

Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy

PRAYING FOR OTHERS AND FOR OURSELVES

by: Rev. Matthew Furgiuele

11th in a series— Diocese of Gaylord



November is the month in which, according to Christian tradition, we pray in a special way for the dead. As we come to the end of the jubilee year of mercy, it is good for us to reflect on the importance of praying for others and also for ourselves. One of the greatest afflictions of contemporary humanity is activism: the idea that we have to do everything for ourselves, and that consequently our value comes from what we produce. How different is God's perspective. We see this in the parable of the barren fig tree (Lk 13:6-9). God is always full of mercy and it is never too late to change; however, without prayer this is impossible. Prayer then is the means we have to be in right relation with God and to experience the depth and the fullness of his love for us. As St. Alphonsus Liguori tells us in his treatise *The Great Means of Prayer*, "Those who pray will be saved and those who do not will be damned!" This should console us rather than frighten us, because it makes it clear to us that by means of prayer we shall be saved.

Consider this: of all that Jesus had to suffer out of love for us, his greatest sorrow was when he was abandoned in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus wanted to be accompanied, and so he took Peter James and John with him, but they slept instead of keeping watch with him. When we pray, we are accompanying Jesus, especially when we are able to do so in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, either in a tabernacle in Church, or when it is exposed in adoration. Even when we are unable to make it to a church or a chapel, we should still pray, because Jesus told us that hidden prayer is very pleasing to God (Mt. 6:6).

St. Teresa of Avila is a master of prayer, yet she gives a very simple definition of it: "mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who, we know, loves us." (Life, 8). How much we all need to be reminded of this marvelous truth: God loves us. When we pray, we experience the love that God has for us, and, in experiencing that love, we are moved to give it to others.

St. Pio of Pietrelcina used to give one very simple piece of advice to the multitude of pilgrims who sought him out: "pray, hope, don't worry." How wonderful it would be, and how many less preoccupations would we have if we could learn to live in that way. Prayer gives us hope, because it allows us to have a relationship with God, and, as St. Paul tells

us: “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rm 8:31). Once we have that hope that comes from prayer, “all your worries, all your sufferings, physical or moral, pass away.” (St. Josemaria Escriva, *The Way of the Cross*, Second Station).

Prayer is the means we have of imitating Jesus who “did not come to be served but to serve.” (Mk. 10:45) and this is why our prayer must be not only for ourselves but also for others. We must learn to make prayer the first thing we do: “First, prayer; then, atonement; in the third place, very much 'in the third place', action.” (St. Josemaria Escriva, *The Way*, 82). The more we pray, the greater will be our concern for others, and consequently the more our life will be a life of service, one in which we love God above all else and our neighbor as ourself. (Mt. 22:37-40).

As Pope Francis reminds us, “[t]his is what prayer does: it transforms the desire and models it according to the will of God, whatever that may be, because the one who prays aspires first of all to union with God, who is merciful Love.” (General Audience May 25th 2016). He reinforces this when he points out that “Pride compromises every good deed, empties prayer, creates distance from God and from others. If God prefers humility it is not to dishearten us: rather, humility is the necessary condition to be raised by Him, so as to experience the mercy that comes to fill our emptiness. If the prayer of the proud does not reach God’s heart, the humility of the poor opens it wide. God has a weakness for the humble ones. Before a humble heart, God opens his heart entirely.” (General Audience June 1st 2016).

Let us all end this jubilee of mercy by asking God to grant us the humility to recognize ourselves as we are, like the tax collector in the parable (Lk. 18:9-14), who was “certain only that he is a sinner in need of mercy.” (General Audience June 1st 2016).