

Fullness of Life Through Prayer

by

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Preface

Jesus wanted all of us to have life in abundance. “I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full” (Jn 10:10). So life is our purpose . . . and our richest treasure.

Prayer is meant to be a means for achieving fullness of life. It is vital that we pray well, for how much we pray is not as important as how we pray. To pray well we follow the masters.

Father Chaminade, Founder of the Marianists, spent much time and energy teaching his disciples how to pray. This little booklet is inspired by his teachings. It presents the principles underlying prayer as well as a common method of praying.

The spiritual teachings in this booklet are themselves meant to be prayer. Therefore, scripture texts are given at the end of the booklet, both as a help for understanding the truths presented and as a guide for praying them.

May the Lord and his Mother speak to you in your heart as you journey through the teachings of this booklet to a fuller life.

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Fullness of Life Through Prayer

1. Foundation of our life. God created us out of nothing, and he continues to hold us in existence. This truth is the foundation of everything in our life. It states our most fundamental relationship with God.

Our conscious life does not automatically reach this level of relating to God. We easily stay on the level of eating and resting, working and making a living, recreating and cultivating friendships. Meanwhile there is at the core of our being a center where we are one with God as our creator and Father. It is that juncture where we are constantly emanating from God's creative love and flowing back into the embrace of his will. Here we are at the very source of our life in God, where God is the fount of all our spiritual power and energy.

Scripture recognizes this center of the inner person and calls it the "heart." St. Paul describes it as our spirit, in contrast to the more outward levels of life in our psyche and our body. We are called to life most intensely in our spirit, but over the years we cover this inner heart of our being with patterns of sensations, ideas, images, feelings, and projects that engage us on more superficial levels of living. Nevertheless, the God who created us and holds us in existence continues to call us to meet him in our heart.

2. The gift of life. In creating us God gifted us with life—that vital interior force which is the inner source of all our being and our doing. That life manifests itself in three important urges or impulses: to enjoy being who we are, to grow into fuller being, and to give to others. We experience these inner urges resonating within us in the impulses to like ourselves, to become more than we are, and to do good. When we no longer feel any urge to enjoy, to grow, and to give, we become bored, languid, and listless. We are dying. We are out of touch with the source of life within us.

Life, then, is our basic purpose; it is God's deepest desire for us. His will in our regard is that we "have life, and have it to the full." On our part, we must choose life, embrace whatever fosters it, and put aside whatever hinders it.

3. In God's image. God created us in his own image. That means our inner urges to enjoy, to grow, and to give are not random or chaotic, but are directed by an inherent pattern to become like God and to be one with him.

Hold any live seed in your hand and look at it. That seed contains inner patterns which determine how it will grow and produce. You cannot make it grow into just anything you wish. You must respect the image in which it is made.

An acorn is made in the image of an oak tree. It has inner tendencies to grow into an oak and to give acorns. A human cell is made in the image of the parent who produced it. It has an inner tendency to grow into a human being with its features already determined by the image of the one who made it. We are made in the image of God. The core of our person

has an urge to grow into the likeness of God. If we force our inner self to grow in any other likeness, we do violence to our own self and eventually bring on our own destruction.

The call to grow to maturity in the image of God and to serve others as God does is inherent in our heart, in the deepest part of our person. The fullness of life and happiness is found only in following that inner call to enjoy being who we are, to grow more into who we are, and to give—all after God's image

4. A work of God and us. Achieving fullness of life and service is always a cooperative work of God and ourselves. God extends to us his presence, but we must welcome him into our heart. God endows us with power, but we must exercise that gift. God draws us to himself, but we must consciously turn every part of our self over to him. God has created us without our consent, but once he has gifted us with the power of choice, he cannot redeem us without our using that power. To be fully alive, we must choose it. God lovingly respects our inner freedom to choose our own destiny. He attracts us to himself and gifts us with his own power, but he unites us to himself only to the degree that we choose to give ourselves over to such a union.

God draws us and gifts us according to the image in which we are made. Because it is God's own image, each time he extends himself to us or gifts us with his presence, we become more one with him. At the same time, the more we know God, choose him, and serve others in his name, the more we become our truest and fullest selves.

5. God is always ready to bless us. Most of us grow gradually. In Christ we have already begun what will come to fullness in heaven. But we must yet pass through many stages of knowing, loving, and obeying God in all his designs for us. We are always on the threshold of a fuller life no matter where we are at the present time.

At whatever stage we are, God is always ready to receive us, to listen to us, to reveal himself more fully to us, and to grant us his gifts. In whatever situation we find ourselves, God has a grace ready for us. But we must leave aside all business on the other levels of our life and enter into the stillness of our heart where God is waiting to meet us. Truly God is with us, and he communicates with us from within. Only there can we discover the riches waiting for us—like a treasure hidden in a field.

6. Faith. God is the source and the fullness of our life in his image. He makes himself accessible to us in at least three ways: 1) through his external word, such as a passage from scripture or a teaching of the Church; 2) through the mysteries of Christ, those experiences of Jesus which put divine reality into human form; 3) through interior words or gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is the act by which we take hold of these truths, mysteries, and gifts in our heart in such a way that they become for us personal convictions, insights, and powers of our spirit.

Thus our first conscious communion with God is an act of faith through which we recognize God communicating with us and initiating us into his ways. Through faith God's love is accessible at all times.

On God's part, faith is a gift. Although we have an inclination to union with God in the depth of our heart, we do not have the power to unite our self to him. God gifts us with that power. On our part, faith is a response to God's gift of his presence to us, an exercise of the gift of faith.

Faith is the essential means by which we come to know God as he is in himself and in us—not face to face, but through concepts, images, feelings, and intuitions. Faith puts aside the demand for signs and proofs to our senses and our reason, and it reaches out for a more direct and pure union with God in the depth of our spirit. Faith brings us a greater light of conviction and love than does rational or sensory proof.

Faith is as infallible as direct vision, although it is not as sharply experienced by our senses. Nevertheless, it resonates in us enough to move our whole being to praise, longing, and service. Faith is more a conviction by intuitive grasp than a correct conclusion drawn from sure data. Belief in God's presence without signs fills us more than faith which comes through external manifestations of God.

Faith is a conviction about spiritual things which we do not see, a conviction without seeing. Faith is an intimate attachment of our soul to God. To believe in Jesus is to welcome him into our heart. That is why faith of the heart justifies: Jesus gives himself to those who welcome him into our heart. That is why faith of the hearts justifies: Jesus gives himself to those who welcome him in faith.

The activity of faith is not limited to our mind. Faith is not complete until we are moved in our emotions and our will as well. Faith brings us a knowledge of God and of ourselves which moves us to self-improvement and gives a direction of service to our lives.

7. Prayer of faith. It is chiefly during prayer that God grants his gifts and favors to those he loves. It is then that our growth in God's image is most favored. Therefore, the hours of prayer are the most precious of our life.

Prayer is a conscious encounter with God. The prayer of faith leads us into this consciousness guided by faith alone. In God's presence, we strive for no other knowledge than that bestowed by faith, and we seek to be moved by no other motives than those provided by faith. We put aside the offerings of our senses and our psyche, and we follow only those movements within us which are caused by faith. We want to cling to God alone in the depth of our spirit, leaving aside everything else, so that the reality of God can penetrate our whole being. So we simply exercise our faith during prayer as we give our full attention to the presence of God—his truths, his mysteries, his gifts.

To pray in faith means to believe that whatever we are praying for is already being granted by God. God usually grants our requests gently and progressively—and often imperceptibly at first. But he begins to answer our prayer as soon as we begin to pray. Because we might not be able to perceive it, we must believe it is taking place, like Elijah believing that the cloud, which was not yet formed, would bring rain.

Throughout the time of prayer, we keep our attention on God, not just to become better informed about him, but to enter into his ways. We do not want to understand only, but we want the word or mystery to abide in us and to move us. Prayer is not a time to study, to solve problems, to plan ministries, but is a time to be with God, to know him, to love him, to praise him. In response to God, we desire to change, to become like him, to unfold in us the image in which we are made.

There are many ways of being preoccupied with ourselves in God's name which are not real prayer. Two men went up to the temple to pray. They both "prayed." But one was focused on himself in God's presence; the other was focused on the God of mercy. The latter went home changed; the former did not. The prayer of faith is always meant to transform us in the way it transformed the publican—through focus on God.

8. Purity of heart: necessary disposition for prayer. Jesus tells us that the pure of heart will see God (Mt. 5:8). Our heart is pure when nothing in it opposes the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling there, when our feelings bind us to nothing which might keep us from seeing God and being filled with his presence. A pure heart is calm and free, undisturbed by created things or events because it is not tied to them by desires or feelings. As a consequence, it is free to see God, free to cling to him and rest in him.

We keep our heart pure if at all times we dispose ourselves in a state favorable to prayer. We keep ourselves ready to commune with God at all times as we join with the servants watching for their master's return.

We cannot be open to receive God's graces if we are bound up in our self or in creatures. If our heart is given over to some person or thing through a possessive attachment, we will pass over or brush aside the communications proffered by the Spirit of Jesus. We must be empty of all that resists or crowds out God's love in any form. Only then will we avoid that interior contradiction of praying for something and at the same time rejecting the grace we ask for.

The habitual practice of interior silence and of recollection brings calm and quiet to all our powers so that in faith we are able to recognize God and the movements of the Spirit within us. Attention to the practice of the virtues¹ between periods of formal prayer is a form of constant preparation for prayer and an excellent means of acquiring the habit of living in union with God. By the interior silences we gradually take on the dispositions of Jesus who was always ready to commune with his Father.

¹ The virtues referred to here are those dispositions of Jesus we need for living fully our daily lives. These are presented in the booklet *In His Likeness*.

9. Resistance of the old self. Purity of heart is difficult to achieve because in us are two sets of tendencies opposed to each other. The one set comes from a self that our ego built. Because our ego is endowed with the power to choose, it can either recognize and respect the image in which we are made, or it can construct its own image around which to build the self. Choosing to grow in the image of God opens our heart to welcome God; choosing to live by our own image makes our heart a temple for idols.

Our ego is that capacity to organize all that we are into what constitutes our “self.” Before we ever recognize the tendencies springing from the image of God in us, we are moved by desires to gratify our sensual needs, to claim things as our own, and to build our own image as a center of our self. All these tendencies lean toward what the world without God offers to us, what St. John groups under pride, greed, and pleasure. If we follow these tendencies, we build a false self around our own image.

Since our ego is the creator of the image of our false self, our ego also must sustain that image. God holds in existence only what he creates. So we use much of our life energy building and sustaining our own image and the false self which we build in its likeness. We easily make this our life project. We strive to establish our own worth and then we need others to recognize and affirm it. We live very much by the evaluations of others, as false as they might be. We try to live up to their expectations in order to win support of our ego-built self. Even the good we do for others easily becomes a part of our life project to be our own source of worth.

All the while we suspect that we are building on sand, but we continue to pretend there is nothing better to build on. Our original sin of building our self around our own image gradually becomes a constant way of life.

So the tendencies of God’s image to fullness of life meet resistance in us from the beginning. Unfortunately, we all succumb to this stance of opposition to some degree. Why? What goes on within us?

Whenever we experience the inner urge to a full life in God’s image, however subtle that impulse, we also experience our fundamental identity as creature and God as our ultimate source of being. What does that mean in our experience?

It means we experience ourselves as *contingent*, i.e., we are not entirely in control of ourselves. We can lose what we have—our health, our sanity, our fortune, our job . . . anything! We don’t like that feeling, and so we tend to crowd it out by achieving security in any way that seems feasible. We compete, we strive to achieve, and we try to assure as much control over our future as we can.

We experience ourselves as *limited*, i.e., we cannot be or do some things we want to be or do. Things exist beyond us that could overwhelm us. We can be hurt. We don’t like that feeling. So we try to get as much power and control over situations and people as possible, however benevolent that control might be.

We experience ourselves as *dependent*, i.e., much of what we need comes from others, much of what we have depends on others. What they decide determines what happens to us. We don't like that feeling. So we try to possess as much as we can to be self-sufficient. In our relations with others we are always trying to ensure them as part of our security. We use them for our life project more than we like to admit.

We experience ourselves as *changing*, i.e., dying to what we already are and moving into something new. When the dying phase is dominant, we don't like that feeling. So we counteract the reality of pain and loss with pleasure. We numb ourselves to the experience of the cross in whatever way our culture provides.

Thus our original sin of creating our own image with its own set of impulses and tendencies becomes a culture for us. We are caught in the web of a false self that we have constructed and which contains all the elements of eventual self-destruction. Who will rescue us from this sin and its consequences?

10. Emergence of the new self. At the core of our being, beneath all the layers of ideas, images, intentions, and feelings that constitute the false self, the image in which we are made steadily and persistently inclines toward becoming a full person in the likeness of God. This set of tendencies runs counter to the directions of our ego-built self, and for the most part we pay too little attention to them. Nevertheless, these tendencies point the direction to fullness of life for us.

Just as the world offers support and enticement to our ego-built self, God comes to dwell in us to help us grow in our new self. In Baptism the Holy Spirit comes to abide in us and imparts to us the tendencies and inclinations of Jesus Christ. This new life of the Spirit of Jesus calls us to grow into the dispositions of Jesus. This grace is already a life of union with God whose image is our inner pattern of growth and giving.

With this gift of life to our new self arises the struggle between our ego-built self and our God-imagined self (or between our old self and our new self, our false self and our true self). St. Paul calls it the struggle between the "flesh" and the "spirit." What drives our false self comes mostly from the world and indulges our false self: pride, possessions, and pleasure. What moves our new self comes from the Spirit and follows Christ: humility, simplicity, the cross. Clearly these two sets of tendencies oppose each other, and we can experience their conflict within us in many ways.

11. Jesus, model of the new self. Who will set us free from our old self of sin? Jesus came to share our lot precisely to set us free from our inner false self and its consequences. But redemption does not take place in some process outside of ourselves. Jesus lived all the human experiences necessary to confront the evil of our lives and to overcome it with enduring love. Now he comes to dwell in us with all his gifts of life and invites us to walk interiorly with him through that same journey of overcoming evil and entering full life. It is only in making that faith journey with him that we are set free from our false self. But our

resistance is deep and persistent. We find that we cannot come to desire the humiliation, poverty, and suffering of Christ, so necessary to confront and overcome sin, without the outpouring of his Holy Spirit in our heart. That outpouring begins already in Baptism, and the Spirit abides in us to impart to us the tendencies and inclinations of Jesus. At special moments of grace in our lives we can experience a new release of the Spirit in our heart.

Now we confront the most fundamental choice of our life. On the one hand, the Spirit draws us, in the image of Jesus, to humility, poverty, and suffering toward fullness of life. On the other hand, our ego-built self draws us toward honor, riches, and pleasure by trying to create, sustain, and indulge our false self. We can opt for either direction—to take up the new life which the Spirit gives, or to indulge the old self with our own resources and the promises of the world. Each way produces its particular fruit in due season.

12. Our heart formed in Jesus. A pure heart is to be found only in the new self. This happens when we have allowed the dispositions of Jesus to become our own so much that they shape the attitudes of our deepest interior spirit.

A heart formed by the Spirit of Jesus does not follow the tendencies of indulging the old self: greed, envy, competition, vengeance, self-pity, self-justification, and such things. Rather, it strives attentively to follow the inclinations of the Spirit: love, peace, patience, forgiveness, generosity, humility, poverty, and the like. These latter dispositions ready us for communing with God at any time.

Purity of heart is not mere dry asceticism, but a dynamic condition which releases new life within us. It is an interior climate that allows God's presence to energize us.

We cannot always be with God in formal prayer. But we can join one period of prayer to the next by the ongoing work of purifying our heart. We take joy in and live by what we gained from our last period of prayer, while the fruit of that prayer carries us toward the next time of formal prayer. Some general guidelines for continuous purification of heart between periods of prayer might help:

- + By choice avoid everything we know to be offensive to God and repent promptly when we have offended him.
- + Refuse to let our heart follow any tendencies against our will; remain free in relation to all created things.
- + Avoid haste, frivolity, and excessive concern about our work. Such things remove us from living the tendencies of Jesus within us.
- + Often consciously affirm the desire to embrace God's will in all things.
- + Do everything with the assurance that the Holy Spirit is helping us from within. Do nothing as though we were alone.

Because God's love encompasses our entire being, we try to empty our heart of any opposing ideas or competing love. We surrender our ideas, thoughts, and memories to God. We cease relying primarily on our own reason for insights and understanding. We surrender our affections to God, and we invoke the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide us. We rely more on obedience to the movements of the Spirit than we do on the natural attractions of our nature. This is what it means to live with the pure heart of Jesus.

13. Choosing topics for prayer. Because prayer is our most conscious encounter with God, we must treat the time of prayer as a precious treasure. It is very important to choose the topic of prayer beforehand—the night before for the following morning, or in the morning for evening. The work, truth, or mystery chosen already begins to influence our spirit once we fix it as the subject of our prayer.

Generally the topics for prayer are one of three kinds: a word from Scripture (e.g., Psalm 23), a truth of faith (e.g., God created me and sustains me in being), or a mystery of Jesus (e.g., Jesus died on the cross). At times our needs might determine other subjects. For example, if we feel a lack of fervor at Mass or a distaste for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we can take such topics for prayer in the light of faith.

In choosing a topic, we follow our needs, our interior attractions, or the grace we desire to obtain from prayer. For example, if we want to strengthen some conviction or grow in faith, we will choose some word from Scripture or some teaching of the Church. If we want to change or acquire some attitude or disposition, we will choose some mystery, that is, some event in the life of Jesus or Mary which embodies that attitude. If we have been granted some interior gift of the Spirit, we might choose to rest in that grace during prayer. So we choose the topic by considering what subject will most likely lead to the result we desire. We fix in our mind the topic and the fruit desired in such a way that we can easily recall them at any time.

Once we have prepared the topic, we carry it in our memory like a treasure to be unfolded during the next period of prayer.

14. Entering into prayer. There are four important considerations for entering into prayer.

1) *The presence of God.* God embraces us at every moment with his presence, ready to communicate with us. We are always in God's presence, but often we are not aware of him. So we enter into prayer by giving our attention to God, recalling that he sees and hears us. Once begun, we hold ourselves in his presence throughout the entire time of prayer.

We immediately recall, under some specific aspect, who God is: Creator, Father, Ruler of the Universe, Almighty, Source of Life, etc. We express our feelings of awe, reverence, praise—whatever arises within us.

At the same time we recognize, under some specific aspect, who we are in God's presence: creature, loved by God, limited, gifted, sinner, ignorant, chosen, etc. Again we express our sentiments to God.

Seeing in the light of faith who God is helps us to see who we are in his presence. In prayer, awareness of the one should not be separated from awareness of the other because prayer is always a work of God and us together.

2) *Union with Jesus.* Of Christ alone, it can be said: "He submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard." We realize that of ourselves we cannot pray as we should. We do not have the dispositions to be heard by the Father. But Jesus invites us to pray in his name, to join him in his prayer to the Father. The more we know we are sinners, the more we feel the need to unite ourselves to Jesus praying for us.

Jesus is always praying before the Father. We join in his prayer, uniting ourselves to him so that we come to the Father clothed in merits and the power of Jesus.

We desire to pray like Jesus: through him, with him, and in him.

THROUGH him. We appear before the Father in Jesus' name. The efficacy of our prayer depends on the acceptance of Jesus by the Father. We know that we are completely dependent on the merits and power of Jesus, which he opens to us as we pray. We never try to pray with only our own resources. We always need Jesus to amplify our prayer by his merits. Thus, we put ourselves entirely under the influence of his Spirit and his grace. His Spirit helps us pray as he prays, and his grace helps us recognize that we cannot pray effectively without his merits.

WITH him. Jesus is already praying for us to the Father. We join Jesus in his prayer. Not only does Jesus offer our prayer as his own, but now we also can offer his prayer with him. As we pray with Jesus, we want to be conformed to his spirit, to pray with his dispositions and attitudes. If we cannot pray with his human emotions and desires, we are like paralyzed limbs, united to Jesus but unmoved by his life. To pray with Jesus means to share in his total experience of prayer, like a live branch on the vine, or like a member of the body sharing the experience with the head.

IN him. We desire to be so one with Jesus that his prayer is our prayer. We pray as his members, becoming faithful images of Jesus praying to the Father. Therein lies a guarantee of the efficacy of our prayer.

Jesus allows a union with him only of our true self. Our false self, created by our own ego, can never have anything in common with Jesus.

3) *Union with Mary*. There are two excellent reasons to be in the company of Mary throughout the time of prayer.

First of all, God chose her to experience him in a unique way—as his mother. Mary conceived God in her heart by faith and in her whole being by the power of the Holy Spirit. She knew Jesus in every mystery and virtue of his life, his death, and his resurrection. It is an awesome privilege for us to pray in the company of one who knows the Lord so fully that her charity brings him forth in our heart, just as she brought him forth into the world.

Secondly, God gave Mary the primary role in forming him in his human personality. Because we want to take on the same personality, she has the same role in our life. That is what it means to us to live the mystery of the Son of Mary. To pray in union with Mary means to open our heart to her formative presence during prayer. The more we are influenced by her presence, the more we are taken into the experience of being formed in the likeness of Jesus. That is the nature of Mary's influence.

4) *Invoking the Holy Spirit*. Jesus has given us his Spirit to be with us at all times, especially to guide us in prayer. Therefore, we ask the Holy Spirit to take possession of our mind and heart as we submit our entire being to his inspiration and guidance. We leave aside all useless thoughts, disturbing concerns, and unruly affections as we abandon ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We confide to the Holy Spirit the grace we desire to derive from prayer. He will pray in our stead when necessary. The Spirit will speak his inner word in our heart and will produce in us his own fruits.

15. Praying: a common method. In God's presence, united with Jesus and Mary, given over to the influence of the Holy Spirit, we are into the heart of prayer.

Immediately we bring to mind the topic chosen beforehand. If the topic is a passage from Scripture or a revealed truth, we consider the subject under various aspects—meaning, importance, applications—especially in view of the grace we desire. If the subject is a mystery of Jesus (e.g., Jesus born in a stable), we imagine vividly the details of the event, ponder his actions, words, and especially his inner feelings and dispositions. In every case, we reflect in a listening attitude, open and attentive to the movements within us.

When we are moved by some insight, feeling, or desire, we pause and savor it so that it can take root in us. We make acts of faith until a truth becomes a personal conviction. We express an emotion until it attaches us to God or turns us away from evil. We nurture a desire until it moves us to change for the better. Awe, praise, gratitude, contrition, petition—we express such sentiments to God in a colloquy as long as they continue without strain or burden.

Our aim is to experience within us the sentiments of Jesus. Any movement within us springing from faith moves us toward God in some way. We deliberately carry forward such movements until they insert us into God's ways. Therefore, we examine how our behavior expresses or contradicts a truth or a mystery. We might compare our attitude to the inner dispositions of Jesus. We can make concrete applications until our life becomes a part of the truth or the mystery. We always express these insights and sentiments in a colloquy. That is the heart of our prayer.

Sometimes we will be moved quickly, but at other times we may have to continue considerations for some time, perhaps even into the following period of prayer. But we always remain sensitive to the movements of the Spirit within and give ourselves over to their influence. We do not indulge in lengthy speeches or in prolonged reasonings. Prayer is not a study; it is an encounter with God.

Prayer is continuous with the rest of our life. It should influence our entire life just as our lifestyle greatly influences our prayer. Therefore, we determine some specific way to carry into the rest of our life what we gained in prayer. The direction or resolution we take should have three characteristics: it should be specific, of immediate application, and such that we can easily recall it and repeat it. We might fix on some specific act in our behavior. We might want to continue a particular sentiment resonating in us. Or we might like to root firmly in us an attitude of Jesus. Some truths are assimilated simply by a prolonged feeling or awareness.

Like the rest of prayer, the resolution should come from yielding to the Holy Spirit. Resolutions on our own initiative, unmoved by God, lack the necessary vigor to be fruitful, and end in frustration. Faith responds to God's action within us, not to the movements of our ego-formed self.

In summary, this common method of praying in faith gradually makes God's word our own convictions and by degrees attaches us to Jesus through feelings and choices. Thus God's wisdom and power become the guiding light and strength of our life.

16. Concluding formal prayer. Though the formal conclusion of prayer is brief, it is very important. It assures a continuation in us of the good effects produced by prayer. It consists of four brief acts.

- 1) We thank God for the honor of being called to prayer, for any insights, sentiments, and desires we experienced, and for the graces received. Even if our prayer is dry and tasteless, it is a grace to be accepted by God in his presence.
- 2) We ask pardon for any lack of openness or response on our part, for any resistance or obstacle we maintained during prayer.
- 3) We commend ourselves to God and to the Blessed Virgin as we leave formal prayer. We place in their care all that happened in prayer and ask them to sustain that grace in us.

- 4) We formulate some reminder to carry with us throughout the day that will recall the grace of prayer and keep it active in our life.

17. Review of prayer. To preserve the dispositions acquired during prayer, we do not leave prayer too abruptly. Quietly and calmly we pass from prayer to more exterior occupations.

The effects of prayer are too precious to leave to chance. Therefore, at some moment after formal prayer, we review the preparation, manner of praying, and what we gained from it. This examination can take place either immediately after prayer or at some later time in the day. If we are unable to have a fixed time each day to review our prayer, we will examine it more thoroughly several times a week. The important thing is to give the fruits of prayer the care they need to become permanent dispositions in us.

The review of prayer will touch on the following points:

- 1) Our readiness for prayer: With what dispositions did we come to prayer—eager, reluctant, calm, disturbed, joyful, angry? We try to recall what desires we had as we came to pray.
- 2) Preparation of the topic: When did we choose the topic? What fruit did we desire from prayer?
- 3) Fidelity to the method: Did we follow the method most appropriate for us? (Until we know it by memory, it is helpful to have an outline of the common method of faith before our eyes while praying. An outline is given in the Appendix.
- 4) Interior movements: What feelings, desires, impulses do we remember having experienced during prayer? The purpose is to discern whether the movements are from my nature, from God, or from Satan, and to affirm those from God. (The rules for discernment are given in the next section).
- 5) Distractions: What distractions took our attention from God? What are the sources of those distractions?
- 6) Direction or resolution: What happened in prayer that we wanted to continue in our life?

We might be unable to review all the points each day, but we will always keep the review as part of the rhythm of our prayer life. To assure the integrity of the practice of reviewing our prayer, we should regularly give an account of our prayer life to someone—spiritual director, community director, head of zeal, or some similar person.

18: Discerning the interior movements of prayer. At every moment, God is present and active within us, attracting us to him and guiding us. All the more can we be confident that he is doing so during the time of prayer. Jesus told us that no one could come to him unless

the Father draws him. At the same time he assures us that he wants us to be with him in the Father.

This attraction by the Father registers within us. We can perceive it in the inner impulses, desires, moods, etc. The movements are there, although we are often unaware of them. Even so, if we are attentive to the movements within, we can notice God's action.

There is a difficulty, however. Interior movements can come from sources other than God. They can come from our false self or from evil spirits. To follow the movements of the Holy Spirit, we must be able to distinguish which movements come from God and which ones come from our false self or from Satan.

In general, the source of interior movements can be known by the direction they set for us and by the fruits they produce. Here are some signs to help discern what is from God and what is from elsewhere.

From God: (moves toward fullness of life of the new self in Christ)

- + We are drawn to a change of heart, to correct a fault, to improve our life.
- + We tend toward union with God in some form.
- + We desire to be faithful, to persevere in prayer, to pray better.
- + We experience inner peace, even in difficulty or suffering.
- + We feel sorrow for sin; attraction for virtue.
- + We find joy in the knowledge of self, even of our weakness and limitations.
- + We are willing to wait for God in patience.
- + We are drawn to trust in God.
- + We desire good for others and act in their behalf.

From my false self or from Satan: (moves toward gratifying and inflating our ego-built self)

- + We are drawn to reflect on, desire, or savor things which gratify our own self image, our "old self."
- + We find virtue unattractive.
- + Our aim is to feel good or to be complacent that we have prayed well.
- + Our focus is drawn from God to our self or other things.
- + We "put in time" at prayer as a duty or make it an act of penance.
- + We expect to be rewarded because we pray well.
- + We have an urge to stop praying.
- + We fear that God will not hear us or that we will be a failure at prayer.
- + We experience confusion, anxiety, or disquiet.
- + We experience distrust, discouragement, sustained guilt, or feeling rejected by God.

As we discern the source of the movements within us, we strive to leave aside or reject those coming from our own self or from Satan, and to follow those aroused by God through faith. These latter are God's action and gifts resonating in our nature. To follow them is to walk with Jesus in faith.

Many things, very good in their proper place, can prevent us from praying. For example, intellectual reflections that help us to understand but do not move us to change are useful study, but they are not prayer. Study is more an exercise of the intellect and judgment, whereas prayer is more an exercise of faith and movement of the heart.

Likewise we might spend our time improving our skills of ministry, like preparing a talk or preparing an approach to a counseling session. Clearly such activity is good, but it is not mental prayer. It can even be a ruse of Satan to prevent us from praying. During the time of prayer, nothing is more important than full attention on God.

19. Difficulties in prayer. There are three difficulties which we are certain to meet in prayer: distractions, affliction, and dryness. It is good to understand how to deal with them.

Distractions are any thoughts that take our focus off of God. During prayer, God is our only preoccupation. Thoughts that direct our attention away from him, whatever their nature, keep us from assimilating the gifts and consolations proffered by God in prayer.

Afflictions are any hurts, burdens, or sufferings that try us severely and make it painful for us to pray.

Dryness is the state of sensing no interior movements at all during prayer, which makes prayer seem as useless as it is, at that time, uninteresting.

In any of these difficulties, we first try to distinguish the causes. We examine the possibilities.

1) Infidelity to prayer. We check on our preparation for prayer and on fidelity to the method. We cannot hope to reap the benefits of prayer if we are not faithful to the providential means given to us.

2) Lack of purity of heart. Difficulties, especially distractions, often arise from undisciplined affections or from levity of spirit. The only harmful distractions are thoughts arising from some undisciplined love or emotional attachment, which gives our attention to some creature in preference to God. Thoughts which are simply the ongoing activity of the mind need not distract our attention from God. We can simply let them run their course, while we maintain ourself in God's presence. We can recognize a disordered attachment by our reluctance to turn our attention away from it to be fully present to God.

Levity of spirit is a form of immaturity that treats all things as though they were trivial and inconsequential. If that is our disposition, we will enjoy letting our mind wander aimlessly

during the time of prayer with no fixed purpose in mind. A sign of levity as a cause is that the distractions have no fixed aim, and they do not progress or lead to anything. They have no goal except flightiness.

Disordered affections and levity of spirit have their own consequences in preventing good effects from prayer in us. It is also possible, however, that God sometimes withholds himself from us in punishment for negligence or sin. To gift us with his grace when we are negligent or sinful would be an abomination.

3) Purification. Sometimes God withholds his consolation in prayer in order to make us aware of some sin or to purify us from certain attachments to our false self or to the world. Such purification by God's hand is always accompanied by means for greater progress in virtue or as a preparation for a greater gift from God. Sometimes God wants us to feel our separation from him in order to increase our desire for him. Sometimes he wishes to give us a greater awareness of our own condition and a deeper knowledge of him. Often purification is necessary in order for us to experience a new revelation or gift of the Holy Spirit. The purification itself may be a more intimate entrance into one of the mysteries of Jesus or Mary.

We know that a difficulty is a purification and not a punishment by three conditions: a) we remain faithful to prayer; b) we find no discernable inordinate affections or levity of spirit; and c) the presence of some signs that God is at work, as indicated above.

4) Call to a new grace. God does not bestow his gifts without careful preparation. Difficulties, especially dryness, might be necessary to open us to new gifts. If dryness in prayer is prolonged and the signs of fidelity and purity of heart are present, then dryness is a sign of a call to a new stage of prayer, a new kind of union with God.

Once we have discerned the cause of the difficulties we experience in prayer, we act accordingly, either to remove the obstacle or to respond to God's action within us. Here are some things that are always helpful:

- a) Persevere in prayer, faithful to the method.
- b) Surrender our whole self to the action of God in hope and interior calm. Turn to God as Jesus did in the desert.
- c) Be patient, willing to wait in confidence for God's own time.
- d) Express sorrow for any lack of openness to the Holy Spirit.
- e) Thank God for his goodness in our present state. It is a privilege just to be accepted and loved by God in such a state.
- f) Reflect on what God is saying through our present difficulty and what profit we can draw from it.
- g) Renew often our union with Jesus and Mary.

20. Continuous prayer: presence of God. “Then he told them a parable about the need to prayer continually and never to lose heart” (Lk 18:1). The best way to achieve continuous prayer is to live our whole day in the presence of God. How can we come to this habit?

The pivotal points of the practice of the presence of God are the periods of formal prayer. From formal prayer we carry with us some good effect and live it until the next period of prayer (an insight, an attitude, a desire, some behavior). During the time of prayer, we surrender ourselves to the influence of the Holy Spirit, and we allow our attitudes, convictions, and desires to be formed by that influence. As we leave prayer, we want to continue to live by those same dispositions, the attitudes and virtues of Christ himself. If we live in them, the transforming sentiments experienced during prayer gradually will color our whole day with all its preoccupations and works.

The practice of the presence of God goes back to our most fundamental relation with God—God is creator and we are created; he is the source of all good, and we are the recipients; he is infinite, and we are limited; in sum, God is the source of all, and we of nothing. Yet, this very God is within us sustaining, attracting, and transforming us. As this truth permeates our awareness, we gradually become sensitive to the movements of the Spirit in us during the day just as we do in prayer.

Of course, the practice of the presence of God is not continuous thought of God, but a sense of being in his presence. It means being familiar with God, accustomed to his presence. Progressively and almost naturally we begin to think, feel, and act everywhere influenced by the truth of God’s presence. The “new self” in us, being formed by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit during prayer, continues to live and grow strong outside of formal prayer.

As the presence of God becomes a constant reality for us, the mutual influence of prayer and the rest of our life becomes greater. Our lifestyle is shaped by what happens to us in prayer, and in turn our prayer is affected by the way we live our day. We gradually develop a state of attentiveness to God and of responsiveness to his call in all that we do.

By degrees, faith shapes our whole life through the practice of the presence of God.

21. The new self in the mysteries of Christ. When we want to acquire or change some attitude or disposition, an effective way is to pray one of the mysteries in which Christ lived that disposition. By “mystery” we mean any human experience of Jesus making God’s love visible, redeeming us, and returning to the Father.

Every mystery of Jesus has an external and internal aspect. Few of us will ever imitate Christ’s external mysteries; all of us are called to share in his internal mysteries. For example few of us will ever be crucified externally with Jesus; all of us must share in some way the interior experience of his spirit when he was crucified. The interior is the essential. Two criminals shared in the external mystery of the crucifixion with Jesus, but only one shared in his interior mystery—and entered paradise with him.

By using the common method of prayer of faith, we actually live through in prayer the interior experience or mystery with Jesus. In faith, we imagine what Jesus experienced in some event in his life, and we concentrate on his interior experience. For example, when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, what was going on inside of him? When he was tempted, or when he cured the paralytic, or when he forgave the penitent woman, what was happening inside of Jesus? When he rose from the dead—his interior dispositions during these mysteries are the aim of our prayer.

In faith we open ourselves to take on those same dispositions of Jesus in our life, to live through them with Jesus in our own experience. We desire the same dispositions as Jesus, and we need to live the experiences that form them in us. We ask the Holy Spirit to move us to union with Jesus in our interior attitudes.

Finally, in faith we resolve how we will live the particular mystery as we leave prayer to carry out our ministry.

All the interior mysteries of Christ are meant to be our experiences also. We are called to live them with Jesus in prayer and in life. Prayer prepares us to live them in ministry. Each mystery we pray and live with Jesus gives us a more abundant life and develops another facet of our new self in Christ.

22. The new self in the mysteries of Mary. All the mysteries of faith that were accomplished in Mary were announced to us also. They will take place in us to the degree of our faith. Mary is model, but she is also Mother. We are not simply to imitate her, but to share in the very same mysteries. We do not meditate on the mysteries of Mary only in order to admire her or even to be moved to do good, but in order to let the reality of her life resonate in us and form us in the image of Jesus. Every mystery of Mary was an experience of being redeemed or of sharing in the redemption of others. Those same mysteries will take place in us according to our union with Mary in them by faith. A mother communicates life through the union of love.

Let us take a few examples. At the Annunciation Mary heard God's word and surrendered to it. She believed that what God said would take place. She gave herself over to God's promise. We are called to relive that mystery many times in our life, even daily. At Cana, Mary asked for a very human favor, even against God's own timing. In her confidence she saw Jesus change his mind for her. He taught us to ask against all odds and persist until our prayer is answered. We are called to relive Cana in our life.

The mystery of Mary's love at the foot of the cross, her sustained presence to Jesus during the hour of his death, her fidelity in the moment of powerlessness—all these experiences are to be lived by us in order to bring life in abundance.

Mary prayed with the disciples for the coming of the Spirit, and she prayed with them until the Spirit came. How urgently we need to live that mystery today!

The mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception might seem to be beyond us. However, the interior mystery is meant to influence us as it did Mary. Aspects such as the gratuity of salvation, the careful preparation of grace by God's providence, the abundance of grace coming from God's love—these are all meant to be a part of our own experience.

Every mystery of Mary in which we participate forms our new self more and more in the image of Jesus. We enter these mysteries primarily through the common method of the prayer of faith.

23. Prayer and Ministry. We are called to imbue all good works with the interior spirit of Jesus. Our new self, developed through prayer, conditions us to do so. Prayer exercises and sustains us in all the virtues necessary for ministry, and therefore it is essential if we are to do all our work out of our new self. Just as God imbues and transforms us in prayer, so the fruits of prayer can imbue all our works and transform them.

The prayer of faith incites us to live the virtues of Jesus as we undertake our work.

It is true that we can do good works without praying, but there is something lacking. Even though we do some good, it is very little compared to the good that God wants to accomplish through us as a result of prayer.

Spiritual works can be done only by the Spirit. God does not call us to do works which we can accomplish without him. We are called to be ministers of his grace in some manner, and we can do so only in union with him through prayer. Our vocation directs us to an apostolate which only God's grace can effect. We are not dealing with our own personal matters, but with those of the Lord and his Mother.

Ministry is a normal consequence of prayer. We do not share in God's gifts for ourself alone. In prayer, God communicates to us his desire, his will for others. Therefore, the fruit of good prayer is zeal, a desire for the good that God wills for others. That zeal will sustain us in our ministry. Led solely by human wisdom, we fall short of our call and sink into discouragement. Through prayer, the Spirit of God enlightens and animates us in everything.

Appendix

A Common Method of the Prayer of Faith

1. **Choose a topic.** Determine topic and desired fruit ahead of time, according to need, attraction, or desired fruit: a passage from Scripture, a mystery of Jesus and Mary, a teaching of the Church, etc.

2. **Enter prayer.** Go to a place of prayer. Relax. Give full attention to God.

- a) Recall under some specific aspect who God is: Creator, Father, Source of Life, Ruler of the Universe.
- b) Unite self to Jesus, already praying for you.
- c) Unite self to Mary, forming you by her maternal love.
- d) Surrender to the Holy Spirit, gifting you.

3. **Pray in Faith.**

- a) Bring to mind the chosen topic. Reflect. Imagine details. Consider the meaning, importance.
- b) Examine how your behavior expresses the truth, mystery, or gift . . . or contradicts it.
- c) Notice inner movements—feelings, desires, tendencies. Express these movements
- d) consciously, savor the truth, insight, disposition, etc., until it takes root in your mind, heart, will.

Repeat the above process on the next point or aspect of topic.

4. **Conclude.**

- a) Thank God for the graced time of prayer.
- b) Ask pardon for any lack of response or openness.
- c) Commend yourself to God, the Blessed Virgin. Place all that happened in their care.
- d) Carry with you an interior remembrance of the grace of prayer.

5. **Review.** At some time after the formal prayer, review briefly the experience, going over the points given above. This will renew and affirm once more the grace of your prayer.

Scripture Quotes

(Relating to text in the document)

1. Foundation of our life.

Ps 33:6-9 (By God's word all was made)
Jn 1:2-4 (All was made through the Word)
Rv 4:11 (By God's will everything was made)

Ps 139:1-8 (God knows me thoroughly)
Jn 15:4-7 (The vine and the branches)
Jn 17:21-26 (One in the Lord)

Jer 24:7 (Change of heart)
Ez 11:19, 18:31, 36:26 (A new heart)

1 Thes 5:23 (Body, psyche, spirit)
Rom 8:5-11 (Live in the spirit)

2. The gift of life.

Hos 2:26 (Calls us into the desert of our heart to speak to us)
Jn 1:4 (Life in Christ)
Ps 139:13-18 (Wonderfully made)
Rom 8:6-11 (Death in the unspiritual)
Jn 10:10 (Jesus came to give life to the full)
Dt 30:15-20 (Life is ours to choose)

3. In God's image.

Gn 1:27 (Created in the image of God)
1 Jn 3:2 (We shall be like him)
Mt 5:45-48 (Act like the Father and become like him)

4. A work of God and us.

Mt 25:14-30 (Parable of the talents)
Lk 12:22-32 (God's providence)
Lk 10:11 (Jesus sends the seventy-two)
Col 1:15-20 (Jesus is the image of God)
Rom 8:28-30 (God cooperates with us to make all things work unto good)

5. God is always ready to bless us.

Lk 17:20-21 (Kingdom is here and within)
Phil 3:12-16 (Still striving in Christ)
Mt 7:7-8 (Ask, seek, knock)
Jn 14:20, 23; 15:7 (God abides in our spirit)

6. Faith.

Mk 1:15 (Repent and believe)
1 Jn 2:20, 27 (We are anointed and taught by the Holy Spirit)
Jn 6:44 (Cannot go to the Father unless drawn by him)
1 Cor 13:12 (Grasp God as a reflection)
Jn 20:29 (Believe without seeing)
Heb 11:1 ff (Examples of faith which justifies)

7. Prayer of faith.

Lk 10:41-42 (Martha and Mary)
Dt 30:16 (Obey and be blessed)
Mk 11:22-24 (Whatever you ask, believe you already have it)
1 Kgs 18:41-46 (Elijah believes his prayer for rain is answered before there are any signs)
Eph 4:23-24 (The new self in the spirit)
Lk 18:9-14 (Two men went to the temple to pray)

8. Purity of heart: necessary disposition for prayer.

Ex 33:18-23 (Who can see God and live)
Ps 24:3-4 (Who can stand in holiness)
Lk 12:36-39 (Ready, watching for the master)
Mt 6:24 (Cannot serve two masters)
Lk 9:23 (Renounce self, take up your cross)
Ps 46:10 (Be still and know I am God)

9. Resistance of the old self.

Rom 7:14-25 (Our inner conflict)
Jn 2:16 (Definition of the “world”)
Mt 6:1-6 (Earning the applause of others)
Mt 7:24-27 (Build on rock, not sand)
Ps 2 (The uproar of the nations)

Lk 22:24-27 (Who is the greatest)
Lk 12:16-21 (Building bigger barns)
Jn 12:24-25 (Unless the grain dies)

10. Emergence of the new self.

Lk 5:36-39 (New wine, new skins)
Rom 8:5-11, 14-17 (The new self in the Spirit)
Gal 5:18 (Led by the Spirit)
Rom 7:15-20 (Inner conflict)
Gal 5:17-26 (Contrast of flesh and spirit)

11. Jesus, model of the new self.

Rom 7:24 (Rescued through Christ)
Rom 8:1-4 (Jesus became sin for us)
1 Jn 2:20, 27:29 (Anointed by the Spirit)
Gal 5:19-23 (Effects of the flesh and the spirit)

12. Our heart formed in Jesus.

2 Cor 5:17 (We are a new creation in Christ)
Jn 7:37-39 (Life from within us)
1 Pt 1:13-15 (Obedience to Christ)

13. Choosing topics for prayer.

Mt 7:7-8 (Ask, seek, knock)

14. Entering into prayer.

Acts 17:28 (In him we move, act, have being)
Heb 5:7 (Christ offered prayer and entreaty)
Heb 7:24-25 (Christ interceding for us)
Heb 4:14-16 (A priest for us)
Phil 3:9-12 (Perfection only through Christ)
Phil 2:5-11 (Have the mind of Christ)
Jn 13:15 (Example of Christ is our pattern)
Eph 4:15-16 (Grow into Christ)
Jn 13:8 (Allow Christ to wash me)
Lk 1:26-38 (The annunciation)

Lk 2:6-7 (The nativity)
Lk 2:51-52 (Jesus was subject to them)
Jn 14:26 (He will teach you all things)
Rom 8:26 (Spirit helps us in our weakness)
Gal 5:22 (Spirit produces his fruit in us)

15. Praying: a common method.

Is 55:10-11 (God's word has its effect)
Ps 34:8 (Taste and see)
1 Pt 2:2-3 (Nurture the new self in Christ)
1 Cor 12:3 (Cannot acknowledge Jesus as Lord except in the Spirit)
Jn 15:5-7 (Vine and branches)

16. Concluding formal prayer. (No quotations)

17. Review of prayer. (No quotations)

18. Discerning the interior movements of prayer.

Jn 6:44 (Unless the Father draw us . . .)
Jn 16: 23-24 (Ask, your joy will be complete)
1 Jn 4:1 (Test every spirit)
Mt 7:17-19 (By their fruits you shall know them)
Mt 6:6 (Pray in private, in your heart)

19. Difficulties in prayer.

Lk 19:15-26 (Use of talents received)
Mt 15:15-20 (What comes from the heart defiles)
1 Pt 1:6-7 (Trials to purify us)
Heb 12:5-13 (God corrects, trains by suffering)

20. Continuous prayer: presence of God.

Gal 2:20 (Our life is Christ in us)
1 Cor 10:31 (Do all for the glory of God)

21. The new self in the mysteries of Christ.

Phil 3:10 (All I want to know is Christ)
Rom 6:5 (Imitate the death and resurrection of Jesus)
Jn 15:20-21 (Disciple like the master)
Col 1:24 (Make up what is lacking in Christ's body)

22. The new self in the mysteries of Mary.

Lk 1:45 (Word believed is fulfilled)
Lk 1:26-38 (The Annunciation)
Jn 2:1-11 (Wedding at Cana)
Lk 11:5-8 (Importunate friend)
Jn 19:25-27 (Mary on Calvary)
Acts 1:14 (Praying for the coming of the Spirit)
Acts 1:8 (Receive power, then witness)
Acts 3:12-16 (Work by the power of Jesus)
Lk 9:1-6 (The twelve are sent out)
Lk 10:1-10 (The seventy-two are sent out)
1 Pt 4:10-11 (Each one has a grace for the service of others)

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