woman and the God who loves her, so that it is relational at its heart, a conversation with Someone rather than the mere recitation of words. At its deepest, prayer is not the saying of words into the air but communication with a real Person, God, who loves a woman and desires her company, so that prayer is a conversation, a relating, an exchange of love between the woman and her God, personal and relational at its very heart. This means prayer is to be understood as talking and listening with Someone, relating to a Person who loves her and listens, rather than performing a religious exercise, so that the point of prayer is the relationship, the communion with God, and not the correct performance of words. The woman who understands prayer as communicating with a Person prays to Someone who loves her, relating rather than merely reciting. Communicating with a Person is what prayer is at heart, a real exchange between a woman and the God who loves her, so that prayer is a conversation and a relating rather than the mere recitation of words into the air.

Freed From Getting It Right

Understanding prayer as a relationship frees a woman from the pressure to get it right, for a relationship is not a performance to be judged but a communion to be lived, so that she can pray imperfectly and still truly pray. Many women feel pressure to pray correctly, to use the right words, to feel the right things, to perform prayer well, and this pressure can make prayer anxious and lifeless, but understanding prayer as a relationship frees a woman from it, for one does not perform a relationship but lives it, and a woman can relate to God imperfectly, with wandering attention and stumbling words, and still genuinely pray. This means a woman need not get prayer right to pray truly, for prayer is a relationship and not a performance, so that she can come to God as she is, pray

imperfectly, and still have real communion with Him, freed from the pressure that would make prayer a burden. The woman who is freed from getting it right prays as she is, relating to God imperfectly but truly, no longer burdened by the need to perform. Freed from getting it right, a woman can pray imperfectly and still truly pray, for prayer is a relationship to be lived rather than a performance to be judged, so that she comes to God as she is and has real communion with Him.

A Father Who Waits in Secret

Prayer is addressed to a Father who waits in secret, intimately present and longing for a woman's company, so that she prays not to a distant judge but to a loving Father who desires to be found by her in the quiet of her heart. Jesus taught that when a woman prays she should go into her room, shut the door, and pray to her Father who is in secret, revealing that God is an intimate Father who waits in the secret depths, present and longing for her company, so that prayer is coming to a loving Father who desires her, not performing before a distant judge. This means a woman prays to a Father who waits for her, who is present in the secret of her heart and longs to be found, so that prayer is an intimate meeting with a loving Father rather than a formal performance before a remote God. The woman who prays to a Father who waits in secret comes to an intimate and loving God who longs for her company, found in the quiet of her heart. A Father who waits in secret is whom a woman prays to, intimately present and longing for her company, so that prayer is a meeting with a loving Father who desires to be found by her rather than a performance before a distant judge.

CHAPTER TWO

The Movements of Prayer

Adoration, Sorrow, Thanks, and Asking

Catholic prayer has a shape, moving through several great movements, adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication, which together form the full conversation with God and reflect the different ways a woman relates to Him. Understanding these movements of prayer, why the Church prays in these ways, helps a woman pray a full and balanced conversation with God rather than reducing prayer to asking alone.

In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. — Philippians 4:6

Adoration and Thanksgiving

Two great movements of prayer are adoration, in which a woman worships God for who He is, and thanksgiving, in which she thanks Him for what He has done, so that prayer begins by turning toward God in praise and gratitude. Adoration is the prayer that worships God simply for who He is, His greatness, His goodness, His holiness, lifting the heart to praise Him, while thanksgiving is the prayer that thanks Him for His gifts and His works, both of them turning a woman away from herself and toward God in praise and gratitude, so that prayer is centered on God and not only on her own needs. This means a woman's prayer should include adoration and thanksgiving, the worship of God for who He is and the thanking of Him for what He has done, so that her conversation with God begins by lifting her heart to Him in praise rather than beginning and ending with her own requests. The woman who prays adoration and thanksgiving turns toward God in praise and gratitude, centering her prayer on Him. Adoration and thanksgiving are movements of prayer that worship God for who He is and thank Him for what He has done, so that a woman's prayer begins by turning toward God in praise and gratitude rather than centering only on her own needs.

Contrition and Supplication

Two further movements are contrition, in which a woman sorrows for her sins and asks forgiveness, and supplication, in which she brings her needs and the needs of others to God, so that prayer includes repentance and asking. Contrition is the prayer of sorrow for sin, in which a woman acknowledges her faults before God and asks His mercy, humbling herself and seeking forgiveness, while supplication is the prayer of asking, in which she brings her needs and the needs of others to God, petitioning Him with confidence, so that prayer includes both repentance and request. This means a woman's prayer should include contrition and supplication, the sorrowing for sin and seeking of mercy and the bringing of her needs to God, so that her conversation with God includes honest repentance and confident asking, the acknowledgment of her faults and the entrusting of her needs. The woman who prays contrition and supplication repents before God and brings Him her needs, completing the movements of a full prayer. Contrition and supplication are movements of prayer that sorrow for sin and seek mercy and that bring needs to God, so that prayer includes honest repentance and confident asking alongside praise and thanks.

Why the Church Prays This Way

The Church prays in these movements because they reflect the full reality of a woman's relationship with God, who is worthy of worship, generous in gifts, merciful toward sin, and attentive to need, so that the movements of prayer are not arbitrary but rooted in the truth of God and the relationship. The Church prays adoration, thanksgiving, contrition,

and supplication because these correspond to the real dimensions of the relationship with God, His worthiness of praise, His generosity deserving thanks, His mercy toward the sinner, His care for the one in need, so that these movements of prayer are rooted in the truth of who God is and how a woman relates to Him, not invented forms but the natural shape of the conversation. This means the movements of prayer teach a woman to pray a full and balanced conversation with God, reflecting the whole relationship rather than reducing prayer to one note, so that she worships, thanks, repents, and asks, relating to God in the fullness of the conversation. The woman who understands why the Church prays this way prays the full movements, relating to God in the balanced conversation that reflects the whole relationship. Why the Church prays this way is that the movements of prayer reflect the full reality of the relationship with God, worthy of worship, generous, merciful, and attentive, so that adoration, thanksgiving, contrition, and supplication are the natural shape of a full and balanced conversation with God.

CHAPTER THREE

Praying the Church's Words

Vocal Prayer and the Great Prayers

One of the great forms of Catholic prayer is vocal prayer, the praying of words, whether one's own or the treasured prayers the Church has handed down, and far from being inferior to silent prayer, vocal prayer is a genuine and valuable way of relating to God. Understanding vocal prayer and the great prayers of the Church, why the Church prays set prayers and how they are a real conversation with God, helps a woman value and use this foundational form of prayer.

Pray then like this: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. — Matthew 6:9

The Value of Set Prayers

The set prayers handed down in the Church, far from being empty repetition, are a treasury of words that teach a woman to pray and carry her prayer when her own words fail, so that praying the Church's words is a genuine and valuable form of prayer. Some imagine that only spontaneous, self-composed prayer is real, and that set prayers are mere rote, but this is mistaken, for the prayers the Church hands down, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the great prayers of the tradition, are a treasury that teaches a woman how to pray, gives her words when her own fail, and unites her prayer with the whole Church across the ages, so that set prayers are a real and valuable form of prayer. This means a woman need not disdain set prayers as inferior but can value them as a genuine way of

praying, words given by the Church to carry and shape her prayer, especially when she is tired or dry or without words of her own, so that the Church's prayers become truly her own. The woman who values set prayers uses the treasury of the Church's words as a genuine form of prayer, shaped and carried by them. The value of set prayers is that the words handed down in the Church teach a woman to pray and carry her prayer when her own words fail, so that praying the Church's words is a genuine and valuable form of prayer, not empty repetition.

The Our Father, the Model Prayer

The greatest of all prayers is the Our Father, given by Jesus Himself as the model of all prayer, so that in praying it a woman prays the perfect prayer, learning from it the shape of all her prayer. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He gave them the Our Father, the perfect prayer, which honors God, seeks His kingdom and will, asks for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance, so that this prayer, given by Christ Himself, is the model of all prayer, teaching a woman what to pray for and in what order, the pattern of a rightly ordered conversation with God. This means a woman has in the Our Father both a prayer to pray and a model to learn from, for in praying it she prays the perfect prayer of Christ and learns the shape of all prayer, putting God first and bringing her needs in their proper place. The woman who prays the Our Father prays the model prayer of Christ, learning from it the shape of all her prayer. The Our Father, given by Jesus as the model prayer, is the greatest of all prayers, so that in praying it a woman prays the perfect prayer and learns from it the shape and order of all her conversation with God.

Praying Words With the Heart

Vocal prayer becomes real prayer when a woman prays the words with her heart, bringing her attention and love to them rather than reciting them absently, so that the words become the vehicle of a real communion with God. The danger of vocal prayer is that the words are said while the heart is absent, mere recitation without prayer, and so vocal prayer becomes true prayer when a woman prays the words with her heart, attending to their meaning, bringing her love and intention to them, so that the familiar words become the vehicle of a real relating to God rather than an empty performance. This means a woman makes vocal prayer real by praying it attentively and from the heart, letting the words express her love and carry her communion with God, so that even the most familiar prayers become living prayer when prayed with the heart engaged. The woman who prays words with her heart makes vocal prayer a real communion with God, the words carrying her love and attention. Praying words with the heart makes vocal prayer real, a woman bringing her attention and love to the words rather than reciting

them absently, so that the familiar prayers become the vehicle of a true communion with God.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pondering and Listening

Meditation and Mental Prayer

Beyond vocal prayer lies meditation, or mental prayer, in which a woman prays not mainly with set words but by thinking about God, pondering His truth, and conversing with Him from the heart, a deeper and more personal form of the conversation. Understanding meditation and mental prayer, how to ponder God's word and truth and converse with Him interiorly, opens to a woman a richer form of prayer that moves beyond words into real reflection and personal exchange with God.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight.
— Psalm 19:14

Thinking About God

Meditation is a prayer of thinking about God, pondering His truth, His word, His works, and the mysteries of the faith, so that the mind is engaged in considering God and the heart is moved to respond. In meditation a woman uses her mind to think about God, pondering a truth of the faith, a scene from the Gospel, a word of Scripture, the goodness of God, turning it over, considering it, letting it sink in, so that her mind is actively engaged in God and her heart is moved to love, desire, and respond. This means meditation is a prayer of reflection, a thinking about God that engages the mind and moves the heart, deeper than reciting words because it involves a woman's own pondering and personal engagement with the truth of God, so that she really considers and relates to Him. The woman who meditates thinks about God, pondering His truth until her heart is moved to respond, engaging Him with her mind and heart. Thinking about God is the work of meditation, pondering His truth, word, and works so that the mind is engaged in considering God and the heart is moved to respond, a prayer of reflection deeper than reciting words.

A Conversation From the Heart

Meditation leads naturally into mental prayer, a conversation from the heart in which a woman speaks to God in her own words about what she is pondering, and listens for His

response, so that prayer becomes a personal exchange. As a woman ponders God in meditation, she is moved to respond, to speak to Him from her heart about what she is considering, to tell Him her thoughts and feelings, to ask and to listen, so that meditation flows into mental prayer, a personal conversation with God in her own words rather than set formulas. This means mental prayer is the heart-to-heart conversation that grows out of pondering God, a woman speaking to Him personally and listening for Him, so that prayer becomes a real and intimate exchange, her own words and God's gentle response, the living conversation at the center of the relationship. The woman who prays a conversation from the heart speaks to God personally about what she ponders and listens for Him, entering a real exchange. A conversation from the heart is mental prayer, a woman speaking to God in her own words about what she ponders and listening for His response, so that prayer becomes a personal and intimate exchange rather than set formulas.

Lectio Divina as a Path

The Church offers Lectio Divina, the prayerful reading of Scripture, as a time-tested path into meditation and mental prayer, guiding a woman from reading God's word to pondering it, responding to it, and resting in God. Lectio Divina, divine reading, is a method the Church gives for meditation, guiding a woman to read a passage of Scripture slowly, to meditate on it by pondering what God is saying, to pray in response from her heart, and to rest quietly in God's presence, so that it leads her step by step into meditation and mental prayer through the word of God. This means a woman who wants to learn meditation has in Lectio Divina a clear path, a way of using Scripture to enter the pondering and personal conversation that meditation is, so that she is not left to figure out mental prayer on her own but guided into it by the Church's time-tested method. The woman who uses Lectio Divina as a path enters meditation and mental prayer through the prayerful reading of Scripture, guided step by step. Lectio Divina as a path leads a woman from reading God's word to pondering it, responding, and resting in God, so that the Church's method of prayerful Scripture reading guides her step by step into meditation and mental prayer.

CHAPTER FIVE

Resting in God

The Prayer of Contemplation

Beyond meditation lies the deepest form of prayer, contemplation, in which a woman moves beyond thinking and words into a simple, loving being with God, resting in His presence, so that prayer becomes a quiet communion that needs no words. Understanding contemplation, the prayer of simply resting in God's presence in love, reveals the summit of prayer toward which the other forms lead, a wordless communion with the God who loves her.

Be still, and know that I am God. — Psalm 46:10

Beyond Words and Thoughts

Contemplation is a prayer beyond words and thoughts, in which a woman simply rests in God's presence, loving Him and being loved, without the activity of thinking or speaking, so that prayer becomes a quiet being-with rather than a doing. Where vocal prayer uses words and meditation uses thoughts, contemplation moves beyond both into a simple, restful being with God, a loving gaze, a quiet presence to Him, in which a woman does not speak or think so much as simply remain in His presence, loving and being loved, so that prayer becomes a wordless communion. This means contemplation is the simplest and deepest prayer, a resting in God beyond the activity of words and thoughts, a being-with that needs no doing, so that a woman simply remains in God's presence in love, which is the summit toward which the other forms of prayer lead. The woman who prays beyond words and thoughts rests in God's presence in a loving, wordless communion, the deepest form of prayer. Beyond words and thoughts, contemplation is a simple resting in God's presence in love, so that prayer becomes a quiet being-with rather than a doing, a wordless communion that is the summit toward which the other forms lead.

Stillness Before God

Contemplation requires stillness, a quieting of the soul before God so as to be present to Him, so that a woman learns to be still and know that He is God, resting in His presence rather than filling the time with activity. The Scripture counsels being still and knowing that God is God, and this stillness is the condition of contemplation, a quieting of the mind and heart, a setting aside of words and busyness, a simple presence to God in silence, so that a woman learns to be still before Him, resting in His presence rather than filling her prayer with constant activity. This means contemplation asks a woman to grow comfortable with stillness and silence before God, to quiet her soul and simply be present to Him, which is difficult in a noisy and busy life but is the doorway into the deepest communion, the resting in God that stillness makes possible. The woman who learns stillness before God quiets her soul to be present to Him, entering the contemplative rest that stillness opens. Stillness before God is the condition of contemplation, a quieting of

the soul to be present to Him, so that a woman learns to be still and know that He is God, resting in His presence rather than filling her prayer with activity.

A Gift to Be Received

Contemplation is ultimately a gift God gives rather than an achievement a woman produces, so that she disposes herself to it by stillness and love but receives it from God, who draws her into deeper communion in His own time. While a woman can dispose herself to contemplation by meditation, stillness, and love, contemplation in its fullness is a gift, something God gives rather than something she achieves by technique, for it is He who draws her into deeper union, deepening the prayer beyond her own doing, so that she receives contemplation as grace rather than producing it by effort. This means a woman need not strive anxiously to contemplate or feel she has failed if the deeper rest does not come at will, for contemplation is God's gift, and her part is to dispose herself by stillness and love and to receive what He gives, trusting Him to draw her deeper in His own time. The woman who understands contemplation as a gift disposes herself by stillness and love and receives it from God, not striving to produce it. A gift to be received is what contemplation ultimately is, God drawing a woman into deeper communion rather than her achieving it, so that she disposes herself by stillness and love but receives the deeper rest from God in His own time.

CHAPTER SIX

Many Doors, One Relationship

The Richness of the Tradition

The Catholic tradition is rich with forms of prayer, the Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, the Liturgy of the Hours, spontaneous prayer, and many more, and these are not competing options but so many doors into the same relationship, each a different way into communion with the one God. Understanding the many forms of prayer as doors into one relationship frees a woman to explore the richness of the tradition and to find the forms that fit her, without anxiety that she must use them all or that one is the only right way.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness. The Spirit himself intercedes for us. — Romans 8:26

A Rich Variety of Forms

The Church offers a rich variety of prayer forms, each with its own character and gift, so that a woman has many ways to pray, from the meditative Rosary to the Liturgy of the Hours to spontaneous conversation, a whole treasury to draw on. The Catholic prayer tradition is wonderfully rich, offering the Rosary with its meditation on the mysteries, the Divine Mercy Chaplet with its appeal to God's mercy, the Liturgy of the Hours that sanctifies the day with the Psalms, spontaneous prayer in one's own words, and many other devotions and forms, so that a woman has a whole treasury of ways to pray, each with its own gift. This means a woman is not limited to one way of praying but has a rich variety to draw on, different forms for different needs and seasons, a treasury of prayer the Church has developed over the centuries, so that she can explore and find the ways that help her pray. The woman who knows the rich variety of forms draws on the treasury of Catholic prayer, finding many ways into communion with God. A rich variety of forms fills the Catholic tradition, from the Rosary to the Liturgy of the Hours to spontaneous prayer, so that a woman has a whole treasury of ways to pray, each with its own character and gift.

Doors Into the Same Relationship

The many forms of prayer are not rival techniques but different doors into the same relationship with God, so that whichever form a woman uses, the point is the communion with God it opens, and not the form itself. Though the forms of prayer differ, they all lead to the same place, communion with the one God, so that they are not competing methods but different doors into the same relationship, each a way into the conversation with God, so that a woman uses them not for their own sake but as means into the relationship they all serve. This means a woman can hold all the forms lightly, valuing them as doors into the relationship with God rather than as ends in themselves, choosing the ones that best open that relationship for her, so that the forms serve the communion with God and are not confused with it. The woman who sees the forms as doors into the same relationship uses them as means to communion with God, valuing the relationship they open rather than the forms themselves. Doors into the same relationship is what the many forms of prayer are, different ways into the one communion with God, so that a woman uses them as means into the relationship they all serve rather than as ends in themselves.

Finding What Fits You

Because the forms are doors into one relationship, a woman is free to find the forms that fit her, the ways of praying that best open the relationship for her, without anxiety that she must use them all or that only one is right. Since the forms of prayer are doors into the same relationship, a woman need not use every form or worry that she is praying wrongly if some forms suit her more than others, but is free to find what fits her, the

forms that best help her pray, that open the relationship with God for her in particular, so that she builds her prayer life from the forms that work for her. This means a woman can explore the tradition and settle into the forms that fit her own temperament and season, without guilt that she does not use them all or anxiety that she has chosen wrongly, so that she finds her own way of praying among the many doors the Church offers. The woman who finds what fits her settles into the forms of prayer that best open the relationship with God for her, free from anxiety about the rest. Finding what fits you means a woman is free to settle into the prayer forms that best open the relationship with God for her, without anxiety that she must use them all or that only one is right, building her prayer from the doors that work for her.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Gift of Feminine Prayer

Women and the Depths of Prayer

There is a particular gift that women bring to prayer, for the Church's great tradition of deep, mystical prayer has been shaped disproportionately by women, whose natural interiority and relational attentiveness especially equip them for profound encounter with God. Understanding the gift of feminine prayer, how women are especially suited to the depths of prayer and how the great women mystics model this, encourages a woman to embrace her own capacity for deep communion with God.

I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go., Song of Solomon 3:4

Women and the Mystical Tradition

The Church's mystical tradition, the heritage of deep, contemplative prayer, has been shaped in a remarkable way by women, so that the great women mystics stand among the Church's foremost teachers of prayer. Among the greatest teachers of prayer in the Church's history are women, Teresa of Avila who mapped the interior life, Therese of Lisieux who taught the little way of love, Catherine of Siena and Hildegard of Bingen and many others whose deep encounter with God shaped the Church's understanding of prayer, so that the mystical tradition is disproportionately a feminine heritage, women leading the Church into the depths of prayer. This means a woman stands in a rich tradition of feminine prayer, with great women mystics as her guides and models, teachers who show that women are especially capable of profound communion with God, so that she can look to them and take heart in her own call to deep prayer. The woman

who knows women and the mystical tradition sees her own capacity for deep prayer reflected in the great women mystics who shaped it. Women and the mystical tradition are deeply joined, for the Church's heritage of contemplative prayer has been shaped disproportionately by women like Teresa of Avila and Therese of Lisieux, so that the great women mystics stand among the Church's foremost teachers of prayer.

A Natural Capacity for Encounter

Women often bring to prayer a natural interiority and relational attentiveness that especially equips them for deep, personal encounter with God, so that the very qualities of a woman's heart suit her for the depths of prayer. The deep prayer of the women mystics was not accidental but flowed in part from qualities often strong in women, an interior depth, an attentiveness to relationship, a capacity for love and intimacy, which especially equip a woman for the personal, relational encounter with God that prayer is, so that the very shape of a woman's heart suits her for profound communion with Him. This means a woman has, in her natural interiority and relational gifts, a special capacity for deep prayer, an equipping for the encounter with God that prayer offers, so that she need not think deep prayer is for others but can recognize her own suitedness for it and embrace her call to the depths. The woman who recognizes her natural capacity for encounter embraces her own suitedness for deep prayer, equipped by the gifts of her heart for communion with God. A natural capacity for encounter is often a woman's gift, her interiority and relational attentiveness especially equipping her for the personal, relational communion with God that prayer is, so that the very qualities of her heart suit her for the depths of prayer.

Embracing the Depths

A woman is invited to embrace the depths of prayer to which she is especially suited, not settling for a shallow or merely dutiful prayer but reaching for the deep communion with God that is her heritage and her capacity. Because a woman is especially equipped for deep prayer and stands in a rich tradition of feminine mysticism, she is invited not to settle for a shallow, routine prayer but to embrace the depths, to reach for the profound, personal encounter with God that her heart is made for and that the women mystics attained, seeking the deep communion that is her heritage. This means a woman can aspire to more than a dutiful prayer life, embracing her capacity and her call to the depths of prayer, reaching for the intimate communion with God that she is especially suited for, so that she does not sell herself short but seeks the deep encounter that is possible for her. The woman who embraces the depths reaches for the profound communion with God she is made for, not settling for a shallow or dutiful prayer. Embracing the depths is a woman's invitation, reaching for the deep communion with

God that is her heritage and her capacity rather than settling for a shallow or merely dutiful prayer, seeking the intimate encounter her heart is made for.

CONCLUSION

Find Him There

The woman whose prayer had become a routine she maintained without expecting much now knows what prayer is meant to be. We have seen that prayer is not a performance but a relationship with a Father who waits in secret; that it moves through adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication; that vocal prayer and the great prayers of the Church are a genuine way of praying; that meditation and mental prayer open a personal conversation from the heart; that contemplation is a resting in God beyond words; that the many forms of prayer are doors into one relationship; and that women are especially gifted for the depths of prayer.

Through all of it runs a single invitation: find Him there. Prayer is not a box to check or a performance to keep up but the living conversation at the center of a woman's relationship with God, a God who loves her and waits to be found in the quiet of her heart. The point of all the forms and movements is this one thing, to find Him, to meet the God who is waiting, to live the relationship that prayer is meant to be.

So find Him there. Come to prayer not to perform but to relate, to a Father who waits for you in secret. Pray the full conversation, adoring, thanking, repenting, and asking. Use the great prayers of the Church, and pray them with your heart. Enter meditation, pondering God and conversing with Him from your heart. Grow still, and learn to rest in His presence in contemplation. Explore the many forms of prayer, and find the doors that fit you. And embrace the depths of prayer to which you, as a woman, are especially called. For prayer is meant to be alive, a real conversation with the God who loves you and waits to be found. Do not settle for maintaining a routine. Find Him there, in the living conversation prayer was always meant to be.

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