

*Fr. Thomas Aquinas is solely responsible for this page.



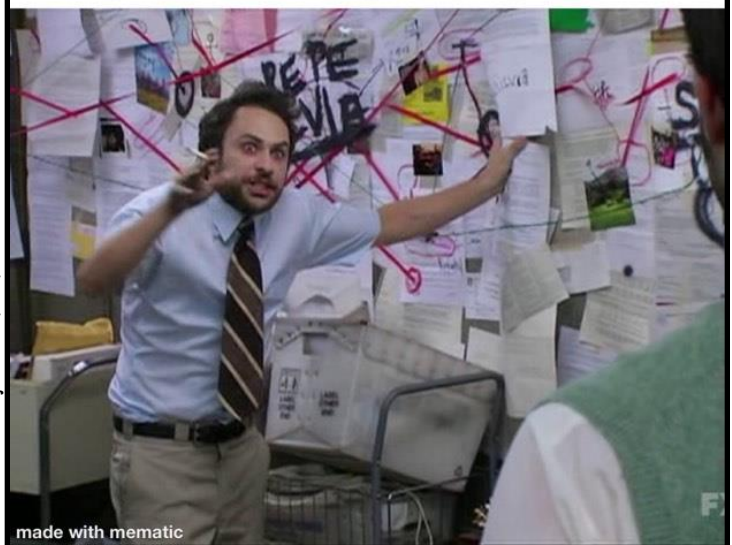
Phenomenal cosmic powers.
Itty-bitty living space.

The Pharisee in today's Gospel is described as basically *talking to himself when he prays*. I don't know about you, but this brings up a question that I wrestled with for a long time: *am I just talking to myself when I pray?* Does prayer actually *do* anything? There are a number of people who hold that prayer is nothing else than a form of self-talk. For example, in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, prayer and worship act kind of like a pep talk that motivates people to live moral lives. People on Twitter love lambasting those who offer "thoughts and prayers" for causes or after tragedies; this is because "prayer" is understood as either a cop out of taking action or as just a ploy of virtual signaling. Lots of "meditation" practices in vogue today rely on repetitive self-talk to encourage people to take charge of their lives, to overcome fears, or to make changes in behavior. A number of Catholics can even take the view that prayer and liturgy are nothing more than pedagogical exercises to teach values or to build community; for example, when I've gone to Mass in some places, it can seem like the Prayers of the Faithful are heavy-handed propaganda broadcasts that we have to force assent to by saying, "Lord, hear our prayer."

We can also run into the problem of the relation of prayer to God's omniscience and the immutability of Divine providence and of predestination (yes, Catholics believe in predestination! cf. Catechism #600). If God knows everything already, then why do we tell Him things? If everything happens according to His will, then why do we try to change it? And how do we explain unanswered prayers? I remember the first time I prayed to God by myself as a child. I had lost a little yellow toy car in the basement, and I asked God to help me find it...it has remained lost for 30 years!

So what *are* we doing when we pray? What is going on? Well, the way that I was able to come to an understanding of this issue was through a careful study of St. Thomas Aquinas's treatment of prayer in the *Summa theologiae*. This was way back in college, and it was my first time reading St. Thomas. I poked around the *Summa* and found the Second Part of the Second Part, Question 83, Article 2, which asks the question, "is it good to pray?" (you can find it online if you go to newadvent.org/summa). The first time I read it, I had *no idea* what St. Thomas was talking about. The second time I read it, it made less sense. The third time I read it, I was completely bewildered. But, after weeks of reading and re-reading this dense little passage, of chewing on it, of wrestling with it, and of spiritually suffering with it, I had *the most powerful revelation of my life*. The revelation that led me to love St. Thomas Aquinas, that 100% saved my faith in the efficaciousness of prayer, and that ultimately led me to join the Dominicans. And that revelation is... what will be in next week's bulletin!

Explaining to your non-Catholic friend how you got a plenary indulgence for a soul in purgatory on the last day of your novena by saying a Rosary during Adoration.



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