

The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic



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1. Introduction

Until the 13th century prayer was understood as comprising words addressed to God or as a desire for God. It was only in the 13th century that bodily postures were integrated into forms of prayer through 'The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic.' This broadened the horizons of prayer since it acknowledged the importance of the body in the process of prayer.

2. The Nine Ways of St. Dominic



The First Way of Prayer: Profound Bowing of the Head

St. Dominic's first way of prayer was to humble himself before the altar, as if Christ, signified by the altar, was truly and personally present. He would say along with Judith (9:16), 'O Lord, God, the prayer of the humble and the meek has always pleased you.' It was through humility that the Canaanite woman and the Prodigal Son attained what they desired; as for me, 'I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under me roof' (Mt. 8:8), for I have been humbled before you exceedingly, O Lord (Ps. 118:107)

The Second Way of Prayer: Prostration

St. Dominic prayed by throwing himself outstretched upon the ground, lying on his face. He would express his great remorse recalling the words of the gospel, 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner' (Lk. 18:13).

The Third Way of Prayer: Discipline (Flagellation)

St. Dominic would rise from the ground and give himself lashes saying, 'This discipline has corrected me unto the end' (Ps. 17: 36).

The Fourth Way of Prayer: Genuflection

Thereafter, St. Dominic would remain standing before the altar, gazing upon the crucifix. He would genuflect frequently, again and again.

The Fifth Way of Prayer: Standing Erect before the Altar

St. Dominic would stand erect before the altar, often with his hands extended before his breast in the manner of an open book.

The Sixth Way of Prayer: With Arms Outstretched in the Form of a Cross

St. Dominic would be seen to pray standing erect, with hands and arms outstretched, in the form of a cross.

The Seventh Way of Prayer: Hands Together Reaching towards Heaven

While praying, St. Dominic would often reach towards heaven like an arrow which has been shot from a taught bow, straight upwards towards the sky ... He seemed to seek for himself that transcendent joy which is found in living the beatitudes.

The Eighth Way of Prayer: Reading the gospels and Other Holy Texts

St. Dominic would withdraw to a solitary place, recollect himself in the presence of God, sit quietly, and after the sign of the cross, begin to read from scripture or a holy book. He would move from prayer to meditation to contemplation. When he read in this solitary fashion, St. Dominic would venerate the book bow to it, and kiss it.

The Ninth Way of Prayer: Praying while Walking Fortified by Making the Sign of the Cross

St. Dominic observed this mode of prayer in his travels. He would walk and pray, and he would repeatedly fortify himself with the sign of the cross.

3. Conclusion

Human beings are individuals who are embodied in a physical body. Therefore, the body must be used to facilitate prayer. Admittedly, a persons body can cause distractions. Therefore, attention to posture, to breathing, and other bodily factors can help overcome such distractions that could arise from the body. Bodily postures are helpful in moving beyond sense perceptions by helping the devotee maintain focus on a reality that pervades his entire being, namely God. Bodily postures are of great value in seeking to commune with God who is both transcendent and immanent. Just as [contemplation](#) calls us to lay our thoughts aside in order 'to gaze lovingly at God' so too, bodily postures help us lay down our physical sense perceptions, in seeking 'to gaze lovingly on God.'