

St. Augustine Discourse on Psalm 37:13-14 (now: Psalm 38)

From the Liturgy of the Hours: Volume I, page 302

The Desires of Our Hearts Is Our Prayer

“In the anguish of my heart I groaned aloud, O Lord.” Who then knows the cause of man’s groanings? **“All my desire is before you, Lord.”** It is not open before men, for they cannot understand the heart: **“All my desire is before you, Lord.”** If your desire lies open to him who is the Father and who sees in secret, he will answer you.

The desire of your heart is itself your prayer. And if the desire is constant, so is your prayer as well. The Apostle Paul had a purpose in saying; **“Pray without ceasing.”** Are we then ceaselessly to bend out knees, to lie prostrate, or to lift up our hands? Is this what is meant in saying: **“Pray without ceasing”?** Even if we admit that we pray in this fashion, I do not believe that we can do so all the time.

Yet there is another, interior kind of prayer without ceasing, namely, the desire of the heart. Whatever else you may be doing, if you but fix your desire, if you fix your desire on God’s Sabbath rest, your prayer will be ceaseless. Therefore, if you wish to pray without ceasing, do not cease to desire.

The constancy of your desire will itself be the ceaseless voice of your prayer. And that voice of your prayer will be silent only when your love ceases. For who are silent? Those of whom it is said: **“Because evil has abounded, the love of many will grow cold.”**

The chilling of love means that the heart is silent; while burning love is the outcry of the heart. If your love is without ceasing, you are crying out always; if you always cry out, you are always desiring; and if you desire, you are calling to mind your eternal rest, your Sabbath, in the Lord.

“And all my desire is before you, Lord.” What if the desire of our heart is before him, but not our groaning? But how is that possible, since the groaning itself is the voice of our desire? And therefore, it is said, **“My groaning is not concealed from you.”** It may be concealed from men, but it is not concealed from you, Lord.

Sometimes God’s servant seems to be saying in all humility: **“My anguish is not concealed from you.”** At other times the person laughs. Does that mean, in his laughter, the desire of his heart has died within him? No. If the desire is there, then the groaning itself is there as well. Even if men fail to hear it, it never ceases to sound in the hearing of God.