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Reminder that the Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday before Ascension Thursday are Rogation Days in which the Church would have us pray the Litany of the Saints. Ascension Thursday is a Holy Day of Obligation.

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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. 4 = THE CHRISTIAN'S STATE OF LIFE

Fifth Sunday after Easter

Prayer of Married People In their Troubles

“Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.” St. John 16:24.

It is the almighty and most faithful God who says this; consequently, the best and safest means against all difficulties is prayer to God. When I think of that, I must say: Your trials are most useful to you, and most desirable. Because the Lord complains that we pray so little to him, and ask so little from him: “Hitherto you have not asked anything.” And so it appears that he sends new crosses sometimes, in order to force and compel you to ask consolation from him in prayer. Therefore, crosses and trials are good for us, because they teach us how to pray for the greater consolation of the afflicted.

I. Troubles teach us to pray.

II. Troubles teach us the best manner of praying.

I. Men could not receive a greater benefit in this mortal life than the gift of prayer. For, since the good of a thing is estimated partly by its necessity, in so far as we cannot do without it, and partly by its usefulness, in so far as it helps us to gain a great deal, what could be more necessary to us poor mortals in the midst of the trials and difficulties of this life, which affect both soul and body, than prayer? For God has determined, generally speaking, to give not a single gift of grace unless to those who ask him for it. What can be more useful and advantageous than prayer? For everything good that we can wish for and desire can be obtained only by prayer, nay, it must sometimes be sought for with importunity. God says to all men: “Ask, and you shall receive.” “Seek, and you shall find.” Come on boldly, and seek what you want, and you will find it with me. “Knock” at my door, “and it shall be opened unto you” (St. Luke 11:9). Remember that God is faithful; he never can fail to fulfill his promises, and his perfections compel him to give us everything he has promised. Therefore, he must give his grace, the eternal joys of heaven, nay, even himself, to all who ask him in the proper way. Hence there is nothing more useful and desirable for human beings than that which forces and compels them to pray, and without which they would neglect such a great good.

And this is precisely the effect of the trials and difficulties that the all-ruling God sends us in different ways. If we have everything to our wishes, then good-bye to prayer; no one thinks of it! The majority of people forget their God; he is cheated of his due service; the churches are never crowded; the altars are bare; there are few who raise up their eyes to heaven, few who speak to the good God, few who think of appeasing his anger:

“Sacrifices are scarce in prosperous times.”

But if the apparently prosperous wheel of fortune turns in another direction; if clouds begin to hide the sun; if the season turns out unfruitful, and brings on scarcity; if a general war disturbs the public tranquility; if a pestilence hurries off numbers of young and old to the grave, oh, then there is an immediate change to be seen everywhere! The hitherto almost deserted churches are again filled with people; the knee is bent humbly before the great God; the hands are stretched out to heaven, or folded in prayer; great and small unite in crying out to God for help and mercy. So does the darkness of night compel us to light a candle; the bitter cold of winter drives us to the fire; a severe illness makes us speak kindly to the doctor; the trials and difficulties of life force us to seek help from God by prayer.

In former times the goodness of God had bestowed countless wonderful benefits on the Jewish people, but none of them was more profitable than the rod with which he sometimes chastised them. And why so? Because as long as things went well with them they were rebellious and ungrateful; they forgot God: “They left God, their Maker” (Deut. 32:15), and adored false gods. And how must the ungrateful people be taught to return to the true God, and to adore him? They must be forced by necessity: “Their heart was humbled,” says David, alluding to their history: “they were weakened,” with pestilence, war, and famine, “and there was none to help them,” and so they changed very quickly: “Then they cried to the Lord in their affliction” (Ps. 106:12, 13).

An equally powerful teacher and master is calamity, not only in a community, but with each individual in particular. Jonas prayed, but when? When he was cast into the sea and swallowed by a monstrous fish. Ezechias prayed with tearful eyes, but when? When he was suffering from a grievous illness, and was on the point of dying. When Ezechias was in good health and prosperous “his heart became filled with pride,” but when he was stricken down by sickness, he began to pray as he never did before. Samson prayed, but it was when the Philistines put out his eyes and imprisoned him. The three Hebrew children prayed in the fiery furnace. Daniel, though he often prayed at other times, was especially devout in the lions’ den. Jacob prayed the whole night through when he was expecting to be attacked by his brother Esau. I hear the disciples of Jesus Christ crying out: “Lord, save us, we perish!” but when? When their boat was on the point of being overwhelmed by the storm; whereas, before the danger threatened them, they allowed their Master to sleep and were talking about other things. The Chananæan woman prayed because her daughter was possessed of an evil spirit. The Centurion prayed, because his servant was stricken with the palsy. The blind man prayed by the wayside, because he wished to have his sight restored to him. The ruler of the synagogue prayed, because his daughter was dead. The ruler of Capharnaum prayed, when his son was in danger of death. Martha and Magdalen prayed when their brother Lazarus lay at the point of death. Thus it is true that prayer is both the fruit and the reward of calamity.

If this means is necessary for any state of life, it certainly is for the married state. If everything went according to their wishes, and if they had no trials to bear, they would hardly think seriously and earnestly of God once in the day, nor would they see any necessity of praying to him for anything; but they would turn away from him like little children, and abandon him. And then the Almighty says: If you will not remain with me, and pray to me, I will teach you how to do it. He then immediately commands his servants, that is, his creatures, to take away some of their wealth from those people; to bring sickness on their beloved son; to cause the husband or wife a mortal illness; to trouble the parents by the willfulness and obstinacy of the children; to make one of the married couple a source of grief and anxiety to the other. And to what purpose? That they may learn to have recourse to him, to stretch out their hands to him, and implore his help. In that way they learn to pray; otherwise they would not have thought of it.

And, what is still better, not only will they be driven to have recourse to God by prayer, but also, generally speaking, the words of the Gospel with regard to the ruler will be verified with regard to them, and to their household: “Himself believed, and his whole house” (St. John 4:53). In such trials not only do the married couple themselves learn to pray, but all the children, servants, and friends must help them therein and ask God to assist them, because the trouble affects the whole family. Nor is this all; they get others to pray also, they have Masses said, and they recommend themselves in public devotions to the prayers of the whole congregation. Thus God is praised by the united prayers of many persons; and prayer of that kind is sure to ascend to heaven, according to the infallible promise of Jesus Christ: “Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (St. Matthew 18:20). “Whatsoever they shall ask, it shall

be done to them by my Father” (St. Matthew 18:19).

II. Prayer must be humble. There is praying and praying. The Pharisee prayed in the temple before the altar; the publican prayed at the same time, in the same temple, behind the door. The latter went home justified after his prayer, but not the former. Many Christians pray, nowadays, to whom the words of St. James might be applied: “You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss” (St. James 4: 3). So that the first requisite for prayer, to be good and pleasing to God, is humility. David says: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles” (Ps. 33:7). Who is that poor man; is it only he who is poor in earthly goods? Oh, if that were the case, woe to the rich and wealthy, for their prayers would do them little good! No; the rich are not excluded, if they pray like the poor; that is to say, humbly acknowledging their wants and miseries, and confessing, with full submission to the divine Majesty of God, that they require his help and assistance in everything, and that he alone can free them from their evils. How do poor mendicants act in order to arouse the rich man’s pity, and to induce him to give them an alms? If they have a sum of money that they succeeded in scraping together elsewhere, do they show it to him? By no means; for if they did, he would give them nothing. No; they conceal it as well as they can; they pretend to be much poorer than they really are; they show their ragged clothes and the sores that appear through their torn garments; they point to their faces, emaciated by hunger, and openly declare and acknowledge everything that could excite pity and compassion. We must appear humbly before the great God to ask his help and mercy by prayer. We must declare to him our necessities, wants, and frailties, both of soul and body; we must tell him that we can do nothing and that we have none to help us, and appeal to his goodness and mercy. This is the prayer of which God says: “The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds; and the Lord will not be slack.” (Ecclus. 35:21, 22).

But when do we feel the greatest impulse to pray? Is it in the time of prosperity? By no means. When everything goes according to our wishes, although we should acknowledge that we have received everything from the goodness of God, who is there who confesses humbly, before the throne of God, wants and miseries that he does, not feel? But when the shoe pinches and hurts, when the hand of the Lord wields the rod, when a severe trial or a heavy cross comes near us, or actually upon us, that is the time to humble ourselves. We do not require to borrow words from prayer books then to express the misery that we feel. How easy it is for us to humble ourselves in such circumstances before the Lord our God! How deep and sincere are the sighs and groans with which we show him the ulcers that afflict us, and cry to him for mercy!

See with what great humility the Chananan woman prayed to Christ to free her daughter from the evil spirit, and herself from her affliction. She prostrates herself before him on the ground, and cries out: “Have mercy on me, oh, Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil” (St. Matthew 15:22). What impelled her to pray so humbly? The affliction she was suffering on account of her daughter’s unhappy state; and as the result of her prayer she obtained mercy from our Lord; for he said to her: “Be it done to thee as thou wilt” (St. Matthew 15:28).

2. Another necessary quality for prayer to be efficacious is fervor and earnestness. David says of himself: “I cried with my whole heart: Hear me, oh, Lord!” (Ps. 118:145.) What good is it to speak with the lips if the heart is dumb? What good is it to play with the fingers on the keys of an organ if there is no one to blow the bellows? The keys will give forth no music, nor will the prayer of the lips merely have any efficacy. A single Our Father, prayed fervently and earnestly, is worth more, in the sight of God, than a dozen rosaries, or any amount of them, said without fervor and attention. “These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (St. Matthew 15:8).

True prayer does not consist in saying so many prayers; for what is the general character of them? If they were all counted up together, many of them would be represented by a mere cipher. There is more idleness than devotion in such prayers. There is such curiosity of the eyes, and such distraction of the mind, that the devil laughs at those prayers. Many read all sorts of things in their books, and do not understand what they are reading, what they desire, or what they are asking for; they are not at all in earnest about receiving from God what they ask for in that way. The Our Father is certainly said hundreds and thousands of times, and many who say it so often do not once earnestly desire that a single petition contained in it be fulfilled; and meanwhile, a soul overwhelmed with affliction at some heavy cross cries out only once to heaven: Lord, grant me patience; Lord, help me in my necessity; or, Lord, thy will be done! This one sigh is more to the glory of God, and to the

advantage of the soul, than all the long, un-fervent, and distracted prayers that are said in time of prosperity.

The approach, or the actual arrival of misfortune, fills ‘the heart with the proper zeal and fervor in prayer. If a beam of wood falls upon a man and crushes him, he does not want a prayer book then; like a hungry beggar, he will easily find a few earnest words, coming straight from the heart, to make known his difficulty to God. In prosperity it is the book that speaks; in adversity, it is our will. Formerly it was merely the lips that moved in prayer, now it is the heart. The eyes do not wander about, the whole being is absorbed in prayer, through the intense desire of being heard.

Pray, then, Christian married people, and all of you; such is my conclusion, in the words of St. James: “Is any of you sad? let him pray” (St. James 5:13). Pray with fervor and humility, as often as difficulties in your state of life cause you sorrow and suffering. Do not say, as people often do: I am so troubled and annoyed at home, that I can do no good; I cannot say a single Our Father devoutly, and it is that which causes me the greatest uneasiness. What do you mean by saying that you cannot pray? If it were possible to pray only in the church, where you can read as much as you like out of your prayer book, quietly and devoutly, then I should acknowledge that crosses and trials would prevent rather than encourage devotion. But real prayer does not consist in that. If you only think of God in your troubles, humbly acknowledge that your crosses come from his hand; if you only cry out from the bottom of your heart: Lord, have mercy on me; Lord, give me patience, you will have prayed very well, indeed. It is easy for you to do that, no matter how troubled you are, and you really often do it, too. Cry out to heaven frequently in that way, and you may be assured that you will not have long to wait for help, or at least for consolation from God, who tells us that he is our loving Father, and that his promises cannot deceive us: “Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full!” Amen.

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