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Just a reminder that Ash Wednesday begins the 40 days of fasting during the Holy Season of Lent. Ash Wednesday is also a day of complete abstinence.

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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. III - THE GOOD CHRISTIAN

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

The Manner in Which we Ought to Pray

“But he cried out much more: Son of David, have mercy on me.” St. Luke 18:39.

What a beautiful lesson this blind man teaches us by his example; for we learn from him that we must pray not only with humility, but also with constancy and perseverance, if we wish to be heard by God. Many Christians are wanting in this particular! I might perhaps make to many the same reproach that Christ made to His Apostles “Hitherto you have not asked anything” (St. John 16:24). And so it is in truth; many Christians do not pray, although they appear often in church and, as they imagine, offer up their prayers there. Be not surprised at what I am saying; I will show you that I have good reason for it.

I. *Many Christians do not pray, but rather demand and desire.*

II. *Many Christians do not pray, but rather begin to pray.*

There is a great difference between demanding and asking. To demand is to insist on having something that belongs to us by right; to ask is to beg for a favor that the person we are asking is not bound to give us. If I have a right to demand a thing, I need not pay many compliments nor seek for fine phrases in which to express my wishes; I can boldly urge my right, and insist on its being recognized. But if I am obliged to ask a favor, I must act far differently; I must bow and scrape, and make known my wants with the utmost humility, and persevere in my request until I get what I want.

What are we when engaged in prayer? All of us are beggars when we pray to God, no matter how rich or great we may be in the eyes of the world. And what sort of beggars are we? Ah, we are in far greater want than all the beggars in the world put together, and therefore, like them, we must knock and ask constantly. And we do not need, like other beggars, to make ourselves appear poorer than we are, nor to pretend to be suffering from all sorts of diseases in order to move God to take pity on us. For indeed our misery is greater than we imagine, greater than we ourselves can say. There is not a crumb we eat, nor a drop we drink, nor a thread of clothing we put on, that we must not receive as an alms from the hands of God. But these wants are of the least consequence. How do matters stand with our souls? A secret pride, innate in all men; a self-love that shows itself in almost all our actions, and ruins even our good works; a vain sensuality that cannot bear the least discomfort or

suffering; a constant, excessive care for temporal things, by which the heart and mind are turned away from the love of eternal goods and from our last end; an unceasing strife that the flesh wages against the spirit and against right reason, which often leads us into sin these and countless other evil inclinations, desires, and wounds of the soul are hidden in us, and through want of attention we are hardly aware of their existence. And what a multitude of outward temptations, occasions, and dangers we have to withstand from other creatures, and from the suggestions and assaults of the devil, inclined as we are already to wickedness! Alas, at any moment we can lose an eternal heaven; at any moment we can prepare eternal torments for ourselves. To avoid this twofold evil, we are in want of the help and grace of God, without which we are incapable of forming even a good thought. Now, the will of God is that we should with all humility pray to Him for that help and grace.

But many who pray are wanting in inward humility of heart. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers." Do we not find people of that kind even among Christians, who come to the house of God to hear Mass, and know not even what they are to pray for, or why they should pray? If they are not under the pressure of some temporal calamity, or otherwise not obliged to ask God for worldly prosperity, they are as strange with Him as if they were not at all in need of His assistance and grace, although in reality they are in the midst of miseries and dangers as to their souls, and therefore have good reason to beg God humbly to help them. But they do not come here to beg for alms like mendicants. "To beg I am ashamed" (St. Luke 16:3), they say with the steward in the Gospel; and their want of humility shows that they speak the truth, or that they imagine they need not beg. What wonder is it then that they receive nothing from God, says St. Augustine, speaking of the words of the psalm "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him." "You are not heard, because you are rich;" not, indeed, always rich in money and worldly goods, but in your own imagination and opinion; for you do not know your own poverty, or at least you do not act as a poor man.

Consider what the publican did in the temple: "The publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven, but struck his breast, saying: O God, be merciful to me a sinner." And he got what he asked for: "This man went down into his house justified, because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (St. Luke 18:13, 14). Consider how Paul acted during prayer; "I bow my knee," he says himself, "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephes. 3:14). See how Peter behaved when he raised Tabitha to life: "Peter, kneeling down, prayed" (Acts. 9:40). James used to remain so long on his knees that they became quite hard: "He prayed so long on bended knees that the skin of them seemed to have become as hard as that of a camel." If these examples cannot move you to humility, then consider the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ, and see in what a lowly posture He prayed in the garden: "Kneeling down He prayed" (St. Luke 22:41). But He did not think that enough: "He fell upon His face praying" (St. Matthew 26:39). And you, poor mortals, who are dust and ashes, and are as nothing before God, dare to appear in His sight with such little respect? But this, my dear brethren, is not yet enough for they who are not wanting in humility are sometimes at fault in another way; they do not pray, but only begin to pray; they are wanting in perseverance.

II. If we had not the clear and oft-repeated promises of God to hear our prayers, then we might perhaps have cause to be afraid of presenting our petitions to such a great Lord, and to doubt whether we should be allowed to have an audience with Him, not to speak of His granting our prayers. We are astonished at the offer made by the vain Herod to the dancing girl, "Ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee, though it be the half of my kingdom; and he swore to her" (St. Mark 6:22, 23), to make her quite sure. We think Solomon fortunate in having such a magnificent offer made him by the Almighty God: "Ask what thou wilt that I should give thee" (3 Kings 3:5). Oh, we say, what a great favor that was! How fortunate for Solomon! But what have we to be amazed at? Is our fortune less? Has not God said just as much to you and me and all men? Has not Christ, the Son of God, made the same promise to us, and assured us of it by a twofold oath, as we read in the Gospel of St. John: "Amen, amen, I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it you" (St. John 16:23).

How unlimited and generous this promise is! If you ask anything, He says, whatever it be; He makes no exception. Again, how forcibly, how sweetly He tries to impress this promise on us, so as to encourage us to con-

fidence in prayer. He does not say, If you ask God, or the Lord; but, the Father. Can there be any sweeter name than that? Nay, to put away all fear from our minds, He does not say my Father, but simply “the Father,” the common Father of all. And to our still greater consolation Christ assures us of that: “For the Father Himself loveth you” (St. John 16:27); so that it is not even necessary for me to ask for you. He complains, as it were, that we are so bashful and diffident in making requests of Him: “Hitherto you have not asked anything” (St. John 16: 24). “Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.” “Knock, and it shall be opened to you. or every one that asketh, receiveth and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened” (St. Matthew 7:7). With all this, then, I ask you again, Christians, can we have the least doubt that our prayers will be heard by the Almighty God, or can we complain that we are too miserable, too much exposed to temptations and dangers of sin, while we have such a powerful means of defense at hand that we can make use of at any moment? Yes, you think; these are all fine words; but what better are we for them? I have often prayed for many things, even for what concerns my salvation; for instance, to be freed from some vexatious temptations, to overcome some evil passion, to have a zealous love for God, to be patient in adversity, to be fully resigned to the divine will; I have prayed for the conversion of my husband, my wife, but all to no purpose. But what are you saying? Have you prayed for those things? And to God? And humbly and fervently, being in the state of grace? Yes, I have done the best I could. But that cannot be; you have not prayed; you have only begun to pray, and have acted like the beggar who went away at the first refusal through impatience.

One of the chief qualities of efficacious prayer is constancy and perseverance. God wishes to be asked, and to be compelled, and to be conquered by a sort of importunity. This is the meaning of the parable the tenor of which is: Is there one of you who goes to his friend in the middle of the night, and calls out to him through the door; My dear friend, lend me three loaves, for some one is come to visit me, and I have nothing to put before him; but the friend tells him to go away, as he is in bed and does not wish to get up. “Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you,” adds our Lord, “Ask, and it shall be given to you; knock, and it shall be opened to you” (St. Luke 11:8, 9). It is not enough to knock once, twice, or three times; you must keep on knocking until you are heard, and the door is opened to you. Perseverance is a great thing, and more friendly than the friend himself. For it deserves what is denied to the friend; the latter receives not when he asks in a friendly manner; but his perseverance excites compassion. God often acts as if He were deaf to our prayers, partly because He does not wish to bestow His gifts too lightly, lest we should not esteem them properly, for generally we think little of what we easily acquire, and partly to induce us to pray more and for a longer time.

Moses was perfectly pleasing to God, yet He did not grant him a complete victory over the Amalekites until he was determined to persevere in prayer in spite of his great fatigue. Isaac was dear to God, and yet he had to wait for twenty years before having an heir from his sterile spouse, in spite of his prayers. The woman of Chanaan, crying out, said to Jesus: Have mercy on me, O Lord. And what did the otherwise so merciful Saviour do? He did not deign to answer her a single word: she continued to implore and entreat Him most pitifully: “Lord, help me” (St. Matthew 15:22, 23). But He takes not the least notice. Even the disciples, who were tired of the scene, began to add their entreaties to hers. But the Lord remains as immovable as before; nay, He spurns her from Him as if she were a dog: “It is not good to take the bread of the children, and to cast it to the dogs” (St. Matthew 15:26). He was pleased with the fervor and faith of the woman, and wished to display them still more. She came up to Him and said:

“Yea, Lord, for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters;” as if she wished to say: Take pity on me; give me at least a crumb! Then at last the generous hand was opened. “O woman,” said Jesus to her with astonishment, “great is thy faith; be it done to thee as thou wilt, and her daughter was cured from that hour” (St. Matthew 15:28). If the woman had gone after the first or second rebuff, her daughter would not have been healed. Nearly in the same way did God act towards St. Monica. With burning tears that holy woman prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine. How long, and how often? Every day for seventeen years. Now, if she had grown tired and given up praying after the first ten or twelve years, her son would have become worse and worse, and there would have been no hope for him; ah, and then, too, the Catholic Church would not have the great St. Augustine.

We complain and grow tired and give up if we do not receive a favorable answer the first or second time we knock. That is to say, that God must attend to us at once, although we perhaps often refuse to hear His voice when we are in the state of sin. No, that will not do. If we wish to pray properly, let us not merely begin, but continue to pray constantly and perseveringly, especially when we are asking for something that is conducive to our spiritual welfare, and that should be the chief, nay the only object of our prayers. Do not give way too soon, for you have the promise of Christ. Do not leave off until you have received. If you pray with that disposition, saying: I will not cease until I get what I ask: you will certainly be heard. If we are refused to day what we ask for, we can still get it tomorrow. And if we are not heard this year, we shall surely be next year. And meanwhile we can be certain that our trouble in prayer will not be in vain. Ask with inward and outward humility, with constancy and perseverance; Ask and you shall receive. Amen.

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