

The First Commandment

Adoration and Prayer. Thoughts for Christmas

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I. ADORATION.

“I am the Lord, your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me” (Exod., 20: 2-3).

As we approach the lovely feast of Christmas, we are always filled with thoughts of the tender and loving Christ-Child, born in the lowly stable of Bethlehem. We behold Jesus, who was God from all eternity, take to Himself the form of a helpless Babe, and choose a crib for His cradle. What creature can fathom God’s humility! And yet, just because Jesus came as a mere Babe, there are some who only remember Him as a Babe; who look upon Jesus as a helpless creature that will harm no one. Others again view God as an old decrepit man, advanced in years, who is more or less indifferent as to our deeds and actions. The great danger of these two conceptions of God is this: they belittle the power and dignity of God, and remove all fear and respect for Him and His Commandments.

But let us not forget that this Christ-Child is also He whom the three Kings from the far East came to adore. As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (for Epiphany), “they came to adore Him.” Let us not forget that this same Jesus is the God who created Heaven and earth and all the creatures that inhabit the earth. He is the same God who watched over His chosen people from whom the Redeemer was to arise; the same God who, amidst thunder and lightning, gave the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue. Recognizing God, therefore, as we do, we must also respect His Commandments, which were given to us in a most impressive manner.

When God delivered to Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, He inscribed them on two tables of stone. The one contained three, the other seven Commandments. The first group comprises our duties towards God, the other our duties towards ourselves and our neighbor.

It is true, these Commandments originally came into being with the creation of the world. They are based upon the natural law and conscience. Every individual man, since the creation of the world, at birth was endowed with a conscience, which acted like a monitor, admonishing him what is right and what is wrong. But for generations the chosen people of God wandered in captivity in Egypt. The Egyptians practiced a false worship, adoring idols or false gods. Some of the Hebrews, (Jews we call them by anticipation), too, had become tainted with this false worship. Now, Jehovah, (the One Who Is,) was delivering the Jews from bondage, leading them safely through the Red Sea. But before they were to enter the Promised Land, God reconfirmed amidst thunder and lightning the original Commandments by giving them in concrete form upon the two tables of stone, beginning with the all-important words: “I am the Lord, your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me.” We shall begin the consideration of this Commandment today.

(O Jesus, assist us with Your grace!)

Of all the duties in life, the most important is our duty to our God. This duty obliges us, first and foremost, to recognize only one God of heaven and earth. God demands of us that we render to Him, and to Him alone, that homage we owe to the Supreme Being, who is our Lord and Master. This homage we call adoration.

Definition.

— To adore God, then, is to render Him supreme worship; to acknowledge Him as our sovereign Lord and Master. The high respect we pay to our parents, superiors, temporal rulers, heroes in battles, or the Saints of God, etc., is different from adoration. This high esteem, this particular respect, we call veneration. These we venerate, but God alone we adore. And this adoration we give to God, can be of two kinds, interior adoration and exterior adoration.

Interior Adoration.

— Interiorly we adore God when we pay Him homage from the bottom of our hearts. We may do this without pronouncing a single word. We find this frequently amongst our faithful, while attending the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, or after a devout reception of Holy Communion. They may forget all about their prayer book and all other surroundings, but their minds are fixed in admiration upon God, upon the altar, or the Holy Eucharist buried in their bosoms. In their minds, they admire their God, adore Him, and thank Him. This is one of the best and highest acts of worship we can offer to God. This is true interior adoration.

Exterior Adoration.

— Exteriorly we adore God, when we join to the homage of our hearts words or an attitude of the body which expresses outwardly the respect and love we feel for God from within. This can be done by vocal prayers, folding our hands, making the sign of the Cross, raising the hands towards Heaven, genuflecting our knee, and all the other ceremonies of the Church. All these are examples of exterior worship of God.

The Two Combined.

— The ordinary way is to combine the two, adoring God both interiorly and exteriorly at the same time — for example, by vocal acts of faith, hope and charity. By faith we subject our minds to the truths revealed by God; by hope we put all our trust in the infallibility of His promises; by charity we love Him with our whole heart, with an undivided love.

Another beautiful example of exterior and interior worship combined we find in the Three Kings from the East, who came to Our Lord in the stable of Bethlehem. Guided by the star and enlightened by faith, they recognized in Jesus the King who was to rule, the God who was to be adored, and the God-Man who was in after time to suffer and to die. This is the meaning of the gifts they offered at His feet. Gold they offered in acknowledgment of Christ's royalty or kingship, the frankincense in recognition of His divinity, and myrrh (used in former centuries to embalm bodies) to betoken His suffering humanity.

Objection.

— But here we are confronted with an apparent difficulty. So many of our non-Catholic friends tell us that we make too much over ceremonial worship, exterior worship, and not enough over interior

worship. All that God demands of us, they say, is that we adore Him “in spirit and in truth,” quoting Scripture for their stand. Some go so far as to reject all external worship. This is the attitude of the Quakers, Amish, etc., who believe in “silent worship” — no ministers, no ceremonial services.

Answer.

— Our answer is, that God demands of us both exterior as well as interior devotion. Exterior worship is a natural consequence of interior worship. The one postulates the other. Our body belongs to God as well as our soul. Hence, if our soul is obliged to adore God “in spirit,” why should not in like manner the body adore God “in truth” — that is, outwardly or in fact? If our body is to suffer the pains, or enjoy the rewards, with the soul in the next world, why should the body not also participate in the duties of humble dependence and of sacrifice that are imposed upon the soul?

Yes, it is but natural that the sentiments that agitate our soul, such as love or hatred, joy or pain, hope or fear, despair or confidence, all instinctively manifest themselves outwardly. Unconsciously they show themselves even unwillingly on our features, in our gestures, in our bearing, in our whole exterior. How then could the faith, the hope and the charity or love with which our hearts are filled, remain pent up in our souls without any exterior manifestation whatsoever? No, it is impossible that the sentiments we feel towards God should not show themselves by exterior acts. Why did the Three Kings from the East expose themselves to so many hardships and travel through foreign lands in quest for the Christ-Child? Was it not for the sake of manifesting both externally and internally their sincere devotion and homage to their God and Savior?

All other creatures give outward homage to God. Whether animate or inanimate, the lilies of the fields, the fish in the waters, creatures of earth, birds in the air, the sun, moon; and the stars in the heavens, all render homage to the grandeur of God, in so far as they are able. Why then should our bodies be the only exception? Even though we be unwilfully distracted in our public prayers, or find it hard to pray with inward devotion when coming to church, yet our external acts of prayer, our coming to divine services, are in themselves acts pleasing to God.

An old monk, we are told, always had a hard time to keep awake, much less to pray with devotion, when he was called early every morning to attend divine services. Upon entering the church, his prayer was somewhat as follows: “Well, good morning, Lord; here is your old ‘sleepy head’ again. I will try my best to keep awake and pray as best I can. But if I cannot pray, I will be able to give you at least as much honor as these lifeless statues that grace your temple.” The external adoration of this monk was, in itself, an act pleasing to God.

On the other hand, a man may feign external worship to the exclusion of all internal worship. He can join religious services in a church, hold pious conversations, and yet not be a God-fearing man. He may do all this out of pure human respect, for gain or other ulterior motives. Such a kind of exterior worship is of no value, but a mere detestable hypocrisy. Such people may be compared with the Pharisees, whom Our Lord compared to whited sepulchres. Outwardly they appear to men beautiful, but inwardly, they are filled with dead men’s bones (Matt., 23: 27).

Necessity of External Worship.

— However, since human society is so constituted, being interdependent creatures as we are, we claim that external worship of God with internal worship has become a necessity. You see, we are not individual beings, entirely independent of one another. We are, as it were, a spoke in the human

wheel of society. As such, we are obliged to edify and encourage one another. But how can this be done without an exterior worship, without vocal prayer and public ceremonies?

Without fear of contradiction, I go even further and say: interior worship cannot even exist without showing itself exteriorly. Interior devotion must have a form, a body, which animates and preserves it. Ivy, left to itself, will spread aimlessly over the ground. But give it a support, and it will climb ever upward, until it has reached the zenith of its support. The same may be said of our interior devotions. They must be supported by outward acts of worship. Hence, as long as the world has existed, we find some form of external worship, some sacrifice offered to God, by all nations and peoples.

This explains those great feasts, divine services, and other pious exercises constantly practiced by the Church. Abolish all exterior worship, and public prayer from home and church, abolish the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Sacraments, close the churches, overthrow the altars, and soon you will no longer have any idea of God, religion, and the duties it imposes. God would be forgotten or disowned, and atheism, irreligion and immorality would reign supreme.

Our only conclusion, therefore, must be this: it is not sufficient to honor God only in spirit, as some may contend, but we must also do so in word and in deed. The body must be united with the soul in paying to God the homage due Him. This is the real meaning of the First Commandment of God: "I am the Lord your God, you shall not have strange gods before Me."

Interior adoration, then, consists in acts of faith, hope, and love; exterior adoration in the external acts of our holy religion. We must, therefore, accept all that God has revealed. We must love Him above all else, and all else for the love of God. We must place our sincere hope and confidence in Him. We must pray to God, whether to adore Him, to ask for favors, or to thank Him for benefits received. We must unite our will to God's will, and say in all things: "O Lord, Your will be done." We must unite our heart's prayer with that of our lips when we pray: "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end." Amen.

II. PRAYER IN GENERAL: ITS NECESSITY.

"With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinks in his heart" (Jer., 12:2).

During the last few years, my friends, we have heard much about the "New Deal," that was about due for suffering humanity. Such a new deal in the spiritual life has long since been overdue for many of our day. We are passing through an unusual period of human history, during which, perhaps more than ever before, the spirits of sensuality, avarice, and pride have taken possession of mankind. People are urged on to a life of unbridled indulgence in the pleasures of the senses, to a mad pursuit of money and of wealth. Spurred on by a sense of pride, they are obsessed with an exaggerated idea of self-importance. Many are eager to lord it over others, while they themselves reject all subordination to lawfully constituted authority. The consequence of such unnatural conditions is the growing spirit of religious indifference, a dense ignorance in matters spiritual, a forgetfulness of God and His Commandments, a disregard for man's eternal welfare. In a word, people seem to be so immersed in things of earth that they no longer feel the need of seeking, as the Apostle Paul bids us, "the things that are above" (Col., 3:1). They have cast overboard the very First Commandment of the Decalogue, which tells us: "I am the Lord, your God. You shall not have strange gods before Me." Truly, the words of the Prophet Jeremiah are again verified: "With

desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinks in his heart” (Jer., 12:2). In other words, as seen in our last discourse, we have ceased to worship God interiorly and exteriorly. This combined worship of heart and lips may be summed up under the one word, prayer. Prayer, then, and its necessity shall claim our attention today.

(O Jesus, assist us with Your grace!)

Definition.

— Prayer, as we understand it, is the lifting up of our hearts and minds to God, to adore Him, to thank Him for favors received, and to ask Him for favors we are still in need of. “By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God,” says St. Paul (Phil., 4: 16). Prayer, then, is the directing of our thoughts and affections heavenward, because, when we pray, we forget the things of this world, our temporal affairs, our cares and our pleasures, and raise our minds and hearts to God. In prayer we occupy ourselves principally with God and our salvation.

In fact, prayer always has a twofold purpose:

- (a) first, to offer to God the homage, respect, love and gratitude demanded of us by the First Commandment; and
- (b) to tell Him our needs, whether necessary for soul or body, for this life, or the life to come.

Kinds of Prayer.

— There are two kinds of prayer, mental and vocal, corresponding to interior and exterior worship of God. Mental prayer is the prayer of the heart; vocal prayer the prayer of heart and lips combined. In mental prayer our soul alone communes with God; in vocal prayer we express by word of mouth the thoughts and sentiments with which our soul is filled.

Mental prayer cannot be too highly recommended. It is by this form of prayer that we learn to know God and to know ourselves. At the same time, we must not neglect vocal prayer, because, as we saw in our preceding discourse, our body as well as the soul must do homage to God. Also, as we are social beings, mutual edification often requires vocal prayer.

Teresa Neumann agrees with other spiritual writers who discourage many complicated vocal prayers. There is only one prayer that Christ taught us, and that is the “Our Father” or “Lord’s Prayer.” The “Hail Mary” we have also from God indirectly, through the mouth of the Angel Gabriel and St. Elizabeth. The “Apostles’ Creed” we received from the twelve Apostles. Besides our Mass Prayers, the acts of faith, hope, love, and contrition, there are but few other prayers that are approved or directly recommended by the Church.

Then we have what are called ejaculatory prayers. Highly recommended, these are short but most effective aspirations of the mind and heart to God. Such are for example, the following: “My Lord and my God!” “O sweetest Heart of Jesus, I implore, that I may love You more and more.” “Jesus, meek and humble of Heart, make my heart like unto Yours.” “Sweetest Heart of Jesus, be my love. Sweet Heart of Mary, be my salvation,” and many others. Each one of these just mentioned is very highly indulged, as often as repeated. All the masters of the spiritual life advise us to practice this form of prayer often; especially, if our occupation does not allow longer prayers. We read, for example, in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, that for weeks he would say no other prayer but the beautiful words: “My God and my all!”

Necessity of Prayer.

— But the question arises: is prayer really necessary for salvation? The answer is, positively yes.

Prayer is absolutely necessary for salvation, and this for three reasons:

- (1) because the honor of God demands it;
- (2) because of the need we have of grace through prayer;
- (3) because of the formal command of Jesus Christ.

(1) For the Honor of God.

— God, as we admit, is the Creator, Lord, and Master of us all. Both faith and reason tell us that He created man for His own glory, in order to have adorers in spirit and in truth. It is, therefore, the solemn duty of every rational creature to render homage to God, to express to Him our respect, love and gratitude. This we do through prayer. Hence, to neglect prayer on account of indifference or ill-will, is a violation of the First Commandment and a criminal impiety. Such people who neglect prayer are worse than the pagans, who, at least, in all sincerity adore their idols, invoke their aid, and offer sacrifice to them.

(2) Grace through Prayer.

— Secondly, we said, prayer is necessary for salvation, because of the grace of God we stand in need of. “Without Me you can do nothing,” says Jesus (John, 15: 5). Again, He says: “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you” (Luke, 11:9). Therefore, to obtain this grace prayer is absolutely necessary. Through His Sacred Passion and Death Christ, as it were, laid up a vast spiritual bank account from which we all must draw. Prayer and the Sacraments are the means by which we apply these merits to ourselves. For this reason St. Augustine calls prayer the key to heaven.

But some will say: “Why pray, when God in His infinite wisdom knows all our wants and needs?” To such I would respond: “Why do parents expect children to come to them and ask for things parents know they need?” Parents know the needs of their little ones, still, did you ever notice how the hearts of parents grow tender and concede to the wishes of pleading children much more readily than otherwise? In like manner, God undoubtedly knows our needs and our wishes before we make them known to Him. But He has a right to require us to ask for them. Hence, St. Paul admonishes us with these words: “Be nothing solicitous; but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God” (Phil., 4:6).

(3) God Commands It.

— Thirdly, we must pray, because Our Divine Savior Himself has given the express command to pray. Nothing is more formal in Holy Scripture. “Watch and pray,” says St. Mark (13:33). St. Luke (18:1) tells us “we must always pray.” St. Paul exclaims: “Pray night and day. Pray without ceasing” (I Thess., 5:17, & Eph 5: 20). There is no question here of mere counsel, but a rigorous precept: we must. It is a duty as important as to love God, or to render justice to our fellow-man.

Furthermore, this precept of prayer applies to everyone, to rich and poor, to the learned and unlearned, to sinner and Saint alike. Our Divine Savior gave us the example. Although not obliged to pray for Himself, still, to impress upon us more strongly the obligation of prayer, He passed entire nights in prayer. “And He passed the entire night in the prayer of God,” says St. Luke (6:12).

But When Should We Pray?

— As soon as we awake in the morning, we should consecrate the day to God with the words, “All for the love of God,” or some similar phrase. At home, we should pray mornings and evenings, before and after meals. And these prayers should be made family prayers. All should participate, while one of the family leads. This was a universal custom for years, and is practiced extensively even today

But how many parents today neglect to say their daily prayers together with their children! How many say them at all? There are some families in every parish who say the Rosary every evening with father or mother leading. Others say the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and other prayers. But I am sure that by far the majority say them privately, and not a few omit them entirely. And why? Because their parents did not accustom their children to this pious and beautiful practice from childhood. Remember, this union of family prayers offers a holy violence to Heaven, and, where practiced, infallibly draws down God’s blessings upon that home and family. This Jesus has promised when He said: “Where there are two or three gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt., 18:20).

But no matter how busy we might be, there is no excuse for omitting our morning and evening prayers entirely. If we cannot say long ones, we can at least find time to say a few short ones. Say them “on the run,” if necessary. Father McGrath, a priest from the West; tells the following story. He was instructing a group of Indians in our holy religion, and preparing them for Confirmation. Amongst them was one old Indian who could not remember anything, not even the Lord’s Prayer. When Bishop Conaty arrived for Confirmation, the case of this old Indian was referred to His Excellency. The good Bishop called for the old gentleman and asked him as follows:

“Father tells me you find it hard to study. Do you say any prayers?”

The reply was: “Yes. When I get up in the morning I look up towards the heavens and say: ‘Good morning, God’!”

“Very well. Do you say any night prayer too?” queried the Bishop. “Yes,” replied the old Indian, “when I wrap myself up in the blanket for the night, I look up at the stars and say: ‘Good night, God’!”

Although brief, yet this old Indian did not neglect his morning and night prayers. He was confirmed by his Bishop.

Then, besides our morning and night prayers and our prayers before and after meals, we are advised to pray often during the day. We all meet with trials and difficulties quite frequently during our lives. When such occasions arise that irritate us, it is just as easy to say “All for the love of God,” as it is to fly into a rage and console ourselves with a long litany of curse-words. Here St. Paul admonishes us, saying: “Pray without ceasing.” That is, we should perform our daily actions for the love of God and in a spirit of penance. For, by making our good intention in the morning, all our actions during the day will be meritorious. Hence, in all our thoughts, words and deeds, we should have no other motive than to please God and to do His holy will in all things. This is “praying without ceasing.”

If such be our motives in all things, then we can ask God in our prayers for temporal favors as well as spiritual favors.

We can ask Him to bless our families and give us health, to bless our crops and our business, to ask, in short, for everything that may be conducive to our happiness here as well as hereafter. Such prayers are most certainly heard. Only, in asking for temporal favors, we must do so with an entire resignation to God's holy will and for a good purpose. For, it is certain that if we should ask for health or wealth only to make bad use of them, God, who reads our innermost hearts and knows our most secret intentions, would not hear such prayers.

This, then, is our duty towards God through prayer. It may be vocal or it may be mental; it may be for things temporal or things eternal. But pray we must. It is a command from on high, upon which our salvation depends. And before peace and prosperity will again return to a stricken world, people must once more fall upon their knees and learn how to pray. For, says the prophet: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is none that thinks in his heart" (Jer., 12:2). Amen.

III. THE POWER OF PRAYER.

"Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father any thing in My name, He will give it to you" (John, 16:23).

From the fourteenth to the sixteenth chapter in the Gospel according to St. John, we find recorded the parting words of Jesus, shortly before His Passion. Jesus had taken His Last Supper with His beloved Apostles. He now arose to deliver His sad farewell discourse. A few hours more, and He was to leave them, so that His crowning work of Redemption by His sacred Passion and death might be consummated.

Like a dying father who feels his death approaching, Jesus addresses His little flock of Christians in a most touching manner. He opens His final discourse with these words: "Let not your hearts be troubled." He then tells them, that for His sake much suffering was in store for them also. But to guide them safely through life's struggles, He had left them His Commandments and His Sacraments. If further help should still be needed, they are but to ask and it shall be given. "If you shall ask anything in My name, that I will do." And later He declares: "Amen, amen, I say to you; if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you" (John, 16:23).

My friends, at that solemn moment, just before His death, Jesus explains to us the power of prayer. As a last legacy, He gives us prayer as the conquering power in attaining our eternal salvation. For, everyone can pray; hence, everyone can be saved. Prayer, then, is also one way we honor God according to the First Commandment of the Decalogue. In our last discourse we spoke on prayer, its nature, its form (mental and vocal), and its necessity. Today we shall consider briefly the power and efficacy of prayer.

(O Jesus, assist us with Your grace!)

Prayer is, so to speak, the ordinary channel through which our Lord communicates to us His graces and comes to our aid, as He promised before His death. It is the bridge that spans the infinite chasm between heaven and earth. It is the ladder of the Patriarch Jacob, which reaches from earth to Heaven, upon which the Angels ascend and descend. They ascend in order to carry our sincere prayers to the throne of God, as the Archangel Raphael said to the pious Tobias: "When you did pray with tears, I offered your prayers to the Lord" (Tobias 12.). It is the ladder on which the Angels descend in order to bring to us the blessings of God. For this reason the great Doctor of the Church, St. Augustine, calls prayer "the key to Heaven, because in fact it not only opens to us the treasures

of divine grace, but also, by means of this grace, makes possible our entrance into Heaven.” Yes, “what weapons are to the soldier,” exclaims St. Eligius, (died 660,) “prayer is to the Christian.”

Prayer is faith, hope, and love in action. For Jesus tells us: “Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you” (Matt., 7:7). By so doing, we shall receive light for our minds, comfort for our hearts, and strength for our wills. For God alone is the source of light, the Father of consolation, and the Lord of strength; and prayer is the means by which these graces and powers are communicated to us.

Light.

— By prayer we receive light for our minds. When we are in the quiet sanctuary of prayer, we are far removed from the distractions of the world. There God sheds over our minds the shining rays of grace and the warming embers of His love. He dispels the darkness of sin and ignorance, disperses the clouds of passion and prejudice, enlightens our minds to holy faith, and makes known to us the hidden things of God. There we measure the shortness of time and the length of eternity. There we peer into the “depths and the riches of the wisdom and mercy of God.” There we feel the majesty and greatness of God. There we realize the littleness and nothingness of man. And if we see aught of good in man, it is because Jesus has already enriched him by His graces and love.

It is through prayer that we see how fleeting and paltry are the vanities and pleasures of this world. We see the hideousness of sin, stripped of its allurements and naked in its deformity. We see through prayer how good and meritorious are virtue and holiness; how beautiful the ways of the Lord and justice. It is through prayer that we realize that we have no lasting city here. It is then that, like St. John, we get a glimpse of the Heavenly Jerusalem, faintly seeing “how great and precious are the promises, and how grand the inheritance which has been given us.”

Comfort.

— Secondly, in raising our hearts and minds to God in prayer, we obtain comfort in return. “Nothing is sweeter or more cheering than a fervent prayer,” says St. Bernard. Our hearts are set aglow with devotion, and our minds are dilated with joy and happiness, because we are now kneeling before the God of consolation, whose spirit, like the sun, warms while it enlightens.

Our hearts are then quiet from the distractions of the world. We see people eagerly strive for earthly comforts and pleasures. But how small and trivial they seem when calmly weighed in the scale of the sanctuary! The sufferings and trials we must endure seem short and momentary when measured in the light of eternity. There our hearts are comforted by those solacing words of the Lord Jesus: “Peace be to you.” For it is as easy for Our Lord, in answer to prayer, to heal the wounds of our hearts and calm our turbulent passions as it was for Him to cure the leper, and to say to the winds and the waves: “Peace, be still!” If our hearts sigh to the Lord: “Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord,” then will the Lord Jesus stretch forth His hand to help us as he did to Peter, and we shall then triumphantly walk with Jesus over the turbulent waters which threaten to engulf us.

Strength.

— Thirdly, when we commune thus with our God in prayer, dear friends, we also gain strength for our wills. Our moral courage is then strengthened. We find it easy to resist sin and dissipate ignorance. For we have fortified ourselves with the armor of Christ. And if He is with us, who can withstand us? Like St. Paul, “we can do all things in Him who strengthens us.” Like the Apostles,

who prayed during ten days for the coming of the Holy Spirit, we too can go forth from the chamber of prayer, “rejoicing that we are accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.”

In one way, our salvation depends entirely on God. For He tells us: “Without Me you can do nothing.” But viewed from another angle, our salvation depends entirely on ourselves. For, God’s grace alone, although in itself infinitely powerful, cannot save us. We are rational and free beings, and God will not save us against our wills. In this light must we understand St. Augustine, when he says: “Work as though everything depended upon you; and pray as though every thing depended upon God.” Therefore, to be saved, we must sincerely desire it. But to have this sincere desire, is to will it; and to will it, is to devote ourselves to the work of our salvation. But in our unaided endeavors we will find the task too hard. Then we must resort to prayer, and cry out with St. Paul: “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.” And the more earnest and persistent our prayers, the more powerful will be His help. And His help, added to our earnest endeavors, will enable us to secure our heavenly ambition. For “prayer,” says St. Augustine, “is a capital drawing interest.”

Prayer, then, becomes for the true Christian a breastplate of might to protect us in the good fight against evil and sin. By prayer we are trained as good athletes to run the race after virtue and holiness. For, says St. Chrysostom, “prayer is to man what the root is to the tree, and the foundation to a building.”

This light, comfort, and strength which we obtain through prayer, my dear brethren, constitute our joy. For true joy is to love the Father and know His Son, “in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” consolation and strength. Our joy, then, will be to keep the Commandments, and thereby blot out the handwriting of sin that is against us. Our joy will be to live piously in Christ, by patiently suffering our sorrows and trials. Our joy will be to live holily and to practice virtue. All this through the power of prayer. For, says Christ: “Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.” And again: “If you know how to give good things to those you love, how much more will the Father, who gives good things to those who ask!” And St. John says: “Whatsoever we ask, we receive, because we keep the Commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”

In the lives of the Saints we see striking proofs of God’s mercy and love, and the faithful fulfillment of His promises through prayer. Joshua prays, and God stops the sun in his course. Moses prays, and God opens a passage through the Red Sea. Elias (Elijah) prays, and fire descends from Heaven. The Ninivites pray, and they are spared from the enemy. The Apostles, the Martyrs, the Confessors, the Virgins pray, and they raise the dead to life, heal the sick, and work the most astonishing miracles. They face the rage of tyrants, and undergo with courage and serenity the most cruel deaths. They openly profess their faith, and preserve themselves pure and undefiled amidst temptations of the world and the snares of Satan.

Conclusion.

— In conclusion, therefore, let us not lose confidence in the power of prayer. If at times our prayers are not answered, let us examine ourselves, whether we prayed with attention, whether we prayed with true humility, whether we prayed with devotion, confidence and perseverance. If these conditions are fulfilled, and still our prayers are not answered, then we should not be discouraged. Our prayers are surely heard; but let us acknowledge then that what we prayed for was not conducive to our eternal welfare. But rest assured that our prayers are not in vain. For, instead of what we petitioned for, other favors will be granted that we need more than the ones prayed for.

Realizing this, we should continue to pray for ourselves and for one another. “Pray for one another, that you may be saved,” says St. James (5:16). Parents should pray for their children, and children for their parents. We should pray for our spiritual and temporal superiors, who stand much in need of prayer in these critical times. Finally, we should pray for our own spiritual and temporal needs. Yes, “pray without ceasing,” cries out St. Paul. For we have Christ’s own promise: “If you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you” (John, 16:23). Amen.
