

MENTAL PRAYER

BY

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MENTAL PRAYER

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GOD IS FATHER

The Admirable Plan of God

Introduction:

“In this way, therefore, shall you pray: ‘Our Father...’ (Matt. 6, 9.)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in Christ has blessed us with every manner of spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm. These blessings correspond to his choice of us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight. Out of love he predestined us for himself to become through Jesus Christ his adopted children, conformably to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his resplendent grace, with which he has adorned us in his beloved Son.

In him we have our redemption through his blood, the remission of our transgressions, in keeping with the riches of his grace. With this grace he has inundated us, by imparting to us all manner of wisdom and practical knowledge, making known to us, in keeping with his good pleasure, the mystery of his will. And this good pleasure he decreed to put into effect in Christ when the designated period of time had elapsed, namely to gather all creation both in heaven and earth under one head, Christ.

In him we also have been constituted a Chosen People, since, in keeping with the decree of him who carries out everything according to the designs of his will, we have been predestined to be devoted to the praise of his glory, we who before Christ’s coming had hoped in him. You, too, after you had heard the message of truth, the Good News proclaiming your salvation, and had believed in it, in him you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the first installment of our inheritance. The final purpose of thus being sealed is our redemption as God’s possession to the praise of his glory.” (Eph. 1, 3-14)

God is Father: such is the good news brought to the world by Jesus, and such is the essential of his evangelical message. There resides the foundation of the whole Christianity. Everything else rests on this dogma as on its basis – and flows from it as from its source. (1)

1. – God is Father
2. – God acts as a Father

I

1/ - GOD IS FATHER: HE HAS ONE SON: THE FATHER AND THE SON LOVE EACH OTHER WITH A MUTUAL LOVE –

From all eternity, long before the Creation of the worlds, God begets a Son to whom he gives his perfections, his life, his beatitude, because to beget is to communicate one's own nature:

“You are my Son, to-day I have begotten you.”

“Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.”

So Life is in God, - life communicated by the Father, received by the Son. This Son, in every way like the Father, is unique: “Unigenitus Dei Filius.” (Jo 1, 18.)

He is unique because he is, with the Father, one only and indivisible divine nature; and the two of them - although distinct one from the other because of their being one the Father and the other the son, - are united by a mutual love, from whence proceeds this third Person, which Revelation calls the Holy Spirit.

This communication of the three divine Persons, this infinite and absolute adhesion of the divine Persons between themselves, this mutual and ineffable possession, constitutes the very happiness of God, and his glory.

Such is the last word of the knowledge of God: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: unity of nature, trinity of persons, and ineffable union of love.

The New Testament is literally full of this Revelation:

- In the Sermon on the Mount, we find sixteen times the name of the Father (Matt. 5-8) - and more than 150 times in the Gospel of St. John alone.

- Let's read again the Discourse after the Last Supper, supreme revelation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Jo 14-18)

- Constantly, the name of the Father is on Jesus' lips: let's read the four Gospels - they will teach us infinitely more than all one could say, and those texts can feed our contemplation for a whole life, and for eternity.

“And this is the sum of eternal life, - their knowing you, the only true God, and your ambassador Jesus Christ.” (Jo 17, 3.)

2/ - FREELY AND THROUGH LOVE GOD DECIDES TO CALL A MULTITUDE OF OTHER BEINGS TO THE DIVINE SONSHIP –

God decides to call certain creatures to the sharing of this divine life communicated by the Father to the Only Son, and also communicated by both of them to their common Spirit.

Through a transport of love whose source is in the fullness of the Being and of the Good which is God - this life is going to overflow from the bosom of the Trinity into Other beings to whom God will give the quality, and the sweet name of children.

By nature God has but one Son; through love, he will have a multitude of sons, more numerous than the stars in the sky or the sands on the earth: “Consider the great love showed us by the Father: not only do we bear the name of children of God, but we really are his children.” (I Jo 3, 1.)

- The whole of the Plan of love is revealed to us as early as the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John.

- Already, Jesus explains it in one of his very first talks, the one he had with Nicodemus, one evening, when coming out of the Temple, when he was in Jerusalem for the Pascal Feast. In an every precise manner already does he speak of this mystery of our second birth, through which we become the sons of God. (Jo 3, 1-22.)

- All along the Gospel, Jesus, Son of God, identifies himself with men, whom he calls “his brothers” (Matt. 18, 5; 25, 40.) and he calls God “My Father and your Father,” and he wants us to say together with him, the same prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven...”

- St. Paul, the Theologian of the New Testament, will complete in a remarkable fashion the teaching of the Master: Between a thousand affirmations he declares that “God has sent his Son into the world so that, in Him and through Him, we should become the sons of God,” - “misit Deus Filium suum...ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemur.” (Gal, 4, 4.) ...he declares, too, that it is to this grace of the divine sonship that we have been predestined, ‘Praedestinavit nos in adoptionem filiorum.’ (Eph.1, 5.)

...That because of this predestination to the divine sonship, the Father has sent us his Spirit so that we are able to have a filial attitude towards God; “Quoniam autem estis filii, misit Deus Spiritum filii sui in cordibus vestris clamante, ‘Abba, Pater.’ (Gal. 4, 6.)

...and that we are, because of this, really “the heirs of God.” – ‘quod si filius, et haeres per Daum.’ (Gal. 4, 7.)

3/ - JESUS, THE WORD INCARNATE, HAS BEEN PREDESTINED TO BE THE HEAD OF THE GREAT FAMILY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD,- THE HEAD OF A BODY OF WHICH WE ARE THE MEMBERS –

God has predestined Christ Jesus to be “the first-born of a multitude of brothers - primogenitus in multis fratribus.” (Rom, 8, 29.) the Head of an immense Body of which we

are the members. Alone born of the Father in the eternal splendors, alone Son by nature, he is made Head of a multitude of brothers to whom he communicates divine life. “Quotquot autem receperunt eum, dedit eis potestatem filios Dei fieri.” (Jo 1, 12.)

He is the vine and we are the branches (Jo 15, 1-9.) Just as the love of the Father was manifested by communicating his life to him,

- so does he love us. ‘Sicut delixit me Pater, et ego dolexi vos.’ (Jo 15, 9.)

He is the corner-stone of the spiritual building of which we are the living stones.
(I Pet. 2, 5.)

At the same time as the Father predestines Jesus to be the Head, the Mediator, the Sovereign Priest and the King of the kingdom of God’s children, having foreseen and known the sinfulness and the wretchedness of man, at the same time God predestines him to be Victim and Host. (I Pet. 1, 18-19.)

St. Paul magnificently sums up the whole of this admirable Plan of the divine Wisdom in a text, the lyrical tone and the rhythmic cadenza of which reminds one of a Canticle or of a Hymn:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

- A - who in Christ has blessed, us with every manner of spiritual blessing in the heavenly realm;
- as he has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish;
 - out of love he predestined us for himself to become through Jesus Christ his adopted children, conformably to the good pleasures of his will,
 - to the praise of his resplendent grace, with which he has adorned us in his Beloved Son;
 - in Him we have our redemption through his blood, the remission of our transgressions;
 - in keeping with the riches of his grace. With this grace he has inundated us, imparting to us all manner of wisdom and practical knowledge,
- B - making known to us, in keeping with his good pleasure, the mystery of his will. And this good pleasure he decreed to put into effect in Christ when the designated period of time had elapsed, namely to gather all creation, both in heaven and on earth, under one head, Christ,
- C - a) in Him in whom, we the first to hope in Christ, were made his heirs, predestined according to the purpose of Him who carries out everything according to .he designs of his will, to be devoted to the praise of his glory.
- b) in Him in whom you too, after you had heard the message of truth, the Good News proclaiming your salvation, - and after you had believed in it, in him you have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, first instalment of our inheritance.

The final purpose of this being sealed is our redemption as God's possession to the, praise of his glory. (Eph. 1, 3-14.)

Without stopping too long, let's notice;

1) The place of Christ Jesus in this admirable Plan:

- election in him;
- filled with graces in the Beloved;
- brought to perfect unity in him;
- become, for eternity, praises of his grace;

2) Meaning of predestination:

- eternal act, before the centuries;
- absolute and efficient act, because it is the fruit of the divine "Counsel" or "purpose."
- act of free sovereignty, because it takes place according to the purpose of Him who does everything through the counsel of his will; it has no cause to speak of, on man's side.
- it is not an immediate destination to eternal glory, but to divine sonship, and through divine sonship to the heavenly heritage;
- it is in view of the dazzling, triumphant and glorious manifestation of his merciful love (which lets us have a glimpse at the reason why God has allowed sin: for the triumph of his grace.)

3) The absolute primacy of Jesus Christ -

"All have been created through Him and for Him.
He exists prior to all creatures and in him they are all preserved in being.
Further, he is the head of his body, the Church,
in that he is the beginning, the first to rise from the dead,
so that he may have pre-eminence over every creature.

For it pleased God the Father that
in him all fullness should dwell
and that through him
God should reconcile to himself every being,
and make peace both on earth and in heaven
Through his blood shed on the cross."
(Col.1, 16-20.)

GOD ACTS AS A FATHER

In gradual steps, he reveals his paternal Plan:

I. - In the Old Testament -

God is revealed and known like a father is revealed and known by a child who has not yet reached his maturity:

A - For the child, Father is the one

- who has built the house where he lives,
- who cultivates the fields, or practices such a trade,
- who puts bread on the table,
- who dresses the child and supplies his needs,
- who defends the child against his enemies,
- who orders, decides, directs, and to whom one obeys.

B - So, in the Old Testament, God reveals himself as;

- the Creator of all things;
- the Providence who supplies all the needs of man;
- He who protects and defends Israel;
- He who orders and to whom one obeys;

He has his tent among the people, he has his prophets - he has his cult by which one recognizes his sovereign domain. Consequently, it is a living God, - as against all the false gods.

2 - In the New Testament -

At the time of the maturity of the world, - God is revealed and known as a father is known by his son when he has reached his maturity:

- “Ut ubi venit plenitudo temporis” – “when the world had reached its maturity (Gal. 4, 4.) - as “no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son decides to reveal Him.” (Matt. 11, 27.)
- “the only begotten Son who rests in the Father’s bosom has himself been the interpreter.” (Jo 1, 18.)
- In many fragmentary and various utterances, God spoke of old to our ancestors through the prophets; at the present time, the final epoch, he has spoken to us through his Son.” (Heb. 1, 1.)

A - The father is known as the one who has transmitted his own life: in the same way, God is known as He who has communicated to us a real participation to his life:

- B - The adult discovers his own likeness to his father; so does the adult Christian.
- C - The adult realizes that he is meant to have a similar activity to his father's; so does the Christian realize that he is called to know and to love God as God knows and loves himself.
- D - The adult takes up his father's defense, becomes interested in all his undertakings; so does the adult Christian in relation to God.

3 - In the life of the souls -

This admirable design of God is known by each soul in particular, in the same way, in gradual steps and according to the laws of progress. The Christian tradition, resting on the experience of centuries, speaks constantly of the three ages of spiritual life:

- A - Jesus said on Maundy, Thursday: "There is still much I might say to you, but you are not strong enough to bear it at present. When he, the Spirit of truth, has come, he will conduct you through the whole range of truth." (Jo 16, 12-13.)
- B - St. Paul – "Whoever is fed on milk is unskilled in the doctrine that teaches holiness; he is but a child. Solid food is for full grown men whose faculties have been trained by practice to decide between good and evil." (Heb. 5, 13-14.)

"We do, however, speak wisdom among those who are mature." (I Cor 2, 6.)

C - In the life of the Apostles, it is easy to note three very distinct phases, which correspond to three ages of the spiritual life:

a) From the first call from Jesus to the Passion:

During this period they only understand very imperfectly, and often in a purely human way, the teachings of Jesus.

b) From the Passion to the Pentecost:

They are still timorous; their faith greatly needs to be made firmer; their charity does not possess the zeal it should have. The privation of the sensible presence of Jesus, once he went back to heaven, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, take them over a decisive step.

c) From the Pentecost to the end of their life:

They walk towards the fullness of their spiritual maturity. Their interior life is characterized by a very great union to Christ, an ardent zeal for the salvation of souls, and an oblation of themselves ending in martyrdom.

4 - The three ages -

A: The beginners

The first degree of charity and the other virtues. Sufficient mortification to avoid more and more deliberate venial sin, and to rise again, at once, after a mortal sin if they happen to fall into it.

Prayer and meditation more intellectual and formal than filled with faith and with love, special inspirations from the Holy Spirit, from time to time, - to which, through cowardice, they are little faithful.

They serve God mostly through fear, duty, or interest.

B: The proficient -

Solid virtues appear; the gifts of the Holy Spirit are more often manifest; mental prayer becomes simpler; trust in, and love of, God are growing.

C: The perfect -

The full spiritual maturity, which in Christian language is called “spiritual childhood,” - high quality of faith, trust, love and abandon; the soul appreciates that God is Father and abandons itself totally to him. It wants but one occupation: to love!

Conclusion:

God is our Father; consequently he loves us, and wishes to be loved by us.

Let's love him with our whole heart: not only in words and in feelings but by avoiding with horror everything that displeases him, and by accomplishing faithfully his holy will.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so, he sincerely wants our happiness. Let's trust him.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he enjoys our company. Let's treat him with affectionate familiarity.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he has for us treasures of indulgence which no rigorist theory must hide from us.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he takes pity on our weakness, and, rather than being over-strict, he tends to give us the benefit of extenuating circumstances.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he only punishes us in the measure demanded by justice: never beyond this point.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so we insult him when we think he is punctilious, “touchy,” pitiless.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he is interested in what we are doing to please him: our efforts and our love touch him.

HE IS OUR FATHER: so he likes to see us work as well as we can, under his paternal regard.

HE IS MY FATHER: so he is ready to come to my assistance every time I invoke him, and - if he seems not to hear me, - it is because he has very good reasons to act in this way, - reasons I shall understand some day and which I will then fully endorse.

HE IS MY FATHER: so I can, after my faults, talk to him in all simplicity, in order to tell him my regrets; it is not at all necessary for me to wait until I go to confession to apologize to him and ask for his pardon.

HE IS MY FATHER: so I can speak to him in full confidence and without any formality, at all time, in any place; and I would be very wrong in addressing to him merely memorized formulas of prayers, instead of allowing my own heart to speak freely to him, were it in the most primitive language, as long as this language expresses the feelings and the wishes of my heart. (*)

(*) - Desbuquoit, "Avec Dieu toujours." pp. 42-44.

(1.) - Notes de Retraites, A. Longpre: Editions de l'Atelier, PP. 22-31

GOD IS YOUR SPOUSE

“For he who has become your husband is your Maker...” (Is. 54, 5.)

In the same vein, the image is again taken up in the New Testament and applied to Christ who is the Husband of the Church - and of every soul - who is His spouse.

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who made a marriage feast for his son... He sent his servants to call in those invited to the marriage feast, but they would not come...” (Matt. 21, 2-4.)

“...and at midnight a cry arose: ‘The bridegroom is coming!’ ‘Go forth to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose... Now while they were gone to buy it (the oil) the bridegroom came; and those who were ready gone in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut.” (Matt. 25, 1-6.)

“For I betrothed you to one spouse, that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ...” (2 Cor. 11. 2.)

“Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church...” (Eph. 5, 25.)

In the Holy Scripture, God is compared to a Father, - to a king, who leads His people to a glorious destiny, - to a shepherd full of solicitude for his flock. But the image of God-Spouse, bound to his people because of a quasi-matrimonial union, holds a choice place.

“Deal with God as you would with a Father, with a Brother, with a Master, with a Husband; choose now one, now another of these qualities. He will himself show you the one that is most agreeable to Him. Don’t be simpletons demand that He should keep His word. He is your husband, ask him to treat you as his spouses.” (Teresa of Avila.)

We, during mental prayer, are invited to take up our relations with God as seriously as do ordinary engaged couples in the world, and more so even, since God is the Spouse and since the marriage is eternal.

- 1 - God is Spouse.
- 2 - Consequences.

GOD IS SPOUSE

A - Testimony of the Old Testament

1. God's Advances:

Let us start by quoting a text in which God through the prophet Ezechiel - tells of what assiduous care he surrounds Jerusalem (the Church, our soul,) whom the pagans wanted to bring down to her ruin, like an unprotected maiden:

“You grew and developed, you came to the age of puberty; your breasts were formed, your hair: had grown, but you were still stark naked. Again I passed by you and saw that you were now old enough for love. So I spread the corner of my cloak over you to cover your nakedness; I swore an oath to you and entered a covenant with you; you became mine, says the Lord God. Then I bathed you with water, washed away your blood and anointed you with fine oil. I clothed you with an embroidered gown, put sandals of fine leather on your feet; I gave you a fine linen sash and silk robes to wear. I adorned you with jewelry, I put bracelets on your arms, a necklace about your neck, a ring in your nose, pendants on your ears and a glorious diadem upon your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver; your garments were gold and linen, silk and embroidered cloth. Fine flour, honey and oil were your food. You were exceedingly beautiful with the dignity of a queen. You were renowned among the nations for your beauty, perfect as it was, because of my splendor which I bestowed on you, says the Lord God.”
(Ezechiel: 16, 7-14.)

The details referred to in this text are drawn from the traditional rites of the Israelite marriage ceremony. The young man's gesture of spreading out his cloak over the young girl represented the exterior sign of marriage.

On the wedding day, the fiancée would wear her most precious ornaments: as Israël, the chosen fiancée of God, has no personal belongings, God offers her the ornaments she will wear. He proceeds also - still according to the usual nuptial customs, - to the purification of his elected one. So God himself prepares his marriage with Israël: His gifts symbolize the incomparable graces he will bestow on His chosen people.

2. Israël's response:

a) Ezechiel:

But Jerusalem, the fiancée chosen with so many honors, does not remain faithful to God: she becomes an adulterer and a prostitute not so much by acting against the sixth Commandment, but in abandoning herself to the idols (self-love) of other nations, offering sacrifices to them.

Jerusalem (Israël)'s idolatry breaks up the nuptial alliance with God:

“But you were captivated by your own beauty (Jerusalem): you used your renown to make yourself a harlot, and you lavished your harlotry on every passer-by, whose own you became. You took some of your gowns and made yourself gaudy high places, where you played the harlot... You took your splendid gold and silver ornaments, the ones I had given you, and made for yourself male images, with which also you played the harlot... You played the harlot with the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors... Also with the Assyrians, and again and again, now going to Chaldea... How wild your lust, says the Lord, that you did all these things, acting like a shameless prostitute...”
(Ezekiel 16, 15 ff.)

By giving herself to the gods of foreign nations (i.e. living according to the ideas of the world, of the devil, of one’s egoism...) Israël (our soul) has received from them no payment; she has given to others the presents (graces) which she had received from her husband (God, Christ,) and so, singularly tarnished the honor of her nuptial alliance with Yahweh.

b) Other prophets: (especially Osee.)

Elsewhere also (Ex, 34, 16), (Is. 1, 21, 57, 8), (Osee 1, 2) etc...the same terms of prostitution and adultery are to be found to picture the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem (Spouse) towards God (Husband.)

- The question asked by Yahweh:

“Where is the bill of divorce with which I dismissed your mother (Jerusalem)?”
(Is. 50, 1)

proves in what concrete way Yahweh’s alliance with his people is considered as a nuptial bond.

- Reproach and prospect of forgiveness are contained in Yahweh’s words:

“Israël, you have sinned with many lovers, and yet you would return to me, says the Lord...” (Jer. 3, 1)

Let Sion - the elected one - listen to the warning, renounce her unfaithfulness and come back to Yahweh, her husband..

“...She shall call me ‘my husband’, says the Lord.”

Then Yahweh promises, “I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity and you shall know the Lord.”
(Osee 2, 18...22)

3. Relationship of Yahweh with his people:

- a) In the Canticle of Canticles -

The relationship of Yahweh with his people, - which gradually becomes the relationship of the Messiah with humanity, or the Church, - manifests itself with the entire splendor given to nuptial feasts in Orient. In this book, Solomon refers to the story of our salvation from beginning to end, the love relationship is such that the Spouse, the Bride,

“not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish...” (Eph. 5, 27.)

can only be the Church, which means the people of God.

b) Psalm 44 -

After the Cantic of Canticles, and its relationship of Yahweh and his people, - or of God and his Church, - as a beautiful love idyll, we come now to Psalm 44, in which the same relationship is presented, as it were, with a flavor of State politics the majestic picture of royal wedding festivities.

The king is shown as a powerful and victorious sovereign, - his enemies vainly oppose him, - he rules in all justice over the whole, of his kingdom. A king's daughter is brought to him in solemn procession:

“Hear, ô daughter, and see, turn your ear; forget your people and your father's house. So shall the king desire your beauty.” (Ps. 44, 11.)

The last verses of the psalm make allusion to the fecundity of this royal alliance: from it will come sons who will reign as princes through all the land.

B - Testimony of the New Testament –

As it was usual among the inspired writers of the Old Testament to apply to God and his alliance or to the Messiah and his work - expressions taken from the relationship between man and woman, - so it is in the New Testament.

1. John the Baptist:

Being the last prophet of the Old Testament, he makes the transition.

- He introduces his mission as being that of “the bridegroom's friend” - Christ himself being “the bridegroom who has the bride.”
- Christ's achievement is therefore his nuptial union with the elected people, and John, the bridegroom's friend, has as his own mission to bring the bride (the people) to him. Such is his role all along. He finds his reward and his joy as soon as he “hears the voice of the Bridegroom,” (Jo 3, 29) - the cry of joy of the Bridegroom when he takes off the Bride's

veil, and unites herself to her, i.e. when the people (or the soul), in its union with Christ, finds the joy of eternal life.

- This nuptial character, which the words of John the Baptist give to Christ's work, is confirmed by Jesus Himself when, in a conversation with John's disciples, He gives Himself the role of the Bridegroom. To justify his disciples who did not fast, he declares that the guests have no reason to be sad "as long as the Bridegroom is with them." "But the day will come when the Bridegroom will be taken away from them." (Matt. 9, 15.)

The last words, unusual in an ordinary wedding feast, show in what concrete way the Lord considers himself as the Bridegroom through the whole of his work, until his death on the Cross ...

2. Parables of the Wedding reception and the Ten Virgins -

The same conclusion is necessarily reached when one meditates the parables of the wedding reception and of the wise and foolish virgins:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who made a marriage feast for his son. And he sent his servants to call in those invited to the marriage feast..." (Matt. 22, 2 ff.)

Here, it is above all the historical mission of the Savior which is in question. The Messiah comes for us, but the Jews - the first to be invited - excuse themselves. However, the wedding is not cancelled, just as the work of the Redemption is accomplished without the Jews, - and even in spite of their opposition. Thus the message 'Come to the wedding feast' (Matt. 22, 4.) is addressed to all, whoever they are and wherever they come from.

And just as Christ's work is shown at its beginning under this nuptial symbol, so is it in its achievement at the end of time as mentioned in the parable of the ten virgins.

"Watch therefore, for you do not know at what hour your Lord is to come... Then will the kingdom of heaven be like the ten virgins who took their lamp and went forth to meet the Bridegroom and the Bride... And at midnight a cry arose: 'Behold! The Bridegroom is coming...' and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast."
(Matt. 24, 42; 25, 1-10)

3. The Bridegroom's work -

- The time which stretches between the historical activity of Jesus in Palestine and His glorious Second Coming at the end of times is all given up to the work He has undertaken in his Church, and through her: i.e., the Salvation of the world.
- Thus is established the analogy with God's people in the Old Testament. Israël knew in a privileged manner the efficiency of God's grace as compared with other nations and was - because of these favors - to contribute to the salvation of the whole world. The same applies nowadays to the Community of those who have been baptized in the Church freed

of all prejudice of nationality and race.

It is therefore easy to understand that, in the New Testament, the expressions of nuptial love, nuptial union, are equally applied - in this last stage of the history of Redemption, - to Christ and to his Church.

4. Paul, the protector of the Espousals -

Like John the Baptist, Paul, in the service of souls, considers himself as the protector, the steward of Christ's Espousals. In the same way as formerly in the Old Testament God was watching jealously over Israël's faithfulness, so does Paul express his work as an apostle near the Church of Corinth who was threatened with false doctrines, in these terms;

"I am jealous for you with a divine jealousy. For I betrothed you to one spouse, that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ." (2 Cor 11, 2.)

• Now, Christ Himself:

"...has loved the Church, and delivered himself up for her, that he might, sanctify her, cleansing her in the bath of water by means of the word; in order that he might present to himself the Church in all her glory, not having spot or wrinkles or any such thing, but that she might be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5, 25-27.)

This text appears with Paul's recommendations to Christian married couples, which fact in itself underlines the matrimonial character of the relationship of Christ and his Church. It is very much in the same vein as the passage in which Ezechiel speaks about Yahweh who claims the nuptial love of Israël, although Paul does not express the love uniting the Bridegroom and the Bride in symbols of material gifts, but of spiritual ones. Christ, our Savior, takes the Church for His Bride, and the Incarnation - Redemption appears like a nuptial feast.

5. The Bride is waiting -

- In the attitude of the Betrothed, the Church is waiting on this earth for the day when her Beloved, her Master, will come to bring her for ever with him into his glory. It is then that will be manifested God's union with his people and his Creation, it will be the triumphant achievement of the event we call Incarnation - Redemption: the glory of Christ, King of Creation and Redeemer of the world, will blaze forth.
- Quite logically, the various and successive images which - throughout the Bible - have shown us the activity of God and of His divine messenger, Jesus, towards humanity, under the colors of a wedding feast, these images find their normal achievement in this sentence of the very last Book of the Bible, - a prelude to the full and definitive vision of our Redemption:

"...the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his spouse has prepared herself. And she has been permitted to clothe her-self in fine linen, shining, bright... Blessed are they who are called to the marriage Supper of the Lamb." (Apoc.19, 7-9.)

The holy city, Jerusalem, the city united to God, then appears:

“...made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.”

and it is in these terms that the Angel announces to the prophet:

“...Come, I will show you the bride, the spouse of the Lamb...” (Apoc. 21, 2-10.)

6. Nostalgia of the New Coming of Christ -

If, according to the Revelation of the New Testament, we consider the Church as, Betrothed to Christ, who has made her His own, but has not yet introduced her definitively into His Father's House not into His glory - we may rightly look upon the ardent nostalgia the Christian community has for the New Coming of Christ as its vital and most intimate function.

This attitude, very especially particular to the primitive Church and its community, is - through its very fervor - characteristic: it confirms how much the Church is conscious of being Christ's bride. At the end of the Apocalypse, this same disposition is expressed in singularly beautiful terms

“And the Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come!’ and let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirst come; and he who wishes, let him receive the water of life freely.”

7. True Nuptials -

Thus, when reading carefully the Scriptures, one cannot ignore the application which is made all along to Christ and the Church, of expressions inspired by the man-wife relationship. And, as proves the passage already quoted, it is not at all by chance or occasionally that they are used: they come up again and again, with striking insistence in every period of the Revelation and - completing each other - they play their part in all the phases of the history of the Incarnation - Redemption.

Not only are the secondary facts and events of the divine plan, but also, the central fact itself: the linking, the uniting of humanity to Christ is expressed in terms borrowed from the nuptial comparison - and, apart from the general meaning they have, they do apply in a concrete and precise manner to the union of Christ and the Church.

CONSEQUENCES

The particular character of the relationship between spouses, which distinguishes it from any other relationship between a two people and confers it its own originality seems to come from two factors:

1. The union of man and woman -
2. The fecundity of this union -

(we shall also, later, see that:

3. All humanism must be Christian,)

1 - Union of man and woman

This union is only possible in this way between persons of a different sex. Already does Genesis refer to the union realized in the couple as: as total as possible, - the man and the woman “will cling to each other, and the two become one flesh...” (Gen. 2, 24.)

- St. Paul also insists on this union, as on a natural consequence:

“Are you not aware that he who unites himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? So says the Scripture: the two shall become one flesh...” (I Cor 6, 15.)

- Let us note that this expression “to become one flesh” does not only concern the body in the strictly material sense of the term, but that it applies to man considered as a whole composed of the union of the spirit and the body; thus it means: ‘to become one and the same being.’

In order to grasp the whole import of this term, we must realize that human language is without any doubt incapable to express more completely and more deeply the union of two beings than through these words: ‘to become one flesh.’ So, the intention of the Scripture is to point out that this union of two persons of a different sex constitutes really the highest form of unity the human mind can conceive.

2. Fecundity of this union -

The second factor logically follows on the first: it is the fecundity of this union through the procreation of a new living being. Under this concrete and real form, it is, as well, connected with the relationship of the two sexes.

3. Application: Meaning and effects of the Incarnation-Redemption –

It is easy to see how these two factors, - union and fecundity -, constitute the couple, in the natural order, and express themselves adequately in the conjugal union of man and woman. But we are not very familiar with the consideration of the Incarnation-Redemption of Christ seen under this same light. And yet we can, and we should, look at it in this way,

for the words of the Revelation urge us to do so.

Let us ask ourselves the question: What is the sense, and what are the effects of the Incarnation-Redemption?

1° - Transmission of divine life.

Christ came to bring us divine life.

“I came so that men have life, and have it in abundance.” (Jo 10, 10.)

The Church is conscious of the fact that her mission is to transmit the life she has received from Christ.

- What do you ask from the Church of God?
- Faith.
- What does faith bring you to?
- Life everlasting.
- If you wish, then, to enter into life, keep the Commandments.

2° - Work of love -

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.”
(Jo 3, 16.)

Transmission of life through love! This places us in the perspective of conjugal life, - all the more as the transmission of everlasting life is worked out in the very union that God himself realizes with humanity in the person of His Son who became man. Because of this union, in it and through it, Jesus shares all the time his divine life with humanity.

What gives the Redemption its specifically Christian character is the fact that it presupposes the Incarnation of the Word of God. In the Incarnation, the Son of God unites himself to human nature, and in this union, he fills human nature with his own life...

So it happens that the Incarnation, and the Redemption which proceeds from it, become - in the deepest and truest sense of the word - a continual wedding feast.

The fundamental elements essential to the relationship between man and wife are there: mutual exchange of life in, the unity of a fullness of love. It is in this perspective that St. Augustine has represented the unfolding of the Redemption:

“The Lord, invited to a wedding, accepts this invitation (at Cana). What is there to surprise us in the fact that he should come to that house to attend a wedding, He who came into the world to celebrate a wedding: for, if he did not come to celebrate a wedding, He has no Spouse on earth.”

“What, then, mean these words of the Apostle: ‘I have betrothed you to a spouse, that

I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ?’ So he has, on earth, a bride which he has redeemed with his blood and to whom he has given the Holy Ghost as a token. He has delivered her from the slavery of the devil, he died for her sins, and rose again for her justification.

“Who will ever offer his bride such gifts? If men offer all the imaginable ornaments, gold, silver, precious stones, horses, slaves, estates, land...: will there be even one to offer his blood? For if he gives his blood to his wife, he will no longer be able to be her husband...”

“On the contrary, the Lord died in peace He has given his blood for her, in order to espouse, after his Resurrection, the bride he already had united to himself in the womb of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. For the Word is the Spouse, the human flesh is the Bride, and the two form one only Son of God, the same one and only Son of man.”

“The womb of the Virgin Mary has been like a nuptial sanctuary where He became the Head of the Church (through his Incarnation) and he came out of it like a Bridegroom who comes out of the nuptial chamber, - according to the prophecy of King David; ...like a Bridegroom who comes out of the nuptial chamber, he dashed out like a giant to run over his course...” (St. Augustine)

3° - Fruitful work -

This fruitfulness, this fecundity, is made manifest in the new race of the children of God which the alliance of the Word with human nature causes to be born sons of Christ and children of the Church.

4° - Superiority of the divine Nuptials -

- 1) The expression: Christ’s Nuptials:

This expression to characterize the Incarnation and the Redemption is superior to other terms, comparisons or images used in the Bible or in Theology:

- God’s people are also the vineyard planted by God and Christ, - the Bridegroom is also the vine.
- Christ, through Redemption, restores the Kingdom of God, the Holy City, the Holy People, and the Sacred Temple.
- His redeeming activity is shown as the preparation of a wedding feast, - it is also given as the image of a shepherd’s solicitude towards his flock...

These various figures, when compared to the Nuptials of Christ, give only a partial light on some particular aspects of the Christian mystery. They do not underline the dignity of the person (vine, Temple) - or the faculty of giving life (shepherd and flock) -

or the fullness of the love relationship (Kingdom, people, city...)

Now, it is all this that the relationship wife-husband expresses to perfection, in the measure in which human facts can figure the mystery of the Incarnation - Redemption.

- 2) Superiority of the union of Christ with the soul

God's work is superior to any human work: this constitution does not imply any lowering of human values but only their subordination to divine values, this in conformity with their nature. Without underestimating the man-wife relation in the natural realm, it is obvious that human life appears very small when compared with divine life, and human love always puny and impotent in comparison with God's love.

If God's life and his love had not been revealed to us, we might have been fully satisfied with human life and human love. But as we can reach the highest plane, the lower one, of necessity, loses much of its importance.

If we knew nothing of the power of the life and of the love included in Christ's Nuptials, we would have - in this domain no higher ideal than the community of life and of love, stamped with nobility and harmony, between man and woman. But in the dazzling light of Christ's Espousals, we can clearly see the inadequacies of the human marriage:

A - Exchange of life -

In their union, man and woman exchange human life, the strength of which is limited, and sooner or later is spent. In Christ's Nuptials, divine life is transmitted, the fullness of which is inexhaustible.

In this life, the Son of God - in the Incarnation - first makes his human nature participate, and thus enriches it.

If the husband's role is to unite his life to that of his wife and to bring her, through this union, the fullness of life, - then Jesus Christ is the only One who - in the Incarnation and Redemption - plays this role in an absolutely perfect manner, for man can never fully realize towards his wife his quality of Spouse, and this because of the limitations to which human life is subjected.

Now, Jesus Christ does fill up with his life not only his own human nature united to the Person of the Word, but the whole of humanity in the measure it gets united to Him through faith and, in the form of the Church, in the measure it welcomes Him as His Bride, receiving from Him his words and his sacraments.

B - The unity -

If the power of life in which man and woman become united is limited and all too soon exhausted, this limitation - which bears at the same time on the conjugal reaction and its duration - affects equally the unity based on the conjugal community. If it is true

that “the two become one flesh”, and so represent in the human order the fullest form of unity, - this same unity remains however both imperfect and fragile, as does everything belonging to the natural condition of man.

- In fact, this community is limited in its duration:
 - “until death do us part...”
 - there always will be the possibility of disagreement between minds and souls, - possibility of unfaithfulness, - of mutual emancipation, - besides, even if a real harmony exists between them, man and woman are only fully conscious of their unity at the moments of particularly intense life.
- On the contrary, the unity which is realized in the Nuptials of Christ and through His Incarnation, between God and man, is well above all these imperfections. It subsists for all eternity, - in it, there is no possibility of forfeiture. This unity is so powerful that the Son of God participates completely in the being and in the activity of his human nature, - in full conscience, animating them continually, so that, in Christ, there is neither sentiment nor act which is purely human: every single thing He does as a man is both human and divine.

And this does not only concern the humanity He has taken in Mary’s womb, but also, the humanity He has espoused in the Holy Spirit. The day the Church is the perfect Bride of Christ, the glory and the life of her Divine Spouse will fill her up completely for all times.

- Let us remember that, in this union, the human part does not lose its own character; the human nature Christ has taken remains; - even at the highest point of perfection it reaches in the God-Man, truly human. And the humanity which in everlasting life reaches its highest degree of perfection in its union with God, remains truly humanity.
- As a result, in this relationship between God and man, as understood by those Christians, who believe in Revelation, the infinite difference that separates the divine from the human remains firmly safeguarded. There is no question of a transformation from divine into human, or vice versa, but of a union which presupposes two elements, a human one and a divine one.

Thanks to the omnipotence of divine love and of divine life, these two elements are melted into one unity which passes all we can imagine.

- This is what constitutes the irreducible difference between Christianity and any form of Pantheism, - the latter, on principle, not being able to accept any real distinction between God and man.

When we consider the Incarnation-Redemption as the Nuptials of Christ, we precisely emphasize the distinction between God and man, thus excluding the pantheist identification.

- The union of God and man in the Nuptials of Christ overshadows inexpressibly in its intensity the union of man and woman in the conjugal community. Because it is only in his union with God that man reaches his full development, and this unity which is his perfection.

Thus, the two beings who, in marriage, became one flesh, represent the total man as far as the duality of sexes is concerned. However, man will never reach his total perfection in a complementary union with another human being. For God created man to make him share, as a son, in his divine life and in Him alone, can man be completed and find his true fullness.

“He (God) predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons according to the purpose of his will.” (Eph. 1, 5.)

This is why, in the conjugal union, man and woman only complete each other in an imperfect manner, - Christ alone completing humanity to whom he unites himself as Spouse, and to whom he gives a share in God’s life.

C - Fecundity -

- This fecundity is limited in the natural community because of the innate weakness which is the seal of all created human life. The fecundity of God’s life is beyond all measure. It is manifested in the richness and the power of life springing from the communion of God and man, and first of all in the human nature of Jesus. But in the community of the Church it is the whole of humanity that benefits from that union so that it is able to live eternally.
- One must, however, distinguish between interior fecundity and exterior fecundity (multiplication). It is, at first, as an exterior multiplication that we see the fecundity of natural marriage, as the procreation of children does not necessarily imply in the parents an augmentation of maturity and of perfection, - some may have numerous children without any consequent development of their personality.
- And even when parents, living in perfect harmony with their children, find their own selves in them and thus see their own life prolonged and developed, the children do not truly constitute the personal achievement of the parents’ personality: they only stand as separate persons besides their father and mother.
- The fecundity of Christ’s Nuptials is also shown, in fact, by an exterior multiplication:

“...a great multitude that no one could number, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues...” (Apoc. 7, 9.)

but all remain interiorly united to Christ who is their life, they are “members of his body, made from his flesh and from his bones.” (Eph, 5, 30)

though members different from each other, distinct from Christ, but “all baptized

in a same Spirit” (1 Cor 12, 13.) to form only one Body. Becoming members of the Body of Christ, God’s children do not lose their personality.

- The Nuptials of Christ with the human race perfectly show us all that, in the marriage of men, is only outlined.

Christ is the Spouse of humanity who has been created and redeemed (before and after the fall). He never ceases to make to humanity the gift of his life through the Holy Spirit. The Church, accepting this life as a devoted bride, is fused in her divine Spouse in a true communion of life. Indeed, the Scripture shows us the Church:

- at times as “Sponsa Christi” - Christ’s Bride
- at times as “Corpus Christi” - the Body of Christ.

There is no contradiction, nor arbitrary play with images or comparisons, for the same phenomenon takes place, with much less amplitude, on the level of the relationship between man and wife becoming, in their conjugal union, “only one flesh.”

- Therefore, it is completely logical that - in official prayers, in hierarchical decisions, dogmatical and mystical treatises, - the Church be always referred to as:
 - Sancta Mater Ecclesia - Holy Mother Church
 - Mater Fidelium - Mother of the Faithful.

When offering herself to her heavenly Spouse and, from Him, receiving her life, the Church truly becomes the fruitful Mother of God’s children. But her motherhood is based on Christ’s fatherhood, to which St. Paul refers when he calls Christ “the last Adam.” (I Cor 15, 45-49 and elsewhere.)

- These expressions,
 - Christ - Spouse
 - the Church - Bride of Christ, and Body of Christ,
 - Christ - Father of the new generation of God’s children,
 - the Church - Mother of the Faithful,

show us that all the essential elements of the conjugal order are realized in Christ’s work.

In this perspective we grasp the deep, significance of the Incarnation and the Redemption when considered as a fruitful communion of life and love between God and men; and we have, as a consequence, the feeling that the purely human communion of life and love is but a pale reflection of the former.

Thus we must not believe that the form of the conjugal community on earth is the prototype and that, later on, the Incarnation was thought out in the mode of the

vocabulary and the realities of the conjugal unity. On the contrary, the Nuptials of Christ are the original and perfect model: they, it is, that represent God's great idea, from which He has organized all the communities of love on earth.

Adam and Eve, in their conjugal community, are but a prefiguration of Christ and the Church.

- 3) All Humanism must be Christian: Everything has been done by, and for Christ.

Contrary to the ideal of a merely earthly humanism, the meaning and the achievement of the human person does not simply consist in developing all the values man has received from nature, or those which are accessible to him, but rather, well above the summits he can reach on his own, to share - through the Son of God made man - in God's own life.

Such is the Creator's intention, as already expressed in these revealed words:

“Let us make mankind in our image and likeness.” (Gen. 1, 26.)

- To really understand this passage we must remember that Christ in whom “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead...” (Col 2, 9.) The word “image” here, means much more than a superficial reproduction: we “are partakers of the divine nature.” (Pet. 1, 4.) So it is in this realistic perspective that Christ is, (and infinitely more than ourselves,) “the image of the invisible God.” God himself being more visible in him, under a human form: “He who sees me also sees the Father,” says Jesus. (Jo 14, 9.)

Moreover, men are equally predestined by God “to become conformed to the image of His Son.” (Rom 8, 29.) and consequently, “we all...are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory...” (2 Cor 3, 18.)

- We realize then that the human person is oriented towards Jesus Christ, God-Man. Such an orientation is expressed in precise terms:

“Even as he (God) chose us in him (Jesus Christ) before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love. He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons...” (Eph 1, 4-5)

It follows that man, as well as the whole world, visible and invisible, has been created, not only “by Christ” but also “for Christ” and moreover “in Him all things hold together.” (Col 1, 16-17.)

- Doubtless this intention of the Creator is only fully realized by the historical fact of the Incarnation of the Word (Jo 1, 14) and its achievement in the New Coming of the Son of man at the end of times. Thus, it is certain - according to the Sacred text just quoted (Eph 1, 4-5.) - that man has been willed by God as essentially Christian, i.e. that God has created man from the beginning to serve as a starting-point for His only Son. He willed to have, in the human being, altogether mind and

body, an image allowing Him to represent in a proper manner in the realm of visible creation the mystery - hidden in God - of the generation of the Second Divine Person.

It is not only the individual human nature of Christ, formed in the womb of the Virgin Mary, it means all the Christians “born of God” (Jo 1, 13.) through Baptism, who receive “in Christ” and “through Him” the grace of divine sonship.

- Thus, the significance of the human person, such as God conceived it is not limited to the natural order (spiritual and material) but beyond this natural order - it is meant to foreshadow Christ, God-Man, and his work.

It is obvious that the “term foreshadow” is not to be taken in the moral sense but as the expression of a “way of being”: just as an object can throw its shadow in front of itself, so the Son of God made man is already outlined in man as Adam. This is why Adam is truly a pre-figuration of Christ; like the shadow, he does not contain the full reality, but has a real relationship with the object that shapes it.

- If man, as an individual, is by his nature oriented towards Christ, in whom alone he finds his true achievement, we must logically transfer the sense of differentiation of the human being - as established by God, i.e. man and woman, to Christ and his work.

Considered under this angle, the deep meaning of the bi-sexual character of the human being is to allow the realization - under human forms - of the community of life and of love formed by God and humanity. What is accomplished to the highest degree of perfection with Jesus Christ, Son of Man, and humanity, or the Church, - Adam and Eve outline and foreshadow on an inferior level.

The Nuptials of Christ and the Church, such as God conceives them, are thus the Prototype, absolutely perfect like everything that is divine. From this Prototype derives all unity of life and of love on earth; it is from it that such unity receives its dignity and its consecration, - it is towards it that it is oriented since it finds in this very Prototype its achievement as willed by God.

- This is why St. Paul makes of the relationship between Christ and the Church the norm which the Spouses on earth must follow in their own relationship: and this not only for their moral life, but it is to help them to grasp what is accomplished in the community, make them understand that, in their own way, they are oriented towards each other, as are Christ and the Church.

“Even so ought husbands to love their wives...so also let wives be subject to their husbands...” (Eph. 5, 22-29.)

This allows us once more to realize that the Nuptials of Christ constitute the supreme ideal, at once divine and human, of any and of all marriage. They alone make evident the true nature of marriage which is to work out a divine love and a divine life in the union of two human beings. Such is the real mystery of the

conjugal community: beyond the riches of the life of spirit and soul it refers us to Christ and to the Church.

And this reference has not been subsequently added to the human marriage, - it is the very meaning that the Creator has included in it.

Conclusion -

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cling to his wife, - and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery - I mean in regard to Christ and the Church.”
(Eph. 5, 31-32.)

“God is your Husband: ask Him to treat you as His Bride.”
(St. Teresa of Avila.)

IN CHRIST JESUS

“I am the real vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. He prunes away any branch of mine that bears no fruit, and cleans any branch that does bear fruit that it may yet bear more abundant fruit. By now you are clean, thanks to the lessons I have given you.”

“Remain united with me, and I will remain united with you. A branch cannot bear any fruit by itself, that is, when it is not united with the vine; no more can you, if you do not remain united with me.”

“I am the vine, you are the branches. One bears abundant fruit only when he and I are mutually united; severed from me, you can do nothing. If one does not remain united with me, he is simply thrown away like a branch, and dries up. Such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire to be burned. As long as you remain united with me, and my teachings remain your rule of life, you may ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. This is what glorifies my Father - your bearing abundant fruit and thus proving yourselves my disciples.”

“Just as the Father loves me, so I love you. Be sure to hold my love. If you treasure my commandments, you will hold my love, just as I treasure my Father’s commandments and thus secure his love. I have told you this that my joy may be yours, and your joy may be perfect.”

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one can give a greater proof of his love than by laying down his life for his friends. You are my friends provided you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants for a servant is not in his master’s confidence. But I have called you friends, because I have made known to you all that I have heard from my father.”

“Not that you chose me; no, I have chosen you and the task I imposed upon you is to go forward steadfastly in bearing fruit; and your fruit is to be lasting. Thus the Father will grant you any petition you may present to him in my name.”

“This is all I command you: love one another.” (*) (Jo 15, 1-17.)

(*) - (All quotations taken from: Kleist-Lilly New Testament.)

“You are, Lord, the life of souls -
my body lives through my soul
and my soul lives of You...”

O You who are my life
and without whom I die,
You, my joy, without which
I am in anguish...” (St. Augustine.)

1. - How to describe the mystery of incorporation in Christ –

The “Mystical Body” is well named; mystical in this phrase means mysterious, for this Mystical Body of Christ is invisible to the eyes of the physical man. It is composed of the Head and of all His Members, - Mankind, Human Nature remade in its Head, - a great human cluster of all the elect who, with the Well-Beloved, make “one Only” Son of God. Herein we have a reality, an actuality, the greatest of all actualities, because it is divine.

Precisely because it is divine, however, it is wholly beyond human ken, outside the scope of human conception. Nevertheless, Our Lord felt obliged to reveal “this mystery hidden from eternity in God...that we are members of the same body.” (Eph. 3, 9, 6.) He would have us know our great privilege! To bring the mystery to our knowledge as clearly as possible, He made use of the most apt similes and figures; but “since every comparison halts,” even Christ’s apt similes and figures can reveal to the struggling human intellect only a dim image of the dazzling reality.

In the Gospel, Our Lord used the figure of “the vine and the branches”; St. Peter (1, 4, 5.) describes the Mystical Body as a spiritual temple of which “Christ is the cornerstone” and we are the “living stones.” St. Paul compares the Mystical Body with the union of husband and wife, but gives us a clearer idea of it by means of his allegory of the human body.

Through these figures, images, similes, allegories, we attain knowledge of the fact of our union with Christ, of our salvation through Him, of our transformation in Him, of our wealth of grace and favor with Him; but there still remains a wide and deep abyss between our feeble concept of the Mystical Body and its actuality. We shall understand this mystery of love and mercy only when we are face to face with God in eternity! Meanwhile, in the hope of obtaining what knowledge we can “of what we shall be one day” (1 Jo. 3, 2.) let us penetrate as deeply as possible into the Realm of the Invisible; we shall find that even the fringes of this Realm are infinitely more beautiful than any thing subject to our limited, material senses.

When we sing the “Credo”, let’s, with all our faith, send up to that higher Realm our ardent belief “in God Creator of all things visible and invisible,” and also “in life eternal.”

2. - Vine and branches –

To make us understand that we must be “incorporated” in Him if we wish to be saved, Our Lord uses the comparison of “the vine and the branches.” (Jo15, 1-9.)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. He prunes away any branch of mine that bears no fruit and cleans any branch that does bear fruit, that it may bear yet more abundant fruit. By now you are clean, thanks to the lessons I have given you.

“Remain united with me, and I will remain united with you. A branch can bear no fruit of itself, that is, when it is not united with the vine; no more can you, if you do not remain united, with me.

“I am the vine, you are the branches. One bears abundant fruit only when he and I are mutually united; severed from me, you can do nothing.

“If one does not remain united with me, he is simply thrown away like a branch, and dries up. Such branches are gathered and thrown into the fire to be burned.

“As long as you remain united with me, and my teachings remain your rule of life, you may ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it.

“This is what glorifies my Father - your bearing abundant fruit and thus proving yourselves my disciples.

“Just as the Father loves me, so I love you. Be sure to hold my love.”

(Jo 15, 1-9)

Our Lord’s allegory brings to the light three facts:

- First, that as vine and branches form only one complete vine, we also are “only one” with Him;
- Second - that we - united with Him - live through His life just as the branches live through the vine’s life - for the Head’s divine life flows in His Members like sap running through the whole of the vine, including the branches;
- Third - that our works are His, because He makes us do them, just as the vine produces fruit: “A branch can bear no fruit of itself, that is, when it is not united with the vine; no more can you, if you do not remain united with me...severed from me, you can do nothing.”

Our Lord always gave His words their full weight, and never spoke idly. Too often, we weaken the general meaning of Christ’s discourses because we fail to give His simple language its full and exact value.

Christ always meant what He said. If we meditate on the passage of the Gospel we have just read, and if we give it its correct meaning, we shall make some wonderful discoveries about the completeness and the intimacy of our incorporation in Christ;

- “...Engrafted upon Him,”
- “...planted in Him,” (Rom. 6, 53.) we form with Him
- “...the whole Christ.”
- We are His “fullness”. (Eph. 1, 23.) Through Him, we have
- “the power to be made sons of God...” (Jo 1, 12.)

3. - Body and Members -

St. Paul, who - because he had been “caught up to the third heaven,” (2 Cor. 12, 2.) had special insight into divine secrets, makes use of the comparison with the human body and its members to explain to the faithful the functioning of their union with Christ.

Jesus Christ is the Head, the Chief.

- “And he has subjected every single thing to his authority and has appointed him sovereign Head of the Church, which is truly his body.” (Eph. 1, 22, 23.)
- “Further, he is the Head of his body, the Church...so that he may have pre-eminence over every creature.” (Col 1, 18.)
- “We, the faithful, are members of this Body, of which He is the adorable Head.”
“You are Christ’s body and individually its members.” (1 Cor. 12, 27.)

- In the human body, the members differ, each having its own function, each its own importance.

“For example, just as the body is a unit, although it has many members, and all the members of the body, many though they are, form but one body, so too is the Christ.”
(1 Car 12, 12.)

- These various members must live in harmony, rendering mutual aid and assistance.

“Suppose the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am no part of the body,” is it for all that no part of the body? ...now, if they were all one member, where would the body be? ...but, as it is, there are certainly many members, but a unified body. ...You are Christ’s body.” (1 Cor 12, 15 ff.)

- The members function under the direction of the Head, Christ...

“Rather by professing the truth, let us grow up in every respect in love and bring about union with Christ who is the head. The whole body is dependent on him. Harmoniously joined and knit together, it derives its energy in the measure each part needs only through contact with the source of supply. In this way the body grows and builds itself up through love.”
(Eph. 4, 15-16.)

- How wonderful is the union between us, the members, and Christ, our Head, a union that makes us one only human body! Even more wonderful is the union existing between the engrafted soul and its divine Head in the unity of the mystical Body.

“Let the ruling principle of your hearts be the peace of Christ, to which you were called as members of one body.”
(Col 3, 15.)

All the epistles of St. Paul preach this union “in Christ Jesus.” And we could not ever understand this great Apostle if we had not always present in our mind - the fact of our incorporation with Christ, as well as all the consequences of this fact.

4. - Character of our union With Christ -

It is impossible to give an accurate, complete definition of the union resulting from our incorporation with Christ: human language - expert as it is to speak of human affairs, is quite inadequate when divine things are concerned - they being on a totally un-reachable level to our mind. As St. Paul says: there are

“unutterable utterances which no man is permitted to repeat.” (II Cor. 12, 4.)

Nevertheless, though we cannot define and explain to our own satisfaction the “mystical”, or better said, the “mysterious” union of Christ with the faithful Christian, we can acquire some knowledge through the use of analogy and comparison.

- Our Lord himself, and - after him, St. Paul - use these very same methods to help us to understand certain mysteries - at least in the measure our human mind is able to do so. One of these striking comparisons used by Jesus is that of the “vine and the branch” - which are not so much a “union” as a unity: they form a whole, and this whole bears fruit. This fruit is not that of the branch, alone, but is produced by the whole vine.

The same way of reasoning applies to the “head and members” comparison, also given to us by Christ, and taken up again by St. Paul. Head and members form the body, which is one entity. Our hands, our feet, our eyes, our heart, are not separate entities: they are parts of our “ego”: a man can truthfully say, “My hand, my foot, is I!” for nothing is more really one than the human body.

- So it is of the union of Christ and the faithful Christian. Christ is the Head, - the Christian, the member. As the hand lives through the head, so the Christian lives through Christ. Just as my hand is myself, so the faithful Christian is Christ.

- Christians, as a congregation, are the “whole Christ.”

- the Church is “Christ’s fullness.”

- St. Augustine makes the definite statement that the Church is

“this one man, this one human nature spread throughout the world which is the one Lord Jesus Christ” and that the Church, this ‘one man’ is ‘Christ and we.’”

- Christ identifies himself with us when he says to his Apostles:

“He who listens to you listens to me, and he who despises you despises me.”

(Luke 10, 16.)

and on the day of the last judgment:

“I tell you the plain truth, inasmuch as you did this to one of these least brethren of mine, you did it to me.”

(Matt. 25, 40.)

and to St. Paul, persecutor of the Christians:

“Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me? ...I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”

(Acts 9, 4, 5.)

In the natural order, in human society, there are many living beings, many entities; but in the supernatural order, there is only one such living entity: Christ and his Members:

“For you all are one in Christ Jesus.”

(Gal. 3, 28.)

5. - The Church -

The comparison of the vine allows us to establish the following equivalences:

In the vine:

In the Church:

1. The vine finds in the soil the necessary nutritive elements for itself and sends sap into the branches.
2. The branches can only bear fruit if they are united to the vine which supplies them with sap.
3. Any branch separated from the vine is dead and cannot bear fruit.
4. The sap is a vital principle necessary to the life of the vine and of each of its branches.
5. All the branches live through the same sap, and they all contribute to the vitality of the whole vine.

- Christ possesses the fullness of divine life and passes it on to men.
- Men can only obtain eternal life if they are united to Christ who gives this life to them.
- Any man willfully separated from Christ is deprived of divine life.
- Grace is a vital principle, necessary to the life of the whole Church and of each one of its members.
- All members of the Church are united in a community through the same divine life, each one being a part of the whole Christ.

- Teaching of St. Paul -

In his epistles St. Paul uses also the comparison of the human body: “You are Christ’s body, and individually its members.” (1 Cor. 12, 27.)

This comparison meets the other one (the vine) and leads to the same equivalences:

	In the vine	In the Body
Christ:	the vine	the head
Men:	the branches	the members
Grace:	the sap	the blood

- The Church – Mystical Body of Christ -

From these two comparisons, we may draw the following conclusions:

1. The Church is a Body that is a visible community, a whole organically constituted.
2. The Church is a living Body, animated by the divine life of sanctifying grace, drawn from the Sacraments.
3. The Church is Christ living Body: Jesus Christ, in fact, is not only its founder, its support, its Savior:

“He is, - says St. Paul, -the Head of his Body which is the Church.” (Co1. 1, 18.)

the Head “from whom the whole body is supplied with nourishment and strength by the joints and ligaments...” (Co1. 2, 19.)

4. The Church is the living body of Christ and of the Christians: Baptism, while making us into members of his body, has united us in a vital way to Christ, - from whom we received divine life, - and to each other. (La Vraie Vie, J. Devaux, p. 221)

- Degrees of belonging to the Church -

The Church is not a simple reality. We belong more or less to her, and we are justified in the very measure in which we do belong.

- The normal case is that of belonging in a visible and perfect way that is not only through Baptism and faith, but through grace.

- The just man, ignorant but in good faith, belongs in an invisible and imperfect way.

- The bad catholic belongs visibly but imperfectly.

“How many are there who are not ours and appear to be in the bosom of the Church, - and how many who are ours and appear to be outside the Church?” (St. Augustine.)

from all this, we must draw two consequences:

- the bad Catholic's situation in the Church is precarious. He will not remain there eternally; or else he will fully adhere, and then will go on to the Church eternal.

“The slave does not always remain in the house.” (Jo 8, 34.)

- Such is also the lesson of the parables, “the cockles” and “the Net.”

The paradoxical situation of the just who are “outside the Church” must make us understand Christ's ardent desire, and encourage us to realize it:

“Still other sheep I claim as my own which are not of this fold. I must lead them also to pasture, and they will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (Jo 10, 16)

6 – Christ's characterization of the union -

No expression can be as clear, as authoritative - to emphasize the intimacy of the incorporation of the faithful soul in Christ as Christ's own words, from him we must learn what to believe and what to think of his Foundation, the Mystical Body.

To us Christ says, “As the living Father has appointed me his ambassador, and I live because of the Father, so, too, he who eats me will have life because of me. (Jo 6, 58.)

What is exactly the life of the Son in the Father? The Nicebe Creed says: “God of God, true God of true God, consubstantial with the Father. “Both persons are one and the same God. Both possess the same infinite, divine, omnipotent, glorious essence. Eternally the Father engenders the Son, who lives “by his Father,” in unity. Where one is, there is the other. Each and both are everywhere. One never leaves the other.

In the whole universe there exists no union comparable with this union. In perfection it surpasses every conceivable tie, union, unity, even those mentioned in the Gospels and Epistles...the union of the vine and the branches, - head and member, - husband and wife, - edifice and corner-stone, - all these striking similes of the mystical Body are insignificant when compared with the actuality of the union of the Son with the Father.

Now, we live by the Son as the Son lives by the Father; therefore we are living in a union that makes us “partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1, 4.) This union is the mystical Body!

Through the very actuality of this union we are, with our Head, one sole living entity, “the Son of God.” Incorporated in Christ and “made one in Him who is one with his Father, we members are called...children of God not merely in name but in reality.” (1 Jo 3, 1-2.)

God has only one Son, the object of his eternal love and pleasure; this Son is “We with Him”; we, regenerated, united to the divine Son. When God the Father, at Christ's Baptism and later on Thabor, was heard to say from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Matt. 17, 5.) He revealed - as the Collect for the Feast of the Transfiguration tells us: “our perfect adoption as sons.”

United to our Head, then, we are the only Son of God. God, practically speaking, has a family. The first Person is the Father. This Father has a Son. From their love proceeds the Holy Ghost. These three, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost comprise the divine family.

Now, this Son, become man, is Head and members; that is, 'He and We.' Thus, we are "members of God's household" (Eph 2, 19.), members of his family! How fortunate we are! The Church, in the Canon of the Mass (Hanc igitur) makes us say that the Sacrifice of Christ is "ours" - is that "of the whole family."

These conclusions would seem rash if Our Lord himself had not emphatically insisted on them; again and again He states the fact of this union of his members with him and with his Father:

"The glory you have bestowed on me I have bestowed on them, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me." (Jo 17, 22.)

I in them as Head, you in me as father; is not this a clear identification of us Christians with Christ, and the assurance of our son-ship by adoption?

Our Lord, however, seems to think that he has not said enough, for he adds:

"Thus their oneness will be perfected. The world must come to acknowledge that I am your ambassador, and that you love them as you love me." (Jo 17, 23.)

The adopted Members, forming with the Son the Mystical Body, "the only Son," are the object of the same love - for it is only natural that a father loves his son with all his members. The members become dear in the sight of the parents the moment they know them as members of the beloved son. By engrafting us upon Christ, by incorporating us in him, God has made us "agreeable to His sight,"...to the praise of his resplendent grace, with which he has adorned us in his beloved Son." (Eph 1, 6.)

7. - "Our" union with Christ destroys not our personality -

One might easily fear that so close a union with Christ would fuse us into Him to the point of complete absorption, leaving nothing of our own individuality - that our souls would be dissolved in Christ as grains of salt in water.

There is no such absorption in the mystical Body! In it the members remain themselves and retain their own characteristics.

"Just as the body is a unit, although it has many members, and all the members of the body, many though they are, form but one body, so too is the Christ." (1 Cor 12, 12.)

As the members of Christ are distinguished one from the other by responsible personality, by merits, by free will, they retain when uniting themselves to their Head -

every one of these characteristics.

To the wonderful details of our incorporation in Christ we have already shown, details so breath-taking that we find it hard even to attempt to describe them, we must add this extraordinary fact...that, although our fusion in Christ actually identifies us with Him, causes us to live by His life, and enriches us with His works and merits, nevertheless the existence of all that makes us “us” is respected and guaranteed.

The persistence of individual personality in the various members of the Mystical Body is merely the consequence - or, rather, the realization of Our Lord’s astounding words;

“As I live by the Father, ...my member lives by me.” (Jo 6, 58.)

Living “by his Father”, the Word does not lose his own personality. St. Athanasius Creed gives a clear exposition of the union and distinction in the Trinity: “Not three uncreated...not three infinities, but one uncreated, one infinity...not three gods, but only one God...not three Lords, but only one Lord” - so much for the union, now for the distinction...

“One is the person of the Father, - another person of the Son, - still another that of the Holy Ghost we do not confuse the Persons.”

Thus, in the Trinity, there is union but not confusion; so it is with the mystical Body.

We live by Christ as he lives by the Father. Why should not our union with him safeguard our person, the source of our individuality and responsibility? What happens in a grand way in the case of the Head can certainly take place on a small scale in the case of the member!

Furthermore, the permanence of our individualities in our incorporation in Christ, is for the mystical Body the cause of incomparable beauty and harmony; for our souls, engrafted upon Christ as ‘the branches upon the vine’, must, and will turn all their energy in His direction, paying the homage of free acts of a free will: it is as if, in the Vine, all the branches joined to it should consciously bend, in sign of homage, towards the central stem whence each and every leaf derives life. Such a vine, obviously, would be a thinking and believing vine, a unity - not only by reason of the bond of existence - but also because of the sweet yoke of love. Such a vine is the mystical Body.

To the union which makes the Christian “of Christ” must be added the voluntary bond of the personality which gives itself “to Christ.” By the very preservation of our own personalities, the mystical Body assumes a unity “which surpasses all understanding.” (Phil. 4, 7.)

We must admit that this perfection of union of the members with the Head will be definite and complete only in heaven. Here on earth, while members are members because they are actually united to Christ the Head, few are fully and entirely members of the mystical Body of their own volition. Without separating themselves from the Head in

essential matters, too many members take their union with Christ lightly, half-heartedly... The supernatural life of such souls is far from full!

On the other hand, happy are those who have learned that perfection resides in the complete union of their thoughts, desires, and will to Christ's! Even here on earth, such souls begin to enjoy the heavenly harmony of the mystical Body.

What a consolation for us to know that our union with Christ does not mean annihilation of personality! What a source of emulation! Retaining in our incorporation in Christ our own powers of functioning and of activity, we can freely - with Christ's help - become day by day a stronger member, a more active Member of the Mystical Body.

“Thus we shall no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried by every wind of doctrine, ...but rather grow up in every respect in love and bring about union with Christ who is the head.” (Eph, 4, 14, 15.)

8. – Union's consequences –

Two principal consequences:

I - In action Jesus Christ cannot separate himself from His members.

Everything that he does, he does it as an entirety. Whenever we go, we take with us all our members. Everything we do, we do it with the cooperation of all the parts that compose our being. So it is with Christ.

We are therefore involved always and everywhere in Christ's action. With us he prays. With us he adores. With us he offers himself. We are his permanent, perpetual co-workers, co-laborers, and co-operators. Very especially so, in our co celebration of the Mass is our co-operation with Christ demonstrated.

II - Everything that Christ possesses is ours.

We are rich by reason of his riches. “...in every respect you have been enriched in him.” (1 Cor 1, 5.)

Actually, the member has in his possession all that belongs to the head. If I wish to give alms to the poor, my hand opens my purse and drops a coin in the beggar's hand; but is my hand stealing the money? What are mine are my hands. If I am a beggar, my hand is a beggar's hand; if I am a millionaire, my hand is a millionaire's hand; if I am a king, my hand gives the royal signature. My hand is I!

So with the Mystical Body. All the Head's treasures and riches belong to the members. His Passion, his Resurrection, his Ascension, his glory, all is ours. Let's recall minding St. Thomas' statement: “The Passion is communicated to Christ's Member as if he, himself, had suffered it.” (Par. 3, q. 59, a. 2.) There can be no clearer exposition of the actuality of the fact that we have been enriched in him.”

9. – Engraftment's effect on physical body –

When entering the Mystical Body the soul undergoes a profound transformation; the soul “partakes” of divine life and “becomes like unto God.” - What of the body?

The “eyes of the body” cannot trace any betterment in the “clay” whose soul is in union with Christ. If anything, the “bad” seem to be materially better off than the “good”, - who reproach them for their prosperity. “...In dealing with their own kind, the children of the world are shrewder than the children of the light.” (Luke 16, 8.)

We need not be astonished at such a state of affairs: in everything the member follows the pattern of the Head. Our Lord willed, because it was his Father's will, that his divinity be hidden in his humanity so deeply that not a ray of inner divine light should pierce through his mortal appearance, save once, on Thabor. “...fashioned as he was to “the likeness of men and recognized by outward appearance as man.” (Phil. 2, 7.)

Thus His life on earth!

As it was with him, so it is with us! None of the soul's inner splendor shines through that shroud of flesh that is the same for all men, saints or sinners. “What we shall be has not yet been manifested” (Jo I, 3, 2.) and did not Christ, of necessity, “undergo these sufferings to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24, 26.)

Christ's day of glorification arrived: so will ours!

Then, just as his dear body was glorified on Easter Day, so will ours be, for, in everything, the member follows the Head.

“What is sown is perishable,
What is raised is imperishable.
What is sown is sordid;
What is raised is glorious.
What is sown is weak;
What is raised is mighty.

The body sown is natural;
The body raised is glorified.
As surely as there is a natural body,
So surely is there a glorified body.”
(I Cor 15, 42-45.)

The “children of this world” also shall awaken, but since they have not been Christ's Members - they cannot share his glorious Resurrection.

Once more, they will put on those poor animal bodies that can still suffer; once more,

they will don, to wear eternally, their filthy rags of flesh, which the spirit of Christ will not vivify. We, however, “in the twinkling of an eye,” shall be changed (I Cor. 15, 52.) for

“If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you.”

(Rom. 8, 11.)

Then will be fulfilled Our Lord’s prophecy,

“Everyone who looks at the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life and be raised by me on the last day.”

(Jo 6, 40.)

Conclusion

He and We...One Only Christ -

From the fact of our incorporation in Christ flows a necessary conclusion: Christ is one...He and We...One Only Christ.

In the natural order there are many living beings, many entities; in the supernatural order of grace and salvation, there is only one entity, One Living Being, Christ, Head and Members. This divine Personage, which is “He and We,” is the sole object of interest to the most Holy Trinity, the one object of the Three Persons’ love; for, because of our union with Christ, God has only one beloved Son, “Him with Us,” - there is only one Vine, only one true vine, Christ, whose branches we are. (Jo 15, 1.)

St. Paul brings this truth into high relief when he says;

“The promises were made to Abraham and to his descendant.
It does not say “And to his descendants,” as if referring
to many, but only to one. “And to your descendant”, who
is Christ.” (Gal. 3, 16.)

St. Augustine adds, “If there be only one descendent of Abraham, Christ, this sole descendant is we, that is to say, this whole Christ, which is the Head and members, which comprises the “Only Christ.” (De Doctr. Christi, III.)

Even the least intelligent of men can understand what great consolation to us in our wretchedness, what wonderful elevation of spirit in our desolation, St. Augustine offers us when he concludes:

“We have become Christ!”

(In Joannem, 21.)

PRAYER –

LORD JESUS

Make us realize
that we are all members
of one and the same family
in your Mystical Body.

May all that happens to others
and all they do,
affect me as directly
as if it had happened to me
or had been done by me;
may their successes be my successes
their failures, my failures.

Give to my heart,
by nature so narrow and selfish,
broader horizons;
for I know, Lord Jesus,
it is impossible to accept
You in my life
without also welcoming
all those who are part of You.

“May they all be one
as You, Father,
are in Me
and I in You...”

Ref. (2)

- One Only Christ by C. Grimaux, - Benziger Bros. pp. 39-55
- In the whole Christ, by E. Guerry – pp. 87-105
- Christ, Life of the Soul, by Dom Marmion, pp. 79-92
- Mystici Corporis Christi” – Pius XII
- The Mystical Body and the spiritual Life, by Boylan.
- The whole Christ, by Mersh

GOD LIVES IN US

- “Anyone who loves me will treasure my message and my Father will love him, and we shall visit him and make our home with him.” (Jo 14, 23.)
- “Here I am, standing at the door and knocking. If anyone listens to my call and opens the door, I will come into him and have supper with him and he with me.” (Apoc. 3, 20-21.)
- “My delight is to live with the children of men.” (Prov. 8, 21.)

God in us is the most consoling, and the most sanctifying of the dogmas of our faith. With this divine presence “we touch what is greatest, holiest, deepest in our interior and mystical life, - we are really in the heart of the supernatural order.” (Farjet.)

By creating us, God built himself a “home.”

“How many souls will one day utter a cry of surprise, when they discover this “inside” they were carrying within them, and which they have ignored.” (Mgr. d’Hulst.)

Oh! Let us not wait for that day to find this out. From now on, let’s take time and meditate in a practical way on this fact of the presence of God in us, - and its consequences;

- 1 - The fact of God living in us.
- 2 - How God is present in us.
- 3 - Signs of his divine presence.
- 4 - Practical consequences.

- I -

God is present in us

1. - Each of us receives the fullness of Christ - (3)

A - Jesus Christ, our chief, is “anointed” by God.

- The consecration of priests, the pre-coronation of a king, are done through anointing them with holy oil. In the same way, when Christ became a Doctor, a Priest, a King and Chief of the Mystical Body, he has been “anointed.”

St. Paul, quoting the psalm (132, 2) tells us:

“Therefore God, your God, has anointed you in preference to your associates with the oil that brings gladness.” (Heb 1, 9.)

Obviously, and as always, the word unction and the sign through which one

anoints are material figures, hence far removed from what has happened in the sublime and eternal anointing of our “Adored Head.”

- In what did actually consist the anointing received by Christ?

“The oil of gladness” that penetrated to the marrow and consecrated the Holy Humanity of Our Lord, is the Word, second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Through his union to the Man, conceived by Mary, the Divine Word - like an all invading oil - infiltrated himself in the substance and in all the faculties of the human soul of the Savior Jesus, in all the particles of his body. Through penetrating him in this way, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was transferring to the Man become God all the prerogatives and the powers of the Divinity.

This Son of Man was becoming Master of every creature, of the whole Universe, - he was receiving the power to speak to the Infinite Majesty and to establish himself as mediator between this Majesty and the Member of the Mystical Body because he was consecrated “Head of the Church.” (Col 1, 18.)

- Through this “anointing”, he has the first place

“for it pleased God the Father that in him all fullness (i.e. all the Divinity,) should dwell.”

(Col 1, 18.)

“In him is embodied and dwells the fullness of the Godhead.” (Col 2, 9.)

How much does this anointing of Christ by the Word go far beyond the feeble image of lubricating and penetrating oil!... It is not an unction realized on the natural plane but on a level infinitely superior where Divinity resides, - for it is God himself who is the holy oil.

B. Jesus, our Chief, is penetrated by the Holy Trinity –

- Thus the Word, Second Person of the Holy Trinity, by anointing the human Nature, resides in Christ as does the oil in the cloth it impregnates. But, wherever the Word is, the Father and the Holy Ghost are also present. Indeed, the three Divine Persons, are inseparable one from the others, being all three in possession of the same divine nature, - all three infinite and equal in all things.

- If therefore the Humanity of Christ is attached to the very Person of the Word, it however enjoys the possession of the other two, for the three do not ever leave each other. Attracted by the Word made flesh, the Father and the Holy Spirit therefore make also their abode in Christ.

- The Father “is well pleased with his Beloved Son.” (Matt. 3, 17.)

- The Holy Spirit fills him with his gifts, as proclaimed Isaias, “The Spirit of the Lord

will rest on Him.”

(Is. 11, 2.)

This is why we read:

“The Spirit of God rests upon me.”

(Luke 4, 18.)

Such is this wonder of Christ-Chief that he becomes, through his infinite anointing, the Temple of the Holy Trinity. The Three Divine Persons fill him completely, from the Head to the extremity of the members.

C. The Member also possesses the Holy Trinity -

- If the three divine Persons fill the whole Christ from Head to the extremity of the members, who are these members, honoured in such a way with the divine presence? They are all of us, who are grafted onto the Mystical Body.

“Ex plenitudine ejus omnes nos accepimus.” (Col 2, 10.)

From the Head who possesses it in its fullness, the divine life flows quite normally into the members, and the fullness of the divine Life is the Holy Trinity. This is how, in our soul already flooded with the light of Christ, i.e. his grace, - God himself enters, - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- For each member of Christ this possession of the Holy Trinity is the necessary consequence of our adoption by the Head of the Mystical Body. My soul is equally present in my hand as it is in my head; this same presence is felt to the extremities of my body.

Now, what is the soul of the Mystical Body? It is the Holy Spirit. He is the Cause of Christ being God:

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you” - (Mary.) (Luke 1, 35.)

and it is through Him that we share in the Divine Nature.

This soul – “the Spirit of Jesus” (Phil 1, 19.) of the Mystical Body is present at once in the Head and in the whole Body.

- Our Lord himself taught us this extraordinary truth of God living in us:

“Anyone who loves me will treasure my message, and my Father will love him and we shall visit him and make our home with him.” (Jo 14, 23.)

Let’s notice Jesus’ words: “Anyone who loves me...” i.e. if he is my member, attached to my Mystical Body by the bond of charity.

- “My Father will love him” - In fact, according to St. Paul, as soon as we are joined to Christ we become “conformably to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his resplendent grace, with which he has adorned us in his beloved Son.” (Eph 1, 6.)

When a father loves his child, he loves him all, his members as well as his head.

- Our Lord goes on: “and we shall visit him.” This expression “we” represents the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who never separate from each other.

- “and we shall make our home with him.”

Christ’s divine life flows in us and fills his Mystical Body, to the very least of those who are incorporated in him.

- and this life, it is God himself, “precious Ointment” of which speaks the psalm, “that runs down from the Head (which is Christ) over the beard, the beard of Aaron,” - which means the Mystical Body, - “till it runs down upon the (Ps. 132, 2) collar of his robe.”

- We are members of Christ, possessors of the Divine Majesty in our own selves. If we could only reflect and realize exactly our happy state.

“Do you know that you are God’s temple, and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?”
(1 Cor 3, 16.)

Again he would tell them, to encourage them to purity:

“The fornicator sins against his own body. Are you not aware that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Him you have received from God; You are not your own masters.”
(1 Cor 6, 18-19.)

St. Leo the Great tells us:

“Recognize, o Christian, your dignity and - having become a part of divine nature - do not return to your former lowliness through an immoral life.”

“Remember whose head and of which body you are a member...”

“Remember that - pulled away from the power of darkness, - you have been transferred in the light and the kingdom of God.” (Sermon 1, on Christmas.)

Yes, “in the light of the Kingdom of God ...” because
“you are the temple of the living God.” (2Cor 6, 16.)

2. - Each of us is a-member of the Holy Trinity family

- “You are no longer foreigners and guests. No, you are fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household.” (Eph. 2, 19.)

- While communicating to us the divine life of sanctifying grace, God the Father, in fact, “has adopted us as his sons ...” Again, St. Paul tells us so:

“God sent his Son...that we might receive the adoption ... You are, then, no longer a slave but a son; and, if a son, an heir also through God’s grace.” (Gal. 4, 4-8.)

- and St. John affirms:

“...to as many as welcomed him he gave the power to become children of God.”
(Jo 1, 12.)

- Of each one of us the Father might say what he said of Jesus on the day of his Baptism:

“You are my Son, the beloved, I am well pleased with you.”
(Luke 3, 22; Matt. 17, 5.)

- The Our Father

we recite so often is but the re-affirmation of our dignity as Sons of God.

- II -

How God is present in us - (4)

1. - As Creator and Conservator of the whole Creation -

When St. Paul was telling the Athenians of the Aeropagus:

“God is not far from anyone of us, - for in him we live and move and have our being.”
(Acts 17, 28.)

he was referring to this ordinary and common presence of God in us, due to his power. He is in us as agent and as cause, to give us our being, our movement and our life, to govern us and direct us according to the plan of his will.

In this way, the whole of the Trinity is in us, necessarily, and independently of our will and of our love.

To show how God is in us is not an easy task. When we want to imagine God in us, the best way is to keep to this explanation of St. Augustine: “We must conceive God in us as we might imagine a great wisdom in a man, be he of small stature.”

2. - As Father, Spouse: special presence of grace -

Above this general presence of immensity, there is yet another special one reserved to those who are in a state of grace: this new presence is distinct from the first one but it presupposes it, and is grafted on it.

With sanctifying grace, in fact, God is in us with a special title, that of Father, of Spouse, of Host, of Friend. He is in us in order to be known and loved by us.

Through the faculties we have received at Baptism - faith, hope and charity, - we are able to know and to love God in a supernatural way; we then have the possibility to enter into communication with Him and to have a filial and intimate relationship with Him; we are able to reach Him, to possess Him and to enjoy Him.

This presence in us - through grace - is called “Habitation.”

It is to this presence of Habitation that Jesus was referring when He said: “If anyone loves me...and we shall make our home with him... (Jo 14, 23.)

“When God lavishes on the soul the Gifts of his sanctifying grace, not only these gifts but the Divine Persons themselves enter into the soul and begin to live in it.”
(Suarez.)

In consequence, we possess the gift and the Divine Giver.

3. - More than a mere moral presence -

So, my mind is filled with the thought of God; his image haunts me, captivates me: constantly I keep in my memory what he is, what he has done, what he has said; my heart is full of his love; I have the very deep conviction that he is thinking of me, that he looks after me, that he loves me; my soul is totally impregnated with his grace, he it is who inspires me; my whole being is under his divine control...

If I do believe that God’s presence in me is but all this - I am very far from reality. What is in me is not only the image of God, his influence, his likeness, his love, his grace, but it is HIMSELF PERSONALLY - it is God, the whole of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And the three divine Persons are not only mere witnesses of our daily life; their presence in our life is active. God - Trinity shapes in us a “new creature” to whom he gives a supernatural organism and participation to his own life.

This divine life in us, he maintains it, develops it, repairs its damages, and makes it grow according to his grace. The Father adopts us as his children, the Son engrafts us into his Mystical Body, and the Holy Spirit communicates to us his gifts and his charismas.

What riches! The whole of heaven in us!

4. - This presence involves the Three Persons -

When we speak of the divine presence, we say as easily:

- God is in us
or - Jesus is in us
or yet - the Holy Spirit is in us

and we can legitimately interchange these expressions because we know that anywhere one divine Person is actually, so is the whole Trinity.

In ordinary language we often say - and we like saying: “Jesus is in us.”

Why this preference? Because the Incarnate Word seems to us to be nearer to

ourselves, and to be more our “Emmanuel” because our relationship with him is easier, more frequent and more intimate; because, more like us, we know him better than the Father and the Holy Ghost. But let’s not forget:

“Who sees me, sees the Father.”

5. - Comparison between the special presence of God in the soul through grace and the Eucharistic presence. (5)

This presence of God in the soul - through grace - is as real as the Eucharistic presence. When we reserve the term “Real Presence” for the Eucharist, we do not mean to oppose it to the former, but rather to the Protestant error according to which the consecrated bread and wine are merely the figure, the symbol, of the body and blood of Our Lord.

The differences between the two presences relate not to their reality, but to other points.

The reason for the divine presence in the consecrated species - as in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary when she was carrying Jesus - is the hypostatic union of the Word with the humanity of Christ. The reason for the divine presence in the soul of the just man is grace, which is also a very perfect union. The principle of the first is the sacrament of the Eucharist, whereas the principle of the second is the sacrament of Baptism - or of Penance.

God’s presence through grace is incompatible with the sin that destroy it. The Eucharist may enter a sinful heart, but without spiritual fruit. Of its nature, God’s presence through grace is permanent, and comes to an end only through sin on the part of the subject. The Eucharistic presence, on the contrary, is transitory, and is terminated with the corruption of the sacred species.

Normally, the grace of God’s presence in the soul is necessary in order to receive the Eucharistic presence: the state of grace is required for Communion, but the purpose and effect of Communion are to intensify God’s presence in the soul by increasing grace. In heaven, Christ will be visibly present but there will be no Communion, whereas grace will subsist.

“Better still, heaven will be this presence seen in its full light. Rather than a place, heaven is a state, the state of those who are no longer reduced to possessing the Blessed Trinity within themselves without enjoying it, but who henceforth possess it with beatifying intensity.”

Presence through Communion is necessary only through moral necessity, whereas the presence of God through grace is as absolutely necessary as grace itself. It is possible to go to heaven without ever having received Holy Communion (provided one has not violated any moral law); but without grace one cannot enter heaven, even if one has not committed any personal sin: witness the case of the children who die without being baptized.

6. - The Kingdom of God and sin -

- Mortal sin does not cancel in us the ordinary or common presence of God; but it cancels his presence through grace, or “presence of Habitation.” This is why we find in the Scripture these two texts which seem to be contradictory:

–“God is not far from any one of us.” (Act. 17, 28.)

God, Creator and Conservator, always remains in us, even when we fall into sin.

–“The Lord is far from the sinners.” (Prov. 15, 29.)

God, Father, God-Love, God of grace, no longer lives in them.

But it is morally rather than physically that we are to view this proximity or this remoteness. Indeed, the more we are like God, the nearer we are to him. Therefore it is with much reason that St. Augustine said - when referring to his sinful life:

“I was then very far...”

7. - Sanctifying grace and natural qualities –

So, the state of grace is the absolutely necessary condition for God’s habitation in us. Alone, indeed, can sanctifying grace open our soul to God, in order for Him to make his temple therein.

In consequence:

- We may possess the greatest natural virtues, and even the super-natural virtues of faith and hope, - we may perform the acts these virtues inspire, - we may receive actual graces and gratuitous graces, like the gift of miracle or of prophecy, - but if we are not in the state of grace, God does not live in us.
- We may possess the most wonderful gift of intelligence, we may know God, naturally, through reason, and supernaturally through faith, - But if we are not in the state of grace, God does not live in us.
- We may possess the most precious qualities of heart, we may love God with natural love, - we may give up our time, our money, our life to charitable works, - but if we are not in the state of grace, God does not live in us.

Oh! Let’s fully understand the priceless value of our state of grace!

- III -

Signs of the in-dwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our soul

The principal signs of the state of grace, in ascending gradation, are the following (St. Thomas Aquinas.):

- 1 - The testimony of a good conscience, in the sense that one is not conscious of a mortal sin. This is the fundamental sign, pre-supposed by the following signs which confirm it.
- 2 - The joy felt in hearing the Word of God preached, not only for the sake of hearing it, but to put it into practice. This may be observed in several countries where there is preserved, together with a simple life, a great Christian faith: it leads the faithful to listen willingly to their pastor when he explains the great truths of the Gospel.
- 3 - The relish of divine wisdom, which leads a man to read the Gospel privately, to seek in it the spirit under the letter, to nourish his soul with it, even when it deals with the mystery of the cross and with the cross he must bear every day.
- 4 - The inclination leading the soul to converse intimately with God, and faithfully to resume this conversation when it has been interrupted. We cannot repeat too often that every man carries on an intimate conversation with himself which, at times, is not good. True interior life begins when this intimate conversation is no longer only with self, but with God.

St. Thomas says: Friendship inclines a man to wish to converse with his friend. The conversation of man with God is made through the contemplation of God, according to these words of St. Paul: ‘Our conversation is in heaven.’ (Phil. 3, 20.) And as the Holy Ghost gives us the love of God, He also inclines us to contemplate Him. That is why the Apostle also says:

“But all of us, reflecting as in a mirror the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his very image from one degree of splendor to another, such as comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor. 3, 18.)

- 5 - To rejoice in God, fully consenting to His will even in adversity. Sometimes in the midst of dejection there is given us a pure and lofty joy which dissipates all sadness. This is a great sign of the Lord’s visit. Moreover, Jesus, in promising the Holy Ghost, called Him the Paraclete, or Comforter. And usually we rejoice all the more in the Lord than we more perfectly fulfill His precepts, for by so doing we form increasingly one sole heart with Him.
- 6 - The liberty of the children of God. On this subject, St. Thomas writes: “The children of God are led by the Holy Ghost, in fact, not like slaves, but like free creatures... The Holy Ghost makes us act by inclining our free will to God’s will, acting for love of Him and not through fear in a servile manner. That is why St. Paul tells us:

“Now the Lord is in the Spirit, and where this Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” (II Cor 3, 17.)

“Now you have not received spirit of bondage so that you are again in fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, in virtue of which we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself joins his testimony to that of our spirit that we are

children of God.” (Rom 8, 15.)

7 - The person speaks of God out of the abundance of his heart. In this sense is realized what the holy Doctor says elsewhere:

“Preaching should spring from the fullness of the contemplation of the mysteries of faith.”

Thus, from Pentecost on, St. Peter and the Apostles preached the mystery of the Redemption; so too, St. Stephen, the first martyr, preached before being stoned.

- IV -

Practical consequences (6)

There is no dogma more fruitful in practice than that of the in-dwelling of the Holy Trinity in us. Innumerable consequences derive from it in terms of piety. This holy presence imposes duties. Let us consider two of these duties: respect and close friendship.

1. - RESPECT -

A - Free from idols:

Since God dwells in us we must free ourselves from idols, and these idols are not made of wood or iron. They are living idols that are called: a woman, a child, a man. There are idols of pleasure, idols of ambition, and idols of money. Everything that we prefer to God, that we want to keep or obtain even if it means offending God, everything that we place in opposition to God, that we esteem, in practice, above God, - is an idol. And when an idol enters a soul, God leaves it. We drive Him out scandalously, and we profane His temple.

B - We are His temples -

Indeed, we are his temples, for after justification our members no longer belong to us but to the Holy Spirit. They belong to Christ through grace; they have been consecrated and dedicated to Him with the holy oil of Baptism.

C - Respect of our body -

Since he has become a member of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the just man must avoid all mortal sin, and above all the sin of unchastity, for whether in desire or in fact, the unchaste person unites his body - which has become Christ's - to an unworthy creature and so violates the Temple of God:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the member of Christ and make them members of a harlot?” (1 Cor. 6, 15.)

Is it not a sacrilege to use a consecrated temple for purposes that are not only profane but actually evil and forbidden by divine law? And yet that is what the person who yields his body to illicit pleasures is doing:

“Do you not know that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit ... and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6, 19.)

Therefore,

“Glorify God and bear Him in your body...” (1 Cor 6, 20.)

Surely this is a supernatural and powerful motive for practicing chastity, - a motive that every Christian should understand and welcome as an inspiration.

D - Respect of the others' bodies -

- The just man will extend the respect he owes to his divine Guest not only to his own body but also to the bodies of others, as if they were churches. Because God dwells in him, he will keep his body clean, and give it reasonable care and respect. He will not rig it out in garments that deform it or leave it almost naked, as do those men and women who are the slaves of ridiculous or inhuman fashions, and torture their bodies out of foolish vanity. He will not degrade his body by grotesque manners, by yielding to debasing purposes or actions, by buffoonery, or, intemperance in food or drink. He will never permit his body to be used for purpose unworthy of its nobility.
- The Church has drawn all these very logical conclusions. How great is her veneration for the bodies of Christians!
In Baptism, she blesses the body, anoints it with sacred oil, clothes it in white. At death, she blesses it again, incenses it, surrounds it with lighted candles and ceremonies, accompanies it reverently to its final resting place, and wants it to be buried in consecrated ground.

E - Respect of our souls –

Since our bodies are the temples of God, our souls are His sanctuaries or tabernacles. Let us strive by our good works to adorn our souls with merits, with the beautiful flowers of all the virtues, and above all, to keep constantly lighted within the lamp of love the candles of sacrifice and renunciation, - often sending forth the incense of prayer, and - on the altar of charity - immolating our passions, our preferences, our aversions to duty and effort, our sensuality, our pride, and our selfishness.

F - Perfect hospitality to God

It is a great honor for subjects to be received in their Prince's palace, and a still greater honor for them to receive him in their homes. How much greater is the honor, not only of receiving the passing visit of our Creator, our infinitely perfect God, but of having Him as our permanent Guest not only in our home, but in our hearts, within the depths of our beings!

May we give Him a reception worthy of Him, and may our gratitude be proportionate to so great a favor!

“Consider what an honor to give hospitality to God in our hearts. Certainly, if a rich and powerful man were to enter our home, we would hasten to clean it from top to bottom, so that nothing might offend the eyes of this friend. Therefore let him who wants his soul to be the dwelling place of God purify it from all stain of evil works.”
(St. Gregory, ninth lesson for the Office of Pentecost.)

2. - LOSE FRIENDSHIP -

This close friendship is the fruit of two presences:

A - The presence of God (which grace always accomplishes.)

B - The presence of the soul (which we must ensure through recollection) - so important is that recollection that St. Francis of Assisi was telling his Friars:

“...to work, but in such a way...that they do not extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which all temporal things should be subservient.”

There are so many reasons that command us to make our souls present to God through recollection:

1° - Fittingness:

If some great personage deign to pay us a friendly visit in our home, would we dare to leave him alone, absenting ourselves for long hours, and pay no attention at all to him? But think of it. The Almighty does us the very great honor of becoming our guest, because He loves us and wants to be with us - and we would think of committing the unfitting sacrilege of not staying with Him, of continually absenting ourselves, of traveling the paths of distraction in our ingratitude and thoughtlessness, - of devoting to trifling matters the attention that should belong to Him alone?

We have time for everything, for things that are useless and even dangerous, for frivolities, for the dust of events that each day's wind carries away, and yet no time, or almost none, for the One who should hold first place in our lives!

If God lives with us, must we not also live with Him? If He abides within us, must we not abide in Him, too? Must we not answer the movements of His heart toward us by the movements of ours toward Him, so that the affectionate union may be established for which He comes within us and which both His charity and ours commands?

Even if friendship were lacking, the most elementary politeness should hold us close to Him, full of attention and courtesy, for politeness also has rights with regard to the One who “alone is great.”

If we love the Father with filial love, our hearts, our sons' hearts, should be able to keep us in His presence. Can we claim to love someone if we experience no need of union with him?

2° - Comforting presence:

There is joy, happiness, for a family when the father is home. The friend delights in possessing the one he loves. The soul in the state of grace should be filled with rapture at the thought of possessing its God in such a perfect way. Do what we may, and the creatures that are dear to us do not remain at our beck and call.

The necessities of life force us, or them, to go away. Distance separates us. And even when they are present, their presence is only exterior. How much more perfect is God's presence in us through grace. Nothing can take God away from us, any power on earth, or in hell, nor even death. As St. Paul cries out: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8, 35) He remains with us and in us constantly, compenetrating the depths of our being. This is the union our hearts dream about.

When isolation weighs upon us, and when - by the force of circumstances or the wickedness of men - a painful void seems to surround us and we have the agonizing impression that we, alone, are in a land of exile, what consolation to say to ourselves:

"No, the exile is not alone; since he is in the state of grace he carries about within himself, everywhere and always, the One who makes up for everything else but whom nothing could replace."

When our hearts are wounded or when, tired of struggling against ourselves, against trials or injustice, we are at the end of our tether and close to despair, what a solace to remind ourselves that He whom the Church calls "the best of Comforters", "the soul's delightful Guest", is right there within us.

Why, poor human, do we seek from creatures the answer to our heart's thirst when we bear within ourselves the One who alone can satisfy it? Why do we search so far in vain, when He is so near?

3° - A stimulant for all -

This presence of God within us inspires us to prayer, and its realization is itself a prayer. How can we think that God is there out of love, like a benevolent father, to live and act with us, and not be filled with affectionate gratitude, and not feel the desire to speak to Him, to pour out our hearts into His, to adore Him, thank Him, ask His forgiveness, and beg His graces and all His powerful help? At the very least, how can we fail to fix our gaze upon Him with filial and trusting tenderness?

When I remember that He is witness to my efforts, how can I fail to feel inspired to do good? He sees me at very close range from the depths of my soul, being as present to me as I am to myself. He knows all my thoughts, affections, intentions, and all the movements of my heart. There is nothing, not even my most secret desire or activity that escapes His eye, for His gaze is constantly fixed on me and penetrates my innermost soul. Should not this conviction turn me away from evil and inspire me to good? What a safeguard!

And besides, how heartening it is to say to myself: He is there to love me, to enlighten me, to defend me in time of danger and to stimulate and sustain my efforts!

“Seek ye the Lord, and be strengthened:
seek His face evermore!” (Ps. 104, 1.)

4° - Easy practice

This fruitful practice is easy and within the reach of all, even of those who have the most to do. We can do it when we are walking, working, going about our duties. It would not seem to be incompatible with any occupation.

This practice of finding God in us demands no intellectual training. The simplest minds are just as capable of it as the learned (if not more so.) They know how to love, and that is enough. In fact many more simple souls than we imagine practice it without being aware of it, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It does not fatigue us: a quick act of our will, a rapid thought suffices to get the contact. Even when we are unable to do other spiritual exercises, we can always do that one.

Conclusion –

To the Holy Trinity

Blessed, Trinity who are Love, only God in three Persons, I believe in you and I adore you in union with the Virgin Mary, the Angels, the Saints and the whole Creation.

I believe that your love for me has made me a Christian. I do not want to be a Christian only by habit, or by sentiment.

I want to be so in full light, through reflexion and by choice. Give me the grace to realize my dignity of true child of the Heavenly Father, of living temple of the Holy Spirit and of living member of Christ Jesus.

Holy Spirit, love of the Father and of the Son, take possession of me through your gifts, because I want to bring into full efficiency the divine faculties of faith, of hope and of love that have been put in my soul by Baptism.

“Father, Son and Holy Spirit, remove from my soul the preoccupations and the trifles of this transitory life; so that I may listen to you, speak to you, love you and be united with you in recollection and in peace.”

Amen.

* * * * *

- (3) One only Christ, C. Grimaux, Benziger Bros - PP. 108-112
- (4) L'habitation de Dieu en Nous, F. Astruc -Imprimerie J.B. Roudil, Lyon PP, 3 -12
- (5) Our Life of Grace – F. Cuttqz, Fides, Indiana, PP. 166-167
- (6) “ “ “ “ “ “ PP. 158--166

PRAYING OUR LIFE

“Whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God.”
(I Cor. 10, 31.)

“Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good.”
(Rom. 8, 28.)

When our soul becomes conscious of God, we begin to pray, to raise our spiritual voices:

- towards our Creator, we feel the need to express our respect, our gratefulness and our attachment;
- towards our Father, we want to manifest our trust and our filial love;
- towards our Spouse, our affection and fidelity;

Prayer, which is a communing with God, can take various forms. Here we will distinguish between:

Living Prayer : i.e. making a prayer of one’s life
and Mental Prayer : i.e. a type of formal spiritual exercise.

I

Living Prayer: Making a prayer of one’s life

If I cannot think of God at every instant, I can do His will all the times this is what the Gospel means when it says:

“Pray always.”
“...one must always pray and not lose heart.”
(Luke 18, 1.)

My soul, when it is in a state of grace, is like a bright burning charcoal. And every act, conform to the will of God, that I perform, is like a grain of incense.

Yes, whether I eat or drink, whether I study or wash dishes, whether I sleep or weep, whether I am driving or meditating, whether I am laughing or suffering - whatsoever my action, if it be conform to the will of God, - it is a grain of incense.

And these grains of incense - the duties of my state - how are they brought into contact with that burning charcoal which is my soul? Simply by earnestly desiring to do God’s will and also by desiring to use the actual grace that He offers me every moment. So, from the burning incense a sweet and fragrant cloud rises continually towards heaven. It has - as it were - an odor of sweetness, an odor of sanctity. For at every instant that I am doing God’s will, that I am “about my Father’s business...”, I am indeed in constant prayer.

“O Lord, ...let my prayer come like incense before you...” (Ps. 140, 1-2.)

and so I pray, not so much through formulas, but through my life.

Jesus said: “Remain in Me as I in you.” (Jo. 15, 4.)

But does “to remain” mean to come and go, or to visit and leave? Of course, it does not. To remain means: to stay - to be continually with - or, in the words of the missal: “never let me be, separated from you.” (2nd prayer before Communion.) - a continual contact with Christ, such is the call of the Master to the faithful disciple.

Following Jesus’ example:

The first reported words of Jesus - preceded and followed, as they were, by the eloquent silence of his life in Nazareth - shed a divine light upon this question:

- “I must be about my Father’s business...” (Luke 2, 49.)

- “And he went down with them and came to Nazareth.” (Luke 2, 51.)

This statement, solemn as it is, enlightens the mystery of those long and seemingly insignificant years we call “the hidden life.”

“To be about His Father’s business” was not to be taken as meaning just preaching, praying and performing miracles, but also doing the thankless tasks of any artisan, rendering the ordinary small services so typical of any village life. In a word, His Father’s business consisted to a great extent in the humdrum things of daily living.

In leaving the Temple in Jerusalem and returning home to Nazareth, Christ did not leave his “Father’s house.” Christ remained always with his Father, because he always - wheresoever he was - was doing his Father’s will: “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”

Not only does it matter little what we do, but it matters even less where we do it - as long as it is pleasing to God - and is done for him.

Because of the Incarnation, nothing is profane:

For: “All things were made through Him - Word of God - and without Him was made nothing that has been made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (Jo 1, 3-4.)

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (Jo 1, 14.)

- the earth is no longer the inimical region where the miserable fugitive, turned out of paradise, has got lost, but it has become “the Father’s house,” and the “gate of heaven.”
- humanity has become the spring-board to divinity.

- though remaining man, the Christian belongs to the family of God.
- as a member of the Mystical Body, he is really and truly a prolongation of Christ. Thus a Christian act is an act of Christ.
- The Christian is but a trembling twig. But he is attached to the tree of Life. Through him flows the sap of Divinity. So his fruits are those of Christ.

Collaboration:

- We must start:

To decide on a destination is one thing. To start is another. God willed to make us free. He has called, but it is up to each one to answer the call and to set himself in motion in the direction of the divine.

- We must continue:

Again, to begin is one thing. To continue is quite another. But making of our life a living prayer is essentially a continuing communication.

- Hand in hand with Providence...

As in the beginning “the Spirit stirred above the waters,” (Gen. 1, 2) so now Divine Providence broods over all things. For the Christian there is nothing without divine meaning. There is no part of Creation or act of any creature that cannot speak to him of God. If only the Christian would listen, he would hear the whole of creation as a symphony of sacred symbols! But to hear he must listen.

- and our Neighbour:

To stretch out and touch God, we have merely to reach towards our neighbour. We will recognize the Father in the faces of His children.

- In Rightful Subordination:

“All things are yours” (1 Cor 3, 23.) - all things serve you, benefit you, lead you to God, but...

“You are Christ’s”: if you did not belong to Christ, nothing would serve you any longer.

“For those who love God all things work together unto good.” (Rom. 8, 28.)

Stop loving, that is: stop doing God’s will, - and nothing will any longer be really beneficial to you or to your neighbour.

II

Living Prayer versus Mental Prayer -

- Prayer of Life and Prayer of Mind are two legs of the same body: in order to progress, one must precede the other.
- Such was the life of Christ Himself - He who spent long nights in prayer (Luke 6, 12) and preparation (Luke 22, 43) spent long days in action and execution.
- Meaningless is meditation that leads not to prayerful action. And similarly vain is action (however “apostolic”) that does not lead us back to “contemplation.”
- To use one without the other is to be like the man with two legs that prefers hopping to walking or running.
- Like Christ at certain times, we too must go aside from our fellow-men, the better to serve them when we return.
- We must go to the Master.....- to return as Teachers,
- we must plunge into silence.....- to bring back Peace,
- we must go down to the well.....- to come up with Water.

It is only by continual contact with Life that living things can live.

“I am the vine, you are the branches... No branch can bear fruit by itself, but only if it remains united with the vine.” (Jo 15, 1, 4.)

- Conclusion:

Lord, I desire to do no other will than yours;
I have given you mine. I will never take it back.
It is forever lost and merged into yours.
Whatsoever you want- so let it be for me.

May your will be done, my God,
For your will is your glory
And your Glory is my desire.

Lord Jesus, I ask 'but one favor,
That I and all those whom you have entrusted to me,
And all my brothers throughout the world,
In all things do your holy will.

* * * * *

WHAT IS MENTAL PRAYER?

“When you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites who love to pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, in order that they may be seen by men...”
(Matt. 6, 7.)

“For who among men knows the things of a man save the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so, the things of God no one knows but the Spirit of God.”
(I Cor 2, 11)

“Wherefore I give you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God says “Anathema” to Jesus. And no one can say “Jesus is Lord”, except in the Holy Spirit.”
(1 Cor 12, 3.)

“But in like manner the Spirit also helps our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself pleads for us with unutterable groaning.”
(Rom 8, 26.)

What is mental prayer? Alone, the Holy Spirit can answer this question. The very first gesture, in any prayer, is to ask Christ, the Spirit, to teach us anew how to pray:

“Lord, teach us to pray... (Luke 11, 1.)

We interrogate Jesus - who gave us his personal instructions about prayer - in our effort to answer these questions:

- What is mental prayer? (7)
- What mental prayer is not. (a)

I

What mental prayer is –

1. - Mental prayer is a meeting with God –

Blessed are the Twelve Apostles who, one day, met Christ on their way; blessed are the two disciples He caught up with on the way to Emmaüs and comforted, with his enlightening words; blessed are John and Andrew on whom He looked when on the lakeside...

As John himself reports with great simplicity: “Jesus turned round, and seeing them said to them: ‘What is it you seek?’ They said to him, ‘Master, where dwellest thou?’ He said to them: ‘Come and see.’ They came and saw where he was staying; and they stayed with him that day.” (Jo 1, 38-39.)

To meet Christ on the road of life, - to feel his eyes fixed on us, - and to spend the

day in the intimacy of his home!

In prayer, we do meet God in such a way: he is here, present in us, by the grace of a living presence, at the same time actual, active, and infinitely loving.

You do not see him, but he sees you. He is more intimate to us than we are ourselves. Nothing of what we do, nothing of what interests us, is indifferent to him. He knows us better than we know ourselves, he knows everything there is in us: our qualities as well as our faults, our efforts as well as our failures.

He sees us with all the possibilities he has put in us in order to realize the Plan of God for us in the great synthesis of His Mystical Body in full growth.

Not only does he hear everything we say, but he knows also everything we think. Not a thing escapes him.

He is here, waiting for us, calling us, all anxious to listen to us to speak to us, to give himself to us. The question, for us, is to become aware of it through faith.

The time for the appointment with the Lord has come: let us give him the whole of our attention, - let's not miss the divine audience...

2 - Mental prayer is a loving, intimate conversation between the soul and her Spouse, God.

“He who has become your husband is your Maker.” (Is. 54, 5-6.)

Every soul of mental prayer is God's Spouse.

“Deal with God as with a Father, as with a brother, as with a Master, as with a husband; choose sometimes one, at other times the other of these qualities. He will himself teach you which one will please him most. Do not make yourselves out to be simpletons: call upon him to keep his promise. He is your husband, ask him to treat you as his spouses.”
(St. Teresa of Avila.)

The soul is invited to take her relations with her God as seriously as engaged couples in this world do, and more so still, since God is the fiancé, and the marriage will be eternal.

“Most certainly we have every right to delight in the greatness of our Spouse, - to know who it is with we are united by the bonds of marriage, - lastly what is the sort of life we are called to live with him.

“Well, in the world, when one gets married, the first thing one worries about is to know who one is about to marry, what his qualities are, what are his assets. And since one does not forbid these investigations to the fiancés who are mortal, why should we not be allowed to know before the wedding day where our husband will take us, where he lives, - to find out what he is, what is his father, what is the country that will become ours, what are the gifts he promises us, - what are his inclinations, - in what way we shall be able to satisfy him, to make him happy and

to please him, - how we shall manage to fit our dispositions to his?

“If one wants a woman to be successful in her marriage, these are the suggestions one makes to her, - whatever the standard of life of her husband. Should we, O my Spouse, on all these points, have less regard for you than for men?” (St. Teresa of Avila.)

3. - Mental prayer is a silent dialogue between our soul and God -

Charles de Foucauld gives this definition of mental prayer:

“It is this state of the soul who looks at God in silence, - telling Him that we love him by our simple regards while our lips are dumb, at times when even our mind is silent. The best mental prayer is that of the soul whose simple regards contain more love.”

The meeting of the soul with God, and the contemplation it implies, would in themselves be an excellent mental prayer, - often called, in fact, “mental prayer of simple regard.” If, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, you feel attracted by it, do not look for anything else.

Teresa of Avila wrote:

“Your Spouse, - God - never stops looking at you; from you he has suffered a thousand awful things and countless abominations without ever turning his eyes away from you. And you, after that, wouldn't turn your eyes away from worldly things to look at Him sometimes? (at the time set for mental prayer.) Think of what he expects from you, he says so himself to his Spouse: it is that we should look at him.”

In reality, one can say many things, in silence, simply looking at each other, - if one is really in love.

In the way God is looking at you, this seen through the Holy Scriptures and the Liturgy, - try and decipher what he thinks of you, what he expects of you. And yourself, through the intense way you look at him, try to make him understand your love, your desires, your resolutions, your availability: in short, your YES to everything he wants of you.

“Well understood, silence generates victory.” (Vloberg.)

“Only silent souls are apostolically fruitful.”

4. - Mental prayer is a dialogue between hearts -

We have heard of St. Teresa of Lisieux's reply to the Sister Infirmarian who had asked her: What do you do during the night when you cannot sleep? - I pray. - What do you tell the Good Lord? - I say nothing to him, I love Him.

Our hearts have been filled with the Holy Spirit (Rom 5, 5.) to allow Jesus -

according to the words of St. Augustine - to love Himself through our heart, to love His Father, and all those He gives us to love. This dialogue may take the form of a very eloquent silence of love. It will be all the stronger as we reanimate more and more our faith in the love of the Lord Jesus for us, - this love at the same time infinite, personal, and divinely delicate.

“Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down one’s life for his friends.”
(Jo 15, 16.)

“He loved me and gave himself up for me.” (Gal 2, 20.)

Jesus loves you such as you are, he sees you as one always sees when one really loves, that is, he sees the qualities he has put in you far more than the faults you have - far more your good actions than your sins, - far more the possibilities you have to do good than your cowardice or your wretchedness.

He knows so well that you possess a unique way of praying, of loving him, of giving yourself to him. As for your weaknesses, the more you acknowledge them loyally, and ask him to forgive them to you in all sincerity, the more he is ready to cure them through his mercy.

Accept to know you are being loved to that extent. And may your realization of such a love inspire in you, at least, a great desire to love Jesus. There again, there is no need of many words.

5. - Mental prayer is a dialogue of the wills -

“Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearth.” (1 Kings 3, 9.)

“Behold the handmaid of the Lord.” (Luke 1, 38.)

Such is the double motion in this dialogue which allows us to team up with the Lord and our brothers. Teaming up is seeking together, acting together. The team spirit unites personalities, from within, at the level of the wills freely offered. The team is a communion of the wills, cohesion of souls, before being the union of efforts to reach the unity of aim, or the result.

This word “team” belongs to the vocabulary of the sailors: a team would represent the group of men engaged for the service of a boat. All these men would know each other well, knew their chief, their captain, equally well, as they all shared - during the long months of dangerous sea voyages - the same hard work, the same struggles against the same storms, the same risks, the same community of destiny. Each one has his task to fulfill, in the knowledge that, humble as it may be, this task is necessary to the salvation of all. Such is a team ... Together, O Lord!

6. - Mental prayer is an exchange -

Even if you feel nothing, the Lord impresses himself on you. O admirable commercium! O wonderful exchange!

He exchanges your pride against his humility,
your selfishness against his charity,
your weakness against his strength,
your cowardice against his courage,
your nothingness against his fullness ...

He fills your mind with his thoughts,
Your heart with his sentiments,
your will with his energies.

He invades you more deeply still,
to the point when is realized
a real identity of ideas,
of affections and of desires:

“It is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal 2, 20.)

7. - Mental prayer is an elevation of the soul to God -

This classical definition given by St. John Damascene is now widely used. The very word “elevation” shows the work of the soul trying to extract itself from the paltry interests, the futile pursuits of the world, and also trying to use all these worldly values as stepping stones for the ascent to the only reality: the final union to God.

Within this acceptance of the word, mental prayer is a victory of the mind over matter, - and this victory is used solely to bring the soul nearer God.

8. - Mental prayer is the breathing of the soul -

It is possible to go on a “hunger strike” - but not so of breathing. Our organism has an essential need of oxygen to purify the blood intoxicated by the work and the fatigue of the muscles. This is a question of life and death!

Our soul has an equal need of divine oxygen. Mental prayer, while purifying the soul of the toxins of selfishness, re-vita-lises our energy and brings us nearer God. In such a way, in mental prayer, we exhale self-love to breathe in the love of God.

“He knows how to live, who knows how to pray.”

“He who prays saves himself, he who does not pray damns himself.”

(St. Alphonse de Liguori.)

II

What Mental Prayer is **not**

1. - It is not a simple intellectual consideration –

Which does not mean that thought is absent from mental prayer, and even a certain effort of reflexion, maybe on a sentence or a gesture of Our Lord, is at times an excellent starting point for a conversation with the Master.

This work, mostly cerebral, can be called “meditation”, but not mental prayer. For instance, a meditation on the power of God is not a mental prayer, - unless it is at the same time an expression of faith, of hope, and of love.

- My intelligence, scrutinizing the infinitely large as well as the infinitely small, disserts on the infinite power of God:
 - this is a meditation.
- My soul expresses its admiration, its limitless confidence in this infinite power of God:
 - this is a mental prayer.

“The faith? It is when one speaks to God as one does to a man.” (The Curé od Ars.)

2. - It is not a spiritual reading -

A pious book or reading may create a favorable climate for mental prayer. To consecrate a few minutes, or a few moments to spiritual reading is often the best way to avoid distractions, especially when one has just left an absorbing occupation, - but spiritual reading is not mental prayer. There is mental prayer only from the time there exists - through faith - a meeting, not with a human author, but with God Himself.

“Our corporal eye needs light in order to see the things of the earth, and reason - this eye of the soul, - needs the light of divine revelation in order to see the things of God.” (St. Augustine.)

“Do not read good books...there are too many of them, read the best ones.”

“Rapid, devouring readings make performing donkeys.” (Montaigne.)

3. - Mental prayer is not a straining of the mind -

We normally have to play an active part in mental prayer, expressing with certain force our love, our desires, our will of union with God; but we must avoid all untimely excitement, any artificial intensity: we would end in headaches or nervous fatigue.

One must come to mental prayer in a very relaxed, free of worries state of mind, in order to make oneself completely available to the Lord; and if, under the action of the Holy Spirit, there are moments of intense prayer, this intensity must not become a tension, but a

dilatation. We must be very much at our ease, very lovingly ready for the audience of the divine Friend, of the cherished Spouse.

“God, so available to him who knows how to love, hides himself from him who tries to understand.” (Doctor Carrel.)

4. - Mental prayer is not a monologue -

If we have to express our sentiments to the Lord, at least mentally, let's not completely take over the conversation: mental prayer is a dialogue, - we must know how to keep silent in order to be ready to listen and to understand what the Master even though without speaking aloud, - wishes to tell us. One must even, sometimes, remain absolutely wordless.

“To learn how to chat with God...” (Guy de la Rigaudie.)

5. - Mental prayer is not a simple pious exercise -

Mental prayer certainly gives us the opportunity to exercise our piety and our faith towards God; but we must not consider it as spiritual gymnastics session...

Above all, it is a return to the Source, a diving into the divine depths, to fill ourselves with God: rather like the sponge which - if it is not to become dry, and hard, and useless - must be soaked in water. How avidly it absorbs this water, through every pore of its own spongy nature!

6. - Mental prayer is not a community rite -

Obviously one may - if, for instance, one is a religious, - practise one's mental prayer in community, that is in the same place as the rest of the community: in chapel, at the same time as is arranged by the schedule or the Rules, - just as one goes to meals together, in the refectory.

But, in the same way as it is left to each one to feed himself according to his own needs, and at his own rhythm within a certain time, - it is left to each one to practise mental prayer according to his own state of soul and according to the evolution of his own relations to God. One cannot imagine a community in which everybody would drink at the same time, or would take a spoon to their lips all together at a given time... One may suggest a theme for mental prayer, - one cannot impose it.

Mental prayer is different from the liturgical prayer which is, by its own nature, a community exercise: the Psalms are sung on the same tone, according to a common rhythm, - the attitudes and gestures, (signs of the cross, bowings, genuflexions are accomplished together, according to precise and established rubrics. But even if it's mental prayer is practised in common, even if it takes its place - as it ought to do - in the total prayer, which is the community prayer of the Mystical Body, - it still remains that it is a personal act.

7. - Mental prayer is not an evasion from life, or from one's duty of state -

Most certainly, mental prayer is a halt, a hiatus, a time exclusively reserved to an audience with God; but it does not mean that there is on one side, contemplation and on the other, action: **mental prayer's aim is to activate with divine influence the whole of our human life.**

Through continual practise, mental prayer becomes gradually the element of strength in a permanent state - that of prayer - and so assures the growing influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the overtaking of all our activities by Christ, to the glory of the Father and for the benefit of all our brothers.

“Lord, take me all, but give me souls!” (Padre Pie, martyr.)

“The apostle is a chalice, filled to the brim with the life of Jesus Christ: it overflows on the souls.”

8. - Mental prayer is not merely a human work -

Considered under any of its different aspects, mental prayer is essentially a collaboration between human free will and divine generosity, - whether we look at it as a meeting with God, or a dialogue with God, - or as exchanges between the soul and God: It is above all an activity in which the grace of God has more part than we ourselves have.

“Divine grace permeates right down into the inferior components of our nature, penetrates into our heart and our senses, our flesh and our blood, and the whole of our corporal being.” (Ruysbroek.)

9. - Mental prayer is neither a source of consolations nor of spiritual satisfactions -

Most certainly, the Lord is the master of his gifts and may at certain times and when he so **wishes - make us relish his presence, but this is not the usual climate in our wordily condition. Mental prayer belongs to the level of faith, not of sensibility.**

“A fly which, wanting to taste the sweetness of honey, touches it with its wings, cannot fly any longer. So it is for the soul who wants to feast on spiritual consolation it no longer has the freedom to rise up to contemplation.”

(St. John of the Cross.)

“The bell that rings has gone through the fire.” (René Bazin.)

Conclusion -

- Mental prayer: “An intimate commerce of friendship in which one converses alone with God knowing that we are loved by Him, in order to better live in Him.” (St. Teresa of Avila.)
- The saint prays mentally with his experience of God,
- the sinner, with his experience of sin;
- each one with the experience of his own limitations in front of God and of one’s brothers.

(7) Faire Oraison, Pourquoi? G. Courtois - Éditions Fleurus, Paris. PP. 9-14

(8) Faire Oraison, Pourquoi? G. Courtois - Éditions Fleurus, Paris. PP. 14 - 24

WHY PRAY, SINCE GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING?

- “But, in praying, do not multiply the words, as the Gentiles do, for they think that by saying a great deal, they will be heard. So, do not be like them; for your Father Knows what you need before you ask him.” (Matt. 6, 7-8.)

- also cf. Exodus 3, 11-14. Exodus 4, 10-17.

God certainly knows what is suitable for us better than we do ourselves - but we do not realize that. In consequence, it is not to God, but to ourselves that prayer is useful. Because, if God knows everything, as far as we are concerned we have much to learn, especially about the nature and the extent of our needs, and about the richness of our total dependence on God, our only and supreme good. (9)

Hence, prayer makes us: a) discover our limitations,
b) discover the riches of God
(Father and Spouse.)

I

To discover our limitations

A child, an adolescent, has many illusions about his own capacities until he discovers his limitations. Many an adult is still an adolescent, since he has not yet made this discovery. For these the trial is necessary, hard, painful, always brought about by failure:

- failures in our intellectual searches,
- failures in our affections,
- failures in our undertakings,
- one finds difficult to love and to be loved as one would like,
- it is crushing to discover one's ignorance.

This is how any sincere and attentive man can experience his poverty as a creature.

Some flee from this experience, refuse their real condition, escape from it, towards illusion, dreams, mirages. Let's think of all the intoxications of man's life: escape through the flesh, or money, art, sport, music, travels, noise, as so many screens, as so many masks...

Others discover their needs and turn towards God: they pray. The animal does not pray. Man is the only being who turns to God to receive from Him what he lacks. This is how prayer appears as God's pedagogy:

His way of teaching man.

Examples of this divine pedagogy:

1. God instructed Agar in this way:

“Sara saw the son of Agar the Egyptian, whom she bore to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. She said to Abraham: “Cast out this slave-girl with her son; for the son of the slave-girl shall not be heir with my son Isaac. “The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, ‘Be not distressed on account of the boy and your slave-girl; heed all that Sara says to you; for through Isaac shall your descendants be called. But I will also make the son of the slave-girl a great nation because he is your offspring.’

“Abraham rose early in the morning, took bread and a bottle of water, and gave them to Agar, placing them on her shoulder. Then he dismissed her with the child. She departed and wandered about in the desert of Bersabee. When the water in the bottle was gone, she left the child under a bush. Then she went and sat, opposite the spot at about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not see the child die.”

“As she sat opposite the place, the child cried aloud. God heard the boy’s cry, and the Angel of God called to Agar from Heaven, and said to her, ‘What is the matter, Agar? Fear not: for God has heard the boy’s cry in this plight of his. Rise up, take the boy, be assured in his regard; for God will make him a great nation.’

“Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went and filled the bottle with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an expert bowman.” (Genesis 21, 9-21.)

2. In this way, too, God instructed his people:

“...But in the land of their exile they shall have a change of heart: they shall know that I, the Lord, am their God. I will give them hearts, and heedful ears; and they shall praise me in the land of their captivity, and shall invoke my name.” (Baruch 1, 30-33.)

3. In this way again, God instructed the prodigal son:

“But when he came to himself, he said: ‘How many hired men in my father’s house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing with hunger? I will get up and go to my father and I will say: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me as one of your hired men.’ And he arose and went to his father.” (Luke 15, 17-20.)

4. In this same way also has God willed to instruct Saül and David:

of. : Saül - I Sam XIII, 9-14;
 XIV, 36-46;
 XVIII, 8-12;
 " 20-29;
 XXVIII, 7-15;

David - II Sam VI, 17-29;
 XII, 13-23;
 XV, 23-26;
 XVIII, 1-19.

Both of them give in to weakness, but for the one – Saül - it will be but a new opportunity for pride, self-sufficiency: after breaking up relations with God, his only thought is to arrange a ‘come back’ into His favor, to buy this favor at any price, including magic.

As for the other, David, his fall is an occasion of truly discovering God: far from him the thought of trying to ingratiate himself with his divine Master through his own calculations, of trying to ensure his own salvation alone, but he finds that it is through his need of God that he becomes attached to Him.

When God leads to complete destitution, is not it always for an increase of love? Is not this the meaning of “exile”? What - then - are the features of this exile, of this total deprivation, in our lives? Do we know how to recognize - through their paradoxical and negative aspect - the invitations given to us to acknowledge God’s presence?

II

Discovering God’s riches -

Agar, having been sent away to the desert with her son, bewails and prays: “Let me not see my child die.” God’s Angel appears and comforts her: “What is the matter? Do not fear, because God has heard the child’s cry from where He is. Get up, take the child with you, for I shall make a great nation of him.” (Gen. 21, 16-17.)

“Our Father who is in heaven knows what you need better than you do yourselves.”

God did hear the child’s voice: but Agar had first to be taken into the desert and, through destitution and thirst, discover experimentally that God sees everything.

“Close the door and your Father who sees in the secret places...”

God sees everything: we know this in an abstract manner, but we have to discover it in practice. Prayer leads us to this discovery: prayer reveals to our heart the wonderful transformation of poverty which - from want - becomes dependence towards somebody who loves us and whom we gradually learn to know and to love: GOD.

• Love needs the need of the other -

Our life with God follows the same pattern as any other life based on love: it cannot survive unless each partner accepts the need of the other:

- Because of our original poverty, we need God.
- In spite of his infinite wealth, God has willed to need us.

Love has no rest until it has reached its goal: to share everything in order to realize the unity to which it tends: "...that all may be one, even as you, Father, in me and I in you; that they also may be one in us." (Jo 17, 20-21.) And to achieve this, love demands reciprocity, the need of the other, and the shared conscience of this need.

We know full well how, should this reciprocity be denied, nostalgia, separation, misery, set in; and, on the contrary, how the beatitude attached to love comes from the willing acceptance of our need of the other, so that one can share everything. God wants to need our need of Him.

- Our poverty becomes our riches -

This crushing poverty, through our prayer becomes our treasure, the means for us to secure God's heart. To refuse the knowledge of our poverty is to ignore God, - it is to refuse to give Him the part of God towards us - God is only God if we accept to need Him.

"What have you that you have not received? and if you have received it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Cor 4, 7.)

Thus our poverty becomes our treasure on the condition that every day we are aware of it ... and it is every day that we must be faithful to Mental Prayer.

- God wants to converse with us –

Through his divine pedagogy, God wills gradually to teach us our true poverty. Little by little He brings us to face Him in all confidences, as beings who know that they cannot do without Him.

God knows our needs, he does not require us to mention them to Him with insistence, to turn them into an importune worry, but He wants us to realize their supreme value and the fact that they are for us the occasion of an interview with Him - as would normally happen between a son and his father: this is mental prayer.

- God keeps us waiting –

It will happen that God will delay complying with our requests because He has pleasure in listening to us:

"If God postpones the answer, it is only to detain us longer near Him, as do the fathers who love their children. - 'I am unworthy...' - Your perseverance will make you worthy. Often God keeps us waiting in order to be more generous."

(St. John Chrysostome.)

“You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free...” (Jo 8, 32.)

that is, you will know the truth about your limitations and about God’s infinite riches.

Conclusion:

O God - who are Beatitude, author of all happiness,

You - whom no one will lose, even if one is mistaken,
whom no one will seek without being called,
whom no one will find unless one first be purified,

You, whose rejection spells out death,
whose search means love,
whose sight is complete possession,

You, through whom we triumph over the enemy -
it is You that I pray.

O God – to whom we owe our survival,

You – who warn us to keep watch,
You – thanks to whom small things do not diminish us,
You – thanks to whom the best in us is not enslaved by what is worst in us,
You – thanks to whom death “is absorbed in its victory,”
You – who turn us towards you,
You – who strip us of what is not, to clothe us with what is,
You – who make us worthy of being heard,
You – who strengthen us,
You – who introduce us to all truth,
You – who tell us all that is good,
You who call us back to the right path,
You lead us to the door,
You who cause it to open to those who knock,
You – who give us the Bread of Life,
You – thanks to whom we thirst for this water which, after we have drank of it,
quenches our thirst for ever,
You – who purify us and prepare us for the divine rewards,

Kindly hear me, O my God!

(St. Augustine)

(9) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro, Equipes enseignantes, Paris, pp. 6-9

WHY PRAY, SINCE GOD DOES NOT CHANGE?

- "...If there be fifty just men in the city, will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the sake of the fifty just men within it? ...What if there be five less than fifty just men? Will you destroy the city on account of five? O Lord, do not be angry if I speak ...What if thirty be found there?..." (Gen. 18, 19-31.)
- "The Lord poured down on Sodom and Gomorrah sulphur and fire from the Lord out of heaven... He overthrew those cities and the whole region, all the inhabitants of the cities and the plants of the soil..." (Gen. 19, 24-25.)
- "While God destroyed the cities of the region, he remembered Abraham, and led Lot away from the catastrophe, when the cities where Lot lived were overthrown." (Gen. 19, 29.)

This God who does not change wants us, however, to pray:

"Watch and pray..." (Matt. 26, 41.)

"Pray without ceasing..." (I Thess. 5, 17.)

because: (10)

1. To pray is to enter into the Plan of God.
2. To pray is to collaborate with God.

I

To pray is to enter into the Plan of God.

God does not change. And we - like Abraham - come face to face with this very immutability, and one day we discover what Abraham did experience: that God no longer would be Himself were he to change His mind, and that a God subject to human hesitations would no longer be He whom we are expecting:

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of Lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow or alteration."

(James 1, 17-18.)

But why, then, do we beseech Him to intervene? What is the good of telling him again and again of our wretchedness if He to whom we cry out is never to alter his will?

Yet, God, "...while he destroyed the cities of the region... He remembered Abraham, and led Lot away from the catastrophe." (Gen 19, 29.) God saves Lot and his sons, but if he does this, it is because of Abraham, as an answer to his prayer.

God is immutable in his designs, but in his designs intervenes his children's prayer.

Aim of prayer –

- The aim of prayer is not to change the order God established, but rather to obtain what God has decided to accomplish by the means of our prayer.
- God has willed that the realization of certain things should be dependent on our prayer.
- It has pleased God that, in his designs, the prayers of those he loves should intervene. For instance, because of Abraham, Lot will be spared, and Ninive will be saved through the penance of her sons. (Jonah 3, 1-10.)

Example:

Those who pray are like the men who are in a boat and who haul this boat by pulling old the ropes fixed to a point of the shore... This point, rock or strong post, - does not move, but the men pull the bark forward by their action on the ropes. They do not cause the quay, or the rock, to change place.

In the same way, he who prays does not cause God to change. To pray is to pull towards God the boat of the Church - and it is ourselves, and not God, - it is our will, our plans, which gradually get nearer their shore, - they veer towards God.

The supreme prayer we shall say will be - like Jesus – “Your will be done...” - not: ‘May it change...’, but ‘May it be done, may it be manifested’ so that we may conform ours to it and want, more and more faithfully, what God wants.

II

To pray is to collaborate with God

God does not change, but prayer is the means by which He shares his Plan with us. When St. Paul wishes to determine the place waiting for us, he puts it in one word: “For we are God’s helpers.” (I Cor 3, 9)

This is manifest in the instance of Abraham: when on the verge of the punishment, God asks himself, as if he feared to reveal his inner thoughts: “Can I keep from Abraham what I am about to do?” (Gen 18, 17.)

To Moses who beseeches him after his people had made the Golden Calf, God - as if to free himself - will say: “Let me alone...that my wrath may blaze up against them...” (Ex. 32, 10.)

In both cases, it is God who has taken the initiative to bring Abraham and Moses into his own counsel because God loves them and makes them his associates.

Testimony of the Saints –

All the Saints have said this in their own way: for instance, St. Teresa of Lisieux:

“Why does Jesus say: ‘Ask the Master of the harvest that he sends laborers, ‘Is not Jesus almighty?’ Oh! It is because Jesus has for us such an unscrutinable love that he wants us to have a share with him in the salvation of souls: he does not want to do anything without us. The Creator of the world waits for the prayer of a poor little soul to save other souls, also redeemed with the whole of his Blood. These are the words of Jesus: ‘Lift up your eyes and see...’ see how many empty places there are in my heaven: it is for you to fill them up. You are my Moses praying on the mountain. Ask me for laborers, I shall send them; I am only waiting for a prayer, a sigh from your heart. If those were not the very words of Jesus, who would dare to believe them?” (Letters of Teresa.)

Supreme divine thoughtfulness –

God knows everything, God does not change. Through prayer, we are placed face to face with the almighty thoughtfulness of a God who has willed to answer his friends:

“Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hearken to them.”
(Is. 65, 24.)

But what is praying?

If we consider the great prayers shown to us in the Bible (Abraham - Moses - Jesus), we may say that prayer appears to be:

- as the meeting of two desires - of man’s desire with God’s desire, or rather as the assumption of man’s desire into God’s. These two desires are sustained by mutual love.
- Prayer is a meeting that takes place inside a love of friendship - (mutual complacency, mutual desire for union, mutual beneficence,) but a friendship of which God is the initiator.
- Through this meeting is worked out the adjustment, the subordination of man’s plans, of his desires, to those of God:

“...not my will, but thine be done...” (Luke 22, 43.)

“...Be it done to me according to thy word.” (Luke 1, 38.)

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

This is the most perfect expression of prayer and of love.

Let us pray like Moses:

“But Moses implored the Lord, his God, saying: ‘Why, O Lord, should your wrath

blaze up against your own people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with such great power and with so strong a hand? ...Let your blazing wrath die down; relent in punishing your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all the land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage.' So the Lord relented in the punishment he had threatened to inflict on his people.”
(Ex. 32, 11-14.)

“As Moses entered the Tent, the column of cloud would come down and stand at its entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses. ...The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one man speaks to another...”
(Ex. 33, 9-11.)

“The Lord said to Moses: ‘This request, too, which you have just made, I will carry out, because you have found favor with me and you are my intimate friend.’”
(Ex. 33, 17.)

Let us pray like David:

(The whole story of David, from after his sin to the death of Absalom.)

“...and David besought the Lord for the child: and David kept a fast, and - going in by himself - lay upon the ground...and he said, ‘When the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept for him. For I said, ‘Who knoweth whether the Lord may not give him to me, and the child may live? But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Shall I be able to bring him back any more...?’”
(II Sam 12, 16, 22.)

Let us pray like Judith:

“For thy power, O Lord, is not in a multitude, nor is thy pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to thee: but the prayer of the humble and the meek have always pleased thee.
O Lord of the heavens, creator of the waters and God of the whole creation: hear me, a poor wretch, making supplication to thee, and presuming of thy mercy...”
(Judith 9, 16-17.)

CONCLUSION:

“The blind man, if he is not completely blind, does not let himself be led by his guide;

But, even should he sees a little only, he thinks that the first path is the best one, simply because he does not see a better one.

And in this way, he may lead astray the man who guides him and who sees better than he does; but the blind man may give orders rather than his guide.

So it is with the soul: if we rely on our knowledge, on our way to appreciate or to feel God - as all these things, and many more, are minute and most unlike what God is really,-

we shall easily lose our way, or come to a stop, for want of being completely blind - that is, completely deprived of faith - which is our true guide.” (St. John of the Cross.)

“When God erases, it is because he is going to write something.” (Bossuet.)

(10) Apprendre a prier, B. Bro, Equipes enseignantes, Paris, PP. 10-13

WHY MUST WE PRAY?

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. Or, what man is there among you who, if his son asks him for a loaf, will hand him a stone? Or, if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent? Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?” (Matt. 7, 7-11.)

Why has the Holy Spirit insisted so much on the necessity of prayer? Because: (II)

1- God wills it: He has a right to our prayer.

- Prayer is an appointment with him.
- It is the condition he has put to His giving Himself to us.

2- We need it: • To live a deep and ardent interior life.

- To have a serious and fruitful apostolate.

- I -

God wants us to pray

A. He has a right to our prayer

Mental prayer is essentially God's own part in our day, - part which will make all the rest of the day fruitful. In the Old Testament, how many times does God mention this same idea...?

“All that you are and all that you have come from Me, including this freedom which is your greatness and your merit. You cannot repay me exactly for all I have done for you, but I leave you a wide margin of initiative. Take advantage of it to offer me in homage all I have given you: for instances, reserve for me the first fruits of all your crops; offer in sacrifice to me the first-born among your lambs. Pour out as a free libation the first cup of the new wine when you gather the grapes. Consecrate to me one day out of each seven and at least a few minutes each day. It is especially the disposition of the heart that I consider, more than the intrinsic value of the gift. Besides, what you will so consecrate to me will not be lost so believe me, I will never be outdone in generosity.”

B. Prayer is an appointment with Him:

“The Master is, here and calls thee...” said Martha to Mary shortly before the resurrection of Lazarus.

God is constantly waiting for us. Whenever we go to God, we are always expected, -

but more actually so at the time set for mental prayer: then, in absolute truth, God gives us a rendez-vous.

Nothing is more distressing to a loving heart than to realize that the loved one has not come at the appointed time to the appointed place...and if there is no reason to justify this absence, what an insult!...

C. It is the condition He puts to giving Himself to us:

- In his eyes, you are priceless: he made you great, in his own image.
- At the same time - and as if to reduce the contrast between Him and you - he has minimized the splendor of his own majesty: he made himself a child, he became man.
- He made you capable of loving him, in spite of the distance that separates you from him his desire is that you should accept to live in his intimacy.
- This will demand of you some attention, - some silence, - some time spent in “tête à tête” with him (mental prayer.)

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man listens to my voice and opens the door for me, I will come in to him and I will sup with him, and he with me.” (Apoc. 3, 20.)

- II -

We need Prayer

A. To live a deep and ardent interior life:

The greatest victory of the devil on us will always be to lessen in our eyes the value of mental prayer, even to the point of doing away with it in our life. This is why we should set our convictions regarding the necessity of mental prayer very firmly on indisputable motives:

1° - Mental prayer purifies us:

- Frees us from the dictatorship of the “selfish ego” by purifying our motivations for action;
- Makes sin repulsive to us;
- makes use of the most distressing and persistent temptations to bring us closer to God; either we shall stop to sin, or we shall stop to pray;
- makes us discover our limitations and how necessary is purifying suffering.

2° - Mental prayer exercises the theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, - faculties that allow us to converse with God.

a) - Faith - Mental prayer, contact with God, Truth.

- helps us to go beyond appearances, to refrain from being caught up by the immediate;
- allows us to distinguish more easily between essential and accessory;
- makes us see people, things, events, in depth instead of letting ourselves be taken in by the exterior and superficial: gives us God's perspectives;
- shows us that "all is grace and can be used..." - humiliations, deceptions, failures, suffering of all kinds - and so the soul, instead of being embittered by the struggles which life imposes on us, - remains all the calmer, more serene and more balanced.

b) - Hope - Thanks to mental prayer, the soul takes conscience of God's power: "It is when I am weak that I am strong..."

- a great desire to grow in God is developed;
- a great trust in God feeds our enthusiasm;
- a great abandon to Providence guarantees the joy in life.

c) - Charity - In this "tête à tête" with God, one feels what the disciples of Emmaus did feel:

"Was not our heart burning within us while He was speaking on the road?" (Luke 24, 32.)

even if the contact does not seem to have produced any conscious results, you have grown in Charity.

3° - Mental prayer feeds on interior life -

"He who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit." (Jo 15, 5.)

"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me." (Jo 15, 4.)

- Interior life = true fruitfulness.
- your interior life depends to a great extent on your mental prayer;
- without regular mental prayer, interior life vanishes; it is but illusion;
- if you do not make an effort during the day to unite yourself to God from time to time, you will have more difficulty in starting mental prayer: it should be but a special moment of a permanent state;
- the more the "evaporation" is likely to be great, - because of our multiple activities; - the more the concentration must be intense and frequent.

4° - Mental prayer confers upon us a real power over God -

“And whatever you ask in my name, (i.e. whenever you allow Me to pray to my Father through you, or by using you...) that, I will do.” (Jo 14, 13.)

In mental prayer we allow God to pray to Himself through us.

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” (Ps. 126, 1.)

that is: - If it is not the Lord who speaks through your lips, your words are but wind.

- If it is not the Lord who gives Himself away through your good works, your activity on the supernatural plane is bound to be sterile.

“He who does not gather with Me, scatters.” (Luke 11, 23.)

“Without Me, you can do nothing.” (Jo 15, 5.)

- Jesus alone transforms, transfigures.
- Jesus alone attracts, cures, raises up...

- III -

We need prayer to live an apostolic life

1° - A soul imbued with mental prayer attracts others to Christ -

- All souls are seeking God, and often the only book in which they can contact Him is your life, that is like a popular edition of the Gospel. How can one imitate Christ without knowing Him, and how can we know Him without mental prayer?
“Bonus odor Christi sumus.”
- A soul steeped in mental prayer attracts in a gentle, meek, but irresistible manner, - a manner that is never the result of learned apologetical or theological discussions.

2° - The experience gained in mental prayer helps in the spiritual direction of souls.

- Mental prayer is not a science one can learn from books. Rather it is an art which one learns to practice under the guidance of an experienced master. It is like swimming the younger one starts, the easier it is, but one can learn it at any ages what is necessary is a Master swimmer.
- Is there any better service one can render somebody one loves than to teach him to dialogue with God? ...to start now what one will do during the whole of eternity?

- Is there, either, a better service to render the world of to-day?

“Science without conscience is but ruin of the soul; science without love and without faith is but ruin of humanity.”

“Put a country in a state of prayer and you will make it a Christian land.”

3° - Like Moses...

“At Raphidim, Amalec came and waged war against Israël. Moses, therefore, said to Josue, ‘Pick out certain men, and to-morrow go out and engage Amalec in battle. I will be standing on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.’ So Josue did as Moses had told him: he engaged Amalec in battle after Moses had climbed to the top of the hill with Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses kept his hands raised up, Israël had the better of the fight, but when he left his hands rest, Amalec had the better of the fight.

Moses’ hands, however, grew tired; so they put a rock in place for him to sit on; meanwhile Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other, so that his hands remained steady till sunset. And Josue mowed down Amalec and his people with the edge of the sword.” (Exodus 17, 8-13.)

4° - Advice from St. John of the Cross:

Necessity of prayer for true apostolate:

“Those who are given to intense activity and imagine that they can convert the world by their preaching and exterior works would do well to reflect on the following: They would be much more useful to the Church and pleasing to God, not to speak of the good example they would give, if they devoted to prayer but half the time they spend otherwise. They would accomplish more with one work than they do now with a thousand, and that with less labor, since their prayer would provide them with grace and spiritual strength. To act otherwise is to strike the hammer on the anvil, to do little more than nothing, - at times absolutely nothing, at other times even to do harm.

Superficially, activity gives the impression of producing something, but in reality it will have no substantial effects, so true it is that nothing can be accomplished save by the power of God.” (Spiritual Canticle, st. 28.)

Conclusion -

“I say it again: let none of those who have started to make orison ever get discouraged, saying:

‘If I still fall into sin, it is worse for me to continue mental prayer...’”

“And I personally think that the worst is to abandon mental prayer and neglect to correct one’s failings. But if you do not abandon it, believe me, it will lead you to the haven of light. ...Although one goes forward in small steps, falling down, picking

oneself up... When one does not cease walking and going forward one arrives, even if it be late, at the goal. In my opinion, to lose one's way is nothing else but to leave off mental prayer."

(11) Faire Oraison, Pourquoi? G. Courtois - PP. (29-50 Teresa of Avila.)

I - WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING OUR POVERTY

“He spoke this parable also to some who trusted in themselves as being just and despised others.

Two men went up to the Temple to pray: the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and began to pray thus within himself: ‘O God, I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men, robbers, dishonest, adulterers, or even like this publican. I fast twice a week, I pay tithes of all that I possess.

But the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but kept striking his breast saying: ‘O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

I tell you this man went back to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

(Luke 18, 9-14.)

One of the first difficulties in our prayer is to know whether we must attach importance to formulas: whether we must, at the very moment we are praying, be attentive and specify what we must say, - or else whether the essential is not, above the, formulas and the demands, the attitude we must take.

Jesus answers through this parable, by showing us that the essential in our prayer is to teach us how to present ourselves in front of GOD acknowledging our poverty. (12)

I

WHY?

St. John of the Cross gives in detail the reasons why we should give priority to our attitude over the formulas:

“It is better for him who loves to show his necessity to his friend rather than to ask him to fulfill it, - and this for three reasons:

- 1° - because the Lord knows better than we do ourselves what is suitable for us;
- 2° - because a friend has more compassion when he sees the dire need of him who loves him, and so is more moved to helping;
- 3° - because we are less in danger to give in to self-esteem and illusion when representing our deficiencies than when we request what we think we need.”

Following the example of:

- Mary : “What does the Virgin say at Cana? Not: ‘Could you give them some wine!? But “...they have no wine.” (Jo. 2, 3.)
- Lazarus’ sister : “Lord, behold, he whom you love is sick.” (Jo. 11, 3.)
- The Centurion of Capharnaum : “Lord, my servant is lying sick in the house, paralyzed, and is grievously afflicted.” (Matt. 8, 6.)
- The Canaanite woman : “O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is sorely beset by a devil...” (Matt. 15, 22.)
- Samuel’s mother : “I am an exceeding unhappy woman...” (I Sam 1, 15.)
- Moses : It is not through prodigies that he obtains his people’s deliverance, nor through his self-assurance, nor through his eloquence in front of Pharaoh. On the contrary, all these human means have but one result: Pharaoh gets more hardened, and each time refuses to let the Hebrews go.” (ex. Ch. 8 to 10.)
- It is in his weakness, when he is discouraged, that Moses sends up his true prayer: “...Who am I?...”
(Ex. 3, 11.) (Ex. 4, 10.) (Ex. 5, 23.)
 - He will pour out his heart in front of God, allowing his lassitude to speak for him, under the burden – too heavy for him alone, - of the people entrusted to him:
“I cannot carry all these people by myself, for they are too heavy for me. If this is the way you want to deal with me, then please do me the favor of killing me at once...” (Numbers 11, 14.)
 - Moses shows to God how impossible and tiring is the mission he has been given, for a man such as he, - exposed to the sarcasm and the anger of Pharaoh as well as to the incredulity and murmuring of the people. He is afraid: but because of this fear, and because of his weakness, he learns how to speak to God.
- Elias : “and he went forward, one day’s journey into the desert. And when he was there and sat under a juniper tree, he requested for his soul that he might die, and said: ‘It is enough for me, Lord, take away my soul, for I am no better than my fathers.’ And he cast himself down, and slept in the shadow of the juniper tree. And behold, an Angel of the Lord touched him and said to him: “Arise and eat...” (3 Kings 19, 4-5.)
- Jeremy : - When God call him: “Ah! Lord”, I said, “I know not how to speak: I am too young...” (Jeremy 1, 6.)
- Great lassitude at the time of his mission: “You duped me, O Lord, ...and I let myself be duped...” (Jer. 20, 7.)

Jesus at Gethsemani : “My soul is sad even unto death: wait here and watch with me.”
(Matt. 26, 38.)

It is then that God intervenes, when there can be no mistake about he who, alone, can bring help...

To Moses : “I will be with you,” says God. (Ex. 3, 12.)

To Jeremia : “I am with you,” says God. (Jer. 1, 8.)

To Mary : “The Lord is with you,” said the Angel. (Luke 1, 28.)

To Jesus : “...and there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him.” (Luke 22, 43.)

II

2. HOW?

- Like the publican!! Cf. Luke 18, 13-14

1° - To refuse one's poverty is not praying –

In certain people, the discovery of their wretchedness provokes an attitude of dissatisfaction – which is not prayer...

Examples:

- the murmuring of the Hebrews – who reproach God, in the person of Moses, to have brought them to this extremity:

“Why have taken us out of Egypt? Were there no sepulchers in Egypt? Why have brought us to the desert?” (Numbers 14, 2-4)

- The Jews in front of Jesus -

“The Jews therefore murmured about him because He had said: ‘I am the bread that has come down from heaven.’ And they kept saying: ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How then does he say: ‘I have come down from heaven.’ (Jo 6, 41-43.)

- the disciples of Jesus -

“Many of his disciples, therefore, when they heard this said: ‘This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?’ (Jo 6, 61.)

2° - To accept one's poverty is praying -

to accept to depend on another is to stop affirming one's self-sufficiency;

- is to be converted;
- is to discover one of the great secrets of our existence;
- is to discover the source of peace and of joy in love: GOD.

- To accept, and even to want one's poverty -

is not to rejoice over a deficiency, but to rejoice that it is the occasion of dependence on another, God. It is the whole meaning of the word "to believe" in the Bible: "to let oneself be carried by another." Otherwise, if the evangelical poverty is only a deficiency, the absence of what we need, should we not - and rightly, flee from it?

- like men who are waiting -

"Take heed, watch and pray, for you do not know when the time is... Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, - in the evening, or at midnight, or at cock-crow, or early in the morning; lest suddenly he finds you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all Watch."
(Mark 13, 33-37.)

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overburdened with self-indulgence and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that day come over you suddenly as a snare. For come it will upon all who dwell on the face of the earth. Watch, then, praying at all times, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that are to be, and to stand before the Son of Man."
(Luke 21, 34-36.)

God seems, in each case, to lead those who love Him to prefer Him to all else. Our prayer is only true if, through it, we choose God anew, - if it is the testimony that we prefer him to the many "idols" around us, (money, human relations, efficiency, diplomacy, etc...) Then, and only then, is our prayer truly the answer to the call of a God who has loved us.

Conclusion -

If prayer does not necessarily involve formulas, it does not exclude them either. In fact, prayer always implies some, were it only an outline. At the limit, prayer will consist only in a cry of the heart, a simple regard towards God.

But this, however, must not be for us an encouragement to laziness. On the contrary, in many cases, and in a disinterested way, we should take care to present to God specific requests: for instance, when the Church is in question: that she may, live according to the Beatitudes - that she may not attach too much importance to temporal results - that she may keep up the courage of praying, etc...

Thus, prayer is something very simple. We have no right to say that our conversation

with God is difficult, complicated. Our first preoccupation must not be to look for formulas, - not even to know what it would be suitable to obtain, - but to learn how to speak to God with our weakness. There, is the first secret of prayer.

See the great charter of poverty, such as St. Paul expresses it: II Core 11, 16 to 12, 10.
– and especially:

- “I will glory in nothing but my infirmities.” (II Cor 12, 5.)
- “...and he has said to me: ‘my grace is sufficient for you, for strength is made perfect in weakness... Gladly therefore I will glory in my infirmities that the strength of Christ may dwell in me.’” (II Cor.12, 9-10.)

(12) Apprendre à prier - B. Bro, Équipes enseignantes, P.P. 16-19

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

“A certain man gave a great supper, and he invited many and he sent his servant at supper time to tell those invited to come, for everything is now ready. And they all with one accord began to excuse themselves. The first said to him ‘I have bought a farm and I must go out and see it: I pray thee, hold me excused.’ And another said: ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am now on my way to try them: I pray thee, hold me excused.’ And another said: ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’

“And the servant returned, and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house was angry and said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the crippled, and the blind and the lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, thy order has been carried out, and still there is room.’ Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and make them come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you that none of those who were invited shall taste of my supper.’ (Luke 14, 16-24.)

This parable of the great Supper to which so many were invited shows we God seeking souls, seeking those he could invite and with whom he could start a dialogue, a friendship. It also shows us that Jesus has foreseen the reasons put forward to refuse the invitation:

“They all with one accord began to excuse themselves:

the first said to him: I have bought a farm;
 another: I have bought five yoke of oxen;
 another: I have married a wife...

These reasons fall into two categories: the care of the family and work.

Then, if family and work are sufficient motives to decline God’s call to prayer, - who will be able to pray?

If prayer is reserved to those who have neither family nor work, who is concerned with it?

And can we pretend that the objection “I have no time,” is really valid? (13)

I

Apparent motives

The parable brings home to us the conclusion that all are called and that we have no right to argue that lassitude or work are obstacles to a life of prayer.

The fact remains, nevertheless, that the effort necessary to pray is difficult for us. But this difficulty is normal: we cannot “feel” - as we would humanly wish to do - God’s mystery, otherwise he would no longer be God.

And the best witnesses of such a difficulty are the Apostles themselves: after several years of common life with Christ, they were not yet capable of spending one hour of prayer with Him, as - for instance - at the time of the Agony. (Matt. 14, 37.)

II

Real motives

The great temptation will be lassitude, and we shall put up the best excuses on its account.

Our Lord insists specially on this point: out of three parables on prayer, two are very strongly-worded teaching on this subject. It seems that, in Christ's mind, the main threat to our prayer is discouragement, lassitude. This is why Jesus exalts the virtue of perseverance in:

- the parable of the importune friend (Luke 11, 5-13.)
- the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18, 1-8.)

In each of them Jesus uses contrast: if we admit that a human judge, cynical and selfish as he is, is capable of rewarding the perseverance, the persistence of somebody who is nothing to him, how could we doubt that God, infinitely good, will reward his children's persistence?

Likewise, in the parable of the importune friend, the grumpy sleeper is not, at any time, an image of God. But if we admit that selfishness yields to importunity, how much more so God's goodness "who will not give a stone, a serpent or a scorpion when he is asked for bread, for fish or for an egg."

To pray at all times -

Let us note the strong terms Our Lord has chosen: three of them are particularly meaningful:

- Luke 18, 1: He told them a parable - that they must always pray (at all times) and not lose heart.
- Luke 18, 5: "because this widow bothers me I will do her justice, lest by her continual coming she finally wear me out."
- Luke 18, 7: "...and will not God avenge his elect, who cry to him day and night?"

The parable is formal: day and night we must be in front of God, like people decided to "wear him out" until his Kingdom come, and this continually, that is all the time, at all times.

The poor man - if he be really poor - does not rest until he has obtained what he needs. If the first law of prayer consists in recognizing our dependence, our need of God, and this need be real, it is normal that the second law should be to expose "without ceasing" this need of ours until it has been satisfied, that is until the Kingdom of God has

arrived.

III

A question: Is not it better to pray little and well rather than to pray a lot?

Answer: Let's distinguish...:

- 1° - Have we got a right to pray only "a little"?
- 2° - Do we know when we pray well?

1° - Have we got a right to pray only "a little"?

- It is against the massive testimony of the Young Church in the Acts of the Apostles:

- "They continued steadfastly in prayer with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren." (Acts 1, 14.)
- "...but prayer was being made to God for him (Peter) by the Church without ceasing." (Acts 12, 5.)
- "...and praying continually..." (Acts 10, 2.)
- "... at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying ..." (Acts 16, 25.)

These texts are law for the whole history of the Church.

- It is against the teaching of Jesus:

- Parable of the importune friend:

"...yet, because of his persistence, he will get up and give him all he needs... And I say to you, 'Ask and it shall be given you...'"
"...how much more will your heavenly Father give the Good Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11, 8, 13.)

- Parable of the unjust judge:

"...and will not God avenge his elect who cry to him day and night?" (Luke 18, 1-8.)

- It is against the teaching of Peter and Paul:

- "Be patient in tribulation, persevering in prayer..." (Rom. 12, 12.)
- "Have no anxiety but in every prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your petition be made known to God." (Phil. 4, 6.)
- "singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to God the Father." (Eph, 5, 20.)
- "Be assiduous in prayer, being wakeful there with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us..." (Col. 4, 2.)

- “The Lord does not delay in his promises, but for your sake is long-suffering, not wishing that any should perish but that all should turn to repentance...”
(II Pet. 3, 9.)

- Against the testimony of those to whom God has revealed Himself:

Anna, a prophetess: “...she never left the Temple, with fasting and prayers worshipping night and day.” (Luke 2, 37.)

- Against God’s practice:

Terrible reaction of God when the children of Israel forget him, while He is waiting for them:

“...but when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a savior...”
(Judges 3, 7-9.)

- Against the testimony of the Prophets:

(Praise of those who remind us of God:)

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation and saying to Sion, ‘Your God is King...’” (Is. 52, 6-7.)

- Extraordinary parable of the watchman and the fate the Scripture reserves for him if he allows himself to go to sleep...:

“You, Son of Man, I have appointed watchman for the House of Israel: when you hear me say anything, you shall warn them for me.

“I will judge every one of you according to his ways...”
(Ezech. 33, 1-20.)

- Against the example of Our Lord:

“I am not alone, because the Father is with me...” (Jo 16, 32.)

“...and he continued all night in prayer to God.” (Luke 6, 12.)

2° - Do we know when we pray well?

- You are they who declare yourselves just in the sight of men...”
(You think you pray well...) (Luke 16, 15.)

- See the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18, 9-14.)
(the publican prayed well, but did not know it.)

Quantity, or quality; which one of these two must prevail in our prayer?

God, in the Scripture, answers: we must not measure the time of our prayer: God

expects everything. God, on his side, is always waiting for us: for Him there is no stopping.

On the other hand, we are never sure of the quality of our prayer.

- “Not everyone who says to me: ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven shall enter the kingdom of, heaven.”

(Matt. 7, 21.)

- “By their fruits you will know them.” (Matt. 7, 16.)

In fact, it is not beautiful thoughts or beautiful sentiments that make up the criterion of true mental prayer, but usually its influence on our daily life.

Often it will happen that you have distractions, that you have spent your time forcing your thought to come back near the Lord, , and in spite of this - that you have done your utmost to unite yourself the prayer of the Holy Spirit in you. Maybe you even have had the impression of having lost precious time. Then, later on in the day, you found you were spontaneously praying, without having wanted to, or tried to do so. What does it mean, but that you have been seeking God with a sincere heart, - and that you have found Him.

Be quite assured that your mental prayer is blessed. Here are three touchstones that will help you to check whether you are on the right path. Your mental prayer is the one the Lord wants for you if it produces good fruits, i.e.:

1° - if during the day the thought of God becomes more and more spontaneous;

2° - if your daily duties are done with a little more love;

3° - if you become more generous when faced with providential opportunities to make a sacrifice or an act of charity.

Conclusion:

“Kindly consider that the Lord calls everybody to mental prayer... If his banquet was not for all, he would not call every one of us... But - I say it again - he puts no restriction. Indeed, he calls us all.”

(St. Teresa of Avila.)

(13) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro – Équipes enseignantes, Paris pp. 20-22

TAKE TIME TO PRAY

“And she (Martha) had a sister called Mary, who also seated herself at the Lord’s feet, and listened to His word...” (Luke 10, 39.)

“Then he came and found them sleeping. And he (Jesus) said to Peter, ‘Simon, do you sleep?’ ‘Could you not watch an hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.” (Mark 14, 37-38.)

Mary took time to pray, and the Lord approved her. The apostles did not obey the Master when he asked them to pray. They went to sleep, - and they fell. As for ourselves, we say that we have more to do than we can manage, and we complain that we never have time to pray. And, though

- 1° - we must pray continually;
- 2° - we must have a special time for prayer.

I

We must pray continually

“To pray continually” would be impossibility if prayer was merely for us an intellectual meditation.

Likewise if prayer was a physical act, we could not, at the same time, pray and be manually occupied;

- if prayer resided in sensibility, any preoccupation such as illness, emotion, would make it impossible and it would be influenced by all changes of mood...
- if it were solely in intelligence, we would only pray when we are delving in theology;
- but, in fact, prayer comes from the depths of our being: our “heart” (let us say ‘our will), will always and in any circumstance be able to speak to God; even when our hands are busy, our sensibility depressed and our head over-burdened with worries, our heart can still speak about what is its life and its deepest love. On the other hand, if this “heart” is occupied by something else but God, prayer will cease. It is our “heart” that God hears talking to Him.” (P. Chevignard.)

State of prayer –

The important point is to realize that it is through the will, the ‘heart’, that we are united to God. And then we are able to understand where this continuous prayer has its roots: in our deep wish, our strong determination to please God, to always do His will.

Thus, every moment of our life is turned into an occasion of approaching God, of dialoguing with Him, of reminding us of His presence. This disposition of the soul is what we call “practice of God’s presence”, or “State of prayer.”

In this way, we distinguish prayer as an exercise and “the state of prayer.” Whenever he speaks of prayer, Jesus shows us much further than the simple “exercise”. One should not restrict to a question of surroundings or time the perseverance in prayer to which we are called by the Master through His parables.

Nor must we either complain about difficulties outside our life of prayer, nor of the maddening rhythm of surrounding activities, nor of the overload of our multiple responsibilities... It is from the inside that one frees oneself, that one settles down in real peace, so that the most tempestuous events will but touch the very fringe of our soul without disturbing it, just as hurricanes only agitate the surface of the Ocean, leaving the depths as calm as ever.

II

We must have a time for prayer

It is likely that one will not acquire this “spirit of prayer” without having taken, and kept, the resolution to reserve every day a certain time to prayer:

To give the whole of our time to prayer, we must learn how to give it a certain time, regularly.

However, this will prove to be impossible if we pray only when we, feel like it. There is a certain illusion: very soon we shall no longer feel like opening ourselves to this dialogue which takes place in the faith - in no time we shall risk to let the little boat drift away and gradually oblivion will set in.

“The most important advice to follow is not to get discouraged and not to leave off mental prayer simply because one does not happen to feel the devotion one longs for... Our soul is like water that has been made muddy: vainly does one try and treat it and agitate it; only time and tranquility will bring back to water its transparency.” (Louis de Grenade.)

Divine rhythm -

It is not without reason that God has wanted to insert resting times in His own people’s life:

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘You must also tell the Israelites: take care to keep my Sabbath for that is to be the token between you and me throughout the generations, to show that it is I, the Lord, that makes you holy.’”

“Therefore you must keep the Sabbath as something sacred... Six days there are for doing work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of complete rest, sacred to the Lord. Anyone who does work on the Sabbath day shall be put

to death.”

(Ex. 31, 12-15) cf. Ex. 20, 8-11.

Likewise, we shall only cultivate in ourselves in a really stable manner what is all important in prayer: THIS SEARCH OF GOD, if we keep rigorously to these rhythms of prayer:

- daily rhythm: one hour of mental prayer (at least 15 minutes.)
- weekly rhythm: make Sunday the Lord's day. (Or, if necessary, choose another day of the week in order to be able to devote more time to spiritual exercises.)
- monthly rhythm: choose one day a month for seclusion and silence.
- annual rhythm: be faithful to a week's retreat a year: one week of praying time.
- every 10 years: Devote six months of our time to reflex, rest and prayer.

A Live Program -

If you organize in advance your day's program, and have faith, you will always find time to achieve what is of real necessity. In the measure you are convinced of the importance of prayer, even at the price of some sacrifices, you will find the means to make room for it in your life.

If prayer is but a luxury, and useless chatting, there is certainly no time for it. If it is a vital necessity, like eating or sleeping, then the objection "we cannot find time for it" is absurd, - just as absurd as that of the sick person who tells the Doctor that he has no time to eat or to take his medicine, or as detestable as owning up to somebody one loves that one has no time to think of him.

Time gained -

Certain days, particularly overloaded with necessary activity, might seem to justify not devoting to it the time allotted to mental prayer. But if one is faithful to it in spite of all, one is surprised, even at times astounded, to realize how thoughtfully the Lord arranges things:

- difficult and complex problems have been settled with disconcerting simplicity;
- delicate and worrying questions have had an unexpected solution;
- an unforeseen coincidence has allowed a precious gain of time...

The Lord will never be outdone in generosity. The minutes we devote to Him He will give back to us a hundredfold, one way or another: to harvest time we must first sow some. The time we sow is the time we devote to mental prayer. Time given up to God in mental prayer is never wasted: it is time gained.

Too much work -

Do not say that work is there, waiting, commanding you. We must act according to God's will and not according to the work to be done: it is God who orders, not work.

Certainly, God orders us to work. However if work - through excess or bad organization - crushes us to the point of taking us away from God and of making us unable to find Him again - it is not work willed by God. In such cases work is a tyrant and we are its slaves: we must free ourselves of it. It is an idol demanding a cult: we must break it.

So many souls to save!

Consequence: it is not too much to devote the whole of my time to mental prayer... There is so much work to do for God!

Indeed there is nothing more wonderful than giving God to souls. But beware of illusions: it may happen that we think we give God, and it is ourselves we give. In order to be able to truly give God, we must fill ourselves with Him to overflowing.

One tries to seek God and the good of souls, and in reality - for lack of mental prayer - it is more or less, at times, oneself one seeks.

Action! Action!

Let us not trust in this deceiving formula:

“It is in action that the apostle must sanctify himself.” Certainly, if the apostolate referred to is animated by an authentic love of God and of neighbor. There, is the problem! The apostolate in itself is no danger: very much the contrary: it sanctifies.

(cf.: Text of St. Thomas in Meditation: Action and Contemplation.)

Experience proves it: because of human frailty, an action undertaken at first with supernatural motivation risks - in virtue of the law of degradation which applies to the moral as well as to the physical order - this action risks to lose its supernatural character if it is not controlled, purified, fed, - at regular intervals.

If we scrutinize at all our motives for action, we shall discover that, at times, under the appearance of lofty motivations, some other are hidden that are not pure:

- subtle satisfaction of being cause, or being center;
- need to exercise our will to dominate... (for a superior, what a weakness!...)
- search for esteem or admiration;
- joy of succeeding where others have failed, etc.
to mention only the least objectionable.

Mental prayer, while impregnating us with the spirit of God, dispels these parasitic elements that risk to vitiate, or at least to impede the divine action in us.

The true apostles relies first on God -

Our mental prayer acts directly on the souls entrusted to our care: it is time gained for the apostolate. With less effort or fatigue, the apostolate - purified as it is by the motive of love - produces more and better fruits.

It is not ourselves, moreover, who are able to sanctify and save souls. It is God who will use us in the measure in which we shall have united ourselves to Him and it is a fact that we are only truly united to Him inasmuch as we are faithful to mental prayer.

In exceptional circumstances –

There may be exceptional circumstances when, in an emergency, we have to leave off mental prayer, or at least shorten it. In such a case we leave God for God, as St. Vincent de Paul would say, and we have not to worry about it.

But if this shortening of our mental prayer was to happen too often, to the point of coming, practically, to suppress it, then there would be much reason to be alarmed - just as the driver who goes by all the filling stations without stopping, “to save time...” risk to stop altogether for lack of gas...

Conclusion –

One of the graces we must always ask from God is perseverance in mental prayer. We have no right to accept the idea that our life of work and fatigue is an obstacle to our life of prayer.

We have no right to consider as sole valuable moments the time spent in “retreat,” and imagine we must, the rest of our days, live on energy accumulated in those periods. We must be convinced that any circumstance can be changed into an opportunity of conversation with God.

Knowing what he told us, we are not laborers paid “piece-work”, but rather we receive our reward at every instant: God comes into our life gradually, little by little, if we do His will each moment. Life, with all it implies, (failures, successes, rest, work, prayer, adoration, apostolate,) is given to us to allow us time to accept God completely. At the hour of our death, every child of God can, and must say:

“It is not I who live, but Christ who, lives in me.”
“Mihi vivere, Christus est et mori lucrū. ”

It is not on the amount of work we have achieved that God will first judge us, but on the way we have made use of the time He has given us.

Beware,
- if one day you had no more time
for prayer,
- you would surely have time
to sin.

PRAY IN THE NAME OF JESUS

- “Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”
(Jo 14, 13.)
- “Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”
(Jo 16, 23-24.)
- “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me...”
(Jo 11, 41-42.)
- “...remember that our advocate before the Father is Jesus Christ...” (Rom. 8, 33-34.)
- “Therefore he is able at all times to save those who come to God through him, since he lives always to make intercession for them.”
(Heb. 7, 25.)
- “Whatever work you may have to do, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, thanking God the Father through him.
(Col 3, 16-17.)
- “...the complex wisdom of God’s plan ... in conformity to that timeless purpose which he centered in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is in the same Jesus, because we have faith in him that we dare - even with confidence - to approach him.
(Eph. 3, 11-12.)
- “Jesus Christ ... is himself no doubtful quantity, he is the divine “Yes”. Every promise of God finds its affirmative in him, and through him can be said the final Amen to the glory of God.”
(2 Cor 1, 20.)
- “...how much more will the blood of Christ himself, who in his eternal spirit offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice, purify our souls from the deeds of death, that we may serve the living God.”
(Heb. 9, 14.)
- Through him let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God...” (Heb. 13, 15.)

In the light of these texts - all so clear - let us ask ourselves whether we do care to join in the desires of Christ, to put first in our preoccupations His thought for us, in each of the things that concern us.

Or does our prayer too often consist of:

- the projecting of our own interior “film”, for our personal benefit?
- the repetition of the same dull and sterile monologue?
- the search for “ideas about” things, instead of putting our soul at the receiving end, in order to learn of the true desires of the soul of Christ? (14)

- 1 - To pray in the name of Christ -
- 2 - Enriching consequences -

I

To Pray in the Name of Christ

1° - WHY?

In the texts quoted above, as in the whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Our Lord is shown to us as the One who is constantly interceding to His Father for us, men. St. John calls him our “advocate.” What does it mean, except that Christ is, in heaven, He who offers to His Father our praise, our adoration, as well as our requests?

We might say that He repeats in front of God our words, that he takes up these poor human words, transforming them and making them his own: and this why our prayer is efficacious, - because it has become Christ’s prayer.

- This is possible because it is Christ himself who has bequeathed his prayer to us. And, in this way, the Christian prayer is something new it is a gift from Christ (Luke 11, 1.) It is his prayer He gives us, the only one God listens to, and grants.
- As charity is a new Commandment, because before Christ came one could not love as He does, with his heart, so our prayer is - must be – new: that is identical to that of Christ, stretching to all the needs of the Kingdom of God, to all men of all times and of all places, because “doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus...” (Col 3, 16.)

2° - HOW can we pray in the name of Jesus?

Let us distinguish three great aspects of this prayer in the name of Jesus:

- A - Our Lord is He through whom we pray to the Father.
- B - Our Lord is He in whom we pray to the Father.
- C - Our Lord is He to whom we pray.

A - Through Jesus we pray to the Father -

- “Up to now you have asked nothing in my name: ask now, and you will receive.” (Jo 16, 23.)
- “How could we, on our own, pray to the Father whom we do not know: ...nor does anyone know the Father except the Son...and the man to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” (Matt. 11, 27.)
- “How could anyone understand the spirit of God except the very spirit of God? And the marvelous thing is this, that we now receive not the spirit of the world but the Spirit of God himself, so that we can actually understand something of God’s generosity towards us.” (1 Cor 2, 11-12.)
- The real cult, it is Jesus who has offered it, and He alone has been able, and is able, to do so in perfection.

“Every promise of God finds its affirmative in him, (Christ), and through him

can be said the final Amen, to the glory of God.”

(2 Cor 1, 20.)

B - In Jesus we pray to the Father -

- Our Lord is He “in whom we render all honor and all glory to God.”
- the office of the Church is to take up again the prayer of Christ to which prayer we incorporate ourselves.
- It is all the admiration, the joy, the will of Christ in front of His Father, the submission to his designs, the passion for His Kingdom, - but told all over again by us, as if we were the ones to have had the inspiration, as if it all came from us.
- The Liturgy will consist in continuing not only the presence, but the life of Christ. The Church is the people made up of those who are chosen to live the aspects of Christ’s mysteries of merciful love in His glory. This is what St. Paul means when he asks: “Let Christ Jesus be your example as to what your attitude should be.” (Phil. 2, 5.)
- At prayer time we shall put to work a reality that exists in us since our Baptisms - we shall render active in energy that is anterior to our prayer: the presence in us of the Spirit of Christ through sanctifying grace. In some ways we only recognize then, the reality of what lives in us, we only allow “the spirit who dwells in our hearts” to speak.
- Thus, when we are praying, there is a conscious effort to enter into Christ’s mystery. We have to learn how not to address ourselves to God save in Christ. Such is the reality of the “Christian prayer”: we must develop more and more this conscience of glorifying in Christ “Our Father”, - His Father and ours.
- We are beings inhabited by Christ and we never are alone before God: we are always two...

C - Pray to Jesus -

- Christian prayer attaches itself to the very mystery of Christ: it centers on it. The whole of liturgy consists of recalling the main stages, the great mysteries of the life of Jesus that have manifested to us God’s grace and His mercy, the eternal secrets of His love.
- The Church reminds God of these mysteries as being the great reasons for Him to hear us:

It will be the theme of all the liturgical prayers:

... “You who came to live among us...”
... “You who have shed your blood for us...”
... “Hear us.”

- God almighty, by giving us His Incarnate and crucified Son, and by all the mysteries accomplished in His human nature, puts at our disposal the infinite resources of his mercy, and gives us power over Him.
- The Church in her Office celebrates her Spouse by a commemoration of the mysteries through which He has given her life, and continues this gift.

As in the Bible:

See: Exodus 32, 11-14;	Deut. 9, 18 - 26;
Judith 4, 8, 15;	Isaia 63, 7 - 19;
Judith 6, 18;	Jeremia 32, 20 – 22;
Psalm 105;	Baruch 2, 11;
Psalm 106;	Baruch 3, 5;

“He who did not grudge His own Son but gave him up for us all, can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need?” (Rom 8, 32.)

Does not the memory of all that God has already done become the main motive of our prayer and of our great hope?

As in Holy Mass:

“Mindful of the Passion of your Son...of His Resurrection...of His Ascension...we offer you the all-perfect victim...and by Him and with Him, and in Him, are given to You...all honor and glory...”

II

Enriching Consequences

1° - Sentire cum Christo:

- Through prayer, a transformation of our sentiments, of our desires, of our sufferings, will take place they will become the sentiments, the desires, and the sufferings of Christ.
- Transformation similar to that that takes place at Mass, from bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. We remain ourselves and yet, through prayer, a sort of transubstantiation is achieved. We acquire, in a certain way, a personality infinitely higher than our own. We are no longer alone to sing the psalms or to read the Scripture: it is Christ, our eternal High Priest, who sings and reads the plan of God’s love in heaven:

“Thus, of these two (Church and Christ) everything occurs as if there was only one person... If they are two in one flesh, why not two in one voice? Let Christ speak, then, for in Christ the Church speaks; and in the Church, Christ speaks. The Head speaks in the Body, and the Body in the Head.” (St. Augustine.)

- Read Chapter V of the Epistle to the Hebrews. (The whole of the Epistle to the Hebrews is like a great illumination of the prayer of the Church.) This delegation of one just man offering himself up and praying for the people, this “recapitulation” in one only of the destiny of all, has it not already been outlined by all the great examples of the Old Testament?

Moses - Exodus 32, 32;	Isaia - 37, 14-20;
Abraham - Gen 18;	Ps. 106
Job - 42, 8;	Ps. 23
Moses "on the breach for all the people."	

2° - Sentire cum Spiritu -

If we are faithful to this great law of prayer "in the spirit of Jesus", or "in the name of Christ", there is no longer any opposition between private prayer and public prayer. No more difficulties:

- on one hand: we are not tempted to take refuge in an individualism which is not Christian: God and my soul...
- nor, on the other hand, refuge in all the illusions of community life which would tend to make us incapable of praying without being sustained by collective euphoria.
- Private prayer as well as public prayer, it is Christ's prayer: they are only Christian inasmuch as they are Christ's prayer, and are said "in the Spirit." (Luke 11, 13)

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words." (Rom 8, 26.)

"Now I want you to understand, as Christians, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God could call Jesus accursed, and no one could say that He is the Lord, except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor 12, 3.)

Whether our prayer be private or public, it is the same Spirit that prays in us: the Spirit of Christ. All common liturgy depends on the personal relationship of each of the members to Christ..., in the same way as, in a choir, the quality of the whole depends on the intensity of the relationship of each to the conductor: when you sing in a choir, you keep your eyes on the conductor only, and not on the other members of the choir, around you.

"The Sons of God are the Body of the only Son, and since he is the head and we are the members, there is only one Son of God. Hence, whoever loves the Son of God loves the Father. And nobody can love the Father without also loving the Son; and whoever loves the Son must also love the sons of God..., and through loving, he also becomes a member in the union of the Body of Christ, - and there will be only one Christ loving Himself." (St. Augustine.)

Conclusion -

Let us conclude by discovering what is the first concrete movement in any Christian prayer, the first call that should begin each of our prayers:

- “Come, Spirit of God...”
- “Come, Lord Jesus, come...”
- “Lord, teach us to pray...”

God alone can shape prayer in us, because - in the end - it is only the love of a God that can face up to God’s love.

And one might say that one is a Christian the day one can speak to God only with and through Christ, knowing that the only countenance God cannot resist is His Son’s.

“All of you who have been baptized “into” Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ.” (Gal 3, 27.)

“God is trustworthy, by him you have been called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ, and Our Lord.” (1 Cor 1, 9.)

“He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as his sons.” (Eph 1, 5)

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying: “Abba, Father!” (Gal 4, 6.)

(14) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro, Équipes enseignantes, Paris, pp. 25-29

OBSTACLES TO THE LIFE OF PRAYER

- 1 - Lack of poverty
- 2 - Lack of preparation
- 3 - Lack of detachment

Introduction:

We are surprised that the Apostles, during the Discourse after the Last Supper (Jo 14, 9) as well as at the time of the Agony - (Mark 14, 37) - and in spite of having lived for several years in Our Lord's intimacy - still remain "apprentices" in prayer.

And yet, who can pretend to "know" how to pray? Faced with God's mystery, we always remain "apprentices". We must convince ourselves of all the difficulties, of all the stumbling-blocks which will always bring us back to say again and again:

"Lord, teach us how to pray..."

1st Obstacle: Lack of poverty - (15)

"But he said to them: ...
(Parable of the invitation to the great Supper.) (Luke 14, 16-24.)

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man listens to my voice and opens the door to me, I will come in to him and I will sup with him and he with me."
(Apoc. 3, 20-21.)

It is always an immoderate attachment to our own plans, to our ideas, to our preoccupations, that prevents us from answering the Lord's call, his invitation. Our soul, busy with our own "ego", is not in a position to listen.

And yet, what does Jesus ask for? That we should "open the door" to him, and he will Himself bring us everything. In the end, will only be admitted into the banquet hall those who have been able to hear, because they were "waiting". And none is really waiting but he who does not cheat with his poverty. (Luke 14, 21-23.)

And he does cheat with his poverty he who pretends to hold a conversation with God through a kind of intellectual gymnastics, or who approaches God to find near Him sensible consolations.

a) - Intellectual gymnastics –

- We imagine that, to pray, we must have ideas: have we not very often told ourselves that our prayer was not good because we did not manage to "have ideas"?

“...I have so little inspiration when I pray...”

- Are we not, then, like a fiancée who, close to her future husband, would tell him: ‘Stop, what you are telling me is interesting, - I will write it down...’
- There is no question, when we come near God, to attend a class of theology, nor to prepare an essay, - but to conform our will, our plans, to his will, to his loving plans.
- Let us take the psalms as models: they are built around a very small number of simple themes, hardly varied in their expression: divine grandeur, human weakness, God’s mercy, man’s confidence. There is no need, in order to understand them to be an aristocrat of intelligence.
- Would have Christ wanted to ask from us “something exceptional” when he called us to prayer, saying:

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened...” (Matt. 11, 26.)

To be invited to his table, it is sufficient to be in need. Let’s take as an- example the admirable simplicity of this peasant to whom the Curé of Ars - intrigued by the regularity and the frequency of this man’s visits to church - asked what he was saying to Christ during these prolonged moments of prayers: “Well, Father, I don’t say anything: I look at him, and he looks at me...”.

Language of the heart:

- Prayer is a language of the heart and is, above all based on faith. “Thy will be done” - All mental prayer must bring us there, or else it still is but an exercise of our pride.
- We must learn how to “look” and how to be “looked at”, to love and to be loved, - which does not exclude a minimum of ideas, of intellectual activity, (i.e. meditation) in order to avoid the roaming of our mind and to help us to keep near God, while distractions might lead us away from Him.
- But this meditation, this intellectual effort, - or even this exercise of our imagination, - will always have to be coupled with the desire to meet God, and to adopt his will and his love.
- It is the living God we are seeking. We do not pray to increase our intellectual equipment, to perfect our “synthesis” or augment our culture, be it religious, - but rather to tell God again and again that we love him and that we know that he loves us, - to conform our life to the merciful plan which is his.

b) - Search for sensible consolations -

- More still do we risk to seek ourselves in our sensibility and to imagine that our prayer has no value unless we “feel” something.
- The world has always been fond of “experiences”, of descriptions, of “states of souls”: there exists a kind of cult for anything that might tell of an “interior testimony”. We are glad to find ourselves reflected in a sensible projection of ourselves. And prayer becomes such an “experience” to embody this projection: which has nothing to do with Christian prayer.

- One does not pray primarily to find oneself but to give oneself to God by entering into His plan.

In Christian prayer, what matters:

- It is not the quality of the interior experience which may, at times, remain in appearance very indifferent, but He who is the object of this experience, St. Paul speaks of “groaning” (Rom. 8, 26.) or of a “cry”. (Gal, 4, 6)
- It is not our experience, but the gift of ourselves. We must go to prayer, not above all to receive, but to give, to give ourselves, to lose ourselves; and if it is really God’s friendship that presides in our prayer, we must go there to give ourselves as a free gift , even accepting often to ignore the fact that we give, - without seeing what we give.
- We must read over again the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican: the Pharisee is convinced that he brings to God, while the publican does not even know that he gives God the best gift ever, by giving Him the opportunity to manifest His goodness.

There might be a certain pharisaic way of saying: ‘I have been happy to give you pleasure...’ which would show that it is first and foremost oneself one has been seeking in the offering of the gift. To be able to give, to know that one can give...is still playing at being rich.

“Like the servant who is waiting” -

- If it is really through love that we pray, we accept to wait until the Other, - God, - wishes to give himself to us and share with us what is beyond us, what will elevate us nearer Him: his plan, his work.

- And if we go to God in the first place because this is our pleasure and because of what we gain from his contact, it is not yet through love:

“As long as one does not love ‘for nothing’
one does not really love.”

- Our prayer takes place in faith, and all the saints have had to stand firm when facing God’s silence; but they understood that this silence was but the sign of the quality of God’s love. Because he loves us, God does not want us to be mistaken about him, to be satisfied with impressions, and he invites us to go beyond, well above these impressions, to reach him in bur prayer.

- God does not want us to try and hang on to past graces, we must “pick the fruit and throw away the branch.” What does it matter in all these graces are the fruits they have produced in our lives, more than the flavor of these fruits. One can forget the delicious flavor of some food and rejoice in the fact that it has kept up and developed one’s strength.

Listen to St. Francis de Sales:

“You tell me that you do nothing in prayer; but what do you expect to “do” in prayer? except what you are doing i.e. offer and re-offer your wretchedness to God? When beggars show off their misery and their dire need, it is the best appeal they could put forward to us. But from what you tell me, you do nothing of this but, at times, remain there like “shadow”, a “statue”. If they place statues in palaces, it is only to please the eyes of princes: be content to be just that in God’s presence: he will give life to the statue whenever it pleases him.”

Conclusion –

Intellectual search: “to have ideas” or
Search of self: “to feel something”

Both are symptoms of a lack of faith inasmuch as one prefers to attach oneself to intermediaries, to signs, rather than to the very reality of the mystery.

- Read: 3, Kings 18, 16-40: comparison between the prayer of the priests of Baal and the prayer of Elias.

- See how God punishes the lack of confidence in him:

a) - when the people in the desert get tired of the manna and clamor for meat:

Ps. 77

Ps. 30

Ps. 29

Num. 11, 4-34

b) - also Luke 1, 8-20: whilst the visit of the Angel was an answer to Zacharia’s prayer, he was not satisfied with the words of the messenger, but wanted a sign: he will get it ... by becoming dumb.

On the contrary, God comforts the faith that has been proven and is not self-seeking. Elias, (Kings 3, 19; 4.)

(15) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro, Équipes enseignantes, Paris, P.P. 16-19

2nd Obstacle: Lack of Preparation - (16)

- Parable of the wise and the foolish virgins -

“On that day the same will happen in the kingdom of heaven that once happened to ten bridesmaids who, being provided with their lamps, had gone out to meet the bridegroom. Now, five of these were foolish, and five wise; the foolish ones, though provided with their lamps, had yet taken no oil with them; the wise ones, on the contrary, had beside their lamps taken oil with them in their jars. But the bridegroom was long in coming, and so they all nodded off to slumber and, finally, slept. Suddenly, at midnight, a shout is raised: “Wake up there! The bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” At this, all the bridesmaids woke up and began to trim their lamps. Then the foolish said to the wise: “Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.” But the wise demurred, “There might not be oil enough both for us and for you,” they said, “better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.” So they went to buy some; but meanwhile the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready entered with him to take part in the festivities. Then the door was barred. Later the other bridesmaids arrived; but when they pleaded, “Sir, Sir, open the door for us,” came back his answer, “Upon my word, I have nothing to do with you. Keep awake therefore; you know neither the day nor the hour.” (Matt. 25, 1-13.)

- One cannot pray unless one has purified oneself and rejected all one's own idols:

“So Jacob said to his family and all that were with him: ‘Do away with the strange gods you have among you, purify yourselves and change your garments. Let us be on our way to Bethel that I may build an altar there to the God who helped me in my distress and was with me on my journey.’” (Gen. 35, 2-5.)

- Terrible invectives against lack of interior dispositions.

“...When you spread out your hands, I close my eyes to you; though you pray the more, I will not listen... Put away your misdeeds from before my eyes; cease doing evil; learn to do well. If you are willing and obey, you shall eat the good things of the land; but if you refuse and resist, the sword shall consume you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken...” (Is. 1, 10-31.)

- Before prayer prepare your soul...” (Sirach 18, 22.)

Another threat weighs on our prayer: the illusion that we are always ready to meet God. Double illusion:

- on one hand, our heart is busy, - we are not in silence-;
- on the other hand, we are strangers to the things of God.

- a) Lack of interior silence -
- b) Lack of spiritual knowledge.

(16) - Apprendre à prier, B. Bro - Équipes enseignantes. pp. 33-38.

- I -

Lack of interior silence

“It is not the difficulties of the road that hurt your feet, but the stones you have in your shoes.” (Arab proverb.)

It is from inside that come the main obstacles, while we are inclined to accuse the outside: surroundings, work, and mode of life... It is inside that we must watch.

We pretend to come and listen to God, to share His plan of salvation, but - overloaded with ourselves - we spend our time telling ourselves our own stories... The Cure of Ars compares the Christians who go to Mass without preparation to a sponge that would be put into a very pure liquid without having been squeezed beforehand.

A. - Examination of conscience of Silence -

1° - Our “memories”:

i.e. interior bitterness, rancour, fits of bad temper, offended pride, memories of all that is not in conformity with the idea we have of ourselves, of all these unclear places in ourselves:

“When will you accept in peace the trial of not being satisfied with yourself? Then only, will you make room for Christ.”
(St. Teresa of Avila.)

We are often like a child who - coming back home to his mother after a long absence, once in the room and in front of her would notice that his shoes have got slightly muddy on the way and would go back to clean them instead of throwing himself in the arms of his mother who is waiting for him...

Let us not, in our prayer, be taken over by memories of all that is encumbering us...

2° - To act “important” -

All the ideas people have about us! ...We attach great importance to the image that others send back to us of ourselves... Like the pigeons who, apparently, are only happy and in perfect condition when each has a companion near him. Isolate a pigeon in a cage one side of which is a mirror the bird is perfectly happy: he has the impression of being one of a couple. The other one only acts as his own reflexion.

So are we often trying - to the people around us - to act the person we would like to be: we beg from them an image of ourselves that reassures us, that flatters us, where we can find rest in a false silence: that of our dreams.

3° - Our activity -

An excessive inclination towards one's work, a desire to achieve rapidly results that can be seen, - these may be the causes of certain agitation, certain feverish activism that ruin prayer. This interior tension will be transferred into the prayer itself: chasing away distractions becomes a distraction. One has become incapable of marking a pause.

4° - Our lack of tact in the practice of charity -

“Therefore, if you are about to offer your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother holds something against you: leave your gift there before the altar, and first go and settle your argument with your brother; and then come back to offer your gift.” (Matt. 5, 23-24.)

Let us notice the precision of Jesus' words;

- not: ‘if you have anything against your brother...’
- but: ‘if your brother has something against you...’

and who is there to pretend that nobody has anything to forgive him?

Hence: to know how to pray and to know how to love one's neighbor go together...
You do not pray any more than you love.

5° - Our passions –

Even all our small attachments:

“Whether the bird be tied to a cable or to a thread, he is tied”
(St. John of the Cross.)

Our fads about comfort..., or maybe an exaggerated attachment to one person.

6° - Our distastes -

a) Occasional boredom -

It is a fact that there are days when one has no taste for prayer. God, usually quite close, gives the impression of being far away. One finds it difficult to gather up energy. One is invaded by a thousand worries which, often, are not on a very high scale, or else one is tired, weary, our brains are empty, our heart, dry. Prayer, specially prolonged prayer..., what is the good? It means nothing. What is there to be done?

Well, it is simple: make orison in spite of it all... It will certainly be the orison of your dreams, but it will, or may be exactly where the Lord is waiting for you. You remain there for the allotted time, like a poor beggar, bored, face to face with God... Who knows? A few weeks, or months, later, you will realize that the Lord has achieved some work in you, without telling you, without even letting you feel it immediately.

Look - read these lines from a Christian workman who, in spite of the exhausting fatigue of a day at the factory, stops every evening at the church for “a bit of mental prayer...” Sometimes he is all out, he feels like “giving it all up.” But here is his rule of conduct:

- To have nothing to say...it does not matter,
- Not to know how to say things it does not matter,
- To have no taste for prayer...it does not matter,
- Not to feel like praying...it does not matter,
- But to have the will to meet the Lord, for Himself alone,
- To be there, like a log, but to be there,
- I am before you, Lord, - I am yours.

b) Habitual boredom -

...But, - will you say, - “it is years since I have really prayed. I have lost for ever the taste for prayer.”

If it is so, it is serious. But do not get discouraged.

Prayer is not a matter of taste: it is a matter of faith. Faith, ardent faith, alive, invigorating, it is a gift from God which we must ask for in a humble, persevering way:

“Lord, that I may believe!”

“Lord, that I may see...!”

Remember the blind man of Jericho, or the father of the child whom the apostles had not succeeded in curing.

These appeals to God, said again and again with all the possible sincerity constitute in themselves a progressive return to mental prayer. They may be for you the secret of salvation. In any case, shake your apathy: always remember that, to want to make orison is to make orison. The worst solution would be to let yourself go.

B. - True interior silence -

1° - What it is:

To love God, - to treat him like somebody, a friend, - to prefer him to everything else, to want to become one with him, to live in the hope and expectancy of such union, as perfect as possible on earth and definitive in heaven, - such is the true meaning of what we call “interior silence.”

2° - It unifies our life -

What consumes our soul, one of the bitterest sufferings, is the inevitable multiplicity, the diversity of tasks that man must attend to, and must repeat time after time. It is through this inevitable repetition that we achieve our activities, be they material or spiritual. But in the middle of this dispersion we are always searching for our center of gravity, for a

unifying element. It cannot be found at the level of our impressions: if the center of our activities is our own self, we shall forever remain in the multiple, the discontinued... Alone, silence can bring about the unification of our life because it sends us up above our sphere, higher up than our own self: silence is expectancy of God - it obliges us to find support where only there is stability: in the will of God.

3° - It demands continual effort –

We must not hide the fact that this silence, this recollection, is difficult to achieve. So many habits, in the world, go against this notion and carry us away from our inmost self, away from solitude, into any and every kind of prattling... We must realize that there is an effort which is needed, which is ever to be started again, and kept up.

Whatever the conditions of life, these difficulties will always exist and it is precisely when we try to bring calm in ourselves that we experience distraction and that we discover how great was this lack of silence. It is quite normal that this effort should be difficult, both because of adverse circumstances and because we do not realize how far we are from it.

4° - It keeps us out of useless talk -

“...on the day of judgment men will render an account of every careless word they utter...” (Matt. 12, 36.)

Christ has given silence as the prime condition of prayer:

“...and when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret...” (Matt. 6, 6.)

Our prayer will be fruitless if we are unfaithful to this effort of interior silence, and as long as we are not convinced that we must be, in the world, “our own milieu” - carrying with us our cloister amidst all the noise, even in the street.

Inasmuch as the world in which we live does not give us the external framework conducive to prayer, we must create in ourselves our own atmosphere. We must have such firm ways of life that they may constitute this very atmosphere, essential to the needs of our soul.

- II -

Lack of Spiritual Doctrine

We must have at least a minimum of knowledge of the true spiritual doctrine. How could you anxiously wait for somebody you would not know? And the better we know, the more we are anxious to wait...

The best way to check and avoid the flight of our imagination is to fix it onto some stable object: onto Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Why do we feel ourselves to be so “vacant” in our prayer, if not because we never have made real efforts to know God? Often our prayer is anemic simply because it lacks food.

Not to confuse spontaneity and carelessness -

Our love will be no less spontaneous because it calls on doctrine. On the contrary, to pretend loving somebody one does not know is risking to stop at a merely superficial love, rather affected. And love is truly “spiritual” only when it values the deep knowledge of the other even more than one’s own satisfaction.

Love implies three phases:

1. - Complacency: when placed in front of God’s perfections, as manifested by creation (especially in Jesus and his immense love particularly:
“Quam bonum Deus!”
2. - Desire of union: the soul, craving for happiness, has discovered that God alone can fully satisfy us. Hence an immense desire to be united to God until we are identified with Him: “My God, my all!”
“For me, to live is Christ.”
“He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit.”
(Jo 15, 5.)
- 3 - Benevolence: Not only does not our soul want to do anything that might in the least spoil such beauty - (avoiding all sin), but we would like, if it were possible, to make God richer still, i.e. to bring about his external glory by conforming to his plan.

- “he loves me who observes my commandments...”

- “...whether you eat or drink, or do anything else, do all for the glory of God.”
(1 Cor 10, 31.)

To escape the tyranny of our egoism in prayer, one of the greatest means is never to neglect this indispensable preparation of our intelligence. Again and again we must place face to face our own desires and what the Scriptures and the Doctrine show us as the great desires of Christ and of the Church.

An example:

Here is a list of texts which - taken from the Scripture can - be used as direct starting-points for our prayer:

The plan of God: Eph.1; 1 Jo ch. 3 to 5; Jo 17.

God’s life: Jo ch. 14 to 17; 1 Jo; Is. ch. 60 to 76.

The gift of God: Christ - Phil. 2; Col. 1; Jo 1; Heb. ch. 5 to 10; Is. 53.
the new life: Jo 3; Ezech. 36.
the sacraments: Jo 6; Rom. 6; Luke 15.

The Kingdom: its history: Ps. 66, 77; Matt. 13; Jo 10; Acts.
its laws: I Cor13; Jo 13; Jo 15; Luke 10; Rom. 8;
Matt. Ch. 5 to 7; Matt. 10.

The Church invites us with insistence to use, in order to feed our mental prayer, the psalms, the Bible, according to the rhythm of the liturgical year.

A suggestion: keep a note-book -

We must be convinced that our inertia and our interior “emptiness” cannot be overcome unless we have decided to fight against them, in a concrete way. Why not keep a “mental prayer note-book”, in which we would write down thoughts which occur to us, when and as they strike us specially, or any other helpful suggestions either from lectures, spiritual readings or conversations: we would in this way have always at hand a minimum of doctrine to help fixing our mind on God’s plan. Why, besides, should we not carry always with us the road map of Christian life that is the Holy Gospel?

Prudent use of certain Texts -

There is always the danger of turning prayer into merely intellectual research, an opportunity to acquire more knowledge. The question is for us to find a happy medium between intellectual laziness and intellectual greed, - this happy medium varying according to each person’s temperament.

For the man who really loves, it is not a matter either of sleeping or of taking notes. No artificial partition exists between the various forms of activity represented by our prayer:

Lectures, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, particular examinations, meditations, have no true value unless they lead us to a conversation with God.

“When we think that God listens to us and is looking at us, it is good to keep silent and to listen; but otherwise we must not remain like fools, doing nothing.”
(St. Teresa of Avila.)

We must know how to be silent in a meeting with God, rather than to carry on with a meditation on ideas; but - as a shield against distractions - we must also know how to turn back to some texts - or to the idea that will allow us to resume our conversation with God, as if this text, or this idea, were a spring-board.

“Reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation, are all linked together; what is the use of reading if - while turning it over in our mind we do not absorb all the essence and if we do not assimilate it into the depths of our being? Likewise, what is the good of discovering, through meditation, what we have to do if this meditation is not strengthened by the request which obtains God’s grace, - and this fervent prayer usually receives as an answer the sweetness of contemplative dialogue.”
(Guignes le Chartreux.)

According to Francis of Assisi, only he who sincerely desires to live the Gospel will understand the spiritual doctrine of the Church. God only unveils his secrets for those who seek them with all their heart.

Conclusion –

“No, sir, neither philosophy, nor theology, nor discourses have any effect on souls; it is necessary for Jesus Christ to work along with us, or we with Him; that we should work in Him, and He in us; that we should speak like Him, and in His Spirit, just as he was himself in His Father, and was preaching the doctrine He had taught Him: it is the language of the Scriptures.”

(St. Vincent de Paul.)

(16) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro, Équipes Enseignantes, Paris, pp. 13-38

3rd Obstacle: SELFISHNESS –

- “And when he was at Bethany, ...there came a woman with an alabaster jar of ointment, genuine nard of great value, and breaking the alabaster jar, she poured it on his head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, ‘To what purpose has this waste of the ointment been made? It might have been sold for more than three thousand denarii, and given to the poor.’ And they grumbled at her. But Jesus said; ‘Let her be. Why do you trouble her? She has done me a good turn. For the poor you have always with you, and whenever you want, you can do good to them; but you do not always have me. She has done what she could: she has anointed my body in preparation for burial. Amen I say to you, wherever in the whole world this gospel is preached, this also that she has done shall be told in memory of her.’”
(Mark 14, 3-9.)

- “...Put not your trust in the deceitful words.” This is the Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord! The Temple of the Lord! “Only if you thoroughly reform your ways and your deeds will I remain with you in this place...” (Jer. 7, 1-9.)

No protection from God unless...

The prayerful acts which Christ admired the most were those done unselfishly: the silent prayer of Mary Magdalene, pouring her perfume over Jesus, is one of the striking examples. In the same vein, David dancing before the Arch (2 Samuel 6, 16-23.) whilst Judas' complaint meets with Christ reprobation and that Michal, Saul's daughter, who turned David in ridicule, is punished with sterility because of this mockery.

We must go to prayer convinced that it is not a means like, or among others, but that we go there to abandon ourselves, to lose ourselves in it. Prayer must develop in us the sense of “gratuity” that is for man the best proof that his love is not merely animal love. So that:

- Beware of our unconscious selfishness -
- Let's go to God because he is lovable.

- I -

Beware of our unconscious selfishness (17)

The great obstacle to mental prayer is in reality the cult of the “ego” which is trying to put itself in the center of the world in the place of God

The great secret to obtain the grace of mental prayer is the vigilance to give to God the whole of his place, and to consider ourselves as a minute element in a great ensemble - and as insignificant in this ensemble.

“And David said to Michal: Before the Lord who chose me rather than your father, and than all his house, and commanded me to be ruler over the people

of the Lord in Israel - I will both play and make myself meaner than I have done. And I will be little in my own eyes; and with the handmaids of whom you speak, I shall appear more glorious.” (2 Samuel 6, 21-22.)

Arab legend - very significant:

A young man comes one day to knock at the door of the girl he loves. To the question, ‘Who is there?’ he answers spontaneously: ‘It is I.’ She refuses to open and tells him: ‘You may go away.’

Angry, he goes far away, trying to forget her, but in vain. Returning from his travels, more in love than ever, he comes back to her, same dialogue as the first time. She only adds, while sending him away, this mysterious little sentence: ‘You do not say the one word which would allow me to open the door to you.’

Intrigued, he goes away to think things over, not in distant travels this time, but in the desert. Gradually his anger and his violence disappear. His love becomes purer. He thinks of her - not for himself, but for her. He lives through her, she lives through him. When he comes once more to meet his beloved, it is in all loyalty that he is able to answer to the usual question, ‘Who is there?’ – ‘It is you’. And this time, the door is opened.

Mental prayer is knocking at the door behind which God is waiting. When, stripped of self, having yielded in one’s soul the whole place to the Lord, he who knocks can say in complete truth, ‘It is You,’ the door opens, and union to God is near.

To insert ourselves in Christ -

The problem consists in giving up - in a certain sense - our autonomy, to insert ourselves in Christ. The simplest way is to act as members of Christ, and that, to the point of making ours his prayer, ours his oblation, ours his worries, as well as the desires, the hopes, the sorrows and the joys that he experienced in His Mystical Body.

Divine purifications -

Our love of God is a mysterious alloy made of two contradictory elements egoism and unselfishness. This is why God - who takes pity on us - purifies our love for him through the fire of the Holy Spirit, taking us across what St. John of the Cross calls ‘the nights’: night of the senses, night of the soul. These are the divine purifications.

The essential is for us to know that these purifications, under a form or another, are a normal thing that is to be expected. It is here that we need an experienced guide.

Because, in these hours when God, in order to purify us, makes Himself more remote, the temptation is great to abandon mental prayer as one gets the impression “that one is more united with God in action than in prayer one feels that - in the time reserved to prayer - one vainly tries to find some response in oneself, one is there, in front of God, without devotion or Inspiration: one feels immensely bored. Then, why waste one’s time?

But, in reality, you do not waste time. You may be an empty shell, as you think, but a shell which silently fills itself with the water from the clear, divine fountain. Be calm, be faithful, be patient. As best as you can, make homage of your time to God, offer Him your wretchedness, affirm to Him your availability. An interior travail takes place in you of which God alone measures the extension, the depth and the fecundity.

We must admit it: prayer is more God's activity than work of man. Prayer is a mystery which passes, obviously, the norms of our logic. Let God act, let God act in you. One day you will emerge from the tunnel and find yourself in full light.

(cf.: "When the soul is in the tunnel" by G. Courtois,
Collection "Feuillets de vie spirituelle.")

Variations in our spiritual life -

"We must never be surprised that a day of great recollection be followed by another one of great distraction; such is our condition in our present life.

This variation is necessary, even in the spiritual domain, in order to maintain us in humiliation, and dependence on God. The saints themselves have lived through these alternatives." (P. de Caussade.)

Besides, these alternations are part of God's way: to the sun succeeds the rain, to daylight, the night. Natural realities are the symbol of spiritual ones: it is necessary for the soul to go through winters in order to reach the blossoms of spring and the productivity of summers and falls.

- II -

Let us go to God because He is lovable

- Everything, today, is judged according to efficiency. Man's technique demands that everything should be a "utensil" and he must only accept whatever "can be some use."
- Now, gratuity is what distinguishes most deeply spiritual love from animal love. "God has loved us gratis." The animal ceases to desire when it possesses its prey; for man, on the contrary, once desire is satisfied, love carries on none the less; he unites himself to the object of his love: love of someone who possesses.
- Comes then a greater discovery of the other's perfection, and increase of a love of mere benevolence: I do not love the other simply because he fulfills my need; but, having discovered his greatness through meeting him often, I know that he is worthy of my homage.
- I like to pay homage to what, in him, remains beyond what I can make use of, the source of seduction, what ensures the continuity of my love. Man alone is capable of paying homage; and this gives brilliance to his poverty: it is no longer that of a beggar who asks

for what he needs, but this poverty becomes a reason to admire all the qualities of the other.

- It is not because I need God that I adore him, not even because he is stronger than I am, but because he is worthy to be adored, to receive my homage. Otherwise, if adoration only came from fear or from desire, it would always be a reaction of weakness.

“Worthy are you, O Lord our God, to receive glory, honour, and power...”
(Apoc. 4; 11.)

- This must eliminate from our prayer any attitude in which interest has a part. This is one of the clearest signs separating the soul of a “rich” man from that of a “poor” man: the rich man receives and gives out of interest, and lives through this interest. The truly poor do not act by interest.
- Now, it is a fact that, very often, we look at prayer as a means which we use among others, or after others; are we not tempted to take refuge in prayer, as one tries an ultimate manoeuvres when all else has failed? Then we turn to God as to a “means”, to give us service, we more or less try to use Him. We only pray, in that case, in the measure of our need of a special thing (examinations threat of a separation, health to ensure, contract to be made, etc...) and we pray practically conditionally... (cf: Judith 8, 10-27 & 9, 5-6)

“O Lord Jesus,
Teach me to be generous,
To serve you as you deserve to be,
To give without reckoning,
To fight without care of the wounds,
To work without looking for rest,
To spend myself out without expecting any other
reward than the knowledge that I am
doing your holy will.”

(17) Faire Oraison, G. Courtois, Édition Fleurus, Paris pp. 31-34

Praying like Jesus

“In this manner therefore shall you pray:

“Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name - thy Kingdom come - thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven - give us this day our daily bread - And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For if you forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will also forgive your offenses. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses.” (Matt. 6, 9-15.)

Let us ask ourselves:

- (18) 1. - Why Jesus prayed.
 2. - How Jesus prayed.
 3. - How to pray perfectly like Jesus.

- I -

Why Jesus prayed -

Our Lord did not have to pray for the same reasons as we have. In a certain sense, He did not need to pray, but He has willed that His prayer should serve as an example to us. And he even indicates that this is the very reason of his gesture of prayer.

Thus, in front of the crowd, after He had the stone removed from Lazarus' tomb:

“Father, I give you thanks because you have heard me. Yet I knew that You always hear me but because of the people who stand round, I spoke, that they may believe that You have sent me.” (Jo 11, 41-42.)

Jesus truly prayed -

Would this mean that Christ prayed superficially, that He somewhat pretended to be praying, as if he were to show off?

His human intelligence certainly did not need to “ascend” to God since He was constantly seeing his Father:

“The Father never leaves me alone.”

but Our Lord, when praying in front of his disciples, has willed to give authenticity to the truth of his Incarnation, - to manifest to us the fact that he possessed a human nature with all it comports of most incarnated sensibility, passions, affectivity and emotions.

And He prayed, with all this sensibility, a prayer which was humble and really human:

- moved to tears when he faced his friend Lazarus' death; (Jo 11, 35-38.)
- anxious about St. Peter's weakness; (Luke 22, 32.)
- crushed with anguish before His own Chalice. (Matt. 26, 39.)

Jesus wants to re-assure us -

This is one of the great aims of his prayer:

“Not what I want, Father, but what you want.”

Christ has wanted to show us that, in certain circumstances, it is normal that man, through his will, desires what God does not want. Our Lord has truly wanted to re-assure all those who - after Him - would be troubled in front of weakness, in front of death, in front of the Chalice of a passion, by showing them that He too, had known all this, and had prayed in the same circumstances:

“Christ carrying man shows somehow the private will of a man when He says: ‘May this cup pass away...’ Indeed it was a human will and it wanted a proper good; but because He wants to be a straightforward man, a just man as is expected when facing God, He adds: ‘Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours.’ It is as if He was telling every one of us: ‘See yourself in Me.’ You can indeed personally want one thing whilst God wants another.” (St. Augustine.)

- II -

How to pray like Jesus -

Not only did Jesus want to show us how to pray, but He has also dictated the very words we would have to say in order to be agreeable to, and accepted by, his Father.

As he promised the efficiency to any and all prayer done in His name, he has wanted to teach us not only the attitudes of such a prayer, but also its great moments and its unfolding. This is why we shall try and discover what is the secret of the important steps of this prayer, of its progression, and also what is the secret of the choice of words He has left us when He was addressing himself to His Father.

The prayers of Jesus have built on the rhythm of all prayers: three characteristic stages: in one and the same movement, they include praise, adoration, and petition.

The three elements of the prayer of Jesus:

All the prayers of our Lord passed on to us by the Gospels have between them a great similarity in their structure, their development, the choice of words, even in their progression. This is especially evident in the two principal ones the Pater, and the Sacerdotal Prayer.

One might sum up around three words these different moments, this progression, and thus - through them - those of any and all Christian prayers:

- A. Father - The prayer of Our Lord is born of the recognition of the gift of God which stirs up praise, thanksgiving.
- B. Your Name - but this gift which manifests Gods greatness leads us to adoration.
- C. Your Kingdom - and when we discover at the same time how important is this gift and how few are those who receive it, the prayer brings to the petition its audacity and its efficacy.

One may discover from the Sacerdotal Prayer (Jo 17) the similarity of the different steps in all the prayers of Our Lord:

- They always are preceded by an invocation to the Father and start with an expression of thanksgiving. (Jo 17, 1-8.)
- Then follows the invocation of the Name. (Jo 17, 6-11-12126.)
- Lastly the prayer for the Kingdom (Jo, 17, 9-26.); with the detail of this intercession such as the Pater specifies it, and such as the Sacerdotal Prayer takes it up again: on earth as in heaven (Jo. 17, 4-5.); - not to fall into temptation (Jo 17, 12.); - to be delivered from evil (Jo 17, 15.).

Parallelism between the Pater and several gestures and words of Our Lord –

The Pater expresses the sentiments essential to all prayer.

Father:	Matt. 11, 25, 26 Jo. 17, 4-5	: I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. : I have glorified you on earth.
Your Name:	Matt. 11, 25 Jo. 12, 28 Jo. 17, 6-11	: I praise you for what you have revealed...nor does anyone know the Father except the Son. : Father, glorify your name. : I have manifested your Name to the men whom you have given me.
Your kingdom:	Luke 17, 20 Jo 18, 36 Luke 10, 11	: The kingdom of God is not coming with visible pomp that can be watched for... : My Kingdom is not of this world. : The Kingdom of God is near.
Your will:	Luke 22, 42 Heb. 10, 7 Jo 4, 34	: Yet, not my will but Yours be done. : Here I am, I have come to do your will, O God. : Jo 6, 38
Our Bread:	Matt. 6, 25 Luke 11, 9-13	: Do not be anxious for what you will eat... : Ask...if any of you asks his father for a loaf, will he hand him a stone?
Forgive us:	Matt. 18, 21-22 Mark 11, 24-26 Luke 23, 34	: Until seventy seven times seven... : Parable of the two debtors. : Father, forgive them...
The temptation:	Luke 22, 31 Matt. 26, 41	: Simon, Simon, ...I have prayed for you, that your faith might not fail..." : Keep awake and pray that you may not enter into temptation... Jo 17, 12
Evil:	Mark 9, 29 Jo 17, 15	: This kind of devil can be cast out in no way except by prayer and fasting... : I do not pray You to take them out of the world, but only to preserve them from its evil influence.

N.B. - Let us note the similarity of these three moments of the prayer of Jesus with the great prayers of the Old Testament, for instance:

those of David (2 Kings 7, 18-29.)

those of Tobias, (Tob 13, 1-23.)

A - Father:

- Above all the titles that have been recognized to Christ Messiahs, - King, -Prophet, - and so many others, - the Apostles and especially St. John and St. Paul, have presented him to us with insistence as “God’s envoy,” - as the personal “gift” of God to men:

“Yes, God so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son so that every man who believes in Him should not perish.” (John.)

“He who did not spare his own Son and who delivered Him for us. How, with Him, will he not grant us all the rest...” (St. Paul.)

Before anything else, Christ is the Son given to the world. This is why His prayer will first of all be necessarily addressed to Him from whom he proceeds, to Him who sent him: the Father.

- This prayer always starts with the invocation of this fatherhood which, in God, is the source of all he is; for men. And, in so doing, Our Lord teaches us to whom we must address our prayer. He whom we are praying is the Father, and - more specifically - the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father, that is: He who has sent him, who has given him to the world. In fact, it is from his grace, from his grace as a First-born Son, that his prayer is born.
- “As my Father has loved me...” Him whom Our Lord prays is he who has manifested his love to men through a gift: the gift of His Son, given to us in the Incarnation, in the Redemption.
- And this is why the first moment of this prayer is thanksgiving, praise, a “Eucharist” with all the nuances that will take this invocation to the Father:

- the wonderment when facing the gift made to the small ones.

(Luke 10, 21-22.)

- the ultimate confidence (Luke 23, 34-36.)

- and St. Paul will sum up all prayer in this very prayer:

“And because you are sons, God has sent in your hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying ‘Abba, Father’.” (Gal 4, 6 & Rom 8, 15.)

B - Your Name:

- But this gift is a grace: a pure and gratuitous gift. Indeed God does not enrich Himself by communicating Himself to man. He does not need to give himself in order to perpetuate himself, to achieve himself. While any finite being cannot reach its perfection without exercising whatever talent or faculty he possesses, he must communicate to others whatever excellence is in him in order to perpetuate himself: the artist who has just given a concert

has enriched himself when using his talent, and he has perpetuated his memory for those who have been his listeners.

= v.g. The spouses who sincerely give themselves to each other do enrich themselves mutually and prolong themselves in the child of this union.

They are finite beings, incomplete, on their way to achievement. God is the only One who has no perfection to achieve through the gift He makes of himself; He is the unlimited happiness to which there is nothing to add. And as, being God, he suffices completely to himself, he is the only One to whom giving himself does not bring anything. Thus he is the only One to be able to give Himself “for nothing” (gratis.)

- And the gratuity as well as the generosity of such a gift appear to us together as being the signs of the purest love, of the only pure love: we are “no use” to God. Man, on the other hand, always keeps a certain interest within his love, even in the self-giving love.
- While contemplating the purely divine aspects of the gift of the Father, while discovering the munificence revealed by this gift, the prayer of Christ becomes adoration. Indeed, Jesus discovers in himself to what point this gift not only is free, but is addressed to beings who do not deserve it, because of their weakness and of their failings: this gift is addressed to the impious to us.

“But God commends His Charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5, 9.)

and the gratuity of this gift is that of a divine mercy from Him who all together gives, forgives, and gives again.

- of he who alone can make himself smaller than the creature he saves because he has no fear whatsoever of losing himself ... “Exinanivit semetipsum”...
- Alone the perfect One can to this extent give himself without any risk of being corrupted
- to those who are stained: like the sun that gives its heat to the filth without becoming soiled.
- Alone he who made the law can forgive, in such a way;
- Alone He who is omnipotence can to this extent dominate his own strength, and - through his love - remain master of himself in front of the offense;
- Alone He who is all love can in such a way take the initiative to deliver himself, to suggest himself as a ransom, making personally the first step towards reconciliation, and so, showing the right to adoration that belongs to the All-Powerful and All-merciful.

“It is right and just to praise you, Father Holy and Almighty, and through Christ to adore your Majesty - and revere it...”

will say the Preface, repeating the hymn from the Apocalypse:

“You are worthy, O our Lord and our God, to receive glory, honor and power...”

We pray a God who is close to us –

- God’s generosity cannot be compared to ours: we think we have done everything possible when we forgive whoever has offended us, but God, in contrast, weeps with the sinner, and comes and takes his place, until death. God, because he has wanted to make himself close to us, has reached a height of generosity which cannot be surpassed.
- Don’t we, too often, stop at a prayer addressed to a misshapen, - abstract image, to a God guardian of an idea, of a law, rather than to the ineffable Person who, through love, has bound His destiny to ours?

Paul and John speak of the divine gratuity -

This gratuity is the most characteristic trait of God’s love, representing what, in Him, is the strongest basis for the meaning of our adoration, and being as well the source of our hope and of our optimism.

- “Hope does not disappoint, because the Charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For why did Christ, at the set time, die for the wicked when as yet we were weak?”

(follow closely St. Paul’s reasoning, such as he develops it here:)

“For scarcely in behalf of a just man does one die; perhaps one might bring oneself to die for a good man: but God commends his charity towards us because, when as yet we were sinners, Christ died for us. How much more, now, justified in His blood, shall we be, through Him, saved from the wrath?

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, how much more, once reconciled, Shall we be saved by his life?...”

(Rom 5, 5-10.)

(cf.: 1 Tim 15-16. Tite 3, 5. Eph. 2, 8. Rom. 9, 16)

- There is no question here either of an effort, or of a record, but of God who is moved to pity. But is this for us - as for Paul and John - a mystery, THE mystery, God’s secret? Read over again the beautiful hymn of Paul to the benevolent Love of God for us, Love hidden for centuries, (Eph 1, 1 ff.); look - through the way the Apostles have spoken of it, - for what must have been source of joy for Christ’s adoration: the faithfulness, the over-abundance of this gift from the Father. (cf.: Eph 1, 3; Jo 10, 10; Rom 8, 31-39.)
- “Father, glorify your name.”
“Hallowed be your name...”

Christ knew that, when He was praying for the honor due to the Father to be rendered to Him, He was also praying that, at last, be recognized the true character of the superiority of the Almighty: that of Mercy - so that, at last, be evoked and this time under his true name -

the only One who could bring us salvation: GOD - LOVE.

C. Your Kingdom -

Because he clearly sees the greatness of the gifts of God, Christ is all the more aflame with the desire to have them shared, and accepted, by those who have been entrusted to Him.

- Christ, having received from His Father “those entrusted to him...” (Jo 6, 37-44.)
- his first care will be to see that they safely remain in the Father’s hand, (Jo 10, 29.)
- this is the whole object of the second part of the Sacerdotal Prayer, as well as of the second part of the Pater:

“Those you have entrusted to me, ...they are my crowning glory.” (Jo 17, 9-10.)
“I am not long for this world, ...but they remain in the world.”

- hence the petition:

“May they be one as we are one!” (Jo 17, 12.)
“Preserve them... Consecrate them to the service of the truth...” (Jo 17, 17.)

- Christ, knowing the value of the kingdom since He is Himself the ransom through which this Kingdom has been acquired, ends His prayer in a supplication for all those who are called to belong to it.
- Jesus has specified a certain number of petitions that He wishes us to take up for ourselves:

- 1) - “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice.” (Matt. 6, 33.)
(justice means holiness, and sums up the practice of the Beatitudes - laws of the Kingdom which will be taken up again in the Pater: forgiveness, etc..)
- 2) - The Spirit of the Kingdom. (Luke 11, 13.)
- 3) - Laborers for the Kingdom. (Matt. 9.37.)

Let’s be realistic:

Don’t we often live in a false idealism, believing that the reign of God is foreign to the concrete circumstances of our life?

Look at Christ’s example:

- His attention for all and every one;
- nothing is indifferent to him when it concerns the difficulties or sufferings of those around him.

There are not two separate worlds: that of our own life and that of our prayer, - the latter alone co-operating to the kingdom of God. On the contrary, all the elements that constitutes our life: the tasks, the humblest cares, the most fortuitous meetings, the weaknesses... (especially the weaknesses -) all these constitute also the Kingdom if, through our prayer, we know how to give them existence in front of God.

On certain days, the best way to “make” our prayer will simply be to take up our agenda - or to go through the different steps of our day and, beforehand, to analyze in front of God each one of our planned actions:

- What relation is there between this and that - and Christ?
- What is Christ’s wish as far as this one, or that, is concerned?
- Can I possibly have this, or this one, in my life, as well as Christ?

Simplicity of prayer, and of the Kingdom: a hidden seed - ferment.

Let us be confident -

- “If you ask for anything in my Name, I will do it.” (jo 14, 14.)

He does not say, ‘in whatever way you ask...’, but: ‘in my Name...’ For he shows himself still much more of a Savior when he does not do what he sees us asking against our salvation. The Doctor knows well whether the patient is asking for something that is in the interests, or against the interests of his health; and if he refuses to grant the patient the harmful things he is asking, it is only for the good of his health.” (St. Augustine.)

- III -

Praying perfectly like Jesus

1. Our prayer and Christ’ prayer

Where is our prayer born?

It is within the relationship of Christ with his Father that our prayer takes place. This is what constitutes its originality as a Christian prayer it is completely ordered by the gift of Christ.

It is born of the recognition of this gift, of this grace that comes from the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and it is supported by the manifestation of this gift, in order to rise up to the divine secret which it represents, and also to the adoration of the goodness that is its source. Then, from there, our prayer dares to ask that this gift be continued until the Kingdom comes.

First, divine initiative -

It is because there has been a divine initiative, - and an initiative manifested in Christ,

- that we may have the pretension to approach God. We cannot lift ourselves as far as God on our own, but, - as says the Church after the Canon of the Mass:

“Taught, formed, carried by Christ, we dare to say: ‘Our Father’...”

“In order that God may be well praised by man, God has praised Himself; to be praised by His servants, He has filled them with His Spirit, and it is His Spirit who praises Him through his servants. Is it not, indeed, Himself who sings His own praises?”
(St. Augustine.)

Through his gift of Christ to us, God makes us, as it were, enter into his monologue, in the wonderful secret of His design, (Re-read Eph. 1) And so, in the measure we take up on our own account Christ’s desires and His sentiments, it happens through an admirable reciprocity of love - that our own desires become the object of his decrees of eternal love, and concur to the realization of his merciful designs.

Our acceptance of Christ’s prayer

Thus, prayer is only Christian prayer when it realizes this subordination of our will to that of Christ, - also this acceptance of God’s love, this taking possession of Christ’s prayer. And, straight away, our prayer finds its perfect statute: that of Christ’s prayer.

“...Remembering the blessed Passion, the Resurrection ...
we present this chosen oblation, the perfect victim
...By Him, with Him, in Him, are ever given to You
all honor and glory. Then we dare to say: Our Father...”

2. Perfection of Christ’s Prayer –

Expression of perfect friendship:

If the greatest news in Christianity is the discovery that God calls us to share His friendship (Jo 15), to enter into charity with Him (and, in consequence, with each of those who are His image,) this friendship will be real only on the condition that it tends towards a perfect reciprocity, i.e. to an absolute conformity of wills.

and this will only be possible:

- if the other truly becomes this “alter ego” -
- if his existence, his desire, his will become a law for me.

Now, on our own, we cannot expect this, “tend towards it, not pretend to it...” - unless you are introduced by Christ (Heb 6, 8, 9.) Such is the deepest characteristic of His prayer: to be the expression of a perfect friendship; to be like the answer - on earth - of the perfect love of the Son for the Father.

To identify ourselves with the desires of Christ:

As for us, the only infallible way into the perfect friendship, the perfect reciprocity, the perfect conformity to the divine love which the Spirit claims in our hearts, will be to identify ourselves with the desires of Christ. And, in this way, what would have been unthinkable on our own is realized: our prayer overruns its own limitations and finds itself clothed in the very perfection of Christ's prayer: with its daring and its universality.

Audacious prayer –

Thus our prayer shares in the audacity, the assurance, the infallibility of Christ's prayer: alone, Jesus has been able to tell the Father: "I will" (Jo 17, 24) and to pray in complete abandonment to the Father because to Him alone

"all things have been given into His hands." (Jo 3, 35.)

To him alone, doubt is spared, - he is certain of the absolute efficacy of his requests, because alone he is intimate with the Father, and because alone he knows perfectly, as a man, what Providence has subjected to this prayer.

Which allows Him, Jesus, to communicate this assurance to those for whom He prayed (v.g. St. Peter, Luke 22, 32.) and to bring into being their confidence:

"...even now I know that whatever you will ask from God,
God will give it to you." (Jo 11, 22.)

Thus, Christ's peace and filial abandonment - as well as his audacity - become ours.

Magnanimous and universal prayer -

Through Christ's prayer, our prayer is united to all the Christian mysteries, Incarnation, Redemption, Resurrection, etc. Receiving in our heart the world's despair, we have the power to transform it into the distress of Christ's soul during His agony, sharing the joy of men, we have the power to turn it into the hymn of Resurrection.

Alone, the desires of Christ fully correspond to those of the Father, and - through His, - our desires can have a share in the care of "all the Churches", and in the instauration of the kingdom in all its fullness.

"I want to lead you all to Paradise", often said Francis of Assisi.

Confidence even in front of distress -

When facing the misery and distress we meet, and against which we can do nothing, do we really believe that it belongs to us to turn everything round towards God? Are we convinced that we have the power, through prayer, to change the sign of this distress of the world?

Or rather do we simply allow ourselves to be crushed by this helplessness we feel, by the impression that “nothing can be done”, in front of too much sadness, banality, impossibility to break through, or in front of problems the particulars of which partly escape us (social injustice, wars...etc.) And, at times, don't we even rely a little on oblivion...instead of making of our prayer a real commitment?

Conclusion - To give God to God.

The gift of his Son to Himself, such is the offering God asks of us, because it is the gift He makes to us, gift which is the Holy Spirit himself.

God needs our love as He needs his Son, - it is not optional now that He has so decided, - and he has so decided for all eternity, and from all eternity.

Thus, when we stop loving God, God somehow loses his Son, - and when we come back to Him, He finds his Son again.

We possess the real power to give Him this Son of his in us - and if we refuse, there is a gift of the Son to the Father which does not take place, without however the eternal gift ever ceasing.

“I have called you friends because all I have learnt from my Father, I have made it known to you.”

God has but one love, and when He loves he can only give this one. The Father wills to re-live with us what passes between the Son and himself. Such is finally the ultimate secret of our prayer and of its perfection.

(18) Apprendre à prier, B. Bro. Paris, PP. 41-50

PRAYING WITH THE CHURCH

- Jesus takes part in the cult in the synagogue:

“Invested with the power of the Spirit, Jesus now returned to Galilee, and news concerning him spread far and wide in the region round about. He instructed the people in their synagogues, and won applause from all.

“One day, he came to Nazareth, the home of his childhood. On the Sabbath, he went according to his custom and stood up to read.” (Luke 4, 14-17.)

- He respects the cult offered to God in the Temple:

“So he made a whip of small cords and drove all the men out of the temple; so, too, the sheep and the oxen; the coin of the money, changers he scattered about by overturning the tables. He said to the sellers of doves: ‘Get these things out of the way. Do not turn my Father’s house into a market place!’” (Jo 2, 15-17.)

- He wants a true cult in the Temple:

“One day the Pharisees and a group of Scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered round him, and noticed that some of his disciples ate their meals with common, that is unwashed, hands. Now the Pharisees, like the Jews generally, do not eat unless they wash their hands up to the wrist, merely to uphold the tradition of the elders; and when they return from the market, they do not eat unless they first wash, and there are many other things handed down to them as binding, such as the washing of cups, jugs and pans.

The Pharisees and the Scribes, therefore, asked him: “Why do not your disciples live up to the tradition of the elders, but eat their meals with unwashed hands?” He replied: “Rightly has Isaias prophesied about you, hypocrites, in the Scripture text:

“This race honors me with its lips, but its heart is far away from me. They worship me in vain; for they teach as binding precepts mere rulings made by man.”

“Setting aside the Commandment of God, you cling to the tradition of men. The washing of pots and of cups, and many other things you do like these,” and he went on to say to them:

“Honor your father and your mother, and whoever curses a father or a mother shall be put to death.” Yet your teaching is different: once a person says to his father, or his mother, ‘Any support you might get from me is ‘Korban’ (that is a gift already made to God), you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother; and thus you render null and void the word of God by your tradition a tradition which you are handing down. And you do many other things similar to these.”

He then called the crowd around him again and said to them: “Listen, all of you, and use your understanding! There is nothing outside a person which, by going into him,

can defile him. On the contrary, the things that come out of a person are the things that defile him. Let everyone heed what he has heard.”

“When he had come indoors, away from the crowd, his disciples asked him about that obscure saying: “So you, too,” he said to them, “are still without understanding? Do you comprehend that whatever goes into a person from outside has no power to defile him, since it does not go into his soul, but only into his body, and then passes out as waste?”

And thereby he declared all foods clean. He continued, ‘What comes out of a person is the thing that defiles a person. Yes, it is from within, out of the hearts of men, that evil intentions proceed - fornication, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, fraud, wantonness, envy; profanity, pride, folly. All these wicked things come from within and defile a person.’
(Mark 7, 1-23.)

All these texts clearly show us that Jesus consented to belong to a real community; he recognizes the customs, the traditions of the Jewish people, - and the ritual meals of the community. Jesus has prayed publicly in the Temple, in communion with his fellow countrymen...

The Church follows his example in her liturgical prayer. Let us meditate here on

- the motive of a prayer in common,
- the true way of praying together, and
- how to pray with the Bible. (19)

- I -

Why a prayer in common?

A. - A law of life: a favorable environment –

Every living being needs an environment in order to develop. And this is not optional. The slightest thing, a change in the atmosphere, in the weather, is sufficient to destroy life. Frost one night and the harvest is lost.

The same applies to the most precious and the most fragile belonging of man: his divine life. Not with impunity can he breathe any atmosphere. And there are sunless environments, heatless places, which leave nothing in the soul but a desert.

A medium of life -

Before anything else, the liturgy of the Church is just this: a medium of life, the atmosphere created by the life of Christ, by the manifestation of God, in order to bring this same life into existence in man, - and in order to develop it in him. The Christian community gives an environment which teaches to live according to the ways of Christ, an environment which helps, sustains, and enlightens man’s heart.

I receive the prayer of Christ -

Just as I do not invent my life, I do not invent my faith, but I receive it. Likewise, I have not to invent my prayer, but I receive the prayer of Christ, the prayer born of the Spirit of God living in the community of His sons.

The elder ones introduce the younger ones into this life according to Christ; the former generations educate and bring the new ones into this movement of prayer, born of Christ and sustained by his expectation.

It is no folklore -

An environment is a necessity for the blossoming of any life. And it is not sufficient - as too many presentations would have us believe (v.g. certain files on religious ceremonies) to assimilate the liturgy to the folklore of a village, to the customs of a community, to the traditions of a family or of a profession. No, there is much more in question: the living environment, the very conditions which are indispensable for the breathing, the feeding, and the growing of the one who wants to live. And if the environment disappears, - so does life.

He who lives is master of his environment -

The strong are responsible for the weak. So it is in the life of prayer: doubtless, it is the young who bring to mind, and demand, the essential; and the fervor of the new ones refreshes that of the older ones. But it also the steadfastness of the older ones which will help the beginners to acquire truth - or to lose it.

Sense of the liturgy -

The ultimate reason of a common prayer is summed up in this: the Church suggests to me the prayer of Christ, and welcomes, me in the living environment, in the community, where it is possible for this prayer to come to life, and to blossom out.

So, it is no more optional for a limb to live attached to its organism, or to get detached from it, - than it is for a Christian to do without his community. He is only a Christian in the measure in which he is a member of Christ, and he is only a member of Christ if he allows life to come into him through his communion to the faith and to the prayer of his brothers.

Like Jesus

- who fully accepts to be a member of a community
- that has traditions: Preparation of the Last Supper;
- that has priesthood: Mark 1, 44;
- that has a law: Matt. 5, 17;
- that has an authority: Matt. 22, 2-3.;
- that has a temple: Luke 2, 46; Matt. 23, 21; Mark 11, 17;
- that has a cult: Jo 18, 20.

The spontaneous reactions of his prayers testify that He is integrated in his life environment: it is the psalms, received and learnt from the community that He takes up again and again in each of the great occasions of His life:

- in the last solemn announcement of His coming death. Jo, 12, 27.
- at the last Supper, when facing treason: Jo 13, 18.
- in the last Discourse Jo 15, 25.
- in the very last prayers Matt. 26, 38; Matt. 27, 46.

Like the early Christians:

The early Christians remain bound to the temple (Luke 24, 53; Act 2, 46; 3, 3; 5, 25, 42, etc...) and they keep the Jewish customs, which have acquired a definite meaning since Christ has taken them up.

Very often the Apostles repeat the Psalms when speaking of Christ and of his prayer:
(see Act.13, 33-35; Matt 27, 43; Jo 19, 24, 26; 1 Cor 10, 26;
1 Cor 15, 27; Heb 10, 5-10; etc...)

The prayer in common is not optional –

He does not understand the Christian prayer, who does not see how it is bound to a community, to a liturgy, - literally “to-the-work-of-a-people” , and that is, to the work such as Jesus has accomplished it during his life.

And this prayer is no longer optional: Christ has chosen it for us. Let us question ourselves on our reticence to the idea of a prayer in common: beyond laziness, or own little individual comfort, are there no other, deeper, obstacles? ...A false angelism, an illusion: one thinks that one can do without learning, without receiving from others the food of prayer, the manna; and above all, ignorance, or - worse still - merely exterior, abstract, superficial knowledge of liturgical things and signs: though they are so simple, so real and so near, all their meaning being (not a theatrical stage, be it a pious one,) but the living and active presence of a God - Savior.

B - The means of expressing his love -

Let us take the example of the artist. Why does he need to “realize” concretely the beauty he loves, and why does not he keep to himself, and in himself his feelings, his fervor?

Why did Beethoven - once he became deaf - feel the desire to have published the symphony which he would never hear? If not because of the ineluctable need to incarnate, to bring to life and to share this fervor and this interior praise?

Prayer is born of the ardor of the loving souls just as Creation is born in the divine love of the need to share. Otherwise, the “public” prayer is but poor theatricals, ...whilst in truth it is meant both to lead to interior prayer, and to express it.

My active participation –

If I have not to invent, but to receive the true prayer, as a free gift from above, – this prayer of the living Christ which I learn through His Church, - it would be an illusion to believe that, for me, there is nothing left but a passive role...

If the vine receives its life from the sun, from the air, it is not only made of sunlight...

Homage of the whole of myself –

We must not reduce the whole of the liturgical exterior activities accompanying prayer to a merely pedagogical aim, meant for training, for the acquiring of the right dispositions - just as if their function existed only at the beginning of prayer. Certainly not the role of liturgy is not only to ensure the environment, the “tradition”, the transmitting and formation of prayer from age to age, but just as much, and without any doubt, still more, to translate the expression, the visible incarnation of this homage of the whole of myself which is prayer. Without this homage, without this interior devotion, the public prayer in common is no longer any more than vain demonstrations, and at the outside limit, a lie.

Liturgy on earth - Liturgy in heaven -

The Scripture does not limit liturgy to its earthly manifestations but - on the contrary – shows us its source, its living center, in Heaven, in this liturgy of the Lamb, in this jubilation of the Apocalypse around the Sacrifice of Jesus. (Apoc. 4 & 5; Heb. 9&10.)

We must here make a reversal: through the liturgy it is not us first, who go up towards Heaven, but Heaven that becomes present to us, - it is merely the soul starting on its eternal function, its divine “Office”, wonderful achievement of the whole of its earthly life.

Sense to be given to the initiations to liturgy:

Why do initiations to liturgy, and everything that goes with them: singing rehearsals, ceremonies rehearsals, etc., why do they seem rather false, artificial, and why do they appear to us as useless games or preoccupations of aesthetes? Is it not because, too often, they are only ordered by an external motive, a “community” wish, without deep interior roots?

Is it not a general rule in the whole of our life to need exterior signs, but at the same time, and more still, is it not a law to shape these signs to make them into the expression of what they represent, a spiritual life?

One judges a people through its feasts...and a group through its songs - certainly so, but not through the ceremonial or the technical achievement of these feasts (see dictatorships...) but through the soul they show us.

It would be just as wrong to confine private prayer - because it is interior - to the

limits of the individual (prayer goes beyond the individual), as to disown the prayer in common.

- Have we taken care, in both cases, to go back to the Source and to the true measure: Christ's prayer? Outside this only Prayer, there is none.
- Are we convinced that it is really foolish to oppose public prayer to private prayer?

There is but one "Christian prayer": that of Christ, taken up again by the Christian. The prayer in common has no sense, no value, without interior prayer.

As in an Orchestra -

And any one special instrument does not lose its personality through the fact that it is playing in an orchestra: on the contrary, it grows to the splendor of the whole harmony, and vice versa; the whole harmony gets its full value from the quality of each instrument.

Likewise, from our place in the liturgical choir, we bring the collaboration of our private prayer. If I have not the desire to live in Christ, and for Christ, how could I pretend to take His place in the world, and my brothers' place in front of God, in the prayer in common? (Re-read Isaias 29, 11-12; Apoc. 5, 4-10; Heb. 9&10.)

- II -

How to pray in common -

- The prayer of Christ has served as a model and as the method for our private prayer
- The prayer of the Church serves as a model and as the method for our private prayer,

so that there is now only one prayer: that of Christ, living in His members.

The Church prays like Christ -

Jesus left us but a small number of prayers. So, in order to form her own as well as join, in all circumstances, in the prayer of Jesus, the Church has taken, her Lord as a model, finding her inspiration in what the Evangelists tell us of His own prayer.

We see Christ choosing the psalms as the repertory of his own feelings. Likewise, the Church is going to keep the psalms, remembering they are the expression of the prayer of her King and Savior.

On the other hand, the Evangelists have presented to us Christ as fully realizing everything announced by the great figures of the Old Testament:

- For St. Luke, He is the new Elias who will go to the desert, will be transfigured, persecuted because of His witnessing and finally raised up to Heaven;

- For St. Matthew, He is the new Moses, he who brings the definitive law;
- For St. Paul, He is the new and last Adam who recapitulates and gathers together all the peoples through the gift of a heavenly life.

Thus in the supplication of Elias, in the complaint of the Servant of Yahweh, in the thanksgiving of Moses, in the Canticle of Adam, - the Church will read, will recognize the thanksgiving of Christ, the prayer of her Savior, who gives them at last full achievement, full reality.

The Church praying like Christ is the Liturgy –

Here is the key to the whole of Liturgy, and

- in all occasions (v.g. rhythm of the year and of the seasons)
- in all texts and formulas (v.g. the psalms, the Canticles of the Old Testament)
- in all actions (v.g.: the sacrifice of Isaac, - the retreat of Elias or of Moses in the desert, - the struggles of the prophets, Jeremy, Isaias...)

we must look for what all these realities tell us about Jesus:

- He is the manifestation of God and these realities, these reasons, these formulas, these stories, these parables, are only the servants of the action, the life, the soul of Jesus.
- To interrogate them is to discover a little more of His mystery.
- To interrogate Him, is to know a little better; what God wants to tell us, and what He wants to hear us tell Him through his Son Jesus,

An example -

Let us take an example:

Thanks to this key to the Liturgy, the Paschal Vigil can find its true sense.

- To unveil for us what is thanksgiving, the Eucharist, the Pasch of Christ, the Church merely takes up again the series of the great Canticles of the Old Testament:

Genesis, which becomes the Canticle of the new Adam - likewise, the thanksgiving of Moses after the Red Sea, the joy of Isaias, - the proclamation of Ezechiel...they all are now given a new meaning, or rather, their true signification is at last realized: they become the prayer of Christ who fully accomplishes them all in the very last “prophecy” of the great vigil: the Canon of the Mass.

- And this, we could take up again on the occasion of every feast, while discovering how each Introit, each Offertory, each Gradual, and each reading opens to us the eternal moments of Christ’s, prayer, inviting us to take it up again on our own account,

At the School of St. Augustine -

“God could not have made a more excellent gift to men than to send them his Word, through whom He has created everything, - and to unite them to Him as his own members in order that He be at once Son of God and Son of man.

an only God with the Father,
an only man with men;

so that when addressing our prayers to God, we should not
separate Him from the Son
and that the Body of the Son, offering His prayers, should not
be separated from His Head.

Thus Our Lord Jesus Christ, unique Savior of His Body,

- prays for us,
- prays in us,
- and receives our prayers.
- He prays for us as our priest,
- He prays in us as our Head,
- He receives our prayers as our God.

So let us recognize: - that we speak in him,
 - that He speaks in us.
 - it is in us that He makes Himself this
 prayer of the psalm which is called
 “Prayer of David.”

Let nobody say, then, when repeating these words,

- Christ does not speak here,
- nor: it is not I who speak.

But - if he believes to be in the Body of Christ, let him say all at once:

- It is Christ who speaks
- It is I who speak.

“Never speak without Him, and He will never say anything without you.”
(St. Augustine.)

- III -

How to pray with the Bible –

All the books of the Bible give a precise meaning to the Christian character of our life and of our prayer. The liturgy has underlined their relation to the mystery of Christ.

Here are a few charts which may serve as a starting point for our prayer, and feed it during the liturgical year.

THE PRAYER OF LITURGY

CHRISTMAS CYCLE

The World was near God
And he made himself the light of men.

Advent	Isaias	The <u>expectation</u> of peoples The <u>Promise of a Savior</u> The trusting certainty in Almighty God.
Christmas	Ep. Romans	The <u>manifestation of love</u> Freeing us from anger, sin, and death.
Epiphany	Synoptics	The manifestation of the <u>Christ Lord</u> : Savior, Master, Judge.

EASTER CYCLE PENTECOST

the darkness did not comprehend HIM but as many as
received Him, to them He gave power to become the
sons of God.

Septuagesima Passion	Genesis Exodus Ep. Captivity	The story of Salvation Its reasons.
Passion Palm Sunday	Job Jeremy Isaias 52, 52	The ailing servant.
Passion Easter Paschal Time	St. John (Gospel, Epistles, Apocalypse)	The mysteries of the raised Savior – the new life – Expectation of the spirit of love
Pentecost	Acts of the Apostles	The foundation of the Church
Time after Pentecost	Synoptics Historical Books of the Old Testament	What the kingdom will be its history, its laws.
	Books of Wisdom The Prophets	God acting in it Expectation of judgment Parousia, the final Kingdom.

THE GREAT PRAYERS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis	18, 16-33 24 32, 10-13	- Abraham intercedes for Sodom - Ezechias goes to look for a fiancée for Isaac - Jacob back from exile
Exodus	15 32, 1 to 34, 9	- Canticle of Moses after the Red Sea. - Moses' supplication for the people
Numbers	14, 13-19	- Moses' supplication for the people
1 Sam	1, 9-15 2, 1-11	- Anna, Samuel's mother
2 Sam	7, 18-29	- David after he has learnt of God's choice
1 Kings	8, 1-53	- Dedication of the Temple
1 Kings	18, 36-37	- Elias at the time of the holocaust.
2 Kings	19, 14-19	- Ezechias prays for deliverance.
1 Chron.	16, 8-36 17, 16-27 29, 10-20	- (2 Sam. 7, 18-29) - David, on God's promise - David, prayer for Salomon.
2 Chron.	20, 5-13	- Josaphat facing the invasion.
Esdras	9,	- Esdras for the confession of sins.
2 Macch.	1, 23-29	- Nehemias, for the renewal of the fire.
Wisdom	9, 1-18	- Salomon for wisdom
Ecclus.	36, 1-19 51, 1-12	- For deliverance. - Thanksgiving.
Tobias	3, 1-6 3, 11-23 8, 7-10 13, 1-23	- Tobias' prayer. - Sara's prayer. - Prayer of Tobias and Sara. - Canticle of Tobias
Judith	(4, 8-15) 6, 14-21 (7, 18-21) 8, 10-27 9, 1-14	- The great supplications of the people. - - God is not a son of man. - - The God of the humble.
Esther	(4, 17 a-k (4, 17 k-z	- Prayer of Mardochai. - Prayer of Esther.
Isaias	38, 1-22 63, 7 to 64, 11	- Ezechias facing death. - Prayer of the people.
Jeremy	17, 12-18 20, 7-13 32, 17-25	- Trust and vegeance. - Confessions - Power of God.
Lam.	5	- Remember, O Lord.
Baruch	2, 11 to 3, 8	- Prayer of the exiles.
Daniel	3, 26-45 3, 52-90	- Canticle of Azarias - Canticle of the three young men.
Jonas	2, 3-10	- Jonas saved.
Habacuc	3, 1-19	- O Lord, I have heard your renown.

PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. Christ's example:

The moments of His prayer:

Luke	III, 21	- after the Baptism.
Mark	I, 35	- at the end of the first day of miracles at Capharnaum.
Luke	VI, 12	- before choosing the Twelve.
Mark	VI, 46	- concludes the multiplication of the loaves.
Luke	IX, 18	- before the confession of Cesarea.
Luke	IX, 29	- before the Transfiguration.
Luke XI	XI, 1	- before the teaching of the Our Father.
Jo.	41, 42	- before the resurrection of Lazarus.
Luke	XXII, 31	- before Peter's disowning.

His prayers:

Luke	XI, 1 to 4	- the "Our Father."
Luke	X, 21	- Christ's thanksgiving for the revelation He has been entrusted with.
Matt.	XI, 25, 26	- the Eucharist.
Jo.	XVII	- the sacerdotal prayer which gives the Passion its full sense.
Mark	XIV, 32	- prayer of the agony at Gethsemany.
Luke	XXIII, 4	- prayer for his tormentors.
Mark	XV, 34	- prayer of abandonment and total commitment.
Matt.	XXVI, 46	- "In manus tuas"

B. The teaching of Our Lord and of the Apostles –

1. Pray like a poor – in the desire of seeing God and in the expectation of the Kingdom –

Luke	XVIII, 9-14	- the Pharisee and the publican.
Matt.	XXV, 6	- parable of the virgins
Mark	XIII, 35	- Be watchful
Matt.	XXIV, 43-50	- At an hour that you do not expect...
1 Thess.	V, 2-6	- let us not sleep...
1 Cor.	XVI, 22	- Our Lord, come!
Apoc.	XXII, 20	- I am coming soon.

2. Pray in all occasions – “continually”, “always”, “without ceasing”

Luke	XVIII, 1 and ff.	- Parable of the unjust judge.
Luke	XI, 9 to 13	- Parable of the importune friend.
Matt.	VII, 7	- ask, seek, knock...
Phil.	IV, 6	- In all your needs.
Eph.	V, 20	- Always and for everything.
Act.	I, 14	- All devoting themselves to prayer...
Act.	XII, 5	- Without ceasing.
Act.	VI, 6	- For the appointment of deacons.
Act.	XIII, 3	- For sending off to mission.
Act.	XX 7 to 11	- Until dawn.
Act.	X, 2	- Without stopping.
Act.	XVI, 25	- About midnight, in prayer.

3. Pray in the name of Jesus: in the Spirit –

Jo.	XIV, 13	- What you shall ask in my name.
Jo.	XVI, 23, 24	- He will grant it to you in my name.
Jo.	XI, 41, 42	- You always hear me.
Rom.	VIII, 33, 34	- He who intercedes for us.
Col.	III, 16, 17	- Always in the name of the Lord.
Eph.	III, 11, 12	- Confidence of access through our faith.
Phil.	II, 5	- Have the mind of Jesus.
Heb.	IX, 14	- Who has offered Himself.
Heb.	VII, 25	- Always lives to make intercession.
1 Jo.	II, 1	- Our advocate.
Apoc.	V, 4-10	- The Lamb who was slain only worthy to open the scroll.
II Cor.	I, 20	- We utter the Amen through Him.
Luke	XI, 13	- Your Father will give you the Holy Spirit.
Eph.	V, 18, 19	- Give thanks in the name of Our Lord Jesus.
Eph.	VI, 18	- Pray at all times in the Spirit.
I Cor.	XIV	- I shall pray through the Spirit.
Rom.	VIII, 26	- The Spirit Himself intercedes.
II Cor.	XIII, 13	- No one can say ‘Jesus’ but through the Spirit.
Gal.	4, 6	- The Spirit of his Son, which cries ‘Abba’.

C. The attitude of Our Lord towards those who pray Him –

Jo.	11	- the Virgin at Cana.
Jo.	IV, 26	- the Samaritan woman.
Jo.	IV, 50	- the official at Capharnaum.
Mark	1, 31	- the apostles imploring the cure of St. Peter's mother-in-law.
Luke	V, 12	- the lepers.
Matt.	VIII, 13	- the centurion of Capharnaum.
Luke	VII, 21	- the messengers from John the Baptist.
Luke	VII, 48	- the sinful woman.
Matt.	XV, 22	- the Canaanite woman.
Mark	XIV, 39	- the Apostles afraid of the tempest.
Luke	VIII, 40	- Jairus.
Luke	VIII, 43	- the woman with a hemorrhage.
Jo.	V, 8	- the cripple of the pool at Bethzatha.
Mark	VII, 32	- the deaf-and-dumb.
Mark	VIII, 22	- the blind man of Betsaida.
Luke	XVII, 14	- the blind men of Jericho.
Mark	X, 50	- the 10 lepers.
Luke	XXIII, 43	- the good thief.

INTERIOR SUPPLICATIONS –

Luke	V, 20	- the paralytic of Capharnaum.
Luke	VI, 6	- the man with a withered hand.
Luke	VII, 13	- the widow of Naim
Jo.	VIII, 11	- the adulteress.
Jo.	IX, 6	- the man born blind.
Luke	XIX, 3	- Zacheus on the sycamore tree.
Jo.	XII, 7	- Mary of Bethany pouring out her perfume.

PRAYER NOT GRANTED –

Mark	IX, 5	- Peter wishes to camp on the mountain.
Luke	IX, 59	- a disciple wishes to bury...
Luke	IX, 61	- a disciple wishes to take leave of his people.
Luke	X, 40	- Martha wants Jesus to invite Mary to help her.
Matt.	XX, 20	- the mother of James and John.

THE PRAYER OF THE PSALMS

I – THE PSALMS PRAYERS OF CHRIST -

CHRIST MADE MAN:

His vocation: 2, 88, 109, 131.
His entry in the world: 18, 39
His life, his dialogue with the Father: 2, 4, 20, 30, 33, 41, 62, 83, 85, 90, 118, 138

THE PASSION:

Christ Savior: 6, 9, 31, 36...
Christ and sin: 6, 9, 50, 72...
Christ crucified: 21, 68, 87...

CHRIST IN GLORY:

Victorious: 17, 75, 117, 123.
His ascension: 23, 26, 44, 46, 109.
Judge: 45, 57, 74, 81, 93, 149.
His reign: 2, 71, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 99, 100.

AND PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

BIRTH OF THE CHURCH – HER LIFE:

Foundation and confirmation: 45, 47, 67, 86, 147.
Its history: figuratively: 77, 104, 105, 106.
As revelation: 80, 84.
Its pilgrimage: 65, 83, 120, 121, 124-126, 128, 130, 136.
Its prayer: 65, 70, 76, 94, 129, 134.

THE CHURCH AND SALVATION:

Penitent: 36, 43, 48, 54, 59, 73, 129
Missionary Church: 66, 86, 95
The Church of martyrs: 63, 78, 79.
Its exile: 125, 136.
Peace and Unity: 4, 67, 83, 84, 132, 146.

THE CHURCH IN GLORY:

Its thanksgiving: 64-67, 106, 112-117, 123, 128, 134-137, 144-150
The Church and the praise of Creation: 8, 18, 23, 28, 64, 103, 148.

PRAYERS OF THE VIRGIN MARY –

Immaculate Conception:	17, 29, 65, 92
Annunciation:	44
Christmas:	18, 23, 86
Compassion:	12, 30, 37, 38, 139, 142.
Assumption:	44, 45, 83, 86.

II

IN THE LITURGICAL YEAR

Advent:	18, 24, 79, 84.
Christmas – Epiphany:	2, 18, 28, 46, 65, 71, 92, 94, 95, 99.
Lent and Passion:	6, 29, 31, 37, 42, 50, 101, 129, 142.
Good Friday:	21, 58, 68, 87.
Holy Saturday:	15, 29.
Easter:	65, 75, 112, 113, 117, 138.
Ascension:	26, 46.
Pentecost:	47, 66, 103, etc.

IN THE SACRAMENTS AND THE DIFFERENT STEPS OF LIFE

Baptism:	1, 22, 41, 113, 117, 77, 104
Penance:	temptation: 4, 21, 68, 90. Contrition: 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129. Purification: 11, 29, 34, 36, 50, 53. Pardon: 102, 112, 114, 115.
Eucharist:	preparation to Mass: 5, 14, 42, 49. The Eucharist: 22, 64, 80, 144. Thanksgiving: 15, 19, 22, 33, 83, 138.
The Sacrament of the sick:	6, 37, 40, 87. Old age: 27, 38, 70, 89, 101.
The prayer for the dying:	6, 26, 27, 39, 41, 54, 101.
The prayer of the priest:	15, 25, 41, 42, 83, 133.
The sacrament of the Spouses:	44, 19, 33, 127, 132.

IN ALL OCCASIONS

Praise:	8, 18, 28, 94, 95, 97, 102, 103, 110, 112, 113, 116, 117, 134, 135, 144, 145-150
Confidence:	4, 10, 15, 22, 26, 61, 120, 124, 130, 145.
Petition:	9, 53, 69, 85, 114, etc.
Dialogue and silence with God:	15, 24, 26, 30, 33, 41, 44, 61, 62, 83, 118, 130, 138.
Expectation and call to God:	2, 30, 38, 41, 54, 61, 70.

Conclusion:

“Never speak without Him, and He will never
say anything without you.”

(St. Augustine)

If the Liturgy is able – as it is – through the psalms and the prayers of those who already are part of the Kingdom, to invite us to enter into the prayer of Him who recapitulates all prayer, - the Lord Jesus, - it is above all because He is living, - because He is the Living One.

Victorious keeper of God’s secrets, he can share them with men, and become their advocate near the Father: because He has acquired salvation and victory, - and forever.

(19) Apprendre a prier, B. Bro. Paris pp. 52-56, 70-77

TO PRAY IS SIMPLY TO LIVE LIKE MARY IN NAZARETH
- IN THE INTIMACY OF JESUS

“But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.” (Luke 2, 19.)

“...and his Mother kept all these words in her heart.” (Luke 2, 51.)

For Nary - to live is to pray
- to pray is to live.

In the framework of an ordinary working family, Mary has lived a perfect interior and apostolic life because (20)

1 - she lived in the intimacy of Jesus -

2 - she has taken advantage of everything that was likely to get her more united to God - and also likely to help us.

- I -

Mary in the Motherly Intimacy of Jesus

Because of her privileged relationship to Jesus, Mary - His Mother - spent her life, according to the Holy Scripture, in a double, total, service, both exterior and interior.

1. Exterior Service -

This service consists in all the normal motherly care Mary bestowed on the Divine Child: waiting upon him, tending to his needs, bringing him up. Holy Scripture contains only one sentence with regard to this service: namely that Mary “wrapped” the new-born Child “in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the manger.” (Luke 2, 7.) All the rest is to be read between the lines, and is a matter of course.

The Savior was a true human child, and it was his will to grow up under the same circumstances as we all do; and Mary was His true Mother, and therefore did for Him all that a mother does for her child. The life of them both is a true human life like our own, according to the standards of time and circumstances.

The childhood and youth of Jesus are related in a few words, but in reality they occupied days, weeks, months and years with - for His Mother - the many usual tasks of nursing, tending, feeding, carrying and dressing, just as is the case with us all.

All this, Mary did for the Divine Child; and how did she do it?

a) - with great and untiring care, day and night. No nurse of any royal child could be as devoted to her Highly-born charge as was Mary to Jesus.

b) - She acted with great ability. As her ancestor David once fed and conducted the people

entrusted to him (Ps. 77, 72) “by the skillfulness of his hands” - so this wise Virgin and Mother nursed and tended her Divine Son with no less wisdom and judgment.

- c) - She acted with all the love and tenderness, and at the same time all the reverence due to her Child, her God and her Redeemer. It is a beautiful and certainly a true thought, that God put into Mary’s heart all the love and tenderness that the human race owed to the Savior. She regarded herself as the representative of mankind in this royal service, like the priest when he offers sacrifice, - and assuredly no priest handles the Holy Body of Christ, with such love and reverence as Mary did.

And there were other circumstances which rendered this attendance upon the Child much more direct and personal.

- the poverty of the family, which scarcely allowed the service of other hands;
- the various journeys, the discomforts of Bethlehem, and the misery of the exile.

Thus it came about that Mary was, and had to be, everything to the Child, nurse, personal maid, companion; she carried Him in her arms, and made Him rest on her bosom. What a happy, faithful nurse and mother our Savior had in Mary!

2. Interior Service -

But so far we have dealt with the outward service. Mary’s interior, spiritual service to Jesus was far more precious. Twice the Holy Scripture makes a special and emphatic mention of this:

“But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.”
(Luke 19, 51.)

This service, then, consisted in the spiritual activity and sympathy with which Mary accompanied the mysteries of our Savior’s childhood.

- 1° - Mary observed and followed all these mysteries attentively and lived them through with him.
- 2° - Mary implanted them deeply in her heart and mind, and reflected them in her words and actions. Sometimes, when we hear or read a beautiful poem or song, we wish to possess it, to copy it and learn it by heart, in order to enjoy it again and to take more pleasure in it. Mary did something of this sort.
- 3° - Mary retained these mysteries only in order to think them over and to consider them again and again. They were the subject of her meditation in the quiet hours when she gave full play to her thoughts, in prayer, sitting near the holy Child’s crib, or working near the youthful Savior. She spun continually the golden thread of these mysteries, beginning again and again with new delight; she compared them one with another, tried to comprehend them in their height and breadth and extent, to fathom them in their depth and sublimity, and to follow them out in their wonderful connection.

3. Contemplation -

- Mary had before her the living center and object of her loving thoughts. She saw God's countenance in the face of her Child. She would contemplate it now for years, daily and hourly; she could see it in childhood, in the beauty of boyhood, in the serious cheerfulness of ripening manhood, - in the apparent unconsciousness of childish slumber, or lighted with heartfelt love and heavenly wisdom, in the ecstasy of contemplation. She could gaze upon this countenance till she knew it, so to speak, by heart.
- In this countenance, all God's mysteries were revealed to her, the Divinity in humanity, infinity and eternity in this span of life, omnipotence and majesty in weakness and helplessness, the unspeakable Word in speechlessness, the joy of the whole creation in sorrow, tears and persecution. She could follow up, to her heart's content, the beautiful mystery of his growth; she could see how He passed on ever to more perfect work; how His heavenly wisdom revealed itself more and more, seeming always more lovable when the conversation turned upon God and divine things; and, oh joy for a mother! She could watch how in His every feature and gesture He, day by day, presented some new and touching resemblance to herself.
- And how did she accompany these precious observations in her heart? She adored all these manifestations of His Divinity and humanity; she adored everything in Him, and hallowed thus, as it were, all devotions to God-man by her participation in them; everything in Him was for her a motive for praise, for admiration, for love, for reverend joy and rapture. She well knew that she represented heaven and earth in her adoration and love, as well as in her outward services. We had our place, too, in her prayers. Unceasingly she offered herself to Jesus for us, offered us to Jesus, and offered Jesus to His Father for us.

These were the services that Mary rendered our Savior and the occupations of these thirty blessed years of peaceful sojourn with Him in Nazareth; occupations of immeasurable depth, unspeakable value and of incalculable perfection, - and yet they left undisturbed the quiet, calm life at Nazareth.

- II -

Mary's use of her opportunities

Mary made use of her unique relationship to the Savior in a two-fold manner first for herself, and then for us.

1 - For herself, Mary made use of her dutiful presence near our Savior for her own sanctification. It may well be that one reason among others why our Savior remained so long at Nazareth was to perfect His holy mother. After God, then, the chief fruit of this life of Jesus falls to Mary's share, and rightly so. Mary is the high highest and most sublime of God's creatures; she stands the nearest to our Savior.

- No one understood Him better, or made a more abundant and more magnificent return for the time and attention He bestowed upon her, - with her, the harvest was always a

hundredfold.

- The childhood of Jesus was, for Mary, a third and quite extraordinary epoch of grace: the first began with her Immaculate Conception - the second with the Incarnation - the third with the Birth and hidden life of Jesus.
- Indeed, every glance at the Divine Child was a new revelation of God, all contact with Him, an interior sanctification and increase in purity, every word, every gesture, every look of His, a new grace. If one glance of Jesus did so much when He called the Apostles, - and with Peter, - if one conversation with Him so often decided the salvation of a soul, - if one touch of His healed the sick and raised the dead to life, - what a power of sanctification there must have been in living altogether with Him for years, in the daily sight of Him, in the conversations with Him, in the thousand little attentions and kind offices which she, as His mother, bestowed upon Him, and which - consequently - left new treasures of grace and holiness in the heart of the Immaculate Mother.
- Even as time went on, did she become more enveloped in the holiness of Jesus? She was to Him a beautiful world in which he was always at work, and where His graces and His designs as God and Creator had he most signal triumphs. Erstwhile, the beauty of this Paradise had enticed Him from the bosom of the Father; how marvelous must it have been after the work of thirty years!
If our Savior, by his earthly sojourn, had accomplished nothing but the sanctification of His Mother, His coming would have been justified and repaid beyond measure.

2 - But Mary used her privileges on our behalf also:

not, it is true, by proclaiming our Lord's advent; for that was the work of others, the Apostles, - but in thinking of us, recommending us to our Lord, and offering Him for us. And later, when the time came, to record and set forth in Holy Writ the material object of our faith.

- Divine facts are the object of our faith, and these facts, according to God's ordinances, are confirmed by witnesses and handed down to posterity. The Apostles and other contemporaries of Jesus were able to bear witness to His public ministry, to many of the deeds and events of His life; but the greater part of it, and for the most important facts, there was but one witness, - and that was Mary.

Through the long retirement and obscurity of Jesus, His life had completely escaped the world's notice. When the Evangelists undertook to write His life, there were no eye witnesses of Our Lord's Nativity still living, except Mary, and absolutely no one save herself could have given testimony of the Incarnation and of the conversation of the Angel with her. And without the knowledge of those facts, what would the life of Jesus be, but a building without foundations, a stream of which the source is known to no one?

Mary, then, contributed this precious addition to the mysteries of our faith, and such was the outcome of her exceptional relationship to the childhood of Jesus. We owe her the knowledge of this childhood, just as we owe her the Child Jesus Himself.

St Luke may very possibly have sat at her feet, have heard from her lips those touching incidents of the early years in Jesus' life which he has recorded in his Gospel. He seems even to disclose it, by noting on two occasions that Mary had kept all these things in her heart, as though he wished thereby to indicate the source of his information.

Conclusion -

We must imitate Mary in the occupations of her hidden life. She had this inestimable advantage that she lived with the Savior and - as His Mother - could and was bound to tend Him, so that her interior and exterior life had Jesus for their direct object. This is a privilege which St. Joseph alone was permitted to share with her.

But we, too, can enjoy this advantage to a certain extent, if we make it our favorite employment to think often and gladly of our Savior and His life, to picture Him to ourselves in some mystery, to apply it to our day's work, and to conform ourselves to His example, inwardly and outwardly.

This is an occupation of great value, peculiarly well-pleasing to God, and similar to Mary's occupation, this: "the spirit of prayer" in all our activities. This is the way in which we may keep and ponder in our hearts the mysteries of Jesus. And who knows if it will not be of utility to others also? The mysteries of the Childhood and hidden life of Jesus are of special importance for this very reason that they are found the main elements of our ordinary daily life - in the practice of prayer, work and obedience. Here, indeed, we catch the fragrance of interior life.

NAZARETH - The Virgin and her hidden offerings -

Through your existence, you have accomplished no "exploit" - nor did you make yourself famous in men's eyes by any prodigy... Your activity has been the humdrum task of housekeeping; but in the execution of this humble work, you have put an exceptionally loving disposition, and through this, your life has acquired a surprising value.

To the Lord, you were offering each of your small tasks, accomplishing them solely with the intention of pleasing him, - and putting into them the whole of your peaceful and courageous fervor.

Since this constant will of yours to love God through all things has made of your life something so beautiful and so perfect, kindly remind us always that it is the intention that gives value to our acts: what is important is not what we are doing, but the way we do it. Even if our task is very simple and may appear "despicable" to some people, show us that it can become very valuable through the spirit of love we place in its accomplishment.

Help us to put in our activity an intense fervor of love, and of offering, - and make us realize the greatness and the fecundity of what God wants to achieve in our work.

(20) - The life of Our Lord Jesus Christ,

M. Meschler, B. Herder Book Co., St. Louis, pp. 159-165.

METHODS OF PRAYING

(a word of History) (21)

“Before prayer prepare your soul;
and be as a man that tempts God.” (Ecclus. 18, 23.)

1. - The importance of Method -

It is true that every method appears, at first glance, to cramp the spontaneity of natural actions: we smother, or have the impression of being smothered when we control our breathing according to a regular rhythm; our gait becomes awkward when we count and measure our steps. And, in a more elevated sphere, how many aesthetes have vainly dispensed themselves from all the conventional rules of drawing and perspective or of syntax and prosody, - which only hamper, so they say, the- free flight of their genius!

But it is all a matter of adapting ourselves; discipline, when assimilated by practice does not bother us in the least; we no longer think of it, we profit from its effectiveness ourselves, and thus benefit others. Every hygienist recommends exercise for the breathing and for the muscles. Doctors pay great attention to the rhythm of the circulatory system and to assimilations (metabolism.) They keep an eye on these and correct their deviations.

The fact that it must be trained, disciplined and subjected to rules and methods does not reflect on the dignity of prayer. Prayer is an art. However spontaneous art may be, it's worth and effectiveness are dependent on culture.

In order to speak or write, we must know grammar, syntax and rhetoric; in order to reason, logic. Besides, we must know our subject; and the listener or reader easily recognizes those who lack this culture. Nevertheless, it would be equally nonsensical to mistake the method for the prayer, and to believe that we have prayed just because we have complied with certain rules. Is this a greater or lesser danger than that of reducing prayer to the recitation of a set form of words, even though they be sacred or consecrated, and believing that we have prayed, because we have repeated words?

Whether it is disciplined or spontaneous, prayer remains an elevation of the soul to God; the life of prayer still -consists in a union of the soul with God, in Christ. There is no incompatibility between prayer and its methods, because spontaneity is also a method.

2. History of the Different Methods –

A. Collective and Public Prayer:

The very nature of collective and public prayer calls for a basic regulation: that of time and formulae. Though they did not ascribe the same value to it as is justly given to it now, the most zealous exponents of private prayer have never ruled out liturgy. Nevertheless, it is clear that the soul's spontaneous movements will not become attuned straight away to prayer so imposed. They will neither follow the timetable nor the fixed

expressions, nor will they conform to the sequence of the calendar.

The most individual souls can do is to attempt to adapt themselves to the rhythm of the congregation. If they fail to do so, no fault will be imputed to them, and neither will they be prevented from; remaining united to God.

Present day Catholics who come, at appointed but infrequent intervals, and take part in liturgical prayer, will not consider this as an imposition. The position is quite different for those for whom public prayer is a duty of state: people such as priests, monks or nuns, bound by the choir office who is, we may say, the professional people of prayer, by virtue of their vow of perfection.

B. Rules for Personal Prayer

Masters of the Spiritual Life have, lost no time in proposing to their charges methods designed to reconcile their personal with their collective prayer.

In Chapter 37 of his Rule, where he regulates the divine Office, St, Basil (d.370) also recommends “pious industries” to keep the soul watchful. St. Benedict does likewise; and, in between, comes St. Jerome (342 – 420.) The tradition is perpetuated.

We need only cite Cassian (Collat. 1) and - at the dawn of modern times - St. Bonaventure (1274.) Having, in “The Six Wings of Seraphim” expounded the five reasons which caused the Church to institute the Divine Office, he draws up rules for the maintenance of personal devotion during its recitation. (Vii, 10.)

Besides, it seems to us that it must have been easy for the monks to preserve continual union with God, when we consider how this union was nourished by psalmody, and maintained by oral and mental prayers during the course of peaceful monastic days, regularly taken up with work which was not too absorbing. There was no necessity to legislate in this domain of private devotion. Monks and nuns lived a life of prayer, in the stability of their cloisters. Those who were negligent, - for there were such: - remained just like the rest, for long hours, day and night, in the choir.

Nevertheless, we notice how private and interior prayer gradually supplants public prayer in the estimation of fervent people. This interior prayer will later be called “mental prayer”, as a mark of its superiority. It is practiced by loving choice. At times, for those who have made such a choice, liturgy sinks to the rank of a social function which is fulfilled as a duty of state.

Now, we come to modern times. A new form of religious state - the life of the apostolate makes its appearance in the Church.

C. Methods of Prayer for Traveling Apostles:

Francis of Assisi and Dominic Guzman dispense their disciples from the vow of stability and send them out to preach to the people. The liturgical Office can no longer be their life’s chief work.

The usual solemn ceremonies are no longer compatible with their daily round. However, private prayer, even in the spoken form of the breviary, still remains possible for them.

As traveling apostles, they are in great danger of being monopolized by action, and of losing the spirit of prayer, unless - during their wandering life, they remain very generous, heroic men, sustained by a special grace.

The first Friars Minors, the first Preachers, are saints, men of prayer and penance. But their number increases and what was formerly an elite, becomes a crowd. We cannot expect or obtain heroism from a crowd...

The leaders responsible for these people, men who usually preserve the primitive fervor themselves, - do not forget that prayer is always necessary. In order to meet the requirements of this principle, they rule that private personal prayer must henceforth conform to the law of public prayer. It must be said at fixed hours, in determined places, where the faithfulness of each person to the fulfillment of this duty may be subject to control.

Nothing in Scripture or in ecclesiastical tradition is opposed to the idea of regulating the manner in which the commandment to pray should be fulfilled. In itself, such an idea is neither harmful nor indiscreet, and does not hinder the soul's intimacy with God. Yet it has paved the way for real and regrettable misunderstandings, if not for abuses.

D. Prayer in Common:

The life of prayer calls for effort not a spiritual, but an ascetical effort, - namely, the habitual recollection, watchfulness over our thoughts, discipline of our senses and mortification, - which prepares the soul to receive grace, and which, in turn, grace facilitates.

All those persons who made this ascetical effort at the time of their first fervor should be able to keep it up; for the experience of centuries has considerably moderated it. Nevertheless, all do not consent to persevere in it to the end. Fickleness, inconstancy, negligence, sometimes ill-will, more often an incomplete or unsuccessful training, real or affected ignorance, all these former weaknesses re-appear in those who have aspired to become new men.

Even the best, those who - though they may sometimes have faltered - at least have not given up, and who lead a life of intense prayer, those may have need of pulling themselves together.

In order to afford these good persons time to recover, and to oblige those who are negligent to make at least a minimum effort, the laws of the Franciscan and Dominican orders stipulated from the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries, that prayer should be said in common, at stated hours, in fixed places, under the guidance of Superiors. Later on, reading aloud was added for the benefit of those who would not have the time for a personal preparation.

Constraint thus steps in. At the instigation of zealous reformers, severe measures are employed in an attempt to keep souls in a sphere where liberty, spontaneity, a joyful and burning conviction alone should lead them to the summits.

The ideal is to pray as one breath. The minimum - the last resort - is to pray as one eats. The hours, times, form of prayer, are fixed just as the hours and the menu for meals are arranged.

E. Western Life Influence:

However, we must see these things in a more general perspective, namely that of our western civilization, which has drawn the religious state into its own orbit of influence.

Monasticism has its origin in Eastern Countries. In spite of the fact that St. Columbanus and St. Benedict - to name only the most outstanding founders, - adapted the institution to the temperament and customs of western ascetics, they had comparatively little contact with THEIR TIMES, since they isolated their monks from surrounding conditions. Even in our own day, many Benedictine or Carmelite monasteries do not comply with, for instance, the change of the summer time. Their exercises are still determined by the solar time.

Time does not count in oriental life. Western life, on the contrary, fixes a time for everything, and a particular occupation for each moment. The faster its pace becomes, the more minutely - the word is strictly accurate - does it determine the synchronization of moment and action. Our contemporaries live with their eyes glued to the hands of the clock.

Now, though it has greatly increased the number of tasks to be done, our civilization has not multiplied time. In order to give prayer its due share, it was necessary to determine a place for it in the daily schedule. Then, having become one of the occupations of the day, instead of being the soul; of all occupations, prayer has reached the sorry pass of being more and more confined to its place and time, - divorced as it were from the rest of life, and exercising practically no influence, on it.

F. One Hour in Prayer:

Other inevitable consequences:

As long as prayer blended with daily life through celebration of the liturgy, it could be fairly deep and sustained. Now that it is restricted to a fixed period, it must - so to speak - be concentrated.

And we should spend an hour in prayer... This is the shortest time, according to the Masters, that may be devoted to prayer if it is to be useful. Experience has proved - and continue to prove - this. An hour is a long time; or, at least, it passes less quickly in prayer than at work. We may admit it without shame, as did St. Theresa who watched the slow progress of the hands of the clock.

In order not to become wearied or waste time in prayer, we must learn the secret of well using our time: we must provide ourselves with the means of spending an hour alone with God.

This, then, is how the various methods originated. They enable us to fill the hour of prayer with thoughts, reflections, sentiments – or affections and resolutions.

G. Mental Prayer becomes Meditation:

The exponents of prayer did not have to look very far. They knew how rhetoric built up a discourse, ORATIO, - choosing a subject, outlining it, developing its various parts, proving it, refuting objections, drawing conclusions, and giving a complete summing up in the peroration. These procedures were carried out into the domain of prayer; they were applied to a pious subject: ORATIO, mental prayer, thus came into being.

With the same intention of occupying the sacred hour usefully, and thinking that it presented a good opportunity for sustaining the soul with convictions and inspiring it with good resolutions, prayer was prepared by deep reflection on the mysteries, dogmas and virtues: mental prayer became MEDITATION.

Prayer, which of its essence is an elevation of the soul to God, thus turned aside from its true purpose and nature. It became a learned work unsuited to simple uneducated persons who could not organize their thinking, as is the case with all who are untrained in scholarly discipline. Such people rightly considered themselves incapable of, this kind of prayer.

Nevertheless it is evident that, when we refer to a life of prayer, of mental prayer, we do not suggest that our daily activity should be invaded by methodical prayer, or by methods of mental prayer: what we have in mind is the suffusion of our thoughts, feelings and works by the Spirit of Christ.

This, of course, is not possible without either discipline or method.

Was this fully understood by those who knew that a reaction against abuses of method was necessary, but who had no idea how to keep such a reaction within proper limits? In many cases, they have merely substituted one human system for another: namely, their own. For, to reject all systems is a system in itself.

H. Deep Cultivation of Personal Prayer:

Had people found public, even liturgical, prayer sufficient for their requirements, had their attention not been drawn - by grace - to the need of divine intimacy which can only be satisfied by private and mental prayer, - would there exist in the Church such a great, well-sanctioned tradition as that shown by the thousands of books on mental prayer and its methods, which have been read, re-read and commented upon? Indeed, history shows that, side by side with liturgical prayer, a deep cultivation of personal prayer has always been practiced by the saints, in order to endow the former with a more profound and effective significance.(St. Bonaventure.)

Having finally arrived at the truth, despite systematic distortion of it, we recognize:

- 1 - that, in order to satisfy both divine commandment and human necessity, we must always pray;
- 2 - that mental prayers, determined by a schedule and complying with a specific method, are not incompatible with continual prayer;
- 3 - that they greatly assist it: because we cannot arrive at continual prayer - which is an elevated prayer - unless we lovingly practice mental prayer in a constant way.

I. Methods of Prayer:

And this is a disciplined and therefore methodical prayer. As we have stated before, there is nothing derogatory in training for prayer; no sincere person will confuse prayer with method, nor will he imagine he has fulfilled his duty to pray, simply because he has complied with the rules.

There remains a final objection which we have not directly answered, although we have furnished abundant material in that direction.

Roughly speaking, it is this: the spread of methods of prayer and of methodical mental prayer, as is proved by the history of spirituality, obviously coincided with a decrease in the spirit of prayer.

We should be grateful for this objection merely drawing attention to a coincidence between the two events: the spread of method and the decrease in the spirit of prayer. If less circumspection had been shown, some might have seen here relationship of cause and effect: POST HOC, ERGO PROPTER HOC.

Referring ourselves to the history of spirituality, we simply deny the coincidence. The weakening of the spirit of prayer, if it must be admitted, depends on the weakening of faith and piety of the Catholic spirit, - in short: on the unmortified state of souls. This state of affairs dates from the age of the Renaissance and the Reformation, - although, admittedly, we have no perfectly accurate knowledge of the state of Christianity during the previous periods; it may be sufficient, perhaps, to concede that the dechristianization of the masses is now more obvious, more easily proven or verified by a study of history...

But methods of prayer and the practice of methodical mental prayer are as ancient as speculative spirituality or - if you wish - spiritual theology... Clement of Alexandria (c.200), Origen (250) and St. Cyprian (250) had already written TREATISE ON PRAYER, whose counterpart is found in the homilies of St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose and St. Augustine. The theory of spirituality has made little substantial headway since Cassian (430). We omit a reference to the times of St. Bernard, of the Victorines, of St. Bonaventure.

J. Methods of Prayer spread among Christians:

It is true to say, however, that since the Reformation, since the spread of the works of St. Ignatius of Loyola and his disciple St. Francis de Sales, we are better informed concerning the piety of Catholics living in the world.

Not indeed that devout faithful people are any more numerous than they were in the preceding ages, where we imagine - and quite wrongly - that piety was confined to the cloisters; it is merely that we have come to a more intimate knowledge of them. Silence enshrouds the innumerable prayerful persons who were trained by the Third Orders of Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites during the course of previous centuries. However, we see their numbers increase, inspired by, and under the influence of, the canonized saints.

We are therefore justified in saying that there always has been a great number of prayerful souls in the Church, - also that it is they who have sustained and saved this Church during the course of its chequered history, - and that they have never lacked masters to teach them how to pray. Documentary evidence is of no real importance, as - in any case - we can always be certain of the beneficial action of the Holy Ghost. But there is no dearth of documents, nor will the help of the Holy Ghost prove wanting in our case, if we sincerely wish to cultivate within ourselves the life of prayer.

* * * * *

Conclusion:

Clothe me with Yourself,

O my God, Trinity I adore, help me to forget myself entirely to settle myself in You.

O my beloved Christ, crucified through love, I feel my impotence and I ask you to clothe me with Yourself, to identify my soul to all the movements of your soul; to substitute yourself to me, so that my life is but a reflection of your life. Come into me, as an Adorer, as a Restorer and as a Savior.

O consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, come into me, so that there be in me like an Incarnation of the Word; that I may be for Him an extra humanity in which He renews all his mysteries.

And You, O Father, bend over your creature; see in her nothing but the Beloved One in whom you have been well pleased.

O my Three, my all, my beatitude, infinite solitude, immensity in which I lose myself, I deliver myself to you as a prey; bury yourselves in me so that I bury myself in You, in anticipation of the day when, in your light, I shall contemplate Your abysmal greatness.

St. Elizabeth de la Trinity.

Ref. (21) – La Vie de Prière, - V. Breton – Auber, Paris pp. 39-49.

A METHOD OF PRAYER

“Why is one day more important than the other, when it is the sun that lights up every day? It is due to the Lord’s wisdom that they differ; it is through Him the seasons and feasts come and go. Some he dignifies and sanctifies, and others he lists as ordinary days. So, too, all men are of clay, for from earth was men formed; yet, with his great knowledge the Lord makes men unlike; in different paths he has them walk.

Some he blesses and makes great, some he sanctifies and draws to himself. Others he curses and brings low, and expels from their place. Like clay in the hands of a potter, to be molded according to his pleasure, so are men in the hands of their Creator, to be assigned by Him their function. As evil contrasts with good, and death with life, so are sinners in contrast with the just.”

(Sirach 33, 7-15.)

God, lavish and varied in his gifts, respect each of his children and does not want to impose on all the same exercises and discipline.

The same applies to the Church. She suggests methods of prayer without imposing any of them.

1. Method of prayer.
 2. “Our Father” - excellent method of prayer.
 3. The Rosary, School of life.
 4. Other methods of mental prayer.
 5. Absence of method of mental prayer.
- (St. Teresa of Lisieux.)

- I -

Method of Prayer

Principle to be Safeguarded:	The prayer of the Church Serves as a model and As a method For private prayer.
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I. - Danger -

We have every right to be incredulous when we are told of “methods of prayer.”

“Like animals, tethered to a stake, which cannot go any further than the rope will allow, and who can only turn round and round, feeling bored ... He would know man very little who, meeting him, would prepare three points as suggestions to him, not allowing him to move away from them.” (P. Surin.)

This excellent example warns us rightly against an exaggeration of any method in this field. The Scripture as well as all the spiritual masters say it over and over again: nothing would be further from God's ways than to impose spiritual conceptions on people.

And there is something legitimate in our reticence when facing a "method" of prayer: nowhere can the respect be greater for differences of temperament, for the history and the wishes of each individual, than in our relationship with God.

All the more so as, here, the essential is the meeting of two persons, of what is irreducible between God and each man, - all the more also as the very essence of our life of prayer is the fact that it is a dialogue, and a dialogue which is meant to sustain a friendship.

Is there anything more personal?

2. - Advantages -

And though, when we face the scattered aspect of our life, of its activities, we often feel the inadequacy of a purely negative reaction: avoiding temptations of idle chat, the various distractions - this is not enough.

It is also necessary to really feed this deep desire of a meeting with God, so that - when opportunity presents itself, we know how to grasp it, - so that we know how to turn every event into a chance for a true dialogue.

Now, the real obstacle to our life of prayer comes from an unruly love: our self-love; and we can only replace one love by another one. To reach that end, we would welcome, at times, the possibility of relying on the help of a simple, easy, real "method."

3. - Value -

All methods have their advantages and their dangers. Under the pretext of freedom and docility to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, certain mystic souls tend to dispense with effort and remain very vague. On the other hand, too rigid a method mechanize to excess the play of the faculties when they ought to retain the spontaneity of life and. be responsive to the slightest inspirations of the Spirit of Love.

Second rate commentators will always have difficulty following the creative freedom of the great masters. The price of supernatural greatness in the saints is their inability to give adequate expression to all of the divine reality which they experience. That is why they must be understood rather according to the spirit than to the letter, and their mottoes must be set into the context of their lives. This higher understanding of their directives in the light of their actions and of their spirit enables us to appreciate them in the rich complexity of their nature and in the variety of their missions in the Church.

Thus, the value of a method will be determined by these two qualities:

- first of all, its adaptability, - the freedom it leaves us: it remains a means, and not an

end in itself. It should not appear as a ready-made garment, which would not fit everybody.

- and secondly its capability of introducing the dialogue, the Christian dialogue: that of Christ with his Father, and that of the Church with Christ.

Now, in our relationship to Christ, there is - for each one of us - a great problem to solve: that is, to go from an abstract level to a personal one, - leaving the realm of ideas we form about Christ and coming to a direct contact.

We find in our life of prayer the very same hesitations found in the shaping of any friendship: there is a time when we are not yet completely sure of "the other one" -when we are not certain that the other one is going to think, or to react, like us then comes another period when, - sure to meet each other, - any exchange is based on a personal relationship, - when we accept any event without fear, even if there is apparent divergency, because the reciprocity is a true reciprocity grounded in love.

We love the other one because the other one loves us. What sustains, what helps the dialogue to live is this very reciprocity in love, It is the fact that the other one is happy to discuss what makes our life - is happy to love us.

Thus the value of a method will be judged not first of all by the volume of abstract ideas it brings out to me, or by any other considerations, but by this question of prime importance: is this method a help, or an obstacle, to the development of a true dialogue between Christ and me?

4. - An example - to dialogue while using the Gospel -

We desire this dialogue with God, this dialogue through Christ. And we endeavor to feed this exchange through the Gospels.

Now, fairly soon we are to acknowledge that a disappointment is in store for us. The Gospel offers us objective facts, - often, to our way of thinking, too objective... So many of these facts, of these stories, tell us precious little: cure of a man possessed by the devil, - controversies of Doctors of the Law, etc... - while we would like to grasp a little more of the human psychology of Our Lord.

It is very much the same with the discourses and the Sermons: either they are difficult to understand, or else they come to us under a form too remote from the dialogue, - even those that appeal most to us, v.g. the discourse after the Last Supper.

One of the normal reactions on our part is to try and feed our dialogue of prayer on other texts than the Gospels and the New Testament, - other texts which, so we think, appear to have a more appropriate form.

This is, without any doubt, what makes often the success of these ready made prayers, or of these dialogue-shaped texts. But here too, we can expect disillusion.

It does happen that -after a time of seduction, these texts, somehow appear rather

solemn, - we don't speak as they do, and - really - they do not provide us with true dialogue, - they are commonplace, stale, and give us the impression of misrepresenting Christ's image, to take away most of the divine from him. Then it is that we are presented with a solution for our "private" prayer, through the very method of the Church the one the Holy Spirit has always inspired to the Christians:

- 1 - very simple prayers, always the same ones: Kyrie, Gloria, Psalms,
- 2 - but said every day in the light of a different Gospel. The Church takes an episode in the life of her Savior and – through this page - meets Christ's soul while entering into the dialogue of his prayers.

And so, through the medium of these short and simple formulas petition for mercy, praise, adoration, the Church takes up again the dialogue of Christ. And this is in a great variety, the very variety of all the various moments of her Lord's life, but always brought back to the unity and the simplicity of the "Our Father" which eventually sums up everything. (Look at the place of the "Our Father" in the mass: as the conclusion of the whole prayer of the Canon and as the expression of the unity with God at last obtained anew.)

This will apply to all true "method" of prayer.

- II -

The "Our Father", excellent method of prayer

1 - The "Our Father", containing the soul of Jesus and all the human soul:

Father, Thy Name, Kingdom...
i.e. praise, adoration, petition.

2 - and the "Our Father", said in the light, as lit up, as carried on a page of the Gospel; some pages are like summits, and will serve as luminous beacons which will light up and give meaning to a lot of other-passages. Just as if, in these main pages, the light of the Gospel was diffused, and reflected on all the other ones.

Let's take three examples:

1° - The Christmas "Our Father."

God manifests his love as a Savior by taking a human form. There is no love unless it is personal.

At last, God gives in to the wish of His love, - this wish to make himself known as a somebody, in His Son, in the One who will be able to represent him, and who will address him as a Father. Thus, all the recognitions of Christ as being "the Son of God" will be linked to this mystery, v.g.:

- the confession of faith of St. Peter:

“You are the Son of the living God.” – “Blessed are you, Simon... It was my Father in heaven that revealed this to you...? (Matt.16, 13-20.) (Act. 2, 36.)

- the confession of faith of the disciples:

“To whom shall we go?...You have a message of eternal life; we firmly believe and are fully convinced that you are the Holy One of God!” (Jo. 6, 68.)

- the confession of faith of Martha: Jo 11, 25-27.
- the confession of faith of the Centurion: Matt. 27, 54.
- all other confessions of faith: Matt. 10, 32-33. / Jo. 1, 9-14 / Col. 1, 15 ff.

For our “private” prayer, let’s say the “Our Father” again, through each of these texts, in the spirit of Christmas.

2° - The “Our Father” of the Passion -

Christ is hit by evil, he forgives, he gives the bread of the Kingdom, he prays for deliverance, he enters into the fight of salvation. Thus, we shall gather together here:

- the announcements of the Passion - the outrages – the rejections - the scorn, endured by Christ:
 - Matt. 13, 54-57; Luke 9, 7 -9;
 - Matt. 11, 20-24; Mk. 10, 17-22.
 - Luke 13, 34-35;
- the calls to penance and to the fight:
 - Matt. 19, 23-26 Jo 12, 20-50.

In the same way, we shall meditate the “Our Father” through these texts, in the spirit of the Passion.

3° - The “Our Father” of the Resurrection –

It recapitulates all those which belonged to Christ at every new gift of life: the miracles and the sacraments which are, the ones and the others, but anticipation of the full gift of divine, resurrected life:

- the daughter of Jairus, Mk 5, 21-43.
- Lazarus, Jo 11, 1- 44.
- the blind man, Mk 8, 22-27.

and for the sacraments, for example

- the discourse on the bread of life, Jo 6, 22-59.
- the discourse on the living water, Jo 4, 7-15. Jo 7, 37-39.

In conclusion, only one question will emerge in all prayer - be it private or public and that is: What does represent the Our Father said by Christ in such or such moment of his life in me, taken as the prolongation of his presence?

and so, to “set myself in prayer” I shall only have to open the Gospel to bring around and gather the major moments of the life of Christ, throwing onto them the light of these passages which illuminate each other and then commune to the soul of Christ, whose secret is revealed to us in the Pater.

No one can say “Jesus is Lord” except through the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12, 3.), and we know that the prayer of the Spirit is “Abba. Father!” (Rom. 8, 9-15.)

Our prayer-book, our only method, is really the Gospel (recapitulating the whole Bible) with all its variety, but transformed into dialogue through the Our Father. Alone, the Gospel is the concordance of the life of Christ with all the harmonies, with all the wave-lengths of our soul. For, in all prayer, there is no other path than to “put on the same sentiments that were in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2, 5.)

- III -

The Rosary - School of Life

1. - Interdependence in a whole –

Every day we are committed to, and taken up in, a multitude of complex situations education and orientation of the future of our children, - housing, - threat of unemployment, - indifference to the message of the Gospel, - riots, - strikes, etc.

For any one of these situations, if we reflect at all, we feel part of the life of the whole world: politics, whether domestic or foreign, of the country, decisions of the Church, etc... We know that these events carry with them consequences affecting our family life, our religious life.

It has been said that “In any adult there is the whole world.”

2. - Faith must enlighten these situations –

We must open our faith onto these perspectives. Otherwise, it will risk remaining for us a lovely dream of our youth, un-related to our adulthood. And we shall lose our taste for prayer.

God has a plan for the world. God, without becoming partial - for He is a Father - has a special thought about such and such an event in my family, in my neighborhood, - of such a political situation, - such an international conference, and about the questions which are discussed there.

It is the aim of the revision of life to discover this regard of God on all things, and to commit ourselves to the share of responsibility inherent to each of us.

3. - A necessary prayer for adult –

But it is necessary that the prayer of an adult should accompany the revision of life of an adult, so that that this same revision of life may give us, - in our temporal action as well as in our apostolic mission, - the light and the strength of God which alone will make us able to cope.

The “I believe in God” is one of these adult prayers, because it is the resume of the unrolling of God’s plan for the world. When we say it, it reminds us that everything has been created by God, and that everything is meant to return to God through the Salvation of Christ continued in the Church, unto eternal life. We can project the light of his divine words upon every one of our situations, upon each of the events of our life.

What better way of ending a revision of life than to, say the “I believe in God”, so calling down God’s own light upon all the facts that we have “reviewed” in faith? God cannot, in that moment, in the secret of our consciences, refuse us this light.

4. - The Rosary, adult prayer –

The Plan of God is also developed throughout the Rosary.

The Rosary, indeed, makes meditate upon all the important mysteries of the life of Christ, - since the dawn of Salvation with the Annunciation, through the Redemption of the Cross, unto the victory of Christ, of Mary and of the Church, in the glorious mysteries.

But why this fastidious repetition of the “Hail, Mary...?”

When we go to the movies, the pictures of the film on the screen are accompanied by a musical background which helps us to better enjoy the various episodes of the story. The “Hail, Mary” are a living background which puts us in front of Mary, - reminds us that she is everywhere and always present all along the unrolling of God’s plan.

She is the Mother of Christ, and Mother of all men who became the brothers of Christ through Baptism. She is their Mother in all the most complex situations in which they may be involved. And - like a mother- she is actively near us to help us realize our mission as sons of God, in the complexity of our adult life.

The mysteries of the life of Christ and of the Virgin continue in the Mystical Body of Christ, to which we belong. Christmas continue, Easter and the Pentecost continue in today’s world through the Church and Mary continues her mission as our Mother, at the same time discreet and omni-present.

The Rosary allows us to project the light of the mysteries of Christ on the difficulties of our life as adults; it encourages us to be, amid these difficulties, active workers in the service of God, so that what depends on us may be more and more conform to His plan of

Salvation.

How could we lack hope when we know that Mary is our Mother in Christ Jesus, and wants to help us, in the most complex situations, to do whatever God expects of each of us?

5. - Ways of saying the Rosary –

It certainly will be useful to make, in a more concrete manner, the apprenticeship of this prayer. Let's not cast it aside, as a young apprentice would his file, on the first day, under the pretext that he does not manage to smooth his work out properly.

Here are some indications which might be helpful, on different ways to use this prayer:

1) The Ordinary way –

Meditate on each one of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary - one after the other, (for instance, one mystery a day with a decade of the Rosary.)

Joyous Mysteries: Luke I, 26-38 - Annunciation
 Luke I, 39-45 - Visitation
 Luke 2, 1-20 - Nativity
 Luke 2, 22-38 - Presentation in the Temple
 Luke 2, 41-52 - Jesus recovered in the Temple.

Sorrowful Mysteries: Matt. 26, 36-46 - Agony in the Garden of Olives
 Jo. 19, 1 - Scourging
 Mk. 15, 16-20 - Crowning with thorns
 Luke 22, 26-32 - Carrying of the Cross
 Jo. 19, 23-30 - Jesus dies on the Cross

Glorious Mysteries: Matt. 28, 1-15 - Resurrection
 Act. 1, 4-11 - Pentecost
 Luke 1, 46-55 - Assumption (meditate on the Magnificat.)
 Luke 11, 27-28 - Coronation of Mary in Heaven.

- The events of our life: happy (joyous mysteries) or difficult (sorrowful mysteries) all lead to heaven: (glorious mysteries.)
- To grow properly and give much fruit - glorious mysteries - a fruit tree needs sunshine - joyous mysteries - and also rain - sorrowful mysteries.

2) – “The Short Rosary” –

Each day meditate on each of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, saying only for each of them the “Our Father” and one - or a few – “Hail Mary”.

This way of going each day over the whole of the Plan of our Salvation is excellent. Thus it is sometimes possible to pray on one's journeys.

3) Meditations on a mystery, with the help of the evangelical text -

Read the text of the Gospel corresponding to a mystery and, after each sentence, or each verse, say a “Hail Mary” - asking Our Lady to help us to understand - and to live in the same spirit as herself - the event of her life about which we are actually reading.

4) Meditation of the Gospel:

One may extend this way to any text of the Gospel, even outside the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary.

For instance, when we are tired, or simply to refresh our reading and meditation of the Gospel, or to help us during a Communion.

6. - The Mysteries of the Rosary –

The recitation of the Rosary implies an offering and a petition. It is the very structure of the prayers - oral as well as mental - of the Church.

(Having offered the mystery (A) we will end by the petition (B) - following the enumeration of the mysteries.

A. – We offer you, lord Jesus, this...
decade in honor of:

1 – your Incarnation in the womb of Mary

2 – the Visitation of your Holy Mother to St. Elizabeth, and the sanctification of St. John the Baptist,

3 – your Nativity in the stable of Bethlehem.

4 – your Presentation in the Temple and the Purification of Mary.

5 – your Finding in the Temple by Mary.

6 – your agony in the Garden of Olives.

7 – your cruel Flagellation.

8 – your Crowning with thorns.

9 – your carrying of the Cross.

10 – your Crucifixion and your ignominious DEATH on Calvary.

11 – your Resurrection.

B. – and we ask you by this mystery and the intercession of your Holy Mother,

1 – a deep humility.

2 – charity towards our neighbour.

3 – the detachment from the goods of this world, and the love or poverty.

4 – a great purity of body and mind.

5 – true wisdom

6 – the contrition of our sins.

7 – the Mortification of our senses.

8 – the scorn of the world.

9 – Patience in all our crosses.

10 – the conversion of the sinners, the perseverance of the just and the relief of the souls in Purgatory.

11 – The love of God and fervor in his service.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 12 – your triumphant <u>Ascension</u> . | 12 – and ardent desire of heaven. |
| 13 – the mystery of <u>Pentecost</u> . | 13 – the <u>descent of the Holy Spirit</u> in our souls. |
| 14- the <u>Assumption</u> of your Holy Mother in heaven. | 14 – a tender <u>devotion</u> for such a good Mother. |
| 15 – the <u>Coronation</u> of your Holy Mother. | 15 – <u>Perseverance</u> in your grace and the <u>crown</u> in heaven. |

7. – The Seven Joys –

Preparatory Prayer:

“O very pious Virgin Mary, purify our lips and our hearts so that we may worthily recite the Crown of your Seven Joys. We offer it to you for the relief of the souls in Purgatory, for the needs of the Church and of our Country, and also to satisfy fully God’s justice for our sins. We unite ourselves to the intentions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of your Immaculate Heart.”

JOYS	VIRTUE	GIFT
1. Annunciation	Humility	Fear of God
2. Visitation	Love of neighbour	Piety
3. Birth of Jesus	Love of poverty	Force
4. Adoration of the Magi	Faith	Counsel
5. Finding of Jesus in the Temple	Search for God’s will	Science
6. Resurrection	Hope and charity	Intelligence
7. Assumption	Grace of happy death	Wisdom

Other Methods of Prayer

We shall give here, for the purpose of documentation, the outlines of the main classical methods of mental prayer, such as they are shown in mental Prayer Manuals.

1. - General Method of Mental Prayer -

General principles which apply, whatever the particular method adopted, or whatever degree of mental prayer one may have reached:

I - Object of our mental prayer:

God is interested in everything in which we are ourselves sincerely interested: vs.

1) - God himself, Mary, the Saints, treatises of theology, the Creation

2) - My neighbor:

- his temporal or spiritual health,
- his family,
- the other religious families,
- the enemies of the Church,
- the classes of society, etc.

3) - Myself:

- the Plan of God on me, in the Mystical Body;
- my soul, my body;
- my plans;
- my mistakes, etc.

II - Preparation for Mental Prayer:

As one usually does one's mental prayer when rising in the morning, the preparation for it should be done the evening before. To this end, we must choose our book, our subject of mental prayer. The main rule in this matter is to take into account the state of our soul, our spiritual needs, the faults to correct and the virtues to acquire to resemble Christ.

This reading of the subject can be fairly quick, but we must partly foresee at the same time the affections and the particular grace that we shall ask God the following day in our mental prayer. Never start mental prayer without having prepared it.

III - Immediate preparation –

- “When I awake, without accepting such and such thoughts, turn immediately my mind towards the subject that I must contemplate...Dress myself while entertaining these thoughts or any others related to the subject of my meditation.” (St. Ignatius.)
- Place and attitude that will help mental prayer.

IV - Starting mental prayer –

The first step is to place ourselves in front of God, Friend, Spouse, and Father. The success of our mental prayer depends in great part on this very act.

Four ways to proceed:

- a) Consider God Himself near us, through faith.
- b) Consider God in the intimacy of yourself.
- c) Picture to ourselves Our Lord present at our side under a sensible form.
- d) and, if we are in front of the Blessed Sacrament, consider God present in the Host.

Hence: acts of humility and adoration.

- renew our intention to offer this mental prayer for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

V - Body of the Mental Prayer - Acts of the heart, the will -

1) – Essential acts:

- a) theological acts: Faith, hope, charity -
- b) the four ends: Adoration, thanksgiving, seeking, pardon in expiation, asking for grace.
- c) the prayer of simplicity: single regard of God.

2) the four colloquies:

- the colloquy is actually and properly achieved when we are speaking to God as a friend speaks to a friend - a child with his father, a spouse with his spouse at times asking for some favors, at times apologizing for a fault, at times confiding in Him and asking for advice.

- 1° - with Mary
- 2° - with Jesus
- 3° - with the Holy Spirit
- 4° - with the Eternal Father.

VI - Resolutions: fixed practical resolution

- related to the annual Spiritual Exercises, or to the monthly ones.
- related to our needs, and in conformity with our particular examination.

VII - The end of mental Prayer:

- examination on the way we have actually performed our mental Prayer;
- thanks to the Holy Spirit;
- ask for necessary graces.

Various ways to practice mental Prayer -

It is highly important to be thoroughly acquainted with the various ways that have been suggested by the best masters for mental prayer so that we can use them according to

- the state of our soul at a given time;
- the object of our mental prayer - in order to benefit by it as much as possible;
- or according to our spiritual age.

We may adopt at first one of the other of the suggested methods practice it for a reasonable length of time - and later on change over to another one.

1. - Method of meditated reading -

This first method is the one used by St. Teresa when she started practicing mental prayer.

The famous Fr. Louis Lallemand was often recommending it and this was the reason and the explanation he would give about it:

“You take a spiritual book, such as the New Testament, or the Imitation of Christ; read - at different times - either one chapter, or even a few lines.

Then you meditate a little on what you have read, trying to penetrate into the meaning, and to imprint it on your mind. Draw from it some holy affections such as: love of God, or penance, or any other virtue, - and take the resolution to practice this virtue whenever opportunity arises.

However two extremes must be avoided:

- one is reading too much at a time, the other
- trying to meditate too much -

so that the mind goes astray and becomes dry rather than lively through practicing the good one has in view.

But one must remain within the limits of a fair moderation, stopping at each thought as long as the mind will find in it a pleasant and useful subject.” (Doctr. sp. VII° Principle.)

If one takes care to remain faithful to the general principles or to the general method already mentioned, this way of practicing Mental Prayer will be highly profitable: it is within the reach of all souls bent on mental Prayer. But if one neglects the general method, soon one will only have the benefit of a mere reading which no longer will deserve the name of Orison.

2. - Method of meditated vocal prayers –

St. Ignatius explains it in the following way:

“The second method of prayer consists in considering, in the text of a special prayer, the meaning of each word.

All the general directions will be observed in this, as in the other methods. The prayer of preparation will vary according to the person to whom the text is addressed. Kneeling or sitting down, according to disposition or to devotion, eyes closed or not, but not allowed to wander here and there, you will say: ‘Our Father !’

You will stop on these words as long as you find ideas, comparisons, taste or consolations. You will do likewise for each word of the ‘Our Father’ - or of any other prayer you will have chosen to pray in this way.

Having finished the exercise, and addressing yourself to the person you were, in fact, talking to, you will ask in a few words the virtues or graces you feel you most need.

(Ex. Sp. No. 250-257.)

This very easy method of Mental Prayer, then the mind is constantly guided and sustained by a definite text, can be applied either to the well-known prayers like the Pater, Ave, Credo, or to any other prayers answering to each person’s preferences, like the Act of self-offering as Victim, of St. Teresa of Lisieux, - or the prayer “O my God, Trinity I adore,” of Elizabeth of the Trinity, etc..

Priests in particular will like to meditate in this way on the Canon of the Mass. It often happens, indeed, that these admirable prayers, though said every day, do not feed our devotion as they ought to, because they are said quasi automatically. By weighing each word in turn, one avoids dryness; one discovers unknown depths and riches.

This elementary method of praying may rapidly lead to affective orison.

3. - Method of Pictures -

“A good means to help your mental prayer,” says St. Teresa “is to have a picture of this adorable Master which suits your taste. Have it usually under your eyes, so that the sight of it will excite you to converse more often with your Spouse.”

A crucifix, a picture of the Virgin, such or such picture representing a mystery of the life of Jesus or of Mary, especially the Stations of the Cross considered at length, all may become a good apprenticeship in the art of Mental Prayer.

4. - Method of examination, - or interior review -

This is the first method of praying suggested by St. Ignatius. We try to go back into ourselves, to assess the state of our soul and our comportment with regard to the observance of the ten commandments we examine our passions, our weaknesses, our infirmities, our impotence the depth of our misery, the triple concupiscence of the seven

capital vices. We humiliate ourselves in front of God, - to Him we make a sincere confession of our sins and of our infidelities we ask for His pardon. We detest all the wrong we have been doing and we resolve to do better in the future.

This Mental Prayer is very beneficial, especially so after some more notable faults and to avoid the dangers inherent to apostolic life, - Fr. Lallemand used to recommend it particularly to apostolic workers.

5 - Method of application of the senses –

Fr. Roothaan gives the following explanation of this precious method:

“It is called Method of the application of the senses because, in it, the soul uses the help of our interior senses to deepen the knowledge of a mystery upon which we have already meditated through these faculties; one eyes see, our ears hear, our sense of smell, our taste, our hands, - all fulfill their own function...”

“The Exercise of application of the senses will be especially useful in two cases, and will produce two great goods.

- Sometimes, we are unable to speculate very deeply and we will be more ready - through the sight of sensible objects - to go into higher considerations;
- on the other hand, sometimes the soul - already full and very fervent with a devotion found in the knowledge of the most sublime mysteries - will descend to the contemplation of these material objects and there will find a tasteful food, a sweet consolation, a delicious fruit: it is produced by the abundance of the love which fills it, causing the least things, - a gesture, a sign, to be highly prized, and an unending increase of consolation and of love.” (Ex, sp. p. 172, #1.)

The method of application of the senses is particularly useful to meditate fruitfully on certain subjects like hell, heaven, scenes of the Gospel, and mysteries of the life of Jesus or of Mary.

Here is how St. Ignatius presents this method, often used by the saints:

“In the first point, I shall see with the eyes of imagination the persons, meditating and contemplating, in detail, the circumstances in which they find themselves, and trying to get some benefit from such a vision.”

“In the second point, I shall hear, with the help of imagination, what they say or might say, reflecting in myself to get some benefit from it.”

“In the third, I shall imagine feeling, breathing and tasting the suavity and the infinite sweetness of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues and all the rest, - according to the person I contemplate, reflecting in myself and trying to draw from this some utility.”

“In the fourth, I shall exercise the sense of touch, kissing for instance the places where walk, rest the persons I contemplate, always trying to do so with some

profit.”

(The author, Fr. Roothaan points out, only indicates as objects to be touched the places, not the clothes and still less the persons.) (Ex. sp. Nos. 121-126.)

- No special order is imposed. The important point is to avoid rigidity and subtlety. If such and such a sense does not suggest anything useful - as often happens for smelling and tasting - you pass on to another one.
- In the thought of St. Ignatius and of the masters the use of this method ordinarily pre-supposes that one has meditated on the mystery in a deeper way. This contemplation having helped the intelligence; to discover all it can wish for, this simple and easy method can only add to the clearness of our convictions just as - when used in connection with evangelical scenes - it can add to the respectful familiarity reached between the persons use contemplate and our soul who, somehow, re-lives each mystery.

6. - Method of contemplation -

This method, equally very simple and very useful - especially for the contemplation of the scenes of the Gospel, consists in seeing and in looking carefully at the persons (for instance, while contemplating the Christmas mystery: see Mary, Joseph, the Child Jesus, the Angels, the shepherds;)

- in listening to what-each of them say; and in considering
- what they do;

and all of this, just as if the mystery was taking place right under our own eyes, for the first time, - taking part in it ourselves, with the due respect and piety.

Who cannot see how such a method is within the reach of all, and is of the greatest usefulness, especially in the meditation on the mysteries - which we must contemplate, not as a past action but as an action both actual and present.

The fruits of such contemplation can vary ad infinitum, according to the actual needs of the soul who is contemplating.

7. - Method of application of the three faculties of the soul: intelligence, memory and will:

One could call this method, “the ordinary or common method,” the one most souls use habitually, and the one which adapts itself perfectly to all degrees of the spiritual life.

Let us indicate its main points:

A - Introduction to mental Prayer: according to the way described in the General principles.

B - Determination of the general intention to honor and glorify God by means of this

Orison, - and of the particular intention: the desired grace as fruit of this mental prayer.

C - Composition of the location.

All the Saints recommend using imagination in the beginning of mental Prayer, because the picture helps reflex ion, contemplation. This composition of the place, or location, is particularly useful in the meditation or contemplation of the evangelical scenes.

This composition of the place must be understood in a broad sense. It is not limited to seeing, through our imagination, the material location, - for instance the Temple, the lake, the mountain where Jesus is standing, where the mystery takes place but also to note the appearance of the damned, - the poverty of the crib, - the attitude of Jesus and Mary, - the column of the Scourging, - the crown of thorns; etc.. by the means of the imagination or by this representation of the mystery, we enclose our mind in the mystery we want to meditate, “- St. Francis de Sales will say, - “so that it does not go hither and thither, neither more nor less than one encloses a bird in a cage.” (Introd. p.11, c. I-V.)

D - Application of the intelligence enlightened by faith and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The working of the mind is essential. Intelligence, enriched by faith and the gifts of the Holy Ghost is the enlightening faculty. It must light up the will and bring holy desires to life.

Mental Prayer is neither a study, nor a mere spiritual reading, nor an effort at a purely intellectual meditation on a given subject, but it supposes and demands all the same the application of the mind to the consideration of the truths of Faith.

E - The four colloquies, according to the way indicated above.

They are the most important part of Mental Prayer. Without them, the exercise does not deserve the name of Orison, and remains fruitless.

During these intimate colloquies, our hearts get inflamed with divine love, - resolutions in relation to the contemplated subject take form, and prayer brings down divine grace which - like dew - will help these resolutions to grow and develop.

Even in the higher degrees of Orison, the soul could not follow another way, - at least in the main lines. In true mental prayer, we must always:

- put ourselves in God’s presence,
- reflect, - love, and pray.

8 - Carmelite Method -

A – Introduction -

1. Preparation: to think of God, loving Him in humility and trust.
2. Remind oneself of the aim of the Orison, i.e., to become a little closer in the Lord's intimacy, as He uses this friendship to bring his graces into the world.
3. If necessary, short reading, for instance in the Holy Scripture, or the Saints' writings.

B - Body of the Mental Prayer -

1. Through an act of faith, putting ourselves in the presence of Our Lord's humanity.
2. Reflexion started from a scene from the Gospel, or some words of Jesus.
3. Colloquy of affection, or silent contemplation.

C – Conclusion -

1. Thanks for general beneficence, and for particular graces.
2. Offering of all our possibilities, to be used in the service of the Lord.
3. Choice of resolution and petition of the necessary grace to realize it.

9. - Method of St. Francis de Sales -

A. Introduction

1. - Placing ourselves in God's Presence –

- a) Present in all things
- b) Present in our soul
- c) Present in heaven
- d) Present in the Blessed Sacrament.

2. - Invocations to obtain the grace of orison -

- a) to God
- b) to our guardian Angel
- c) to the Saints.

3 - Reminding ourselves of the chosen subject - and composition of the location if necessary.

B. - Body of the meditation –

- 1 – Reflection: Try to fully understand the meaning of the evangelical scene or of the word of God.
- 2 - Affections: Try to express a few of the sentiments suggested by the preceding considerations, for instance: love of God and of the neighbor, zeal, compassion, admiration, fear of God, hate of sin, etc...

- 3 - Resolutions: Try to draw a practical conclusion which may serve to improve the soul.

C. - Conclusion –

1. - Give thanks
2. - Ask God for His blessing for ourselves and others.
3. - Spiritual Bouquet.

10 - Method of St. Ignatius –

A. Preparation

1. Placing ourselves in the presence of God - Act of Adoration.
2. Purification of intentions: we come to orison better to serve God.
3. Preludes:
 - a) historical: brief reminder of the fact we shall meditate upon.
 - b) imaginative or composition of the location.
 - c) petitive: already ask for the grace that will be the fruit of the orison.

B. Body of the meditation

1. Exercise of our memory: bring back to mind the subject, remember the circumstances.
2. Exercise of our intelligence: deepen the theme to meditate; foresee the practical conclusions to be drawn and the means to avert the obstacles.
3. Exercise of our will: express the feelings that have been aroused in us by reflexion end with practical resolutions carrying on one particular point.

C. Conclusion:

1. Colloquy: heart to heart conversation with God.
2. Petition of grace for ourselves and for others.
3. Examination on the value of our meditation.

Pater - Ave - Anima Christi -

11 - Method of St. Sulpice –

A - Proximate Preparation.

1. Placing ourselves in the presence of God.
2. Unite ourselves to Jesus Christ.
3. Invoke the Holy Spirit.

B - Body of the Orison -

1. Adoration, or Jesus before our eyes.

- a) consider in Our Lord the subject of' the meditation, - watching his actions - listening to his words - perceiving his sentiments.
- b) express our feelings to him - according to the subject: admiration, adoration, praise, thanks, love, joy, compassion.

2. Communion or Jesus in our heart.

- a) conviction: consider the importance of the virtue contemplated in Jesus Christ.
- b) reflex ion: consider how far we are from the divine model, and express the feelings of contrition for the past, of' confusion for the present, of desire for the future.
- c) petition: beseech the Holy Spirit to develop in us the sentiments we have contemplated; use to this end all the arguments coming to our mind glory of God, holiness of' the Church, kindness of the Father, promises of the Son, etc. Ask the same graces for others.

3. Cooperation - or Jesus in our hands.

- a) take a precise resolution.
- b) offer ourselves to the Holy Ghost so that he acts in us and helps us to put into practice the resolution we have taken.

C - Conclusion -

- 1. Thank for the lights and the graces we have received.
- 2. Ask for forgiveness for infidelities and also for distractions.
- 3. Spiritual Bouquet.

Put ourselves under the protection of the Holy Virgin and recite the "Sub Tuum".

12. - Method of St. John Baptist de la Salle -

A - Disposition of the soul -

1. Exercise of the presence of God -

- a) God present in the place where we are - because he is everywhere because he is there where two or three are gathered in his name;
- b) God present in ourselves - because in Him we have life, movement and being - because he lives in our soul through grace.
- c) God present in the church, because the church is the House of God, and there resides the Blessed Sacrament.

2. Acts of piety -

- a) three acts referring to God faith, adoration, thanks.
- b) three acts referring to ourselves: humility, confusion, contrition.
- c) three acts referring more particularly to Christ: calling on the merits of Christ Jesus,- act of union to Christ, - invocation of the Spirit of Christ.

B. - Application of the Soul - to the subject of the orison.

1. Act of faith towards Our Lord, who teaches us virtue through his example or his words.
2. Act of adoration towards Our Lord whose transcending holiness is revealed to us through his examples and his teaching.
3. Act of thanksgiving towards Our Lord for the love he teaches us and in which he gives us example.
4. Act of confusion considering how far we are from what Our Lord wants us to be.
5. Act of contrition.
6. Act of application to ourselves of the doctrine of Our Lord and choice of a resolution.
7. Act of union to the Spirit of Our Lord.
8. Act of petition to God to obtain the grace to realize what he expects of us.
9. Act of invocation to the saints asking them to come to our help.

C. - Thanksgiving of our Soul -

1. Examination of the Orison.
2. Thanksgiving for graces received.
3. Offering of the resolutions taken under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
“Sub Tuum.”

13. - Method of St. Alphonse de Liguori -

A - Preparation -

1. Act of faith and adoration
2. Act of humility and of contrition.
3. Petition for light.
4. Ave Maria.

B - Body of the meditation -

- 1 - Brief reflexions: Thoughts accompanied by acts of faith, if necessary using a book.
- 2 - Affections: express sentiments of humility, of confidence, of love, of sorrow, of resignation, etc...
- 3 - Prayer of petition, to implore light, final perseverance, and especially the gift of holy love.

C - Conclusion –

1. Thank God.
2. Adopt resolutions.
3. Ask for grace of fidelity to them.

Absence of a Method of Prayer –

What distinguishes the spirituality of Teresa of Lisieux is its lack of any special method of prayer. This is most important, for the life of prayer is the soul of all spirituality. More than any other element, it reveals to us, in the lives of the saints, the secret of their union with God.

In the eyes of Teresa of Avila, the great reformer of Carmel, prayer was everything, Sister Therese of the Child Jesus had read and re-read in the writings of her holy Mother the descriptions of prayer that she left us: vocal and mental prayer, prayer of recollection, prayer of quietude, prayer of union, and, in speaking of the seven mansions of the soul, the principal stage of that life of prayer and union beginning with the elementary forms of active prayer and going on to the most subtle analysis of the superior states of mystical marriage.

In the case of “Little Therese” there is no trace of those mansions, or those stages, or any possibility of such classification. Nothing resembles the Castle of the Soul less than the “History of a Soul.” Although they belong to the same religious family, their spirit is quite different.

The originality of the Saints –

So it is with all the saints who have set the mark of their powerful originality upon the life and thought of the Church. The apostles had their own way of approaching God in their prayer. The primitive Church still lived on the psalms and canticles of the synagogue, but they were vivified by the charismatic breath of the Spirit, of the Father and by the feeling of son-ship in the prayer of Jesus. New forms of life of prayer will always continue to develop in the Church. The Spirit breathes where He will, according to the needs of souls and of the times.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus could never submit herself to too systematic a method of prayer. When still a child, during her walks with her father, she liked to retire a little “on the grass, at some distance”. “Then, she says, my thoughts would become really deep; and, without knowing the meaning of meditation, my soul was absorbed in real prayer.”

The whole life of prayer of the Saint of Lisieux is intimated in this first confidence. Her contemplative thought could never accept too rigid or over-organized a frame work. One day, at the Abbey, one of her mistresses asked her what she did on holidays when she stayed at home. – “I often hide in a tiny corner of my room where I can shut myself in behind the bed-curtains, and there I think...” – “But what do you think about,” the nun asked laughingly. “I think about God, about the shortness of life, about eternity; in a word,

I think!” and she adds: “it is clear to me now that I was then engaged in genuine mental prayer during which the master gently instructed my heart.”

It was said that she followed mass badly on Sundays; but the chaplain at the convent school said that this calls for an explanation. Generally speaking, children are expected to follow the different parts of the mass in their books. Therese was expected to do this like the others, but the child did not... When she was shown what she should read, she would thank with a gracious smile, lowered her eyes onto the book, for a few seconds, but soon raised her head again as if she were distracted. She was praying much better than her companions by giving herself up to contemplative prayer.

Horror of the little devotions -

She had a horror of the little devotions so many good women indulge in. Apart from the Divine Office, her main prayer was the Our Father.

“Sometimes, when my spirit finds itself in such great dryness that I cannot draw from it a single good thought, I slowly repeat the Our Father or the Hail Mary. These prayers alone attract me; they provide divine food for my soul and are sufficient for it.”

No excessive simplification -

We must beware, however, of excessive simplification. Under the pretext of avoiding methods which are too rigid, and of transforming action into prayer, modern activism runs the risk of turning souls away from a deep and direct contact with God, without which our interior life becomes impoverished. The essence of all prayerful life - eternal as the Gospel - consists, according to the beautiful and classical definition of St. John of Damascus, in “raising one’s soul to God”, in order to love Him, adore Him, exalt Him, praise Him, and ask from Him grace and help in all our needs.

The prayer of petition derives from that lofty life of prayer when the soul speaks to God familiarly about His glory, its own needs, in a spontaneous “heart to heart” talk. All the faculties of man, in their highest activities, come into play in this life of prayer and of union.

Each one according to the grace of God -

Each one must follow his personal vocation according to the light of grace and to the inclination of his soul. “The Gospel above all helps the most in the time of prayer,” said St. Therese of Lisieux. “In there do I find everything my poor soul needs.”

Her life of prayer remains the simple, earnest one of the child who approaches God as a Father. “I do like the children who cannot read: I simply tell God what I want, and He always understands me.”

Conclusion - Final Advice:

- Mental Prayer is a gift from God which depends far more on grace than on our own industry. The Holy Spirit is the giver: He it is who calls us to orison, - to Him we must attribute its success.
- However, on our side, we may place ourselves in the right dispositions through purity of heart, recollection, practice of the virtues which enable souls to speak with God. Usage and experience will help to facilitate this holy exercise.
- As the goal and the end of Mental Prayer is to unite ourselves to God through the application of our mind and of our will - it will be all the more perfect as it does unite us more to God, and as, through his Holy Spirit working in us, we acquire more strength to do good.
- Among all the different methods of mental prayer, the best one is, for each of us, the one for which we have more attraction, which helps us and benefits us most.
- Everything that stains the soul - sin, passions, disorder of the senses, - or everything that encumbers it: overload of activities, excitement, scruples, anxiety of mind, - all these are obstacles to mental prayer.
- Go to your mental prayer with the pure intention to seek God only, and also with humble resignation to His will - ready to do and to suffer all He chooses for you.
- At the beginning of the orison, before applying yourself to the subject you have prepared, remain for a while doing nothing. This is necessary to stop the excitement of the senses, of the imagination and the appetites, - to bring calm to our mind, and to settle our soul in a background of interior peace which pre-disposes us to the conversation with God.
- Then place yourself in the presence of God through an act of faith, which you must renew from time to time during the orison.
- Keep your body at rest, no agitation - as far as possible. This helps greatly the Quietness of the soul.
- Do not worry about the extravagant flights of your imagination, and do not get anxious about the trouble it gives you. Simply prevent your mind from following these same flights, and - if distractions do set in bring gently your mind back to its own subject, without any reference to the distractions.
- When your mind is so arid that you cannot meditate, nor produce any affections, suffer this aridity with patience, and quietly remain in the presence of God.
- Stop all the longer where you find more devotion and more fervour - and try always to give more activity to your will than to your intelligence, insisting more upon the affections than upon the considerations.

- Lastly, remember that the best orison is not the one in which we have more consolations, more facility, - but the one in which we are more faithful, more constant and more receptive to the dispositions of the will of God, - while carrying the weight of our troubles and of our misery without ever becoming discouraged.

On our side, let's do all we can, and let's be certain that - whatever disposition we have in mental prayer - as long as we are willing to persevere in orison, God will make it achieve His greatest glory and our greatest good." (Doctr. Sp. VII, principe 1.)

* * * * *

"One suggests as methods what will suit the greatest number of people in most circumstances - but as for each individual case one would not pretend to specify any one method as compulsory - it is for the Holy Spirit to guide each soul, and He has a thousand different ways of doing so."

"As long as you do not reject, through indolence, through lack of fervour, the means here presented for fruitful meditation, - you will - remain free to follow other ways of meditating, if you find some more in conformity with your own tastes and more useful to your spiritual advancement." (P. de Clariviere.)

Let us always remember that
the prayer of the Church must be the model
and the method of
our private prayer.

SOME ADVICE TO MAKE PRAYER EASIER

“Seven times a day I praise you for your just ordinances.” (Ps. 118, 164.)

“When you give alms, your left hand should not know what your right hand is going. Thus your alms are given in secrecy, and your Father, who sees what is secret, will reward you.”

“Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues or at street corners to attract the attention of their fellow men. I tell you plainly, they have their reward already. When you pray, retire to your private room and bolt the door, and then pray to your Father in secrecy; and your Father, who sees what is secret, will reward you.”

“Moreover, when you pray, do not use many and idle words, as the heathen do; for they think that their gibbness will win them a hearing. So do not imitate them.”
(Matt. 6, 3-8.)

“But I tell you with the same assurance: ‘When any two of you are in agreement here on earth regarding anything they ask for, their prayer shall be granted by my Father in Heaven. When two or three are assembled in my name, there I am in the midst of them.’”
(Matt. 18, 19-20)

“As Peter and John were going up to the Temple at three o’clock in the afternoon, the hour of prayer...”
(Acts 3, 1.)

“Now the next day, while they were still on their journey and were just drawing near to the city, Peter went up to the roof about noon, to pray...”

“Come away”, he said to them (the apostles) “for the sake of privacy, to a lonely place, and take a little rest.”
(Mark 6, 31.)

As we see, the Holy Spirit himself has given us in several instances some advice in order to make praying easier:

- Come away...
- Retire to your private room...
- Seven times a day...
- Do not multiply the words...
- If two of you pray together...

The Church, Spouse of Christ, has listened attentively to these recommendations and, from them, has formulated a series of directives in order to:

- make Mental Prayer easier, and
- to show us the pitfalls we must avoid.

To Facilitate Mental Prayer

1. - Choice of time -

There is no exclusive time, but – according to the state of our soul and our way of life – there are moments when we are better disposed to recollection.

For many people, the time following their rising in the morning is a moment of calm, when one is not yet taken up in the whirl of occupations. It is a privileged moment for prayer.

For others, these early moments are still steeped in torpor and apathy. The physical and mental reactions have difficulty starting up. Mental prayer in these conditions is but a struggle against numbness and heaviness, - a deserving struggle certainly, but one that risks to become wearying.

Some people feel more at ease in the evening. Some others still, may prefer – from time to time – the calmness and the solitude of night. A few people, again, very busy in the morning and in the evening, manage to reserve a moment during the day, between two classes, or between two errands.

No matter, - to each of us belongs the choice according to his availability and his experience. The ideal is to fix for our selves a moment when we have a chance to be undisturbed – and daily to keep to it.

2. - Choice of duration -

There again, it depends on each individual and on the available time. A quarter of an hour, - especially for beginners, - is a good average. But five minutes – well employed – may be sufficient for a good mental prayer.

Who cannot spare five minutes in a day? Mental prayer is not so much a question of minutes as a question of intensity, of desire and of love.

However, if you are faithful, gradually the Holy Spirit will invite you to prolong the audience with the Lord: half an hour, three quarters of an hour. You will eventually, one day – at least from time to time – arrive at the point where you remain in prayer for a complete hour. Then you will understand the full weight of the Divine Master's invitation: "Watch one hour with me..." (Matt, 26, 40.)

One hour of mental prayer a day must be the minimum of time that a priest, a religious, a lay person given to the apostolate, must try and achieve. The more one wants to be efficient in the pursuit of holiness and of apostolic radiance, the more one feels the urgent need of prayer.

3. - Choice of place -

There is no prescribed location for prayer. Some make excellent mental prayer in the midst of a crowd, in the subway, in a waiting line. Normally, the House of the Lord or one's own room is the most recommended places. Recollection is usually easier when we find ourselves in front of the Tabernacle or of the exposed Blessed Sacrament.

But if one has no possibility to come to a church, one may just as well make orison in a garden, or elsewhere. Let's remember that the Lord advises us to pray at home, "the door being bolted..." (Matt. 6, 6.)

4. - Choice of attitude -

We can pray in any position. Let's choose the one which makes our mental prayer easier, - be it lying down on our bed.

Although – because the exterior reacts on the interior – we should usually avoid either too uncomfortable a position (for instance a kneeling position, without any support, for too long a time, which ends by becoming an ascetic exercise retaining our attention,) – or in too soft an attitude (as for instance ensconced in an armchair, which pre-disposes to numbness and somnolence.)

The best position, it seems, is kneeling down with some support, or sitting up on a chair, leaning slightly forward, and hands crossed on one's knees, in an attitude of respectful adoration.

We must note that some people find it an advantage to make orison in writing, or at least to put down, as they come to them, their ideas or their feelings. Variety and freedom...

5. - Choice of subjects -

There are multitudes of them. On principle, it is for the Lord to choose the theme of the dialogue. You must go to God in all simplicity, just as you are. He will, in his own way, take charge of teaching you, and of filling you with his own choice of ideas.

"Blessed, O Lord, is the man you will teach Yourself." (Ps. 93, 12.)

For you, the essential is to hold yourself, in all humility, at his disposal, - to adhere to his wishes with all the love you can find in yourself, - and so to allow Him to act in you just as He pleases.

However, as God speaks noiselessly, and as you must try to collect your thoughts, it is a good plan for you to have a topic in reserve. Here lies the interest of a text from the Holy Scripture.

Choose it according to the liturgical season, in accordance to your needs, your tastes, and your attractions. The important point, once more, is not so much to reflect on a truth of

the faith than to meet the Lord in faith, and to allow yourself to be penetrated by his presence, his thoughts, his love.

6. - Habitual preparation -

The choice of a text constitutes an immediate preparation. But what counts more is what we could call “habitual preparation,” made of humility, of a minimum of asceticism, of charity, of interior life.

a) - Humility -

In order to meet God, we must transform our soul into a child’s soul, or at least that of a poor man, of a poor sinner ready to repent. Nothing will make the coming of the Lord to us easier than the acute feeling of our basic inferiority when facing God’s holiness. The proud, the Pharisees, are not admitted into God’s intimacy.

“When God wants to show his preference to a soul, He does not consider its excellence but the reality of its humility and the degree of its self-contempt.”

(St. John of the Cross.)

b) - Asceticism -

There would be more souls turning towards Mental prayer, were there more people inclined to mortification. There is nothing like a sacrifice, - small as it may be, - to create a climate favorable to a contact with Him who, for the love of us, gave Himself up unto death, and to death on the cross. Too soft a life does not facilitate the meeting, in depth, with the Crucified.

c) - Charity -

God is Charity. In order to find ourselves on his own wave-length, we must not only develop this feeling, but also multiply the acts of charity towards our neighbor. This, first of all, means knowing how to forgive. We must know to frequently empty out the secret reserves of bitterness, of resentment. To go towards God with feeling of rancor against any of our brethren is a sure guarantee of finding a closed door:

“...first go and settle your argument with your brother, and then come back to offer your gift.” (Matt. 6, 23.)

To forgive, but also to give, and to give of oneself. Nothing can better help us to see Christ in ourselves, through faith, than active charity towards Christ present in others.

d) - Interior life -

This is where we must always arrive: mental prayer should only be the peak in a permanent state. The more, in ordinary life, you pursue God through everything that is hiding Him from you, - or disguises him, - or disfigures him, the more chances you have to find Him in mental prayer.

On the other hand, mental prayer will help you to intensify your interior life through fidelity to your daily duty. It will make more spontaneous these breaks of a few seconds, in the middle of the day, allowing you to plunge from time to time into God, to take a deep breath in Him, and then to come back to the surface, refreshed and revigorated.

7. - Perseverance in spite of aridity -

If mental prayer always brought sweet consolations to us, we could be surprised to see so many Christians, - priests and religious, - being unfaithful to this exercise, recommended throughout the tradition of the Church.

One of the reasons it is being abandoned is the fact that very often mental prayer is a time of darkness and of aridity. What should we do, then?

1. - It may be a providential trial -

Obviously, we are not simple enough to think that we are saints just because prayer is more and more difficult for us... However it is a fact that – if the saints have tasted inexpressible delights – they have also known bitter and prolonged misery... Here are a few examples:

- “Very often, and for many years, I was less preoccupied with deep reflexions than with the listening to the clock telling us of the end of meditation time.”

“And it is certain that the devil, as well as bad habits, was putting in my way such insuperable obstacles to prevent me from making orison, - and that I was feeling such sadness when entering my Oratory, - that I needed, to force myself to mental prayer, the help of all my courage.”

“Finally, God would come to my rescue... Out of the 28 years in which I have made orison, I have spent more than eighteen in this struggle.” (Teresa of Avila.)

- Very near death, Teresa of Lisieux owned up:

“Heaven is more and more closed to me. There is a wall between heaven and me.”

- “My heart is occupied, tempted by human consolations... Ah! When Jesus was filling this heart, it did not even think of mentioning its troubles, nothing could be seen of its features. There was only room for Jesus. Whether the trials came from the outside or from the inside, a quarter of an hour in front of the Blessed Sacrament would strengthen me, would cheer me up, - and today hours of adoration leave me with a broken heart.”

“I am like a sick person who can only speak of his pains or of his disappointments. I am in the negative. So the interior feeling in my adoration is dead. My soul is frozen. Jesus does not allow his beautiful sun to shine any longer.”

“From the abyss, I cry to you, O Lord...”

O Mary, you who had led me, and given me to Jesus, you must lead me again, and again give me to Jesus who I have lost...” (S. Eymard.)

2. - In filial abandon -

Let's be convinced that if Jesus appears to be leaving us alone, to be going away from us, to be asleep and indifferent, He really is very close to us, attentive to all our needs, to every movement of our soul.

- "Through all the nights, all the emptiness, all the impotence, I want to stare at you always."
(Elizabeth de la Trinite.)

- "You will sooner get tired of hiding than I will to be looking for you..."
(Teresa of Lisieux.)

3. - It may, at times, be our negligence -

Must we resign ourselves to the fact that we are not always loaded with favors?

Yes and No.

Yes – if, being very generous in God's service, this aridity in mental prayer is in no way a sign of displeasure from our Master.

No – if, having been unfaithful, we may fear that the Spouse of our soul may not, or will not, unite Himself to us as long as we willingly keep up attachments that are displeasing him.

There are three kinds of aridity more or less guilty:

a) - Carnal aridity -

Tepid life, un-mortified, attached to the things of the world, to sensible pleasures, to disorderly affections, to vanity, to self-love...

One does not care about the rules – silence – charity – recollection – duty of state – obedience – or God himself. Naturally one is bored in front of God, because one is in too pure an atmosphere, and it seems impossible to breathe – in too holy an environment, where we are ill-at-ease, shy, without any filial spirit.

The remedy: to contemplate and to follow Jesus Christ, while generously taking up our cross every day.

b) - Spiritual aridity -

God wants to test us, to humiliate us, to purify us. The soul does its best: no deliberate venial sin; great desire to love and to serve God; no voluntary attachment to sensible goods that could turn us away from God; no unruly affection voluntarily kept up; no self-loving sadness willingly encouraged; care preparation one's mental prayer, - recollection.

However, one keeps up the efficient desire to serve God, one sacrifices oneself

to his service. But there is no attraction for prayer at the appointed time; we find the formal period of orison too long; we are bored; we monologue with difficulty; God does not answer any more.

The remedy is patience tempered with hope and love (from the will,) purity of heart, continuous thought that we are children of God; fidelity to our spiritual life exercises, mental prayer and penance. This aridity is the School of God's friends, of the Apostles.

c) - Mixed aridity -

Aridity proceeding from various mixed causes, (carnal and spiritual.) – partly involuntary and accidental – (weakness, sickness, painful or difficult circumstances in the family or environment, etc...)

This aridity is specially frequent in the persons whose generosity to God's service is backed by really good will, but not deep or spiritual enough to obtain deep, persevering sacrifices, - by purity of conscience and of heart, - by radical abnegation which makes us advance on the spiritual road.

Failing this complete conversion, one remains in a rather unclear state – being neither one thing nor the other – of the semi-fervor rather than tepidity. One does not accept to keep up willingly unruly attachments, but they are the objects of superficial mortification, - one does not tear them up, or extirpate them, or cauterize them.

One has a real desire to serve God and to love Him, but not to the extent of cutting into the quick to refuse all pleasures, as long as one does not see oneself surely and notably guilty.

One works, but too much for human motives. One remains in the vague – worthless or very superficial examinations 0 achieving regularly, or nearly so, a mediocre program of spiritual life – coasting between the call to divine union and the interest of our self love and of our small passions. We don't forget ourselves, - we get discouraged, and we become easily suspicious – we remain imbued of ourselves, and, in difficulties fall back still on ourselves.

Within this state, our mental prayer is rarely consoling, though we do it regularly, through we prepare it - ...we begin it with an act of recollection ...we don't fully accept distractions...

The remedy is, deeply and seriously, a complete conversion to a really generous, spiritual life of habitual mental prayer and of apostolic effort based on faith and love.

8. - Devotion to the Holy Spirit and Our Lady -

See to it that your devotion to the Holy Spirit and to Mary becomes more intense. The Holy Spirit never stops suggesting to you the filial prayer that God

expects from you in “unutterable sighs...” (Rom. 8, 26.) which our poor human words are unable to translate.

Light makes everything it touches become luminous. Fire makes everything it devours become incandescent. The Holy Spirit makes all he penetrates become spiritual.

But the question is to cooperate fully with this spiritualizing influence. It is the intervention of Mary, faithful Spouse of the Holy Spirit, which – through adapting grace to your soul, and your soul to grace – will allow you to benefit to the utmost from the divine breath of the Spirit. This must bring to our mind the interest we have in a filial devotion to Mary who will come to our help in the measure we trust her and call upon her.

In our spiritual life everything is inter-related: a life of orison is the normal consequence of a well-balanced spiritual and moral life.

What we must avoid

1. - Tension of mind -

Everything that implies complications – prolonged tension – over-worry – is not in line with the Lord's wishes. This is why you must beware of tiring out your mind with too continuous an effort: you must reserve for yourself some moments of spiritual relaxation. In other words, take time to breathe.

“This is what you must carefully watch out for... It does happen in the beginnings – when we start to taste the sweet fruits of devotion, we cannot satisfy our hunger for them – we never think we have enough – we plunge into them too deeply. Oh! I must have this presence of God, has it continuously... I must attach myself to it... I shall not let go of it... We tie ourselves up with an invincible obstinacy, to the point of making ourselves ill...”

Oh! This is too much! Too much! Very often the evil is tempting us this way; when he cannot bring us directly to do wrong, he tries to make us embrace more good than we can reach, and goes on over-loading us until we are crushed under too heavy a weight, too over-powering a load...” (St. Vincent de Paul.)

What wisdom! What good sense!

2. - Lack of silence -

Likewise, do not speak all the time – not even interiorly. Have no fear of silence. Place yourself, in all humility, and listen to the Lord.

“It is losing a great treasure than to make ourselves deaf by wanting to speak too much to God without listening to Him.” (Teresa of Avila.)

Please, give him the chance to place a word, and even to speak to you as He wishes. Obviously, there is no question here of words audible to our bodily ears, but of thoughts that – through His Spirit – He will himself inspire to us. Even if you are not conscious of it, a mysterious action will take place in you which will influence your comportment through all the rest of the day.

The Lord's ideas often need a certain amount of time to germinate, to take form, and to penetrate our conscience. Often to, it is when we least expect it that they suddenly appear to us in all their clarity.

3. - Somnolence -

Do not turn mental prayer into some vague somnolence more or less pious. It will perhaps happen that fatigue overtakes you during the time you have chosen for this exercise. The Lord will willingly forgive you. But if mental prayer turns regularly into

sleep – you must react and, if necessary, change time and method.

4. - Discouragement -

Never become discouraged, whatever happens. If, for some worthless reason, you are tempted to suppress mental prayer, or to shorten it, resist. Do not play the devil's game whose interest it is to turn you away from orison.

Perseverance is always rewarded. Not only does God reward fidelity in mental prayer with joys known to him alone, and with a feeling of plenitude which proceeds from His Spirit, but also with a new perspective on everything – which is in some way a communion to His own regard.

Our scale of values – too human as it is – is then upset: everything takes on a new meaning, not to say a divine meaning. But beware: we are down here on earth going through a testing time, a time of instability. This state of euphoria – which represents a real, and gratuitous, grace, does not usually last long. Do not get attached to it.

5. - Pride -

Remain very humble: the slightest feeling of self-sufficiency would be a lie; the least feeling of spiritual pride would be a sacrilege. There is nothing the Lord despises as much as the pride of the Pharisee who boasts of the gifts of God and attributes them to himself. If God overloads you with his graces, it is in order that you may serve Him more generously through your human brothers.

To make use of the tokens of divine Goodness to imagine that you are superior to others would be the surer way to have them taken away – and to attract God's anger. God is very strict on this question.

6. - Isolation from Life -

You must indeed be careful not to isolate your mental prayer from your daily life. In your orison, in the light of the divine thoughts, your every day problems can assume their real meaning. They can also find in there their providential solution.

The influence of your mental prayer should be reflected over your whole life. Nothing is more contrary to the proper spirit of mental prayer than to “turn your back” on the Lord when returning to your occupations, under the pretext that the scheduled time for the dialogue with God is now over... Your mental prayer is finished: your life of prayer is starting.

The point is to take the Lord with you and to remain – at least in your own will – deeply united to Him so that He penetrates with his divine presence all the activities he wants you to undertake for His glory.

No partition between prayer and action. Such partition is opposed to life and leads to sterility. On the contrary, prayer penetrating into action confers on it its true meaning and

its eternal value.

7. - Voluntary distractions -

A – Do not be surprised at them:

Distractions are unavoidable in any prayer that lasts more than the time necessary for expressing what we want to tell God, - or else, necessary for thinking of what interests us and takes up our attention.

As soon as, instead of saying what we think, what we feel or what we desire, - we repeat a text composed by somebody else, - be it by the Lord Himself, like the “Our Father” – as soon as we are obliged, or we oblige ourselves, to reflect on a subject which has no special attraction for us, - we are quickly led astray by our affections, or our dislikes, or our memories or impressions, - or by any object under our eyes, - because any of these takes up our attention far more readily than does a text recited from memory or a thought we do not really want.

Now, the things related to interior life are often very far from having for us the attraction held by the exterior or profane things. And when we say attraction, we really mean interest, because we do not only entertain pleasant thoughts and memories, but anything related to our sensibility, including the worries of life and the difficulties of our neighbour; quite normally, all this tends to occupy our mind.

Thus, he who suffers many distractions during mental prayer should neither be surprised nor alarmed, for this phenomenon is unfortunately general. We believe that to remain a whole quarter of an hour without distractions, - save, maybe, while reading steadily, - is a rare exception.

The essential point is not to avoid all distractions but to comport ourselves as we should when they happen, remembering that alone the Spirit teaches us how to pray.

B. - How should we comport ourselves towards distractions:

The rule is very simple: we must

- not accept them
- not grieve about them.

1. – Not accept them:

To do otherwise would be to give up mental prayer. As long as you are unwillingly distracted there is obviously nothing to be done, because the mind can only work on its goal, i.e. mental prayer, if it is thinking about it, if it is not distracted. So, as soon as it realizes its distraction, it must immediately, very quietly, resume its task.

2. – Not grieve about them:

Involuntary distractions are not even imperfections of the will. God does not hold us responsible for what we have neither willed nor accepted. All we have to do in such cases will be to bring our mind back onto the subject, and take it up anew, calmly, as if nothing had happened. Effort, or resentment, would serve no purpose – except, of course, in some cases when the effort is necessary to tear oneself away from a particularly obsessing idea and distraction.

Always remember that:

- to sincerely want to make orison IS to make orison
- God does not ask for our success, but for our quiet, persevering, loving effort.

Conclusion –

There is no doubt that you want something of me,
Lord Jesus,
All these doors opening out at once – Here it is
in front of me, this life: it is not a dream.
You want something of me, Lord.

Here I am, at the foot of the wall, - all is open,
There is only one road, free towards
The infinite, the absolute.
And I feel still the same, in spite of it all...

I shall have to make contact with you, Lord,
To keep you company for a long time.
To die: but, then, completely.

Like these wounded people who are in pain,
Lord, I ask you to finish me off.
I am tired not to be yours,
not to be You.

AT THE SCHOOL OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI

During his earthly life, Jesus has been lavish with his Word and never ceased - in his mercy - to bend over human misery, but the Evangelists tell us that He always took time to pray to the Father.

- “After dismissing them, he went up the mountainside, alone, to pray. Night fell and he was still there, alone.” (Matt. 14, 23.)
- “Very early the next morning - it was still dark - he rose, left the house, and went to an out-of-the way place; and there, he prayed.” (Mark 1, 35.)
- “On one occasion he was praying all by himself. Only the disciples were with him. He then put this question to them: ‘Who do the people say I am?’” (Luke 9, 18.)
- “...and, withdrawing about a stone’s throw, he knelt down and prayed...” (Luke 22, 41.)

Francis - his eyes fixed on Christ, his model gave himself up to prayer. Orison was the main spring of his life and was so deeply impressed upon him that Thomas de Celano could say:

“It was no longer a man in prayer,
it was prayer made man.”

Hence:

- 1 - Life in Jesus: source of prayer.
- 2 - Praising the Lord.
- 3 - The heart’s free flight.

I

Life in Jesus: Source of Prayer

Man does not reach his destiny of perfection, of happiness, or of bliss, except by becoming incorporated with Christ and thereafter living in him, - living his life, his sentiments, his activity, in order to rise with him and in him to Heaven.

The path to this incorporation is Baptism, which signifies both life and death - the death and the life which must be realized throughout all our existence death to sin, to ourselves and our natural tendencies, and life in Jesus through grace and the good intention, by which everything we do is done, with our being and our will joined to Christ’s.

Our new life consists in the rebirth and the growth of Jesus in each of us. And just as the birth and the growth of Jesus took place in Mary under the action of the Holy Ghost, so does our birth and our growth in the new life in Jesus - our supernatural life - take place through Mary, under the action of the Holy Ghost. We shall not be living this new life except by abandoning ourselves, with all our will, to the action of the Holy Ghost and of Mary.

This passive surrender, be it remembered, implies our complete nothingness, our total lack of ability, which demand that a higher power come to our aid. And this admission of our lack of capacity, and this demand for help from above, is what we mean by PRAYER. .

And our new life in, Christ implies partaking of his life. But the life of Christ was one continuous prayer, prayer understood in the fullness of its extent as Divine adoration and praise, thanksgiving and entreaty, propitiation and reparation.

Now, to act and pray with Jesus is to live out our union with him and become more completely one with him. We pray to arrive at this union, we pray to practice this union, and to render it more perfect. We pray to live in Christ, and we pray to reach Heaven - our true home - with him. This is the air we must breathe if we want to live according to the spirit.

Man is made for prayer as a bird is made for flight. Prayer is the soul's flight to God, it is its sunlit air, its vital element. The man who does not pray is a sick man, he is not in his normal condition - just as a bird that would stay on the ground all day, making no attempt to fly, would show that it was not in a normal condition, that it was ailing, or had its wings clipped.

Prayer is the expression of our natural need of God, of our need of the infinite, of our need of our Father, - just as it is the expression of our own weakness and impotence. Prayer is "an ascent of the intellect to God" (St. Bonaventure III Sent., 9, 1, ad 6 III, 201b.)

Indeed, the understanding needs God, for in him alone it finds rest.

But the heart, too, needs God, so that "prayer is a lifting of the heart to God in affection and love." (St. Bon. ib 17, 2, 3, ad 2, III, 374BO.)

Franciscan prayer would be an elevation of the understanding to God on the wings of affection and love. St. Bonaventure teaches that too:

"Prayer is the soul turning to God. Listen, my soul: when you, are at prayer, you should be fully recollected and enter with your Beloved into the Chamber of your heart, where - all alone with him forgetful of everything exterior, you chat with him; and with all your mind, all your affection, all your desire, all your devotion, you should lift yourself above yourself to rise on high in the ardor of your devotion, until you enter 'the place of the marvelous tabernacle', up to the very house of God." (De Perfect. Vitae ad Sor. c.5 n.5)

The soul in union with Christ, transformed into him, and returning home to the Father

in the delights of the Blessed Trinity. Thus, “prayer is, in truth, a cup to scoop up the grace of the Holy Ghost at the fountain of the overflowing sweetness of that same Blessed Trinity.” (ibid.)

II

Praising the Lord

Franciscan prayer is earnest entreaty, supplication, but - even more so - it is praise of the Lord, hymn of love, of adoration, of thanksgiving, as was the whole life of Jesus.

St. Francis was asked by his disciples to teach them how to pray. Steeped in the Gospel as he was, and wholly transformed into Christ, the Poverello had no other answer than that of Jesus.

‘When you pray, say, Our Father who art in Heaven...’

He had come to realize that the basic and essential prayer is the very prayer of Jesus, which - in his name - we address again to “our” Father, because of our unity in the Mystical Body.

Now, this prayer is first of all a prayer of praise to the Lord: “Hallowed be your name”. The prayers which have come down to us from St. Francis are praises, and his most beautiful one the essentially Franciscan prayer - is the Canticle of Brother Sun: all things give praise to the Lord by the voice of man, which is the voice of Christ, priest of all creation. St. Bonaventure says:

“St. Francis taught his disciples to praise God in all creatures, and by means of all creatures.”

This praise is the very life of the saints in heaven, where they eternally sing: “Holy! Holy! Holy!” It was the life of the first Franciscans all over the world. “Seldom, or never did they cease their praise of God, or their prayer, but they kept offering thanks to the Lord for what good was done, or offering their deep sorrow for things done badly.” (I Cel. 40.)

Often, prayer finds better expression in sighs and tears than in words. The Seraphic Doctor says: “You can pray better with a sigh of your heart than by voice of mouth.” (IV Sent. 23 V, 4 ad 4.) He continues: “To pray truly is to utter bitter sighs of compunction - not fine words. Thus it appears that true, satisfactory prayer, consists not in words and song, but far rather in tears and lamentations.” (ibid. 15, IV, 373 B.)

We know how often the piety of St. Francis led him to sigh and to shed tears. When he began to withdraw from the world, “Jesus Christ crucified appeared to him one day. At his sight, his soul was flooded with love, and the memory of Christ’s sufferings was so deeply impressed on his heart that, thereafter, he was unable to think of Christ, or of the Cross, without dissolving in tears and sighs.” (St. Bon. Lrg. c.l. n.5.)

“The sufferings of Christ were constantly before his eyes and filled them with

incessant weeping. His sobs were heard, wherever he went; he was inconsolable over the memory of the wounds of Christ.” (2 Cel. 10.)

But these lamentations are expressions of love. Franciscan prayer is not sad, and does not engender sadness. Rather, love turns it into song and music:

“When he happened to cast his glance on the Crucifix, he became - as it were - intoxicated with love and compassion. Then he would start singing the tender melody with which his soul was flooded, softly at first, then more loudly, translating the divine whisper, which sounded in his ear into Gallic accents.”

“Then, he might pick up two sticks from the ground, resting one at his neck, as if it were a viol or some similar instrument, and stroking it with the other, the way one strokes the strings with a bow.”

“At the same time, he sang love songs in the French language about our Lord Jesus Christ crucified, except when his feelings overpowered him, causing him to burst into tears and pious lamentations.

“The sighing and the weeping would go on constantly until - forgetting all about violin and bow, he fell into ecstasy and led the earth in his flight to heaven.”
(2 Cel. 127.)

III

The Heart’s Free Flight

So, such is the summing up of Franciscan prayer:

“On the wings of the love of Christ, one takes off in flight to Heaven.”

It is a sincere, unrestrained prayer, an expression of the soul’s sentiments, as well as an expression of the whole of our being, -body and spirit.

If one thing is excluded from Franciscan prayer, it is formalism - set formulas and external manifestations that do not correspond to the sentiments of the heart. Apart from that, any form of prayer is acceptable, and everybody should pray as it suits him, as his interior inclination suggests.

Prayer is essentially an elevation of the mind and heart to God this is mental prayer. But vocal prayer, too, is good, even very good, when it is joined to mental prayer; after all, all our being should pray, Blessed Angela of Foligno says (Autobiography 229):

“When I speak of prayer, I mean not only that of the mouth, but also that of body, heart, mind and all the powers of the soul and the senses of the body.”

That is what is meant by the entire man “having been transformed into prayer”, as his biographer says of St. Francis.

Franciscan prayer is the entire man at prayer a heart and under - standing, body and soul; one way or the other, lip and eye, hand and knee, all must pray along. But Franciscan prayer is also continual. It is the life of Jesus, in constant union with God, elevating the soul and transforming it into Christ and God.

Everywhere and all the time, man should endeavor to turn toward God with a steady, spiritual gaze, as if he stood before him. (St. Bonav. Six Wings VII, 12.) That is not hard for the Franciscan who is detached from every created thing through holy poverty, who, beholding all things in God, exclaims “My God and my all!”

Franciscan prayer is an affectionate glance towards God present everywhere, but present in a special manner in the soul transformed into him. If our heart inspires us any word of love or of gratitude, or any plea for help or pardon, we must express it in all simplicity, without effort, just as we feel it. If the words refuse to come, we know they are not necessary and that a glance or a sigh will tell God more than all the finest words.

But the Franciscan soul loves vocal prayer too, particularly the prayers of the Church, the liturgical prayer, which is no longer that of the individual, but that of the Mystical Body, - the prayer of Christ on the lips of his members. Knowing that it is Jesus who is praying, the Franciscan - rather than paying often impossible attention to every word - endeavors to keep simply in union with Jesus, letting Him pray,

The Franciscan prays with his heart and his mind, but - whenever it is necessary or helpful - he makes use of a book for his prayers or his meditation: he keeps these simple, without constraint, affective rather than reasoned, practical rather than speculative, - seeking to remain passively unresisting under the Divine action, rather than relying on his own natural effort.

But the Franciscan knows that the finest book for meditation, when he wants to reach perfection in Christ, is the book of the Cross, in which St. Francis and his disciples read constantly.

St. Bonaventure says:

“They lived in constant prayer, mental rather than vocal, interested above all in possessing devotion in their heart. They had no liturgical books as yet. Instead, they read day and night, constantly, in the book of the Cross as taught them by their father, who always spoke to them of the Cross of Christ.” (Leg. IV, 31.)

Then, from Christ, they ascended to their heavenly Father, in the perfect prayer, which is that taught by Christ, and addressed to “Our Father who is in Heaven.” (22)

Ref. (22) - cf.: Union with Christ, L. Veuthey, ofm.
Franciscan Herald Press, Illinois. pp. 23-30.

Conclusion:

GIVE THANKS

“It is truly meek and just...At all times
...to give you thanks.” (The Preface.)

Teach me, Lord, to live this prayer,
That I may thank You every day
For everything.

I do at times give thanks
For what seems good:
For health, success; for love and gain;
For all that pleases self.

And yet, how thoughtless - blind -
To thank You not for what is truly good:
For pain, unkindness, censure, blame;
For every hurt that comes
From person, place or work.

By these keen instruments would You,
Divine Physician,
Remove the harmful growths of self,
To give new life; Your own true Life,
And peace, abundantly.

But I am blind - see not
Your loving Hand;
Then, in resisting, suffer more
And spoil Your work.

Had I accepted all with gratitude
I might long since been a saint,
And happy -
A grateful heart cannot be otherwise.

Forgive, then, Lord,
My blindness and my squandered life,
And give me grace, this day, to see
Your chastening Hand in all my hurts –
Nor blame Your instruments;
The grace to take each purifying cross.

And then –
Give THANKS with all my heart.

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Written in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace!

Where there is hatred
.....let me sow love;
Where there is discord
.....let me sow unity;
Where there is resentment
.....let me sow forgiveness;
Where there is error
.....let me sow truth;
Where there is doubt
.....let me sow faith;
Where there is despair
.....let me sow hope;
Where there is darkness
.....let me sow light;
Where there is sadness
.....let me sow joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek...

To be consoledas to console;
To be understoodas to understand;
To be lovedas to love.

For:

It is while givingthat we receive;
It is while forgetting ourselves.....that we find;
It is while pardoningthat we are pardoned;
It is while dyingthat we are born to eternal life.

EVANGELICAL TEXTS

Jesus was Praying -

- “The following happened after the people at large had received baptism and Jesus, too, had been baptized: he was still praying when the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape like a dove; moreover a voice rang out upon the air saying:

“You are my Son, the Beloved; I am well pleased with you.” (Luke 3, 21-22.)

- “Very early next morning - it was still dark - he rose, left the house, and went to an out-of-the way place; and there he prayed.” (Mark 1, 35.)

- “But the talk about him spread all the more. And great crowds flocked together to be instructed and cured of their infirmities. He, however, withdrew to lonely places to pray.” (Luke 5, 15-19.)

- “One day about that time, he went out to the hillside to pray, and spent the whole night in praying to God.” (Luke 6, 12.)

- “About eight days after this discourse, he took Peter, James and John with him and went up the hill to pray. In the course of his prayer, the expression of his countenance changed and his clothes turned a brilliant white.” (Luke 9, 28-29.)

- “Simon, I have prayed for you personally that your faith might not fail.” (Luke, 22, 32.)

- “I shall pray to the Father and he will give you another Defensor to be always with you: the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him, nor does it know him.” (John, 16-17.)

The prayer of Jesus -

- “He exulted in the Holy Spirit and said: ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from wise and prudent men and revealing them to little ones. Yes, Father, for such has been your good pleasure.’” (Luke 10, 21.)

- “Jesus raised his eyes and said: ‘Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of these people standing here so that they may believe that you have sent me.’” (Jo 11, 41-42.)

- “Now comes my hour of heartbreak, and what can I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very purpose that I came to this hour. ‘Father, honor your own name!’ At this, a voice came down from Heaven, I have honored it and I will honor it again.” (Jo 12, 27-28.)

- “When Jesus had delivered this discourse, he raised his eyes to heaven and said:

“Father, the hour is come! Glorify your Son,
that your Son may glorify you.
You have given him authority over all mankind,
that he might give eternal life
to all you have entrusted to him.
And this is the sum of eternal life
their knowing you, the only true God,
and your ambassador Jesus Christ.

“I have glorified you on earth
by completing the work you gave me to do.
And now, for your part, Father, glorify me in your bosom
with the glory I possessed in your bosom
before the world existed.

“I have made your name known to the men
whom you singled out from the world
and entrusted to me. Yours they were,
and to me you have entrusted them;
and they cherish your message.
Now they know that whatever you have given me
really comes from you;
for the message you have delivered to me
I have delivered to them;
and they have accepted it.
They really understand that I come from you,
and they believe that I am your ambassador.

“I am offering a prayer for them;
not for the world do I pray, but for those whom
you have entrusted to me;
for yours they are.

(Jo 17, 1-10.)

- “And yet a time is coming, in fact it is now here, when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Such are the worshippers the Father demands. God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth. (Jo 4, 23-24.)

- “Again, when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues or at street corners to attract the attention of their fellow men. I tell you plainly, they have their reward already. When you pray, retire to your private room, bolt the door, and then pray to your Father in secrecy; and your Father, who sees what is secret, will reward you.

“Moreover, when you pray, do not use many and idle words, as the heathen do; for they think that their glibness will win them a hearing. So do not imitate them. Surely, your

Father is acquainted with your needs before you ask him.” (Matt. 6, 5-8.)

- “This particular kind of spirit cannot be driven out by anything except prayer... (Mark 9, 29.)
- “Once he was somewhere engaged in prayer. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him: ‘Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John taught his disciples.’”

He said to them: “When you pray, say as follows:

‘Father, may you be known and glorified;
may your kingdom be established;
give us day after day our daily bread;
and forgive us our sins,
for we also forgive everyone indebted to us;
and do not expose us to temptation.’”

- “Suppose,” he also said to them, “some one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him: ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; a friend of mine has just turned in from the road to visit me and I do not have a thing to set before him. Shall then the man inside remonstrate and say: ‘Do not pester me; at this late hour, the door is barred; my little ones are in bed with me; I cannot get up and accommodate you?’ I tell you, he may not get up and accommodate him just because he is his friend, but he will certainly get up for shame’s sake and give him all he asks for.

That is why I say to you: ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and you will gain admission. In fact, only he who asks receives; only he who seeks finds; only he who knocks will gain admission.

“Again, suppose some of you, fathers, is asked by his son for a loaf of bread: will he hand him a stone? Or, when he asks for a fish, will he hand him a serpent instead of fish? Or, when he asks for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion? Now, then, if you, bad as you are, are disposed to give your children useful gifts, Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him.” (Luke 11, 1-13)

- “He also told them a parable to show that they must persevere in prayer and not lose heart. “Once upon a time,” he said, “there was a judge in a town somewhere who did not fear God and had no regard for man. In the same town, there lived a widow who used to come to him and say: ‘See that justice is done me: Rid me of my persecutor’. For a time he refused; but later he said to himself:

“I do not fear God and have no regard for man; but, at any rate, since this widow is pestering me, I will see that justice is done her. I am afraid she may finally come and beat me black and blue.”

The Master then added: ‘Listen to what the dishonest judge says! And God will not see full justice done to his faithful who cry to him day and night? Will he really delay acting on their behalf? I tell you, he will see that justice is done them in all speed.’”

(Luke 18, 1-8.)

- “I am not long for this world; but they remain in the world; while I am about to return to you, Holy Father.

Keep them loyal to your name which you have given me.

May they be one as we are one! As long as I was with them, I kept them loyal to your name. I shielded and sheltered the men whom you have entrusted to me; and none of them is lost except the one who chooses his own doom. And thus the Scripture was to be fulfilled.

And now I return to you, and I say this before I leave the world that they may taste my joy made perfect within their soul.

“I have delivered to them your message; and the world hates them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not.

I do not pray you to take them out of the world, but only to preserve them from its evil influence. The world finds nothing kin in them, just as the world finds nothing kin in me. Consecrate them to the service of the truth. Your message is truth.

“As you have made me your ambassador to the world, so I am making them my ambassadors to the world; and for their sake I consecrate myself, that they, in turn, may in reality be consecrated.

“However, I do not pray for them alone; I also pray for those who through their preaching will believe in me. All are to be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so they, too, are to be one in us. The world must come to believe that I am your ambassador.

“The glory you have bestowed on me I have bestowed on them, that they may be one as we are one, - I in them and you in me. Thus their oneness will be perfected. The world must come to acknowledge that I am your ambassador, and that you love them as you love me.

“O Father! I will that those whom you have entrusted to me shall be at my side where I am; I want them to behold my glory, the glory you bestowed on me because you loved me before the world was founded.

“Just Father! The world does not know you, but I know you, and thus these men have come to know that I am your ambassador. I have made known to them your name, and will continue to make it known. May the love with which you love me dwell in them as I dwell in them myself.”
(Jo 17, 11-26.)

- “He said to them: ‘Pray, that you may not succumb to temptation.’ He then tore himself away from them and, withdrawing about a stone’s throw, knelt down and prayed to this effect: ‘Father, if it pleases you, spare me this cup. However, may your will, not mine, be done!’

“An angel from heaven appeared to him, and strengthened him. Now his struggle became intense, and he prayed the more earnestly, so that his sweat became like clots of blood that fell to the ground. At last he rose from his prayer and returned to the disciples to find

them sleeping for sorrow. 'How can you be sleeping?' he said to them; 'Rouse yourselves and pray, that you may not succumb to temptation.'" (Luke 22, 40-46.)

- "Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23, 34.)
- "About three o'clock, Jesus cried out with a strong voice: 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachtani', - that is, 'My God, my God, why do you abandon me?'" (Matt. 27, 46.)
- "Jesus gave a loud cry: 'Father,' he said, 'into your hands I commit my spirit.' With that, he expired." (Luke, 23, 46.)

Jesus recommends Praying -

- "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors, and thus prove yourselves children of your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5, 44-45.)
- "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray the Owner of the harvest, therefore, to send laborers to do his harvesting." (Luke 10, 2.)
- "Once upon a time, two men went up to the temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood conspicuously apart and soliloquized this prayer: 'O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of men - robbers, rogues, adulterers - or like that tax collector over there. I fast twice a week; I pay a tax of ten per cent on every item of my income.' The tax collector, on the contrary, kept in the background and would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast and said: 'O God, have mercy on me the sinner.'"

"I assure you, this man went down to his home acquitted of all guilt; not so the other. Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted." (Luke 18, 10-14.)
- "Not everyone who says to me, 'Master, Master,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7, 21.)
- "I tell you with assurance: when any two of you are in agreement here on earth regarding anything they ask for, their prayer shall be granted by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are assembled in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (Matt. 18, 19-20.)
- "Be vigilant at all times, praying that you may succeed in escaping all these things that are bound to come, and that you may stand your ground when confronted with the Son of Man." (Luke 21, 36.)
- "Should you ask for anything in my name, I will do it, that my Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it." (Jo 14, 13-14.)
- "As long as you remain united with me, and my teachings remain your rule of life, you may ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it." (Jo 15, 7.)
- "It is the real truth when I tell you that, if you make any request of the Father, he will grant

it to you in my name. Up to the present you made no request in my name. Make them, and they will be granted. Thus nothing will be wanting to your joy.”

“That will be the time when you make requests in my name; and I do not tell you that I shall petition the Father on your behalf. Of his own accord the Father loves you dearly, because you are settled in your love for me and in your conviction that I come from the Father.”
(Jo 16, 23-24 & 26-27.)

- “Simon, are you sleeping? Were you not able to stay awake one hour? Keep awake and pray, all of you, so that you may not succumb to temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
(Mark 14, 37-38.)

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