

The Nine Ways of Prayer

1



The first way (Inclinations) St Dominic humbled himself before the altar as if Christ, signified by the altar, were truly and personally present and not in symbol alone.

2



The second (Prostrations) St Dominic used to pray by throwing himself outstretched upon the ground, lying on his face. He would feel great remorse in his heart and call to mind those words of the Gospel: 'O God, be merciful to me, a sinner' [Luke 18:13].

3



The third (Penance) At the end of this prayer, St Dominic would rise from the ground and give himself the discipline with an iron chain, saying, 'Thy discipline has corrected me unto the end' [Psalm 17:36]. St Josemaria Escrivá recommends a type of mortification called 'the heroic minute'. It means getting up without hesitation and offering the day to the Lord: a supernatural reflection and... up! With this you will be well set up for the rest of the day.

4



The fourth (Genuflections) St Dominic would remain before the altar or in the chapter room with his gaze fixed on the Crucified One, looking upon Him with perfect attention. He genuflected frequently, again and again, like the leper of the gospel who said on bended knee: Lord, if Thou wilt, thou canst make me clean [Matthew. 8:2].

5



The fifth (Contemplation) St Dominic would sometimes remain before the altar, standing up without supporting himself or leaning upon anything. Often his hands would be extended before his breast in the manner of an open book; he would stand with great reverence and devotion as if reading in the very presence of God. Deep in prayer, he meditated upon the words of God.

6



The sixth (Earnest Intercession) St Dominic, was also seen to pray standing erect with his hands and arms outstretched forcefully in the form of a cross.

7



The seventh (Supplication) While praying, he was often seen to reach towards heaven like an arrow straight upwards into the sky. He would stand with hands outstretched above his head and joined together, or at times slightly separated as if about to receive something from heaven. One would believe he was receiving an increase of grace and in this rapture was asking God for the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the Order he had founded.

8



The eighth (Thoughtful Reading) Dominic, after the canonical hours, often withdrew to some solitary place and recollected himself in the presence of God. He would sit quietly, and after the Sign of the Cross, begin to read from a book opened before him. His spirit would then be sweetly aroused as if he heard Our Lord speaking. I will hear what the Lord God will speak to me [Psalm 84:9].

9



The ninth (Praying on a Journey) While travelling, Dominic delighted in giving himself completely to meditation, disposing for contemplation, and he would part from his companion. He would go on ahead or, more frequently, follow at some distance and, thus withdrawn, he would walk and pray. While he prayed it appeared as if he were brushing dust or bothersome flies from his face when instead he was repeatedly fortifying himself with the Sign of the Cross. It was thought that in praying in this way the saint obtained his extensive penetration of Sacred Scripture and profound understanding of the divine words, the power to preach so fervently and courageously, and that intimate acquaintance with the Holy Spirit by which he came to know the hidden things of God.

The Nine Ways of Prayer of St Dominic is a treasured Dominican document on St Dominic's manner of praying. It was written by an anonymous author, probably at Bologna, between 1260 and 1288. Sister Cecilia of the Monastery of St Agnes at Bologna is the most likely source.

St Dominic knew that bodily gestures could powerfully dispose the soul to prayer. In this experience of bodily prayer, the soul in turn is lifted to God in an act of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication. These ways of prayer are a glimpse into the inner life of St Dominic and his intense love for God. We can make use of these in our private prayer (it is noted that St Dominic did not pray in these ways in public).