

n. 2558

"Great is the mystery of the faith!"

The Church professes this mystery in the Apostles' Creed (Part One)

and celebrates it in the sacramental liturgy (Part Two),

so that the life of the faithful may be conformed to Christ in the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Father (Part Three).

This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer.'

1

What is Prayer? n. 2558-2565

- n. 2558
- Therese of Lisieux writes: 'For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned towards heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy' (Story of a Soul)
 - Teresa of Avila speaks of prayer as: 'intimate sharing between friends ... taking time frequently to be alone with the One who we know loves us' (Life 8.5).
 - 'Look at Him', she writes, 'He never takes his eyes off you' (Way of Perfection 26.3).
 - John of the Cross reminds us that 'the language which God hears best is silent love' (Maxims on Love 53).

2

Active Prayer

Beginning to pray

'Each of us has a soul, but, since we do not prize souls as is deserved by creatures made in the image of God, we do not understand the deep secrets that lie in them' (Teresa, Interior Castle VII.1.1).

'The soul is a paradise where the Lord says he finds his delight.'
(Interior Castle I.1.1)

'In its centre very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place.'
(Interior Castle I.1.3)

'Let us exert ourselves, for the love of the Lord. Let us abandon our reason and our fears into his hands. Let us forget this natural weakness that can take up so much of our attention ... Care only about moving quickly so as to see the Lord' (Interior Castle III.2.8).

3

Christian Prayer

(from Yielding to Love pages 29-30)

- Communion inspired by Jesus
- His revelation brought meaning to people of all cultures
- Don't be put off by failure of others/ of self
- Be inspired by holy disciples and share their quest

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- Beauty of those who are caught up in the divine
- and express their experience in art
- especially the art of loving
- Experience of love is a sacred encounter
- Being attentive to this encounter = prayer
- Expect prayer to engage us in love-communion

5

The Evolution of Chastity, Teilhard de Chardin (1934)

- ‘Some day, after harnessing space, the winds, the tides and gravitation, we shall harness for God the energies of love. And then, for the second time in the history of the world, we shall have discovered fire’.
- The soul needs to breathe = prayer is essential
- Heart speaking to heart
- Yielding to love
- In prayer we follow our yearning for deeper communion with God

6

The Catechism speaks of ‘Christian Prayer’.

- In Jesus the outer ‘Word’ and the inner ‘Spirit’ are in perfect harmony.
- In him we see God’s love revealed in a human heart and a human life.
- In offering us his Spirit, Jesus is offering us himself, and so a share in his own communion with God, his own prayer.

7

Prayer: a gift from God

Since the initiative in prayer always comes from God, prayer is always a gift to be welcomed with humble attentiveness.

n. 2559. ‘Only when we humbly acknowledge that “we do not know how to pray as we ought” (Romans 8:26) are we ready to receive fully the gift of prayer.’

- See the following chapters in *Yielding to Love*
- Chapter 3 ‘An Obedient Heart’, which reflects on the necessity of truly listening.
- Chapter 5 ‘A Free Heart’, which reflects on the freedom we need to be truly open to welcome God’s offer of communion.
- Chapter 6 ‘A Humble Heart’, which reflects on making space for God in our heart.

8

n. 2560

"If you knew the gift of God!" (John 4:10). The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for God.'

n. 2561

"You would have asked him, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Paradoxically our prayer of petition is a response to the plea of the living God: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water!" (Jeremiah 2:13). Prayer is the response of faith to the free promise of salvation and also a response of love to the thirst of the only Son of God.'

Yielding to Love Chapter 11 reflects on 'A Believing Heart'. Basic to prayer is the belief that God wants to be in communion of love with us, and that Jesus thirsts for this, even more than we do.

9

Prayer of the Heart

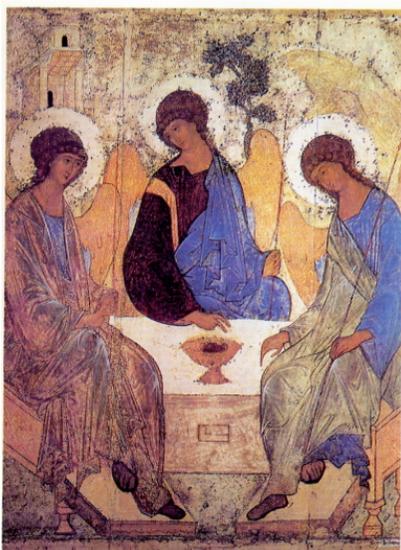
n. 2561 'It is the heart that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.'

The Catechism goes on to give a good definition of what we mean by 'heart' in this context:

n. 2563 'The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.'

10

Sharing in Jesus' Prayer



The icon of the Trinity by the early fifteenth century Russian mystic Rublev is a beautiful statement of prayer.

The scene is a Christian reflection on the scene in the Abraham story when Abraham and Sarah are visited by three divine guests (Genesis 18:1-15)

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In Rublev's icon, Jesus is in the centre. He is looking to his Father who is on his right, ever ready to carry out his Father's will, and always in communion with his Father.

The Father is looking towards the Spirit who is on Jesus' left.

The Spirit, ever ready to carry out the Father's will is looking at the Eucharistic gifts on the table. The one looking at the icon is invited to join them at the table.

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The Catechism concludes its Introduction to Christian Prayer:

n. 2565 'Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.'

Yielding to Love Chapter 4 reflects on A Loving Heart'

Chapter 7 'The Heart of Jesus' reflects on letting Jesus pray in us:

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Yielding to Love pages 84ff

- God speaks a word of love to us, inviting us into communion
- This has always been the case
- Hearing is partial, distorted
- Jesus is God's perfect, focal, WORD

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- Jesus' disciples (Jews) opened their hearts to Jesus
- They experienced his Spirit (communion in love)
- So did people of other cultures
- 'All are called to union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, towards whom our whole life is directed'(Vatican II, Lumen Gentium n.3).

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- Through sharing Jesus Spirit we come to know God as the communion in love experienced between Jesus and his Father.
- 'If you love me, my Father will love you and we will come to you and make our home in you'(John 15:21).
- To believe in Jesus is to share his love-communion
- This is Liberation (Redemption) - Salvation

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When we enter into prayer, therefore, we are responding to God's Word of love, and we are not alone. We are with Jesus. He draws us to himself and takes us to the Father: 'When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself'(John 12:32).

Jesus not only shows us the way to God. He is the way (John 14:6), for it is our communion in love with him that opens us to the Father's love and draws us into God's embrace. In Paul's words, Jesus is the Yes to all God's promises (2Corinthians 1:20). Jesus reveals God's faithful love to us by being himself the expression of it.

Jesus is the way because he is the perfect human expression of God's Word and it is only by responding to God's Word that we can be in communion with God: 'No one can come to the Father except through me'(John 14:6).

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- We watch Jesus as he leaves the house where he is staying and finds a secluded place where he can be alone in prayer (see Mark 1:35).
- We watch him weeping over the city (see Luke 19:41).
- We watch him on the mountain of transfiguration (see Mark 9:2)
- and on the mountain of agony (see Mark 14:32)
- We listen to his prayer in the upper room of the last supper (see John 17)
- and on the cross of Calvary (see Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34-46; John 19:26-30).

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It is Jesus' Spirit who has been poured into our hearts, and it is this Spirit who invites us to be a holy place in which Jesus can continue his prayer.

Just as the Christian life is not a matter of living like Jesus so much as allowing Jesus to live again in us, so Christian prayer is not a matter of modelling our prayer on that of Jesus so much as joining our heart to the heart of Jesus and allowing his Spirit to pray to the Father in us.

Jesus did not ask us to become another vine, modelled on him. He asked us to be his branches and to remain attached to him.

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Through the gift of the Spirit we are invited to pray with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me'(Galatians 2:20).

This transformation is a gradual process, as Paul tells us: 'All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit'(2Corinthians 3:18).

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Jesus reminds his disciples that if they remain attached to him, they will, like branches attached to a vine, bear abundant fruit (John 15:5).

To pray is to make a choice. If we choose to pray in communion with Jesus, one of the most precious fruits of this will be that we will find ourselves sharing in Jesus' prayer. With Jesus praying in us we are sharing in Jesus' own intimacy with God.

We could adapt Paul's words: 'I pray, no longer I, but Christ is praying in me.' Jesus' prayer is being answered: 'Father, may the love with which you have loved me be in them, and I in them'(John 17:26).

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Secondly, we must constantly remind ourselves that God is offering us the intimacy of this communion.

Thirdly, the value or quality of our prayer is measured by the fruit which it produces in our lives: our obedience, our humility and especially our love.

Teresa writes (Interior Castle IV.2.8):

'It is in the effects and deeds following afterwards that one discerns the true value of prayer.'

23

Some Basic Principles

In *Yielding to Love* Chapter 11, I outline some basic principles to be kept in mind when we reflect on prayer:

First, it is important not to forget that, since prayer is loving communion with God, and since God is always the one to begin the communion, the best prayer is the prayer which God is offering.

Let us gratefully accept and treasure whatever communion God is offering us now, for God knows our present capacity to respond. We need to remember that to turn towards God is already to be in prayer.

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Fourthly, whatever happens, Teresa tells us: 'we must not abandon prayer'(Life 8.5). If we do, she offers the only remedy: we must 'begin again'(Interior Castle II.1.10).

Fifthly, we should not expect the journey to be one of simple progression: 'There is no stage of prayer so sublime that it is not necessary often to return to the beginning'(Teresa, Life 13.15).

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Sixthly, it is important to follow the advice of Teresa and 'set our eyes on Christ' (Interior Castle I.2.11).

Jesus will journey with us leading us to a deeper knowledge of the true God – a knowledge that comes through love.

He will also lead us to a deeper knowledge of our real selves, for in Jesus we see what it means to be made in God's image and likeness.

We see also who we are called to be.

Furthermore, we see by comparison how sinful we are. This acts as a warning. It nurtures humility and safeguards us from thinking that any value we have comes from ourselves.

It reinforces our longing to gaze on God, the sole source of all good.

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We must not be looking for consolations, but learn to embrace the cross.

We need to be very careful not to be too self-reliant. This does not mean that we should be overly reliant on others and fail to appreciate the gift of God that we are as well as the gifts that God has given us, but it does require that we keep alert to the truth that all we are and all we have is gift.

We are to listen to Jesus reminding us to become like a child in recognising our dependence on God and relying on God's grace.

27

Seventhly, if we are serious about prayer we must be resolute in turning away from sin, for it blocks out the light of God and opens our souls to darkness.

We will need a resolute will to detach ourselves from whatever is cluttering up our lives and holding us back.

This will vary from person to person, and according to each one's state of life.

If we are serious about prayer we must try to live virtuous lives in obedience to God's will as revealed to us through the ordinary means of God's providence.

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Finally, while there is some value in studying prayer 'from the outside', we will only truly be helped to the extent that we are praying.

Without praying we can learn what God is doing in people's lives and we can get some idea of the intimate communion to which God is inviting us. However, we can understand what other people tell us about prayer only to the extent that their words shed light on our own personal experience of prayer.

Teresa herself tells us this: 'As much as I desire to speak clearly about these matters of prayer they will be really obscure for one who has not had experience'(Life 10.9).

28

I have two audio CDs (MP3 condensed files) of a series of Reflections on Prayer given at Henley Beach, Adelaide in 1999. Cost \$5.00 each.

CD1 offers a talk on the following topics:

1. Transcendent God present in Word & Spirit
2. God present in the world
3. Self knowledge
4. Jesus praying in us
5. Holiness 6. Obedience 7. Humility
8. Active Prayer 9. Teresa of Avila on Active Prayer
10. Petition & Intercession. 11-12. Distractions Part 1&2
13. Friendship 14. Spiritual Direction
15. Detachment 16. 'Indifference'
17. Silence & Solitude

CD2 offers talks on Passive (Contemplative) Prayer

18. Beginnings of Passive Prayer
19. What we can do in this prayer
20. Faith 21. Faith & Contemplation
22. Gifts of the Spirit 23. Fruits of the Spirit
24. Prayer of Union & Betrothal 25. Special Mystical Graces
26. The 'dark night'. 27. Fruits of the 'dark night'
28. Spiritual Marriage 29. Summary of Series