

**Path of intellect
Thomistic prayer**

Column one _____

About 12% of the population follows this path, using the syllogistic method of Saint Thomas Aquinas known as Scholastic prayer. The main emphasis is on the orderly progress of thought from cause to effect.

People of this prayer type prefer neat, orderly forms of the spiritual life, as opposed to the free-spirit, impulsive attitude of the Franciscan approach. Their spirituality is centered on the earnest pursuit of all the transcendental values: truth, goodness, beauty, unity, love, life, and spirit. Like Saint Teresa of Avila, they are willing to exert superhuman effort to achieve their goal.

Because of their disdain for second best, they seek total truth and authenticity in their lives and work hard to reach the whole truth about themselves, about God, and about sanctity. This intense pursuit of truth colors their whole spiritual life.

Books of prayer frequently call the Thomistic method of prayer "discursive meditation." In this type of prayer, one takes a virtue or fault or theological truth and studies it from every possible angle.

Change of behavior is an essential part of this prayer—it doesn't stay at the intellectual level. There is generally a bias against this type of prayer today because it was so much in vogue before Vatican II.

**Path of devotion
Augustinian prayer**

Column two _____

The majority of saints are of this spiritual temperament, as well as 12% of the population (but half of those who go on retreats or belong to small faith groups).

This method uses creative imagination to transpose the world of scripture to our situation today—as if the scripture passage is a personal letter from God addressed to each one of us (like Saint Augustine picking up Romans 13 and reading a message pointed directly at him).

The essential element of this spirituality, going back to New Testament times (Jesus, Saint Paul, the early church fathers), is experiencing a personal relationship with God. Because they read between the lines and catch what is inexpressible and spiritual, those who follow the path of devotion best understand symbols and their use in the liturgy.

This path concentrates on meditations that loosen the feelings and expand the ability to relate to and love others. The stress is on the love of self, others, and God.

Those on this path can follow the four steps of the *Lectio Divina*: listen to what God says in scripture; reflect prayerfully and apply it to today; respond to God's word with personal feelings; remain quiet and stay open to new insights.

**Path of service
Franciscan prayer**

Column three _____

About 38% of the population are this spiritual type—but far fewer of this type come to church regularly.

Like Saint Francis of Assisi, those who follow the path must be free, unconfined, and able to do whatever their inner spirit moves them to do. They don't like to be tied down by rules.

One thinks of Saint Peter impetuously jumping into the water to join Jesus as a typical action of this type.

Franciscan spirituality leads to acts of loving service, which can be a most effective form of prayer. The gospel stories about Jesus have a special appeal, particularly the Incarnation of God in the life of Jesus, which is the center around which Franciscan life and spirituality revolve.

Franciscan prayer is flexible and free-flowing, making full use of the five senses, and it is spirit-filled prayer. Those on this path can make a meditation on the beauty of a waterfall, flower, meadow, mountain, or ocean—all of God's creation.

There is more stress in prayer on the events of Jesus' life than on his teaching. Like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, prayer is done with total concentration—as if this is the most important thing to be doing at this moment. Thérèse did all tasks knowing that each was a part of the total harmony of the universe.

**Path of asceticism
Ignatian prayer**

Column four _____

More than half of churchgoers practice this type of prayer of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. It involves imagining oneself as part of a scene in order to draw some practical fruit from it for today.

This spirituality goes back to the Israelite way of praying in 1000 B.C., to remember and immerse oneself in an event, thus reliving and participating in the event in a symbolic way.

This is how Ignatius meditated on the Nativity scene: "I will make myself a poor, little, unworthy servant, and as though present, look upon them, contemplate them, and serve them in their needs with all possible homage and reverence. Then I will reflect on myself that I may reap some fruit."

His preoccupation with order to was evident in his *Spiritual Exercises*, which, write Thomas Clarke in *Playing in the Gospel*, aimed at overcoming "disorderly affections, so that the retreatant may make a decision that is in keeping with God's will."

According to Clarke, "Most souls who are willing to endure the discipline of the 30 days of intense prayer activity of the *Spiritual Exercises* are rewarded with an unforgettable spiritual experience that frequently changes the direction of their lives."