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Prayer, the Great Means of Grace

Excellence and Sublimity of Prayer

Saint Francis de Sales on one occasion was explaining to some children the happiness of our first parents in paradise. "One of their sweetest joys," he said, "was that Adam and Eve were permitted to walk with God and to speak with him as to a Loving father." Deeply moved by this reflection, a little boy exclaimed, "Oh, what a pity we can't do the same! How I would like to speak to God! How I would enjoy walking with him!"

The holy Bishop smiled at this pathetic utterance and in his winning manner replied: "Be of good cheer, my child. Paradise was lost to us by the first sin, it is true, but *God was not lost to us*. Everywhere He is near us. *We may speak and communicate with Him at all times and wherever we are*. This is done when we pray to Him. In prayer we associate with Him; in prayer we hold sweet communication with God, and God with us, and this intercourse contains nothing but bliss and happiness."

What an honor is for us to speak to God, wherever and whenever we wish! This is a privilege we should treasure above all others. "Prayer transforms hearts of flesh into spiritual hearts; tepid hearts into zealous hearts; human hearts into Divine hearts," says Saint John Chrysostom. *With what reverence, then, should we converse with God!*

"Is there anything more excellent than prayer?" asks Saint Augustine. "Is there anything more beneficial in our life? anything sweeter to the heart, or anything more sublime in our holy religion? Prayer is the groundwork of all virtues, the ladder by which we mount to God. It is related to the angels, it is the foundation of faith."

"Of all things that we esteem and treasure in this life, there is nothing more precious than prayer," says Saint Gregory.

And Saint Ephrem exclaims: "Oh, the magnificent and sublimity of prayer! Happy he who prays zealously. Satan cannot approach him, provided he is free from all deceit. Oh, the sublimity of prayer!"

Consoling Words

It is quite true, as Saint Augustine says, that man in consequence of his weakness cannot fulfill some of God's commandments by his own strength, but He reinsures us in declaring, "as long as God does not deprive you of prayer, He will not withdraw at His mercy from you; for He who gives you the spirit of prayer, will give you that for which you were praying. The prayer of the just is the key to heaven. *In the strength of prayer we are able to do all things*. Prayer is the main protection of our soul. Prayer is the source of all virtues.

"Prayer," asserts Ven. Blosius, is an impenetrable armor, a secure place of refuge. By prayer alone all evil is warded off from the soul. Prayer purifies the soul, averts the punishment due to sin, supplies for negligences, obtains Divine Grace, stifles evil desires, restrains the passions, Conquers the enemy, soothes affliction, brings peace, unites man with God, raises him to eternal glory. "

"Nothing procures for us such a growth in virtue as frequent prayer, the oft-repeated companionship and familiar intercourse with God," says Saint John Chrysostom. "By prayer the heart acquires true nobility, it despises the things of the world, unite itself gradually with God and become spiritual and holy."

"Great is the efficacy of prayer, for it appeases God, attracts the angels and torments the demons," declares Saint Bonaventure.

"Nothing can produce sweeter sentiments than fervent prayer," Saint Bernard affirms. "Nothing can fill the heart of a man with greater joy, nothing can strengthen him so powerfully to perform heroic deeds and endure sufferings."

Necessity of Prayer

Whosoever wishes to obtain heaven must pray. Holy Scripture exhorts us to no other work so frequently as to prayer: “Let nothing hinder thee from praying always” (Ecclus. 18:22). “Be watchful in prayers” (1 Peter 4:7). “Be persevering in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). “With all prayer and supplication, pray at all times in the spirit.” (Eph. 6:18). And how emphatic are the words of Our Lord that we “must always pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

The language of Holy Writ is also the language of the saints. Saint Alphonsus, in several of his writings, complains bitterly that preachers and confessors speak so seldom of prayer and fail to encourage the faithful in this regard as much as they should. He admonishes them that in their sermons, and while discharging their sacred duties in the confessional, they should be most zealous in impressing upon souls the vital importance of prayer. He wrote of himself, “Every time I preach, I repeat these words: *“O people, pray, pray, pray!”*”

Whenever the saints speak of the necessity of prayer they make use of the strongest expressions and comparisons, as the following statement show:

“Would that I could stand on a high mountain where I could be heard by the whole world. I would constantly cry out: pray, pray, pray!” – St. Teresa.

“As our body cannot live without nourishment, so our soul cannot be kept spiritually alive without prayer.” St. Augustine.

“A fish taken out of the water cannot live; in a very short time it dies. Neither can the soul of a man exist without prayer; it will gradually grow languid and die. Let us be convinced that not to pray and to lose the life of the soul, that is, the grace of God, is one and the same thing.” – St. Chrysostom.

A person who prays will certainly be saved, but a person who does not pray will certainly be lost. All who have been saved were saved through prayer. All who have been lost were lost through their neglect of prayer.” – St. Alphonsus.

Salutary Effects of Prayer

Great and glorious are the effects of devout prayer! Prayer moves God to grant us His gifts and graces, *yes, it constrains Him to do so*, because God is infinitely good and merciful. Our Divine Savior says, “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. 7:11)

To inspire us with still greater confidence Our Lord made this solemn promise: “Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (Luke 11: 9). “All things whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that the you shall receive, and they shall come to you” (Mark 11:24). “Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it to you” (John 16:23). How clear and emphatic are these words spoken by our Divine Savior!

God *desires* to hear our prayers because He is good; He *must* hear our prayer because He is just and Eternal Truth and has given us His solemn word and promise.

Prayer Obtains the Greatest of Graces, Final Perseverance

The grace a final perseverance is the grace of a good death. This is the greatest of all graces. A happy death is the end of all evil, the beginning of all bliss.

Saint Augustine observes, “To begin a good work does not mean much, but to *complete it* – therein consists perfection.”

“In considering the life of a Christian, a person does not lay so much weight on how he began, but on how he *ended*, whether he persevered. St. Paul began badly, but ended well. Judas, on the contrary, began well, but his end was terrible,” comments Saint Jerome.

“Believe me,” says Saint Bernard, “Satan is very envious of perseverance, because he knows that perseverance alone will be crowned by God.”

The grace of final perseverance is the most necessary of all graces. Our eternal weal or woe depends upon it. “Whoever perseveres to the end, he shall be saved” (Matt 24:13).

Prayer can obtain for us the grace of final perseverance. This doctrine is taught unanimously by saints and masters of the spiritual life. All agree with the famous teaching of Saint Augustine: “The grace of perseverance

can be obtained by humble supplication.” The devout and learned, Suarez affirms, “If anyone resolutely continues to pray for the grace of perseverance, he will infallibly obtain it.”

Is illustrious doctor, Saint Thomas, writes, “What our merits cannot win, we can obtain by our supplications. *Holiness of life is a fruit of prayer, but a holy death is by far more a fruit of prayer.* A person who does not pray for this grace will not obtain it.”

“We know,” says Saint Augustine, “that God grants the grace of final perseverance only to those who ask Him for it.”

Although Our Lord had solemnly assured Saint Gertrude that she would obtain eternal glory, she continued to pray fervently every day for the grace of final perseverance.

Let us consider the words of the learned Saint Robert Bellarmine: “It is not sufficient to pray for the grace of a perseverance once or a few times only. We must *continue to pray for it every day*, even to the end of our lives.” Let us pray for this grace in the morning, let us pray for it in the evening, at Holy Mass, at Holy Communion, in time of temptation, in time of joy, and Our Lord will assuredly grant us this greatest of all graces.

Saint Gregory remarks: “God desires to give us the grace of final perseverance, but at the same time He wishes us to ask for it often, and as it were, force Him to grant it. Without this grace all other graces would avail nothing.”

In fact, of what profit would be the most abundant harvest if, in the end, it were destroyed by hail, or washed away by a flood? So, too, what would be the advantage of a virtuous Christian life without final perseverance? *The grace the final perseverance is an entirely undeserved grace.* No man can claim a right to the grace that will infallibly give him eternal salvation, and, strictly speaking, no man can merit this grace. St. Paul says expressly, “There is question, not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God *showing mercy*” (Rom. 9:16).

Final perseverance is neither a reward for our works, nor a fruit of our labors, nor a recompense for our merits. It is a *free, gratuitous gift of God’s infinite bounty in goodness.* We again quote Saint Augustine on this subject: “It is the work of God’s hands and not our own work, that we do not depart from God.” And the Holy Ghost declares in Holy Writ, “I will be merciful to whom it shall please Me” (Exod. 33:19).

Prayer strengthens us in time of temptation

Prayer is truly a universal remedy. It can be applied to the highest advantage at all times, in all temporal and spiritual necessities. *Prayer is the most excellent weapon to conquer temptations.* Like the Apostles beaten about by the stormy winds of the Sea of Galilee, we cry out in prayer: “Lord save us, we perish!” And the peace and strength of Christ comes to our aid in the struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Temptations are necessary for us. “No one can be crowned unless he has conquered,” says Saint Augustine. Thousands and thousands of temptations are awaiting us on our path through life. We stand in need of thousands and thousands of graces to come forth victorious over Satan. *These graces must be obtained in the first place by prayer.*

“If you ask me,” says Saint Alphonsus, “by what means you may conquer temptations, I reply: The first means is prayer, the second is prayer, the third is prayer. Where you to ask me a thousand times, I would a thousand times make the same reply.” To banish temptations, immediate resistance, profound humility, confidence in God, and watchfulness are necessary; but *prayer*, according to the testimony of the holy fathers, is by far the most excellent and most efficacious means to win the combat.

Prayer Effects the Conversion of Sinners

In his boundless mercy God hears the prayer of the sinner and gives him the grace of conversion, for Our Lord says by the mouth of the prophet, “As I live, I desire not the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezech. 33:11). It is God’s joy and delight to grant pardon. How consoling is His merciful assurance: “If your sins be as scarlet, they should be made white as snow; and if they be red as Crimson, they shall be white as wool” (Isaias 1:18).

How touching is the well-known parable of the prodigal son. “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee!” exclaims the wayward youth; “I am no longer worthy to be called thy son” (Luke 15:21). – His father, full of joy at his return, folds him in his arms and pardons all his guilt.

Again, the publican in deep contrition strikes his breast and says with deepest humility, “Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). And behold, he goes forth justified.

Can we find a more tender example of our Savior’s mercy than His dealing with the public sinner, Magdalen? She casts herself at the feet of Jesus. Her lips utter not a word. Her heart is too full for speech. She prays amid tears. Our Lord understands this silent language and speaks the word of pardon, “Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace” (Luke 7:48,50).

“Two sinners die on the cross at the side of Jesus on Calvary. One prays and is saved, the other does not pray and is lost,” observes Saint Alphonsus. “*Therefore be comforted, O sinner, and pray. If you find yourself lacking in courage and confidence, turn to Mary, the Mother of Mercy, the refuge of sinners; with Her you will find help.*”

Prayer enlightens our understanding and inflames our heart

Saint Francis de Sales tells us: “Prayer elevates our understanding unto the light and clearness of God and enkindles our will with the ardor of heavenly love.” King Solomon says of himself, “I desired it, and understanding was given me: and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me” (Wisd. 7:7).

“I found more wisdom in prayer at the feet of the Crucified,” declares Saint Thomas, “than in all the books I ever read.” This same holy doctor once asked Saint Bonaventure from which book he drew his wonderful learning. Saint Bonaventure pointed to the crucifix with the words: “This is my book; from it I derive my knowledge.”

That God’s blessing may rest on our works, *all our labors should be commenced with prayer, and with prayer all should be ended.* If our work continues for some length of time, we should interrupt it by short, fervent prayers, called *ejaculations* or aspirations. Light and strength will be imparted to our mind and heart by this holy practice.

“Study without prayer wearies the mind and makes the heart arid,” says Saint Vincent Ferrer.

Prayer is as the breathing of the loving heart. Without prayer, love cannot exist in the heart for any length of time. *The ardor of love must be enkindled by prayer.*

Very appropriate and worthy of consideration is the comparison of Saint Chrysostom: “In order to keep water warm it is not sufficient to place it on the fire once only. It must be brought into contact with the heat frequently, in fact, constantly, otherwise it will lose its warmth, will become lukewarm, and finally assume its naturally cold temperature. In like manner, our heart must often during the day be replenished by the fire of love in order to retain fervor and pious sediments; otherwise we will all too soon fall back into our natural state of coldness.”

Prayer obtains every virtue

Saint Charles Borromeo says that “*prayer is the beginning, the growth, and the completion of all virtue.*”

“Virtues are formed by prayer,” says Saint Ephrem. “Prayer preserves temperance, suppresses anger, prevents emotions of pride and envy, draws down the Holy Ghost into the soul, and raises man to heaven.

By constantly associating with God, we derive grace and strength to practice every virtue. How virtuous and peaceable are those who habitually pray with zeal and devotion! How well pious parents rear their children! How generous such persons are towards the poor, how honest in all their business transactions, how chaste and modest! How frequently they receive Holy Communion, and how zealously they assist at the Sacrifice of the Mass!

Without fear of contradiction we may justly state: *The more and the better a person prays, the better Christian he is.* In a family where prayer is cherished, there is a living Christianity; but where there is no prayer, there is neither Christianity nor true virtue. Saint Chrysostom therefore writes, “If I notice that a person does not love prayer, I know at once that there is nothing good in him. He who does not pray to God is dead and has no true life.”

Man is neither better nor worse than is his prayer. To instill into his monks the importance of prayer, Saint Bernard was accustomed to say: “Knock at the door of a monastery and inquire whether the spirit of prayer flourishes among its inmates, whether they are zealous at prayer. If you receive the answer ‘Yes!’ then be assured the monks are holy. However, should you be told ‘No!’ then depend upon it, their hearts are in a deplorable condition.” The same might be asserted of every parish, of every home, of every individual soul. “A person who begins to pray,” says a saint, “ceases to commit sin; but one who stops praying begins to offend God.”

St. Lawrence Justinian sums up the effects of prayer in these forcible words: “prayer transforms men and makes saints of sinners.”

We Must Pray in Time of Danger

A child runs to its parents when danger threatens. So should weak, frail man seek aid and protection from God when he is afflicted and tempted. We can scarcely conquer the evil spirits without prayer; therefore it is our *duty* to pray in time of temptation. This is the doctrine of theologians, and St. Thomas of Aquin declares that *we are bound under pain of sin to pray whenever we are in danger of committing sin.* To trust in one’s own strength would be pride and presumption, and in the end such a person would be miserably seduced. God draws by His commandments; the devil entices by his wicked allurements. Whoever does not pray will not obtain the grace of victory, and the devil will triumph.

This is the case especially with temptations against holy chastity. Even good resolutions, the remembrance of heaven and hell, are often of little avail, because, as Saint Alphonsus remarks, sensuality blinds men and takes away their fear of God’s punishment. If a person does not pray and take refuge in God when tempted with regard to holy purity, he is lost. The only means of rescue is prayer. Thousands of persons have conquered by praying the *Hail Mary*, or by recommending themselves to the protection of the Mother of God in these or similar words: “My Queen, my Mother, remember I am thine; keep me, guard me as thy property and possession.”

Numberless persons have conquered the most violent temptations, because they took refuge in the Sacred Wounds of our Savior, embraced the crucifix, or invoked the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In bodily dangers, also, as when a heavy cross weighs upon us, or when in danger of death, we must pray; it is our sacred duty. Our Lord desires to aid us, but we must cry to Him for help. In all afflictions Holy Church prays and requests for her children to pray. This good Mother summons them to her altars, assembles them before the Blessed Sacrament and prays with them most fervently. Let us imitate her maternal example and pray in all dangers of body and soul.

Prayer Secures God’s Blessing on Our Labors

Without exaggeration we can say: Whatsoever is truly great in this world is a fruit of prayer. Every man who has achieved something extraordinary in the Church has been a man of prayer. For this reason the beneficent influence of the contemplative Orders in the Church is incalculable. The unthinking world calls such religious idlers, yet they are most useful persons. Christ spent 30 years of His life in prayer and seclusion, and devoted but three years to teaching in public, to show us that the interior, secluded life of prayer is ten times dearer to Him than the active life.

Mary and Joseph, the greatest saints, led a hidden, interior life of prayer. For the same reason Our Lord said that Mary Magdalen had chosen the “better part” in preference to Martha. This view has ever been held by the Church, for according to the doctrine of the Holy Fathers, the contemplative state, the state of prayer, is a necessity for the Church Militant here on earth. This state, above all others, draws down God’s blessing on the Church, wins the battles of the Lord, and brings about triumphs for His Spouse, the Church.

As in the church, so in the family. It is a great favor to have God’s blessing on our work, on our undertakings. But let us never forget, it is prayer that draws down this blessing on our labors. To have *peace* in the family, to experience *joy* and *comfort* in the children, is a *fruit of prayer*. If our business prospers, if our enterprises succeed, we may owe this to someone who is praying for us, or it may be because we ourselves often kneel down and pray.

Prayer aids us in every necessity of life and gives consolation in affliction. Our Lord invites us, saying, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee” (Ps. 49:15). “Come to me at all you who are burdened, and I will give you rest” (St. Matthew 11:28).

We may also pray for temporal goods and God will hear our prayer provided such goods are no obstacle to our attaining salvation. “All things whatsoever you ask for in prayer, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you” (St. Mark 11:24). *Our Lord makes no exception, He includes everything, temporal favors as well as spiritual graces.* In the *Our Father* He *commands* us to pray for “our daily bread.” God hears our petition for temporal goods; this is likewise the doctrine of the infallible Church. Holy Church knows well that man may plant and water, but God must give the increase. For this reason the Church has ordained the Rogation Days, the three days of prayer and procession preceding the feast of the Ascension, to obtain God’s blessing upon the fruits of the earth.

Yes, God grants petitions for temporal favors. Every Christian may and should, therefore, pray for success in business, for the preservation of health, for a bountiful harvest. We must, however, always pray with conformity to the will of God. How often has God in His infinite goodness most strikingly granted the request of those who with childlike confidence prayed to Him for prosperity and temporal affairs!

Why Our Lord Seems Not to Hear Our Prayer at Times

“I have prayed so long but it is all in vain! God will not hear me. My prayer is useless.” How frequently we hear expressions of this nature. It is wrong to complain thus. Our prayer is never useless, never in vain, if we pray devoutly. True, our petitions may not always be granted in the manner we desire, but listen to what Saint Isidore says: “Frequently God does not grant the prayers of some persons *in the manner they desire*, in order to make them *rebound for their salvation.*”

Saint John Damascene says very beautifully, “*Not to receive what you desire, often means to receive something better.*”

The great theologian Saint Thomas of Aquin, writes: “God acts like a wise physician, whose patient requests him to take away the medicine, but the physician, knowing how beneficial it is for the sick person, does not remove it. God treats us in the same manner. He does not deliver man from tribulation, even if he begs for this favor, because by patiently bearing it man can work out his salvation.”

“God knows the exact hour when it will be salutary to give us something. The child screams and pleads for the knife; the loving parents however refused to give it. God treats us similarly. He gives us something better than that for which we ask,” writes Saint John Chrysostom.

Saint Gertrude once said to our Savior, “Why is it, O Lord, that my prayers are so often ineffectual?” Jesus replied, “If I, who am unsearchable Wisdom, occasionally do not answer your prayers according to your desire, it is, without doubt, in order to give you something more beneficial, because in your human weakness you are not capable of realizing what is most advantageous for you.”

In our temporal affairs, especially in trials and tribulations, and sickness and misfortune, we should always pray with resignation to the will God.

The prayers of many are not answered because they will not give up mortal sin; because they desecrate their tongue by cursing and blaspheming, or because they do not pray with humility and attention. Alas! how many say their prayers carelessly and without reverence, and thus deserve punishment rather than the grant of their petitions. “A person who prays carelessly,” says Saint Bernard, “and still expects his prayers to be heard, is like a man who pours bad grain into the mill and expects to receive good flour in return.”

Whether we pray alone or with others, *we should always pray with humility, devotion and becoming reference.* If we pray in common, it is highly improper to rattle off our prayers as quickly as possible. How many persons give no thought to God as they hastily repeat a certain number of Our Fathers or Hail Marys. As a rule, it is utterly impossible to have any devotion at such hurried prayers. Those who do not wish to pray slowly, and in an edifying manner, not only robbed others who pray with them of the consolation and fruit of devotion, but they rob God of the honor due to Him, and deprive themselves of the benefits of devout prayer.

We would never dare to present our petitions in such a hasty, thoughtless manner to an earthly superior, whether in the spiritual or civil order. We would forbid subjects to approach us in such an attitude. How much more should we shrink from addressing God, the Most High, in so irreverent a manner!

Meritoriousness of prayer

Great and wonderful is the efficacy of prayer! Victory over sin and Satan is gained by prayer; nearly every virtue and grace can be obtained by prayer; the greatest of all graces, that of final perseverance, depends on prayer. In our trials, tribulations and necessities, we should pray to God. Even in temporal matters to we should confidently implore His aid. But if the efficacy of prayer is great and wonderful, the *meritoriousness* of prayer is likewise glorious and amazing.

Our Lord Himself teaches that prayer is meritorious when He says, “When thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing thy door pray to thy Father in secret; and thy Father, who sees in secret, will *reward* thee” (Matt. 6:6).

Saint Bonaventure declares, “At any hour man can gain more by humble prayer than the whole world is able to give him.”

However, prayer is meritorious only if performed in the state of sanctifying grace and for love of God, because we can merit nothing for heaven, unless we are in the state of grace. Why? Because he who is in mortal sin has no *union with Christ* and this is the *principal condition* for acquiring any merit. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me” (John 15:4). Where love and a good intention are lacking, there is also wanting this relation to God. “Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5), said our Savior; that is, nothing meritorious for heaven.

By prayer we obtain, first, *an increase of sanctifying grace*; and secondly, *an increase of glory in heaven*.

Increase of Sanctifying Grace

For every good work performed in the state of grace we merit an increase of sanctifying grace. Prayer is a good work, a meritorious action, because it includes in itself many virtues. In prayer we offer to God our profound homage and reverence, we praise and magnify the Most High as the King of infinite majesty, as the Creator of heaven and earth. We join in the thrice repeated “holy” of the angelic spirits. All these acts are exceedingly precious in the eyes of God.

Further, prayer is the practice of faith, hope and charity; the practice of humility, of gratitude, an expression of confidence and resignation to the will of God. How many acts of virtue are contained in devout prayer! We may well say that prayer is the most excellent of all good words, because no other good work comprises so many acts of virtue, and by no other good work is God more honored and glorified. If other good works, such as fasting and almsdeeds, effect an increase in sanctifying grace, how much more will a devout prayer augment sanctifying grace in our souls!

This increase of sanctifying grace is an infinitely great gain. Is there anything more precious than the Blood of Christ? A single drop of the Precious Blood of our Savior surpasses in value all treasures of this world. And this Blood of Christ is the *purchase price of sanctifying grace*. The saints owe their eternal happiness solely and exclusively to the fact that they are in possession of sanctifying grace, and the reprobate will eternally suffer dreadful torments on account of the loss of grace.

Ah, how precious is grace! It makes us children and friends of God, transforms the inmost being of our soul, elevates us to the nobility of heaven, makes us participators of the Divine nature, yea, it verily *deifies us*. This is the sublime reward we merit by prayer. Ought we not to take delight in praying, since the recompense is so infinitely great?

Increase of Glory in Heaven

By prayer we merit eternal life and an increase of heavenly glory. Prayer, as we have seen above, effects an increase in sanctifying grace, and this brings with it an increase of heavenly glory. Sanctifying grace and heavenly bliss are closely connected. Our degree of glory in heaven will correspond exactly to our degree of sanctifying grace. Every degree of sanctifying grace will be rewarded by a corresponding degree of glory. In heaven every one will be rewarded according to his words; each one will be recompensed according to his labors. “He

who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully, will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor. 9:6).

A good prayer always effects an increase of heavenly glory, provided he who prays is in the state of sanctifying grace. This gain is of unspeakably more value than we can imagine. Even the lowest degree of glory is a treasure of infinite worth. After Saint Teresa realized by Divine revelation the great difference in the various degrees of glory and bliss in heaven, she did not hesitate to affirm: “Were it left to my choice, either to suffer every imaginable torture to the end of time in order thereby to gain one higher degree of glory, or, without any trouble and suffering, to possess a somewhat less degree of bliss in heaven, I would with all my heart prefer to suffer and obtain that degree of beatitude.”

What constitutes a higher degree of glory? The essential happiness of the elect consists in the Beatific Vision. In heaven we shall see God face to face. “The essential bliss of the elect,” says Saint Thomas of Aquin, “consists in clearly beholding the Divine Being; there is an infinitely great dignity in this vision, and therefore nothing better can exist, just as nothing better than God exists.”

Saint Francis of Assisi encouraged himself in the midst of trials by saying, “The eternal glory which I expect is so great that I joyfully endure all sufferings, all illness, all calumnies, all persecution, that may come to me.”

Saint Vincent Ferrer declared: “The glory of heaven is so incomprehensible that all the sufferings of this life, yea, all the tortures endured by martyrs, are not a sufficiently great price wherewith to merit, not to say heaven, but even an hour of heavenly bliss.”

“Were it necessary to die a thousand times a day in order to be enrolled in the Book of Life, in order to deserve to see Jesus Christ in His glory,” asserts Saint Chrysostom, “a person ought willingly to endure all these torments to become worthy of so great a good.”

The Beatific Vision is vouchsafed also to those of the elect who were adorned with the lowest degree of glory. “The last in the kingdom of heaven will be as bright as the Sun, which then will be seven times more illustrious than now,” says Saint Augustine. *A higher degree of glory consists in a higher degree of the knowledge and the love of God and resemblance to Him.* The higher the degree of glory, the deeper will be the knowledge, the more intimate the possession, the more tender the love of God, and the more perfect resemblance to Him. *Every additional degree places us nearer the throne of the Most Holy Trinity.* With every additional degree, our glory, our joy, our bliss is heightened.

If, then, the very last inhabitant of the kingdom of heaven, who is adorned with but a single ray of light and glory, is submerged in a boundless ocean of bliss and rapture, how great must be the beatitude and ecstasy of one who is adorned with ten thousand degrees of this heavenly glory!

Even a devout prayer, an Our Father, a Hail Mary can increase our future happiness one or more degrees. How many degrees a person who worthily and lovingly receives Holy Communion, or who assists at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in intimate union with our Savior can gain! In consideration of those untold advantages, should we not love to pray, should we not offer all our actions to God by a good intention, and for love of Him bear patiently all the afflictions and trials of this life?

Another consoling thought

Let us reflect upon another consoling thought. *Every degree of glory that I merit belongs to me personally.* No one can deprive me of it; by mortal sin alone will it be lost. I can neither give it away nor yield it to another, even should I desire to do so. *As the increase of sanctifying grace is my merit, so every degree of glory which I have obtained is my own possession.* Not even daily imperfections or venial sins will lessen this degree. Saints have gone to purgatory to expiate their imperfections, and sinners have sometimes been admitted to the joys of heaven after a short time of suffering in the purifying flames. But the saint was raised to an immeasurable height of glory while the sinner may have obtained but a few degrees.

What a consolation, what a joy to know that by prayer we can so easily obtain a higher degree of eternal happiness! Everybody is able to pray, not only priests and religious, but also busy fathers, sorely-tried mothers, tradesmen and laborers, sons and daughters, children and aged people, those in health and those who are ill—all can pray at every hour of the day and during the night. One devout aspiration, one act of resignation to God’s holy will, can increase sanctifying grace and thereby also augment our heavenly glory.

Love of God and love for our own soul should urge us to pray often, to pray devoutly, to pray gladly. Alas! when there is question of some temporal gain, we allow ourselves not to rest day or night; but when eternity is concerned, when our eternal happiness is at stake, how slothful, how indifferent we are! Were it possible for the saints in heaven to suffer regret, they would grieve bitterly at the thought that they could so easily have attained many higher degrees of glory, had they not carelessly lost the opportunities while on earth.

However, it is to prayer that the saints owe the graces by means of which they have become saints. It is by prayer that we, too, will be saved and attain to sanctity and a higher degree of Divine love.

Oh, let us pray often, let us pray while we are given time. Let us “Run while we have the light of day, that the darkness of death overtake us not.” Let us heap up treasures for life eternal, for all too soon will the moment be at hand when for us time will be no more. For us, too, “night is coming, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

How we should pray
A Sinner Should Pray With a Contrite Heart

A person who is in the state of mortal sin and is not willing to abandon his sinful ways is an enemy of God. To pray effectively, he must have true contrition for his sins and a firm purpose to amend his life. Saint Augustine therefore gives this advice: “First we must weep, then pray.” “The prayer of an evil tongue,” says Saint Bonaventure, “is not the supplication of one who prays, but the hissing of a serpent.”

“If, however, a person falls into sin through human frailty or rashness,” says Saint Alphonsus, “and sighs over his misery and desires to be delivered therefrom; if he implores God to rend the fetters of his sins, he may rest assured that God will hear his petitions.” Our Lord Himself declares, “Everyone who asks, receives” (Luke 11:10), be he just or sinner.

Saint Augustine asks, “If God did not hear the prayers of the sinner, what would it have availed the publican to ask for mercy?”

“When we pray for graces,” says Saint Thomas, “it is not absolutely necessary to be already friends of God; prayer itself will make us become His friends.”

According to the words of Saint Chrysostom no contrite sinner has ever implored God’s grace and mercy in vain. The words of our Divine Savior Himself assure us of this: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Who should come? Only the just? No! “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick” (Matt. 9:12).

Consequently, Our Lord’s invitation here is meant particularly for sinners. The word “burdened” is interpreted by the holy Father’s as referring to sinners who are groaning under the weight of their sins, who take refuge in the Lord in order to be converted and to obtain their salvation. Only the impenitent sinner who continues to live in the state of mortal sin, who loves his sin, will not be heard.

God is so greatly inclined to pardon sinners that He laments their perdition when they depart from Him and live as dead to His grace. How lovingly He calls them, saying, “Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live” (Ezech. 18:31,32). He promises to receive the soul that has forsaken Him as soon as she returns to His friendship: “Turn ye to Me... And I will turn to you” (Zach. 1:3). Oh, if sinners but knew with what tender mercy God stands waiting to forgive them! “The Lord waiteth that He may have mercy on you” (Isa. 30,18).

In a word, He has declared that when a person repents of having offended Him, He forgets all his sins: “I will not remember all his iniquities” (Ezech. 18:22). As soon as you have fallen into any fault, raise your eyes to God, make an act of love, and with humble confession hope assuredly for His pardon. Then God, who is “merciful and gracious, patient and of much compassion,” will let you hear His words to the penitent Magdalen, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” and He will give you strength to be faithful to Him for the time to come.

If the prayer of the sinner thus pierces the clouds, how acceptable and precious in the sight of the Lord must be the prayer of the just and devout soul!

We Must Pray With Humility

“We must pray with humility,” writes Saint Bernardine of Siena. “Humility must live in the interior and manifest itself in the exterior; for it would be of little avail exteriorly to bow the head and strike the breast, if he who prayed did not also inwardly bend the spirit and humble himself.”

Without humility there is no virtue. Humility is the foundation of all virtues. “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

“Know, my daughter, that he who perseveres in humble supplication for grace will obtain all virtue.” How humble was the prayer of St. Philip Neri! Every morning he would make this petition: “Lord, preserve me this day or I shall betray Thee.”

Even the Son of God humbled Himself profoundly when, in the Garden of Olives, He prayed to His Heavenly Father. “And kneeling down He began to pray” (Luke 22:41). “He fell on His face and prayed” (Matt. 26:39). And this He did three successive times. When we pray, whether standing or kneeling, we should reverently fold our hands, close our eyes or direct them to the altar. Let us speak to God in a humble, reverent posture, mindful of our Savior’s prayer in Gethsemane.

Caesarius, bishop of Aries, contemplating Our Lord at prayer, exclaimed: “Mercy supplicates, and wretchedness will not pray! Omnipotence prostrates itself, and wickedness is ashamed to kneel! Sanctity humbles itself to the earth, and wickedness will not deign to fold its hands! The heavenly Physician kneels in the dust and passes whole nights in prayer, and he who is sick will not stoop. Our Judge prays and implores mercy, and he who is guilty will not beg for pardon!”

St. Bernard says, “If it be true that thousands of angels serve the Lord, and ten times a hundred thousand stand before Him — oh, with what reverence and humility should poor wretched man draw near, when he desires to approach this Divine Majesty!”

We ought, indeed, to abase ourselves in the presence of God, but this does not hinder our treating Him with the most tender love and childlike confidence. As St. Alphonsus says, “He is Infinite Majesty; but at the same time He is Infinite Goodness, Infinite Love. In God we possess the Lord most exalted and supreme; but we also have Him who loves us with the greatest possible love. He disdains not, but delights that we show toward Him that confidence, that freedom and tenderness which children show toward their parents.”

We Must Pray with Fervor and Recollection

We pray with zeal and fervor if we pray with our whole heart, our whole soul, with earnestness and recollection. The eyes must pray, the lips must pray, the heart must pray, in a word, our whole being must pray. Holy Scripture warns us: “Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God” (Ecclus. 18:23). And let us hear what the saints have to say on this subject.

“When we pray, the voice of the heart must be heard more than that proceeding from the mouth.” St. Bonaventure.

“It is better to say one ‘Our Father’ fervently and devoutly than a thousand with no devotion and full of distraction.” St. Edmund.

“What audacity, yea, what madness, to turn away our mind and direct our attention to all sorts of folly, while the Divine Majesty is speaking to us in prayer.” St. Bernard.

“Just as our hands are joined and raised upwards in prayer, so should our lips and our hearts be united.” St. Vincent Ferrer.

Prayer should be from the heart, not from the lips alone. Prayer is and must ever be the work of the soul, the work of the heart’s deepest emotions. “Much love,” says St. Augustine, “but not many words when thou prayest.”

We Must Pray with Confidence

God has solemnly promised to hearken to a prayer said with confidence. “All things whatever you ask for in prayer, believing, you shall receive” (Matt. 21:22). “All things whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you” (Mark 11:24). God is displeased with a want of trust on the part of souls who sincerely love Him, and whom He loves infinitely. Therefore, if you desire to please His loving Heart, converse with Him in future with the greatest confidence and tenderness possible. “I have graven thee in

My hands,” says Our Lord by the lips of the prophet Isaias (49:16). Beloved soul, He meant to say, what dost thou fear or mistrust? I have written thee in My hands so as never to forget to do thee good.

Whoever prays with faith and confidence may look for success in his cause. Our Lord often revealed to St. Gertrude the delight He takes in a confiding soul, and once said, “A person who prays to Me with full confidence does violence to Me, so that I must grant him whatsoever he requests.”

Another time, after having prayed fervently for a certain intention, St. Gertrude asked, “O Lord, what shall I add to these prayers to make them yet more efficacious?” Jesus, turning to her with a countenance full of sweetness, replied, Confidence alone easily obtains all things! Confidence was the characteristic feature of Gertrude’s life, and she was accustomed to say, “All that I have received I owe to my confidence in the gratuitous bounty of my God.” The following is another of her revelations showing how agreeable to Jesus was this confidence. “Although I regard with pleasure,” said Our Lord, “all that is done for My glory, such as prayers, fasts, vigils, and other like works of piety, still the confidence with which the elect have recourse to Me in their weakness, touches Me far more sensibly.”

This same truth our Savior likewise impressed upon St. Mechtilde: “According to the measure of faith and firm hope with which one expects to receive from My goodness and mercy, so much and in finitely more will be given to him; for it is impossible for Me to refuse to man that which with steadfast faith he believes and expects.” What consoling words!

Encouraging also is the comment of St. Bernard: “Our confidence determines the measure of the graces that we receive from God. If our confidence is great we will obtain great graces, for Divine grace is an inexhaustible fountain: whosoever carries thither the vessel of confidence will draw therefrom a great quantity of riches.”

St. Augustine says, “How can we fear that our petitions will remain unanswered when Eternal Truth Itself has promised to hear him who asks?” And St. Thomas of Aquin: “Our confidence in prayer must not support itself on our own merits, but on the mercy of God and the merits of Jesus Christ.” According to this same holy doctor, it is the confidence and not the sanctity of him who prays that imparts to prayer its efficacy.

We Must Pray with Perseverance

For a long time St. Bridget had been tormented by many temptations against holy purity. She implored God fervently to be delivered from these assaults, but in vain. The longer she prayed, the more violent the temptations seemed to become. At length in a moment of weakness she exclaimed impatiently, “Behold, O Lord, I have prayed to Thee for years, and Thou wilt not hearken to me! Why should I continue to pray longer? I feel that my supplications have no value in Thy eyes! I will therefore no longer molest Thee, and my lips shall not open again to pray.”

In this spirit of discouragement, Bridget fell asleep. Lo! in a vision the virginal Mother of God appeared to her and asked reprovingly: “What! my daughter, do you wish to give up the practice of prayer? Do you wish to follow the instigations of the wicked enemy and thereby lose the twofold crown of prayer and perseverance? Do you wish to leave the path of virtue and pursue perdition on the road to sin? O daughter, are you not aware that your Bridegroom wished to put you to the test, and are you not willing to endure the trial?” St. Bridget was greatly abashed at these words, and thenceforth continued to pray perseveringly.

How easily we, too, complain and listen to the deceptive whisperings of the evil spirit: “So often and for so long a time you have prayed; what benefit have you thus derived from your prayers? Cease praying, it is useless; you will never be heard; it is all in vain.” Do not listen to the demon, nor complain. Place your trust in the goodness and mercy of God; continue to pray humbly and with confidence, and truly you will not be confounded.

“Ask,” St. Augustine admonishes, “ask and if that for which you plead is not given you, then seek; should that for which you seek be refused to you, very well then, knock.” How long a time? Perhaps three months? Take an example from St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. Not three months, not three years only, but nearly seven times three years she prayed for her son, until her petition was granted and Augustine was converted. Oftentimes God does not grant our petitions immediately in order to increase our merit; for by prayer, sanctifying grace is increased, and our glory augmented in heaven.

The touching words of Our Lord to St. Gertrude on a certain occasion show how He thus mercifully delays an answer for our greater reward. The people in the locality of St. Gertrude’s convent were distressed by bad

weather. She and her religious had besought God to abate the trial but perceived no good result from their prayers. The saint then addressed Our Lord: “How canst Thou for so long a time withstand the wishes of so many persons when I alone have, by my confidence, obtained favors from Thy mercy of far greater value?”

Jesus deigned to make this response: “Would it be surprising if a father let his son ask him a long time for a piece of money, when he had determined to give him a hundred pieces of silver every time he should make the request? Neither should you wonder if I now delay to grant your petition, because as often as you call on Me for assistance by the slightest word or thought, I prepare for you eternal goods which are worth infinitely more than what you ask.”

“God wills that we implore Him,” says St. Gregory. “He wills that we compel Him, He wishes to be conquered by importunity.”

Our Savior Himself teaches us this by a parable: “Which of you shall have a friend and shall go to him in the middle of the night and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has just come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him;’ and he from within should answer and say; ‘Do not disturb me, the door is now shut, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give to thee.’ I say to you, although he will not get up and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence, he will get up and give him all he needs” (Luke 11:5-8).

Rightly St. Hilary, therefore, says, “The obtaining of grace depends mostly on perseverance in prayer.” Persevering prayer is the key that unlocks all the coffers of heavenly graces, and this key is accessible to everyone.

We Must Pray with Resignation to the Holy Will of God

Our Divine Lord is our most perfect model, not only in all virtues, but also in prayer. We should therefore imitate His actions. In His agony He prayed, “Father, not My will, but Thine be done.” This condition of conformity should never be wanting in our prayers of supplication. Our Divine Master teaches us to pray in the Our Father: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We read that Francis Borgia earnestly implored God to prolong the life of his beloved wife who was dangerously ill. As he was fervently pleading for this favor, a voice from heaven sounded in his ear, “Your wish shall be granted, but it will not be for your good.” Francis burst into tears and exclaimed, “Thy will be done, O my God, not mine! If it be pleasing to Thee, take not only my wife but also my children and myself.” God took his wife and daughter by death; Francis Borgia became a saint, and an illustrious General of the Society of Jesus.

On one occasion Our Divine Lord appeared to St. Gertrude, holding in His right hand health, and in His left, illness. “My daughter,” He said, “choose whichever you prefer.” Which did St. Gertrude choose? Health? No. Illness? No. Unable of herself to decide which would be more salutary for her, she simply replied, “Lord, let Thy will be done, not mine.”

However, whenever spiritual needs are concerned, for example to conquer our passions, to obtain pardon for our sins, to make progress in virtue, to obtain an increase in the love of God or the grace of perseverance, we may ask unconditionally. In this case our will cannot be opposed to the Divine will.

We Must Ask in the Name of Jesus

The Son of God, by an express promise, we might almost say by a solemn oath, vouched for the granting of our petitions if presented in His Name: “Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in My Name, He will give it to you” (John 16:23). By these words our Savior says to you, “Do not hesitate, go to My Father and present to Him your petitions. It is true, you do not deserve to be heard, but I am deserving; make reference to Me and My merits, and I will support your petition at the throne of My Father.”

Trusting in the merits of Christ, we may confidently approach the Heavenly Father in the Name of Jesus and say to Him, “O my God, grant me this petition; look not on my unworthiness, but ‘look on the face of Thy Christ’ (Ps. 83:10). For the sake of the merits of Thy well-beloved Son, for the sake of His bitter Passion and Death, on account of His infinitely Precious Blood shed for me, and on account of His Sacred Wounds, hear me, O good Father!” Will the Father listen to us? Yes, He will. He cannot do otherwise — He must hear His beloved Son.

Oh, how happy are we, children of the Catholic Church, since the merits of Jesus Christ are deposited in the true Church and belong by right to her children. If we appeal to the merits of Jesus Christ, and unite our prayer with His prayer, then our prayer becomes the prayer of Christ. Let us pray in the Name of Jesus. Holy Church sets the example. She expects everything from God, but only through Jesus. This is why she concludes all her prayers with the words: We beseech Thee through Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Ghost, God world without end. Amen.

St. Alphonsus Liguori encourages us to this practice saying: “Let us pray in the Name of Jesus. Let us invoke the Name of Jesus when we are steeped in sufferings; He will comfort us. In temptation, let us call upon Jesus; He will give us strength to resist all our enemies. If our love is cold and arid, let us invoke Jesus; He will enkindle our hearts. Happy the souls who often and devoutly bear this sweet and holy Name on their lips, a Name of salvation, a Name of love.”

The Church, the Place for Prayer

Although we should pray often and everywhere, the Church is the special place for prayer, for it is the “House of God.” God is in the Church as in no other place on earth. He is there as God and Man in the most Blessed Sacrament. There He is enthroned upon His throne of grace, of mercy and compassion. There He invites us with inexpressible love and condescension. Under the lowly appearance of bread He conceals His greatness and majesty so that we may approach Him fearlessly and with full confidence.

Once the devout Father Alvarez knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, absorbed in prayer and meditation. Suddenly he perceived in vision the Child Jesus in the Sacred Host. The Infant Savior extended His arms toward Alvarez, and in His hands there sparkled as many precious pearls and gems as He could hold. At the same time the servant of God heard these words from the lips of Jesus: “If only someone were here to take them from Me.”

The church is, indeed, the most suitable place for prayer; in no other place can we pray so well. “My house is a house of prayer” (Saint Luke 19:46), says Our Lord. The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle, the wonderful communication of the holy angels, the sublime services which dispose one to devotion — all of these instill sweet peace and recollection into the soul. Let us delight in going to the Church, not only on Sunday, but as frequently as possible on weekdays. Let us as often as possible assist at the holy Sacrifice of the Mass where Christ offers Himself for us and prays with us to the Heavenly Father. Oh, how excellent, how perfect does our prayer, our sacrifice become, if we have the happiness to communicate devoutly during Holy Mass. What a consolation it will be at the hour of our death! Then we will not need to fear Jesus as Judge; we will know Him well from meeting Him at Holy Mass, at the communion-rail!

Efficacy of Prayer Said in Common

Prayer said in common is a public profession of faith, hope and charity. It has the power of unity and is supported by the intercession of our Savior. Prayer said in common is an image, or an imitation, of the eternal praise and adoration which the angels and elect offer to God in heaven. As St. John represents it to us in the Apocalypse, all unite in the same praise. And, falling down before the throne of the Lamb, all praise God the Almighty, the thrice holy one. We, too, here on earth, before the altar of the Lamb, before the most Holy Eucharist, unite in the “Sanctus. Sanctus, Sanctus.” How pleasing to God is this prayer of united hearts!

Prayer recited in common is usually said with more devotion. Solemnity makes a deeper impression. For this reason the Church celebrates her feasts with such splendor. “We therefore assemble on festivals,” says St. Vincent Ferrer, “that we may mutually incite each other to devotion, and our prayer thus ascends to God full of love.”

Prayer said in common has a powerful efficacy. It is like an onslaught made upon heaven, a violent assault on the Heart of God. All the faithful call to God and petition Him unanimously, with one voice and one soul. Speaking of prayer in common, Tertullian uses this beautiful simile:

“We assemble in great numbers, in order that, like a powerful army, with united strength and one voice, our prayer may be answered. In this manner we force the Almighty, as it were, and do violence to Him. And with such violence He is even pleased.” Eternal Truth itself thus testifies to the power of united prayer: “If two of you shall agree on earth about anything at all for which they ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in

heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:19,20).

If the prayer of even two or three is so pleasing to Our Lord that He assures us it will be answered, how much the more will God be inclined to hear the united prayer of hundreds, yes, thousands! On this subject, St. Thomas declares, “It is impossible that the prayer of many will not obtain whatever can possibly be obtained.” Even in the natural order we have the maxim: “In unity there is strength.”

Efficacy of the Our Father

Among all vocal prayers there are none more holy, more efficacious and more pleasing to God than the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The Our Father was cherished in the mind of Christ Himself from all eternity; in the bosom of the Godhead it was sanctified, sweetened, imbued with supernatural power, and finally pronounced on earth by His Divine lips. This prayer and no other did Christ teach us and command us to pray when He said: “In this manner therefore shall you pray: ‘Our Father who art in heaven.’ etc. (Matt. 6: 9) Verily, the Our Father is a written petition which our most powerful Intercessor dictated and which He advised and commanded us to address to His Heavenly Father.

We also have the consolation of knowing that whatever we could desire for His honor and for our salvation is contained in the Our Father and that thereby we can induce the Heavenly Father to grant our request.

Composed Entirely of Divine Words

The Our Father is composed entirely of Divine words. We may rest assured that not one of these words will be pronounced in vain; for each word devoutly uttered we merit a temporal and an eternal reward.

Now, if this petition composed by Christ Himself is presented by a person with great confidence to the Eternal Father, and he implores God so many thousands of times during his life to let His heavenly kingdom come to him, to forgive his trespasses, how could it be possible that the Father of all mercy and the God of all consolation would refuse to grant the request of the humble petitioner? Continue, be faithful in your petitions, and certainly the Heavenly Father will not turn a deaf ear to your entreaties.

A Divine Prayer

When you are about to pray an Our Father, be mindful that it is not a human but a Divine prayer composed by God Himself. Endeavor to give due respect to this prayer by saying it with all possible devotion and attention. Do not pray it hastily, but pronounce the words slowly and distinctly. It is by far more pleasing to God and more meritorious for yourself, if you say one Our Father slowly and fervently, than a great many hurriedly and without devotion.

If you suffer poverty, then repeat with special fervor the words of the Our Father: Give us this day our daily bread; — If you have fallen into grievous sin, then say with a deeply contrite heart: Forgive us our trespasses; — If you are assailed by temptations, repeat the words: Lead us not into temptation; — If you are burdened down with a heavy cross, then say with a heart confident, yet resigned to God’s holy will: — But deliver us from evil. If you experience devotion or special consolation at certain words, repeat them as long as these sentiments last and the Holy Spirit operates in you. This is the proper way to say vocal prayers and to make oneself susceptible and worthy of God’s grace.

Excellence of the Our Father

“How brief in words and how rich in content is the Lord’s prayer! In it is comprised not merely a prayer as it should be, not merely the proper manner of honoring God, but nearly everything that the Lord has taught or ordained. In this prayer is given a brief summary of the Holy Gospel. Upon the Our Father all other prayers are to be modeled, with it all others are to be sealed.” Thus wrote Tertullian in the early centuries of Christianity.

Saints use the most enthusiastic expressions when they speak of the excellence of the Our Father.

St. John Chrysostom: “What prayer could be more true before God the Father than that which the Son, who is Truth, uttered with His own lips?”

Blessed Thomas a Kempis: “The Lord’s Prayer surpasses all the prayers of the saints; it excels all the loving affections of inspired souls; it comprises all the sayings of the prophets and the sweet words of the psalms. Happy he who ponders on the words of the Lord, the golden words of the Our Father.”

St. Augustine: “If we pray in the right manner, we can say nothing else but what is contained in The Lord’s Prayer. The Our Father includes in itself the most excellent prayer.”

Saint Thomas of Aquin: “The Lord’s Prayer is the most excellent.”

loveliness of the Hail Mary

Of all the prayers to the Mother of God, we should pray the Hail Mary with special preference, because it is the most pleasing to Her and gives Her unspeakable joy. As the Our Father was composed by Christ, so the Hail Mary was given to us by the Most Blessed Trinity. From all eternity it was borne in the bosom of the Triune God, sanctified and sweetened therein, and in time placed on the lips of the Archangel Gabriel.

He who prays the Hail Mary utters not a human, a natural prayer, but rather a Divine, a supernatural prayer, a prayer of which every word contains a heavenly power. What prayer could be more pleasing to the Mother of God than that composed in Her honor by the Blessed Trinity and transmitted to Her by the angel? By no other prayer has She been so highly honored; never was so much joy and sweetness imparted to Her as by the Hail Mary, for when She first heard this salutation, She became the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of God; and the Most High became incarnate in Her bosom.

The Prayer Dearest to Mary

It is plain from Our Lady’s words to St. Mechtilde that no prayer is dearer to Her than the hail Mary. This saint once addressed the Mother of God thus during Holy Mass: “O holy Mother of God, were it in my power to greet thee with the sweetest salutation ever conceived by human heart, I would be most happy to do so!” Instantly the Blessed Virgin appeared to her with a silver shield on Her bosom, on which was engraven in letters of gold the *Ave Maria*, and said, “No one has yet surpassed this salutation, and no one can salute me with sweeter words than those of the ‘Hail Mary’ with which the Blessed Trinity greeted me. Man can form no idea of the sweetness I experienced when first I heard this salutation.”

The rapture that Mary experienced at the Annunciation is renewed at every devout Hail Mary, as was revealed to Saint Gertrude. This privileged virgin beheld in a vision, when the Hail Mary was chanted at Matins, three streamlets flowing from the Blessed Trinity into the Heart of Mary (Revel. S. Ger. Book 4, Chap. 2). These signified the exceedingly great sweetness which was poured into the Heart of Mary by the adorable Trinity at this angelic salutation.

From this you learn, Christian soul, the beauty and value of the Hail Mary. Resolve to recite this beautiful prayer whenever possible. When you are going up the stairs, say a Hail Mary as did St. Catherine of Siena. On your way to Church or when you go on an errand say a Hail Mary. If you do not wish to say it vocally, say it in your heart, and you will offer a precious gift to the Queen of heaven.

St. Catherine of Siena always had the pious custom of venerating Mary most zealously with the angelic salutation. She recited this greeting whenever she saw a picture of the Mother of God, or whenever she commenced some work. Through this practice she obtained the grace of a constant heavenly purity.

The devout Thomas a Kempis often exhorted his disciples: “Salute Mary with the angelical salutation, for She delights to hear this heavenly sound. As soon as I address the Blessed Virgin with the words of the angel, Hail Mary! the heavens exult, the earth marvels, Satan is put to flight, hell trembles, joy returns, my heart is inflamed with holy devotion. Yes, I feel such consolation in my heart that I am not capable of expressing it in words”

We can understand how the renowned Suarez was willing to exchange his works for a single Hail Mary devoutly prayed. What are the grandest labors of genius, side by side with this sublime abridgment of the glories of Mary, dictated by God Himself? In saying the Hail Mary piously we share in its treasures of light and love.

Preaching in the presence of many theologians, Blessed Alanus proved definitely that every word of the *Ave Maria* is a jewel, and that he who recites it devoutly offers many gems to the Heavenly Mother.

Since every word of the Hail Mary is a jewel, endeavor to pronounce each word with fervor and devotion, that you may be able to present your dear Mother with gems of most precious value. Oh, how great will be Her love for you, if daily you offer Her so many priceless jewels! If we wish to love Mary sincerely, we must begin to pray the Hail Mary with true devotion, then we, too, may hope to experience the fulfillment of Saint Bonaventure's words:

“Mary always salutes us with some grace whenever we salute Her with a Hail Mary.”

Exhortation To Pray

St. Alphonsus wrote a treatise on prayer containing this forcible admonition, which is well suited for the conclusion of our little work:

“Among all the spiritual works I have published, the treatise on prayer is certainly the most beneficial for the faithful, because prayer is an indispensable and certain means to obtain eternal happiness and all necessary graces. I wish it were possible for me to have as many copies of it printed as there are Christians on earth, in order that I could give one to each, and all without exception might realize how important it is to pray in order to be saved.

“This absolute necessity of prayer is explained in all holy books and is clearly and emphatically recommended by the Fathers of the Church. At the same time I know that the faithful are neglecting this powerful means of salvation. I especially deplore the fact that preachers and confessors do not speak more on this subject, and that spiritual books, even those most widely circulated, do not insist on it sufficiently, although there is nothing that ought to be more deeply impressed on the people than the necessity of prayer.

“Let us then be wholly penetrated by the importance of prayer, because, as a rule, all the adults who enter heaven are saved only by this means. May everyone who desires to be saved, apply himself to prayer with more zeal, for prayer is the key to the treasures of God! Alas! how many unfortunate souls lose the grace of God, commit sin and finally lose heaven, because they do not pray and ask God for the necessary assistance.”