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our Savior...

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# The GOODNESS *of our* SAVIOR



*To Those Who  
Trust Him*

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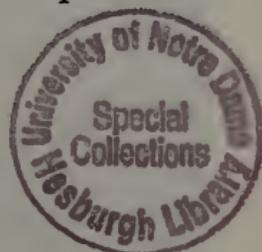
Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration  
Clyde, Missouri

# The Goodness of Our Savior to Those Who Trust Him



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*Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration  
Clyde, Missouri*



"Come to Me, all you who labor and  
are burdened, and I will give  
you rest" (Matt. xi. 28).



# The Goodness of Our Savior to Those Who Trust Him



HATEVER may be the nature of trials and afflictions, whether they concern the mind or the heart, the soul or the body, whether they pertain to our eternal or to our temporal welfare, whether they be new or old, of long or short duration, one power alone is capable of alleviating them, and that is *the power of the infinitely wise and merciful God.* Our Heavenly Father has promised to aid without fail those who turn to Him with unwavering *faith.* In His infinite goodness and mercy, He is ever attentive

to the needs of His creatures, but before He exercises His mercy in their behalf He requires of them a lively faith in His power and goodness.

What was it that *wrested* so many favors from our Divine Lord during His earthly life? It was *faith* — firm faith, not only in His power but also in His willingness to help in troubles and afflictions. “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him who believes,” He said to one who called upon His assistance (Mark ix. 22). In healing all kinds of diseases, in raising the dead to life, did He not attribute these miracles solely to *faith*? He did not say, “Because you forgave your enemies,” “Because you kept My commandments,” etc., but, “Because you *believed* you are cured.” “Thy *faith* has saved thee” (Matt. ix. 22). Faith, then, or child-like *trust* in His paternal goodness, is the fundamental requisite for obtaining help from God in all our needs. If we wish to receive the benefits of God’s goodness, our cry must ever be, like that of the afflicted father in the Gospel: “I do believe; help my unbelief” (Mark ix. 23).

## Consolation in Spiritual Trials



NOWHERE are we in greater need of God's merciful assistance than in the spiritual trials which constantly assail us. The infallible teachings of Holy Scripture assure us that the spiritual life is a continual warfare. Our own personal experience confirms this teaching. A man must be constantly armed in order to defend himself against enemies both from within and without. The enemies of *his own household*, his evil inclinations, his passions, his self-love, seek to seduce him under a thousand pretexts and artifices. From without he must wage battle against the influence of bad example, human respect, the allurements of the world, and the evil spirit, who in his jealousy has sworn unceasing warfare against the happiness of mankind. From all these sources man is assailed by temptations, against which he must be ever on his guard.

Temptations, however, are by no means a sign that a soul is displeasing to God or has been forsaken by Him. They are for the most part *trials*, which, if properly met

and combated, purify the soul and increase its merit for heaven. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation," says the Apostle St. James, "for when he has been tried, he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love Him" (i. 12). And St. Peter admonishes: "Over *this* you rejoice, though now for a little while if need be you are made sorrowful by various trials, *that the temper of your faith* — more precious by far than gold which is tried by fire — *may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" (1st Epis. i. 6, 7).

True it is that sometimes by means of temptations the all-just God brings us under the rod of correction for certain weaknesses, for negligence in His service, for tepidity or presumption, or for natural inclinations which the heart cherishes too keenly. But in any case we must look upon them in the spirit of faith and with confidence that God will grant us the victory if we hope in Him.

In the interior storms which so often break upon us, we sometimes feel that the hand of the Lord is sustaining us in the contest and we fight valiantly against our

passions. The thought of the presence of God and the desire to please Him rouses our courage and confidence. But sometimes God, so to say, *conceals* Himself. He appears to sleep, as He once slept in the little barque with His disciples, while the storm threatens to destroy us. But even in such critical moments there is nothing to fear. God never forsakes those who place their trust in Him. If we have recourse to Him immediately in prayer, as the disciples did, He will still the waves of passion and temptation.

The Apostle St. Paul, who endured the most severe temptations and tribulations, assures us: "God is faithful, and will not permit you to be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also give you a way out that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. x. 13). Even when we think Our Lord is far from us, He is in the midst of our heart. Our Lord Himself revealed this to St. Catherine of Siena. Once after she had overcome a very severe temptation in which she had feared to be defeated, Our Lord appeared to her. She lovingly reproached Him and asked Him where He had been when she was struggling

with the terrible temptation shortly before. Our Lord replied that He had been in the midst of her heart, sustaining her in the struggle and rejoicing in the efforts she had made to overcome it. So, even though we may at times think Our Lord has forgotten us, He is thinking of us more than ever, since we then have most need of Him. He perceives our struggles and strengthens us, and if we do not lose confidence, He will lead us to victory over our enemies.

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## Mercy for Sinners

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IT IS especially toward *sinners* that God manifests His infinite goodness and mercy. The soul burdened by sin ought especially to rise to our Savior on the wings of confidence and trust. *The mercy of God is infinite.* It is the Divine perfection toward which sinners unceasingly stretch forth their hands — the attribute which at all times is ready to receive the contrite sinner with open arms. The mercy of God does not reject even the most miserable sinner; on the contrary, it shows itself most mild and generous towards

him, and where sin formerly abounded, it causes grace to abound. It would seem as if the mercy of God, finding no misery to relieve in heaven, came down to earth to find creatures steeped in misery upon which to lavish its treasures. Truly does David say: "The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord" (Ps. xxxii. 5). So bountiful is God's mercy that a few contrite words of self-accusation blot out the judgments of His strict justice, and a single contrite tear washes away the punishment of eternal damnation.

Our merciful Savior willingly pardons even the greatest sinner. We need but recall the example of the woman accused of adultery, of the public sinner, Magdalen, of Zaccheus, of the publican, of the repentant thief on the cross. Jesus Himself went in search of sinners. He even ate with them, although as a consequence He had to endure bitter persecution. How consoling are the parables of the prodigal son, of the lost sheep, of the drachma that was lost and found, all of which represent the pardon of sinners. Why, then, should sinners fear?

If our sins be as numerous as the sands

on the seashore, as bloody as the treason of Judas, as terrible as the denial of Peter, as abominable as the adultery of David, let us still have confidence, for God's mercy is *boundless*. Our crimes can never exceed His mercy and His goodness. The only requisite is a *good will*. If we have had the misfortune to lose the grace of God by sin, let us strike our breast contritely as did the publican in the temple and pray with him, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Let us show the leprosy of our soul in all sincerity to Christ's representative in the tribunal of penance. St. John assures us: "If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity" (1 John i. 9).

Nor need we fear the power of evil habits. He who gave us the will to reform will also aid us in executing our resolution. With St. Paul we must exclaim: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil. iv. 13). We are not expected to accomplish everything at once. Since God had patience with us as long as we were in sin, will He not take compassion on us when we wish to change our life? Let us

take courage then! To doubt His mercy is sinful. Let us think of the Passion of our Savior. Our Lord would not have suffered so much for us had He not desired to save us.

## **Consoling Promises of the Old Law**

The Divinely inspired psalmist, King David, exclaims: "Bless the Lord, O my soul... Who forgiveth all thy iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases. Who redeemeth thy life from destruction... thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle's... The Lord is compassionate and merciful; long-suffering and plenteous in mercy... nor will He threaten forever. He hath not dealt with us according to our sins... As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him... He remembereth that we are dust" (Ps. cii).

Through the Prophet Isaias, God testifies: "I am He that blots out thy iniquities for My own sake, and I will not remember thy sins" (xliii. 25). "Before they call I will hear" (lxv. 24). "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow, and if they be red as crimson, they shall

be white as wool" (i. 18). And again, through the Prophet Ezechiel: "As I live, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (xxxiii. 11). And through the Prophet Joel: "Turn to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful... and ready to repent of the evil" (ii. 13).

How often, too, does not God assure us in the psalms: "If they will cry out to Me, I will hear their cry"? Yes, innumerable passages of Holy Scripture assert that God's love extends from the rising of the sun even to the going down thereof; that He excludes no one from His merciful omnipotence; that He is ever ready to lend a willing ear to a contrite prayer.

### Promises of the New Law

The promises of the New Law are still more encouraging. Our Lord Himself says, "I have come to call *sinners*, not the just" (Matt. ix. 13). And again, "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them" (John xx. 23) — which means *all* without exception, the greatest as well as the least. He invites *all* to come to Him: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are

burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). At another time He says: "It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick" (Matt. ix. 12).

The Apostle Paul encourages us to "draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. iv. 16). The Blessed Virgin Mary proclaimed the mercy of God when she said: "And for generation upon generation is His mercy to those who fear Him" (Luke i. 50). These are but a few of the Scriptural texts which show forth God's readiness to assist those who call upon Him in their needs. Why, then, should any sinner, even the most depraved, hesitate to cast himself into the arms of the all-merciful God and implore forgiveness?

### **How God Manifests His Mercy towards Sinners**

We poor sinful creatures find great difficulty in forgiving an injury done to us, or in remitting without recompense the satisfaction due to us. Especially is this experienced by those of high rank when they have been offended by someone of low

social standing, since the offense is the greater, the greater the dignity of the one who has been offended and the more lowly the condition of the offender. Consider, then, the greatness of the offense when the Lord of infinite majesty is offended by a sinner, who, in comparison to God, is less than a worm, a mere handful of dust. Who will deny that an offense against the great Lord of heaven and earth gives Him the right to hurl into the abyss of hell the presumptuous creature who dares to insult Him?

But, oh infinite wonder of Divine goodness! The outraged God seems to forget the greatness of His majesty and is silent at the affront received. The almighty and all-holy God bears patiently with the arrogant worm of earth who has dared to despise Him. He keeps back the just punishment which He could so easily mete out to him. And not only does He keep back the punishment, but when a sinner with sincere contrition sighs over his misdeeds, God regards him with as much love as if he had not sinned. He not only forgives the sin committed, but receives the sinner back into His grace, embraces him as a

dear child, and shows him the most tender love, the love of a father for his son. All Christians believe this truth. Yet few seriously consider the infinite condescension of God in this wonderful act of mercy, or are moved to gratitude when meditating on it. Because this exceeding mercy is offered to them every day as a general benefit, they pay little or no heed to it.

This Divine gift of mercy is so sublime, that St. Augustine says: "The forgiveness of sins is a greater wonder than was the creation of heaven and earth." The devout spiritual writer, Ven. Martin von Cochem, develops this thought in the following manner: "When God wished to create the world, He but spoke the words: 'Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters... let the dry land appear' (Gen. i. 6, 9), and heaven and earth sprang into being without exertion on the part of the Creator, who thus formed them from nothing.

"But when God wishes to convert a sinner and drive sin out of his soul, what great exertion, what labor it costs Him, because sin is rooted so deeply in the human heart and resists even the power of Almighty God. Sin hardens the heart of

the sinner and causes him to reject all good inspirations. It presents to his mind the sweet and pleasing aspects of evil and so charms him as to cause him to defy God and to become obstinate in sin. Because God will not force the sinner, though He desires most ardently to convert him, He approaches him with all kindness and employs every possible means to bring him to a better state of mind and to lead him to repentance. When God meets with resistance on the part of the sinner, His *justice* urges Him to punish the guilty one. His *mercy*, however, keeps His justice from inflicting the punishment and seeks by manifold means to lead the sinner to conversion."

## **God's Dealings with Sinners**

Just as a subject who has gravely offended a great prince uses every means to become reconciled to him and to regain his favor, so a sinner ought to employ the greatest zeal and diligence to appease God, and to attain once more to His grace and love. He should strive for the greatest compunction of heart, should bewail his sins day and night and perform earnest

and sincere penance because he has offended the highest of kings, the Lord of heaven and earth. Such should be the ordinary course of a sinner. God has the right to demand this of him and the sinner ought to consider it the greatest happiness if he can appease the just anger of God in any manner.

God's mercy, however, is so bountiful and extends so far that the whole world must be astounded at His dealings with sinners. For He does not wait till the sinner himself desires forgiveness. He *anticipates* his desire and offers him abundant graces to obtain forgiveness. And when the sinner is moved to desire forgiveness, God gives it to him *the very first instant* that he turns to Him with a contrite heart. He forgives him so completely that He no longer remembers the offenses by which the sinner has merited His displeasure. And God not only forgives his sins, but gives him inestimable graces besides, for He restores to him the whole treasure of his former merits.

God rejoices when a sinner accepts His forgiveness, His gifts and benefits. Our Savior tells us: "There will be joy in heav-

en over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance" (Luke xv. 7). The good God rejoices over the conversion of one sinner as if He Himself had received the benefit. The wonders of God's forgiving mercy will appear all the more marvelous in the light of the following facts:—

1. It is a fundamental Christian truth that a sinner would never think of conversion if the goodness of God did not give him the grace beforehand and inspire him with the thought of conversion. This the holy Psalmist David affirms in Psalm xx, when he says: "Thou hast prevented him with blessings of sweetness!" And again: "Thou art my protector. My God, His mercy shall prevent me" (Ps. lviii. 11). Verily the goodness of God is so great that, although He has been so grievously offended, He, nevertheless, *seeks out sinners* and, as it were, entreats them to make peace with Him. He inspires them with good thoughts and admonishes, yes, *begs* them, we might say, to reject sin and lead an upright life. He commands the guardian angels of sinners to urge them to repentance and to use all means to gain their

conversion. He inspires virtuous persons to offer them salutary exhortations, or He admonishes them through preachers and confessors, as well as by pious writings. He has given to priests the faculty and power to absolve every contrite sinner in order to give to the sinner a concrete sign of the forgiveness He Himself imparts.

But if these many entreaties of His immeasurable love fail to bring sinners to a better state of mind, our Heavenly Father uses stronger means. He has recourse to misfortunes and trials. He sends troubles, sickness and difficulties of one kind or another so that the sinner may be forced, as it were, to become converted to Him.

2. When a sinner of his own accord desires conversion, God does not deliberate long before granting it to him. He does not make him beg a long time for forgiveness, but mercifully grants pardon without delay, the very moment the contrite sinner desires it. Witness the example of the penitent thief on the cross, of St. Mary Magdalen and countless others narrated in the Gospel.

3. So great is the mercy of our loving God that He not only forgives the contrite

sinner immediately, but *He blots from His remembrance the sins and offenses committed against Him.* This boundless mercy is beyond all human conceiving. It is hard for even an ordinary person to forgive, and still harder for one of rank and nobility, but to *forget* entirely when one has been grievously offended is, without question, almost impossible. God, however, is so infinitely good that He is moved by the contrition of a sinner and *forgets* each offense, however grave it may have been. It would be hard for us to believe this truth had not God Himself revealed it to us in saying: “If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed, and keep all My commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. *I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done;* in his justice which he hath wrought, he shall live” (Ezech. xviii. 21, 22).

With respect to *good works*, God’s dealings with men is different, for He never forgets our good works, even though we have become His enemy by sin. It is indeed true that a man loses the whole treasure of his merits as soon as he commits a

mortal sin; but God preserves these merits for him, and when he returns to Him by penance, God restores all to him. This is indeed an ineffable mercy on the part of God.

4. When a sinner seeks forgiveness from God, God not only forgives him, but *gives him new graces*. According to the Ven. Martin von Cochem, His love for the repentant sinner is greater than it was before he committed sin because his new claim to mercy has moved God to bestow upon him new gifts. "For," says Father von Cochem, "just as we feel more tenderly toward those to whom we have shown some act of kindness, so God's love increases towards repentant sinners. When God grants forgiveness to sinners, it is not a formal and unfruitful remission of sin. It is a new and stronger tie of the bond of friendship. God wishes to preserve this bond forever and desires that it should not be broken by renewed sins. This new friendship has the following characteristics: First, God restores the sinner to the state of grace and with it gives him all the merits and supernatural goods which he had acquired or had been endowed with,

in so complete and just a degree that he does not forfeit the least of his spiritual riches. Secondly, He raises him to a new degree of merit and gives him graces which he did not possess before. Thirdly, this new grace is a seal and pledge of reconciliation which is to remain forever.

We have a beautiful example of this loving mercy of God in the manner in which He granted forgiveness to the thief on the cross when He said: "Amen, I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with Me in paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43). We see the tenderness of God's mercy also in the prodigal son who, when he returned to his father and acknowledged his sins with sincere sorrow, was lovingly embraced by his father, was clothed with costly robes, entertained at a great banquet and reinstated in his inheritance, or, to say it more truly, was given a *new* inheritance. In like manner, God rejoices when a sinner accepts His graces and is converted to Him.

Our Savior told the parable of the lost sheep to make men understand in some degree how great is the joy of the Divine Shepherd when a strayed member of His flock returns to Him.

We find the story related in the Gospel of St. Luke: "What man of you having a hundred sheep, and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it upon his shoulders, rejoicing. And on coming home he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them: 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep which was lost.' I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance" (xv. 4-7).

Is not this a beautiful comparison to make us understand God's love for sinners? Are not these loving words? To us it would seem that the lost sheep should rejoice more than the shepherd because it has been saved from the danger of being torn to pieces by wolves and has been brought back to the fold where it may again enjoy the protection of the faithful shepherd. However, Our Lord apparently wishes to congratulate the shepherd more than the sheep. For, as He loves the sheep infinitely more than it loves itself, so His

joy over its salvation is much greater than could be that of the sheep. Our Lord even adds that not He alone rejoices, *but that the whole heavenly court* celebrates a new feast of joy at the conversion of every sinner.

## The Treasury of God's Mercy Is Inexhaustible

St. Jerome says, regarding the infinite greatness of Divine mercy: "If you can tell me how great God is, you can also tell me how great His mercy is." He means to say that just as God Himself is infinite, so also His mercy is infinite, inexpressible and unfathomable. Come, then, poor sinner, and draw from this ocean of Divine mercy as much as you will and as much as you can, and do not be afraid that the enormity and grievousness of your sins will surpass this infinite ocean. For if you had committed all the sins in the world and if the least of your sins exceeded the greatest sin imaginable, nevertheless, all your sins, *if you were sorry for them out of love for God*, would be entirely swallowed up and blotted out by the great ocean of Divine mercy. Just as you could

not dry up the ocean by throwing a spark of fire into it, so neither can you dry up the ocean of Divine mercy by your sins, no matter how enormous their guilt.

Neither can the mercy of God be restricted at any time. Every day and at every hour, until the very last moment of your life, He is ready to forgive your sins; and not only the first time you commit sin, but "seventy times seven" times (Matt. xviii. 22), that is, times without limit. If you had fallen back into sin a hundred thousand times, but with *true contrition* again begged God for forgiveness, His infinite mercy would forgive you this great number of sins, and every time would bestow on you the untold benefits mentioned above. A single tear of contrition falling from the eyes of a sinner, a single word of repentance uttered by his lips, or a single sigh rising from his contrite heart is sufficient to obtain the forgiveness of his sins.\*

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\*We must distinguish here between *perfect* and *imperfect* contrition. *Perfect* contrition is sorrow for our sins because by them we have offended God, whom we love. *Imperfect* contrition is sorrow for our sins because we fear God and dread His punishment. *Imperfect* contrition is sufficient to obtain the forgiveness of

We need but a firm confidence in God in order to obtain abundant graces from Him. He desires more ardently to give graces to us than we desire to receive them. If all men had but the least degree of the longing which God has for their sanctification, the whole world would become a new heaven and every soul would become like a seraph in the ardor of its love for God. The desire which God has for our salvation and our bliss is so great that He sent His only-begotten Son from heaven to earth in order to redeem us and to make us blessed. “For God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting” (John iii. 16).

The desire of Jesus Christ for our salvation is no less great than that of His Father, for, as the Evangelist St. Luke tells sins in the sacrament of penance, although perfect contrition is more to be desired. *Perfect* contrition, however, is capable of reconciling the sinner with God and of wiping out all punishment due to sin, even outside of confession, but the sinner must have the desire and the intention to confess his sins as soon as he has an opportunity to do so.

us, it was for the salvation of sinners that He came into the world: “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save what was lost” (xix. 10). To do this, “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even to death on a cross” (Phil. ii. 7, 8).

Each one of us can truly say with St. Augustine: “O my Jesus, what great ardor and what great love hast Thou shown in redeeming my soul! For I was lost and had made myself a slave of sin. But Thou didst come in Thy own person to seek me and to sacrifice Thy life for me. Thou, O Jesus, hast loved me more than I have loved Thee, because Thou didst wish to die for me.” Yes, Jesus has done this not only for St. Augustine, but for every one of us. The intense desire to suffer and to die for *every* man caused Him to exclaim: “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how distressed I am until it is accomplished” (Luke xii. 50). And when He was dying on the Cross, He cried out with a loud voice: “I thirst!” By this cry He wanted to reveal the intensity of His desire

for the salvation of souls. Must we not admit, then, that God desires our salvation more than we ourselves desire it, since we do and suffer so very little in order to obtain it?

## The Sin of Presumption

In placing his confidence in God's mercy, however, a person must remember that although every sinner may *hope* for Divine mercy, yet he must not tempt God by *presumptuous* trust. Presumption is a terrible sin and worthy of damnation. When great sinners are admonished to do penance and to begin a better way of life, or if they are perhaps threatened with the punishment of hell on account of their wicked deeds, they sometimes say: "God is merciful. He will not condemn anyone, but will forgive sinners and bring all to eternal happiness." In support of their words they offer such assurances as the promise of God in Holy Scripture which says that if the sinner cries to God, He will forgive him his sins. Or again, they will say: "If Christ wanted to condemn us, He would not have suffered for us." Hardened sinners who allege these or similar objec-

tions and excuses are presumptuous in relying on the mercy of God. Since they do not repent of their sins, they rather sin the more boldly because God is so infinitely merciful. But how greatly will they lament when God's justice is forced to condemn them because by their resistance to grace they have rejected His mercy.

Whoever perseveres in sin throughout his entire life, relying on being converted at the end, will meet a fate similar to that of the godless King Antiochus. This wicked king, when he was in danger of death, earnestly called upon God and promised to make good the injuries he had done to the Jews, and even vowed to accept the Jewish religion, yet he was not heard by God, because his heart was not contrite. Holy Scripture says of him: "Then this wicked man prayed to the Lord, of whom he was not likely to obtain mercy" (2 Mach. ix. 13). The presumptuous sinner who *postpones his conversion till the end of his life* will not be given the graces which he scorned and rejected many times over. Out of fear of hell, he may call upon God, but how can he hope thereby to obtain mercy? Has not Our Lord de-

clared: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. vii. 21) ?

Regarding those who refuse God's mercy, the Book of Proverbs says: "Because I called and you refused, I stretched out My hand and there was none that regarded. You have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprobations. I also will laugh in your destruction and will mock when that shall come to pass which you feared. When sudden calamity shall fall on you, and destruction, as a tempest, shall be at hand; when tribulation and distress shall come upon you; then shall they call upon Me and I will not hear; they shall rise in the morning and shall not find Me; because they have hated instruction and received not the fear of the Lord" (i. 24-29).

These are such terrible words of threat that no one would have dared to utter them if the Holy Spirit had not Himself incorporated them into Holy Scripture. For what man would dare say that the good God, who has such tender sympathy for all sufferers, would not have pity on the most miserable of sinners? How can this be ex-

plained? It is the *due reward* of such sinners as those who have perseveringly contemned the most high God, have mocked Him because of His threats, have misused His mercy, have ridiculed His justice, have rejected His proffered graces and wantonly angered His infinite Majesty. *Let sinners, therefore, beware of falling into the grievous sin of presumption, but accept the grace of God while it is offered to them.*

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## Help in Temporal Needs and Afflictions

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THE Gospel narratives of Our Lord's public life recount an unbroken chain of mercies toward the needy and afflicted. A touch of His almighty hand, a word from His sacred lips, and the blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed; the withered hand is restored, palsied limbs become normal, fevers abate, and the issue of blood ceases. At His word the most dreadful diseases disappear, lunatics are restored to sanity and demons are driven out. It is as easy

for Him to perform these miracles at a distance as when He is near the afflicted person. The holy Gospel says of Him: "Power went forth from Him and healed all" (Luke vi. 19). Yes, He even raised the dead to life.

## **Prayer, Our Means of Access to God's Goodness**

But if we wish to benefit by the surpassing goodness and power of Almighty God, we must *ask* Him for His blessings by prayer. *Prayer is the point of contact between man and God.* It is the one and only means of communication between the visible and the invisible world. Prayer brings God down to us and raises us up to God. Prayer brings us into touch with the world beyond the veil of material things, to the true realities of life which can be seen only with the eyes of the spirit.

Prayer is defined as the elevation of our hearts and minds to God to offer Him our homage, adoration and love, to thank Him for His benefits, to obtain from Him pardon of our sins and the remission of their punishment, and to ask Him for favors which we need for ourselves or others.

Prayer, then, means going to our Creator with all our worries, troubles and cares, telling Him about them, and asking Him to help us. It means letting Him know how much we love Him. It means telling Him how weak we are. It means begging Him to give us assistance. It means expressing our gratitude for all His benefits to us.

## **Our Need of Recourse to God by Prayer**

Can it be necessary to explain *why* we *need* to pray? Is there anyone who has not himself experienced the need of recourse to God in prayer? How many and varied are the unpleasant incidents to which man falls a prey during life! In this valley of time, where trials, disappointments, ill-health, failure, misfortune, poverty, abandonment, ingratitude of friends, intrigues of enemies, death of relatives and friends, and a thousand forms of hindrances and obstacles daily confront us and cause us vexation, trouble, discouragement and even despair, will anyone say that there is no need of prayer?

An old proverb says: "Trouble brings one to rap at the door of God." To appeal

to God in time of need is the natural course for any man to take. But besides this, God Himself exhorts us to make use of prayer *to implore His favors*. He has made prayer the *means* by which we may *obtain benefits* from Him, as well as the *condition* of His *exercising His Divine goodness* in our behalf. Since this is so, surely there is a *real need* that we should make use of this means to obtain God's help. Even the animals teach us the need of having recourse to God. A little chick or other small animal will run to its mother when frightened. So, too, a little child runs to the protecting arms of its father or mother. Instinctively, each one of us feels and knows that our Heavenly Father is the first and principal one to whom to appeal in time of distress.

Yet not only in sorrow and pain, but also in happiness and joy, we need to pray. When the heart is singing, there is need of prayer, for we ought to express gratitude for God's goodness and mercy to us, for the happy circumstances in which we find ourselves, for the strength and health and joy we find in living, since gratitude, too, is necessary to make us worthy of God's goodness.

## Why We Believe in the Efficacy of Prayer

One would have to write ponderous books to relate all the examples of the efficacy of prayer in the history of God's Chosen People, in the lives of the saints, in the history of the world, and in one's own experiences. We would meet in Holy Scripture such names as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Josue, Samuel the Prophet and David, and even Solomon, the wisest of kings. They prayed and received help from God. It is sometimes foolishly said that this is an age of action and that there is no need of prayer. This is one of the groundless assertions which is made only by people who have no faith. The fact is that, deprived of the gift and power of prayer, we would at once be cut off, and cut off effectively, from the source of highest power, the *spiritual switch* by which the current of grace is turned on for our souls; for, just as the electric current is the power that sets huge machines into action and enables them to carry out gigantic tasks, so communion with God in prayer is for man the source of power which will enable him to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks.

in the daily life of toil and difficulties.

It was the power that came to them in prayer that enabled the greatest heroes of history to beat down adversity, to see the silver lining in the dark cloud, and to keep their eyes fixed on the vision that beckoned them on to greater work and larger conquests for the good of their brethren. It was because these men and women looked to the help promised by Christ to those who humbly pray, that they triumphed over all adverse circumstances and seeming calamities which they encountered.

King David says, "God is our refuge and our strength, and our helper in troubles which oppress us exceedingly." Let us then realize that prayer is a *force*, a gift which God has given us in order to enable us to enter into His storehouses of mercy and grace.

### **Qualities of Prayer by Which God's Goodness Is Moved**

Prayer unaccompanied by honest effort and made without confidence is of no value. We must pray with *devotion, earnestness, confidence, humility and perseverance*. If we are sincere and wish to be heard by

God we will *think* of what we say. We do not honor God when our thoughts are far from Him. When our thoughts are wandering about on earthly affairs and no heed is paid to the words which fall from our lips, how can we expect God to hear our prayers? How can He pay attention to them when we do not pay attention ourselves? Prayer is only prayer when we *lift our heart and mind to God and mean* what we say. The essential characteristic of a good prayer is *prayer with attention, with a conviction of our own helplessness and our dependence on God, with a great desire for the graces we beg of Him, with loving trust in His goodness, and with perseverance.*

There are superficially devout Catholics who think that to pray well is to *pray much*, and, scarcely mindful of what they are saying, they hastily run through rosaries, litanies and countless other prayers. This kind of prayer is of little value in the eyes of God, because He regards the mind and the heart more than the words of the lips. St. Therese always prayed simply though none the less earnestly and devoutly. She says: "I have not the courage to

force myself to seek beautiful prayers in books. Not knowing which to choose I *act as children do who cannot read*. I say simply to the good God what I want to tell Him, and He always understands me. Sometimes when I find myself spiritually in dryness so great that I cannot produce a single good thought, I recite very slowly a *Pater* or an *Ave Maria*; these prayers alone console me; they suffice; they nourish my soul.”

### **Prayer Should Be Persevering and Confident**

We should practice fervent, trustful, childlike, zealous prayer in difficulties. Our Lord Himself is the best teacher of the manner of praying so that we will be heard by God. During His life He related many parables by which He taught the secret of making effective prayer. St. Luke records one of an unwilling judge and a poor widow who appealed to him for help against her enemy, and who found help because of her *continued, persevering* prayer. “There was a judge,” says the Evangelist, “in a certain town, who did not fear God and did not respect man. Now

there was a certain widow in that town, and she kept coming to him, saying, ‘Do me justice against my adversary.’ And he would not for a long time. But afterwards he said within himself, ‘Although I do not fear God, nor even respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will do her justice, lest by her continual coming she finally wear me out’” (xviii. 2-5).

This forsaken widow appealed to the magistrate of the city, the judge, to help her in her need because she had no husband to protect her interests, and no doubt because her adversary had taken advantage of the very fact of her husband’s death to deprive her of her property. Extreme need, therefore, compelled her to have recourse to the judge. This widow applied to one, who, because he was a judge, was *obliged* to help, and who, for the same reason, was *able* to help. But as St. Luke records, the judge did not fear God nor regard man. How then could she have hoped that such a heartless man would have regard for a poor widow? What dismay and fear must have weighed upon her soul! How she must have trembled as she stood before the door of the court.

Yet she dared enter and open up her heart to this judge. With confidence in the judge's favor, she hoped for justice, for her cause was just. Though not believing in the man's good will, she had faith in his office as judge of the city, and relied confidently on God, who, as Scripture says, "rules the hearts even of kings." And finally she obtained her cause because she wearied the judge with her persistence.

With this same confidence, with this same candid faith, with this same perseverance, we must appeal to God, who, as the Psalmist says, "shall judge the world with equity and the people with justice" (Ps. xcvi. 9). Yet how often are the hearts of those who approach the door of mercy faint-hearted and doubting! They see the inscription over the door: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. xlii. 15). And yet they lack sincere trust in God. They say, "Is there really a just judge in heaven? Is hope in Him not merely a phantom for simple-minded people to quiet them? Or if there *is* a just God who helps the needy, will my prayer change His plans?"

And those of little faith exclaim, "Will God have regard for a poor creature like me? He has already forgotten me, otherwise I would not be in this deplorable state. I have been guilty of many sins, and I have not listened to Him in the past, neither to His invitations nor to His threats, so will He hear me?" With such lack of faith and hope, is there any wonder that their half-hearted prayers go unheard? To such distrusting souls St. James says, "Let him ask *with faith, without hesitation*. For he who hesitates is like a wave of the sea, driven and carried about by the wind. Therefore, let not such a one think that he will receive anything from the Lord" (James i. 6-8). Our Lord said to St. Thomas: "Be not unbelieving, but *believing*. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed" (John xx. 28, 29). These words apply to prayer as well as to the occasion on which they were spoken, namely, to belief in Our Lord's resurrection. Believe, then, in the words of God when He says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee."

In the thousands of years since these words were uttered, millions upon millions

of souls have found them to be true. They have returned from the door of God's mercy with glistening eyes, with glowing faces, with cheerful hearts, and with hands filled with the gifts of God. Let us believe the witnesses to God's mercy: Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Peter, Paul, Agnes, Lucy, Cecilia, Therese — the saints of all times, yes, our own friends and neighbors. With one voice they all say: "The Lord is nigh to all that call upon Him — to all that call upon Him in truth" (Ps. cxliv. 18); "Our God is the God of salvation" (Ps. lxvii. 21).

### **Confidence Is the Key to the Treasures of God**

God has solemnly promised to hearken to prayers said with *confidence*: "All things whatever you ask for in prayer, *believing*, you shall receive" (Matt. xxi. 22). "All things whatsoever you ask for in prayer, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you" (Mark xi. 24). "I have graven thee in My hands," says Our Lord by the lips of the Prophet Isaias (xlix. 16), as if He would say, "Beloved soul, why dost thou fear or mistrust? I

have written thy name in My hands so as never to forget to do thee good.” Therefore, whosoever prays with faith and confidence may hope to be heard, provided, of course, that the favor he begs is for the glory of God and the good of his soul.

Our Lord once said to St. Mechtilde: “As great as a man’s faith and confidence can be in My goodness, so much and infinitely more will he receive. For it is utterly impossible that what a person sacredly believes and hopes for should be refused him.” Again, Our Lord said to St. Gertrude: “Although I regard with pleasure all that is done for My glory, such as prayers, fasts, vigils and other works of piety, still the *confidence* with which the elect have recourse to Me in their weakness touches Me far more sensibly.” Confidence is, then, the key to the treasures of God.

This, however, does not mean that good works are unavailing. There is no doubt that precisely by performing good works and leading a good life the grace of a firm faith is obtained. “Faith... is the gift of God,” says St. Paul (Ephes. ii. 8). Let him who possesses it be assiduous in its

practice and avoid whatever might weaken his confidence in God. Nothing can be a substitute for faith, but faith can be obtained by everyone who ardently desires it. Everybody must *believe*. If anyone is not capable of believing, that is, if he has not attained the use of reason or if he is deprived of his mental faculties, others must have the required faith in his stead; but as soon as he is able, he himself must practice it.

### **Childlike Trust**

Do we believe in God's perfect love and perfect faithfulness? Do we believe that He is a God of tender, compassionate, unchangeable and limitless love? Is not, then, the God of limitless love worthy of limitless trust and confidence? And if the God of limitless love is worthy of limitless trust, shall we not accord it to Him? Our confidence and trust in God ought to be truly childlike. Let us not forget that Our Lord said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them" (Mark x. 14). Childlike simplicity and trust is too often absent from our prayers, and in the blindness of our hearts we *demand* things from

God instead of simply *asking* for them.

Most of the restlessness experienced in our lives comes from this lack of trust in God. We would save ourselves much trouble and anxiety if we were to put full trust in God's Providence, in His love, His mercy and His goodness. The child is care-free and happy because it leaves all responsibility to its parents. To the child, his father or mother seems all-powerful. To us, God *is* all-powerful. The child expects kindness and love and care from its mother. Can we not by right expect an infinitely greater solicitude for us on the part of God? If we are weak, He is strong. If we are embarrassed, insulted, injured, have we not God's infinite love to console us? Fortune favors the trustful, because they are not over-anxious about the things of the world, and God's Providence watches over them. Each one of us, then, ought to be as a little child, trusting in God.

We cannot be too insistent upon the necessity of unbounded confidence in the kindness and mercy of our Heavenly Father and of the Heart of Jesus, our Savior. Want of confidence is one of the most dangerous of faults, and wounds the Divine

Heart of Jesus. His unbounded love for us ought to beget a confidence proportionate to such love. To put limits to our trust is to narrow the loving kindness of God, denying in consequence His all-powerfulness, His infinite love, implying that He cannot or will not remedy our evils, forgive our sins or relieve our sufferings. If such thoughts as these do not actually exist in the minds of those who are lacking in confidence, they are at least the basis of their conduct. Such souls show a total misunderstanding of the love of God, and fail to realize the significance of those mysteries by which He testified His love, namely, the incarnation, the crucifixion and the Holy Eucharist. But above all, such lack of confidence removes our only hope.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus has said: "We cannot have too much confidence in the good God. He is so mighty, so merciful." And how perfectly she has proved that statement. So great was her confidence and trust in Him, that she became a living example of the virtues of faith, hope and charity. Relying utterly upon Divine Providence, and wishing only that

which God foreknew to be for her good, she was rewarded by an abundance of grace and strength. Since God was her Father, St. Therese abandoned herself completely to His care. And as children feel wholly safe and secure in the love of their parents, so she felt in the love of God. And God took His little child to His breast and poured out upon her all the bounty of His love. Her soul became a living temple of God's treasures. Her faith was the faith of God Himself; her charity was the burning flame that abides in the Heart of God; her hope knew no bounds.

## **Patience Must Accompany Confidence**

Our confidence in prayer ought to be *lasting*; then one day we shall have the joy of knowing that our prayers have been heard. Man in his haste wishes to carry everything by storm. He hears or reads of some virtue today, and wants to possess it perfectly tomorrow. All things in the world grow slowly. Continue to pray when apparently there is no answer to your prayer. Recalling once more the story of the widow and the unjust judge, remember

that she had to wait a long time. The judge did not agree to help her at all in the beginning. She accomplished nothing at the first visit. Perhaps she was received in an unfriendly manner, answered brusquely, listened to surlily, and dismissed with little hope. So the widow had to go home sad and disappointed. She perhaps retired to her chamber, hid her face in her hands or laid her head on the table and wept. That was only the beginning of her struggle. Another one might have given up in despair, but not she. She had both *patience* and *perseverance*. Perhaps the next morning she went again. At least she went more than once or twice or three times. She continued undaunted until she obtained her request.

A Christian who applies to the Heavenly Father should know how to wait and how to come again. For Our Lord expressly says that God helps where they "cry to Him day and night" (Luke xviii. 7). Notice that He does not say that God helps those who call upon Him here and there, but *day and night*. And not quietly, but loudly, that is, *persistently* and *urgently*. Indeed, this persevering and

continuous prayer is one of the essentials for obtaining our requests from God, and it is one of the hard things required of us. Our Lord emphasized this when He said that we "must always pray and not lose heart," which are the opening words of the parable of the unjust judge to which we have referred.

We have heard these words of Our Lord from our childhood. Let us impress them more deeply on our memory, for we forget so easily and often have to struggle against impatience when our prayers are not immediately answered. We are unwilling to believe that God will take His own time, His own way, His own means. How quickly do we not drop our hands and say: "God doesn't hear me. There is no use in praying." Let us follow the example of the widow. She came again and again.

Let us remember, too, Our Lord on Mt. Olivet, repeating the same prayer three times, and undoubtedly with greater effort at each time. If God seems to put us off, unceasing prayers, day and night, unceasing sighs and tears will certainly be heard at last. Our Lord has given

His Divine word for it. How short a time will seem the visitation of trouble when, sooner than expected, the door of God's mercy is opened to us!

Countless are the other examples we find in Holy Scripture regarding the results of persevering prayer. If the woman who so importunately followed our Savior and called to Him in the street had become discouraged the first time and had not repeatedly pleaded: "Son of David, have mercy on me," her daughter would not have been freed from the evil spirit. If the man who went to his friend's house at night for bread had not knocked repeatedly, he would never have obtained what he desired. Thus it is in innumerable cases. What we do not receive today may be granted tomorrow; what is not given this year may be bestowed upon us in the next.

Dare we prescribe rules to God? Let it suffice that we can depend upon our requests being granted provided we are not wanting in faith and confidence, and provided we do not ask for anything that is contrary to the will of God or detrimental to our salvation. When we are

tempted to be discouraged because we have prayed a long time without any apparent answer, let us recall the example of St. Monica. She prayed night and day for seventeen years for the conversion of her son. Although God deferred granting her request for so long a time, at length not only was the desired conversion obtained, but her son became one of the greatest Bishops and Doctors of the Church, the illustrious St. Augustine of Hippo.

Implicit faith and confidence in God's goodness and mercy, united to fervent and persevering prayer, does violence to God. Even in temporal needs, it is the will of God that we should pray with strong faith and perseverance. The stronger our faith, the more speedily will the desired aid come. But how easily do we not become discouraged and give up. If God does not grant our petitions immediately, we complain and grow bitter, and even turn away from Him in anger. How unbecoming is such conduct in a Christian, and what a lack of humble confidence it displays! Let us then place our trust in the goodness and mercy of God and continue to pray with humble confidence.'

## **Even Unanswered Prayers Are a Proof of the Goodness of God**

Considering Our Lord's emphatic statement, "Ask and you shall receive," we might conclude that *all* our petitions will be granted. And yet do we not pray for certain favors, and apparently receive no answer to our prayers? We must remember, in the first place, that Christ said to *ask in His Name*. The Name of Jesus is a life-giving Name: "Thou shalt call His Name *Jesus*, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. i. 21). Consequently, whenever we ask for something from God which pertains to our eternal salvation, we may be said to ask in the Name of Jesus, and therefore we may confidently hope to receive what we desire.

But are not sometimes the favors we ask for only material things which aim at selfish ambition, which might ruin our lives, our homes, our fortunes and finally bring us to the abyss of hell, because of the improper use we would make of them? It is possible then that sometimes in our blindness, we ask from God things that would be harmful to us, and He does not

grant our request as we would wish. Yet we can be sure that He will give us something far better for us, for no prayer is unheard.

God is like a wise physician who will not give us what He knows to be injurious to our welfare. He lets us wait, perhaps because He sees that granting our petition or giving the gift we desire would hurt us more than benefit us, at least at the time. So, too, a wise parent will not give a child everything it wants. A child, seeing a sharp knife, might reach out his hands and cry for it, but the parent knows that such an instrument must not be given to a child and withholds it from him. So God acts with His children. Or He may let us wait until the gift will be better appreciated. He does not give us our desire at once in order that He may grant us more and better gifts. He lets us wait to test our good will. In this way Our Lord tested even His own Blessed Mother. He let her wait at Cana. He said to her, "My hour is not yet come." So, too, He let Mary Magdalen and Martha wait at Bethany, and only after Lazarus had been laid in the tomb did He come

to them and give them back their brother.

It is possible also that we may ask something from God which does pertain to our temporal and eternal salvation, but we ask for it from a wrong disposition of mind, from a sinful and selfish motive. In such a case we will not be heard, as St. James writes: "You ask and do not receive, because *you ask amiss*, that you may spend it upon passions" (iv. 3). The Lord is good and does not grant the precise request of such a prayer, but grants something more beneficial. St. Augustine says regarding the dispositions of Divine Providence: "It is certain that God desires that which is most advantageous to us much more than we desire it ourselves. He knows better than we by what means that which is best for us must arrive. The choice of means is entirely in His hands, since it is He who disposes and regulates all things in the world. It is also certain that in the events which happen, that which befalls us will always be best for us."

The Holy Ghost, speaking through St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, says that *the will of God is perfect.* (xii. 2.)

Now it is not said that we always *see* it as perfect, but that it *is* perfect. Therefore it is as perfect when we cannot understand it as when we can; as perfect when it seems unjust and grievous to us, as when it seems just and acceptable; as perfect when the way is rough, toilsome and shrouded in thick darkness, as when it is smooth, easy of ascent and flooded with noonday light.

Since, then, the will of God is the best thing in the world for us, let us yield to it. God Himself has declared, through the Apostle St. Paul, "For those who love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom. viii. 28).. God does not say that all things *are* good in themselves, for evil is not good. But all things *work together* for good to *them that love Him*. In some way, then, by God's permissive will, the evil that assails His children will work for their highest good. It may be inscrutable to us at the time we are crushed by trials and difficulties. But faith assures us that it is so. Our Lord said to His disciple: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter" (John xiii. 7).

When Joseph's brethren sold him into Egypt, they did it through wickedness of heart, yet God brought good out of it by establishing Joseph as viceroy of that great land, whereby he was able to save his brethren from the famine which devastated the whole land of Israel.

Think of the Crucifixion itself. Was it not the masterstroke of hell, and did not God at the same time make of it the masterstroke of His mercy? Out of it have flowed the blessings of the Redemption which shall glorify God throughout all ages of eternity. "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments and how unsearchable His ways" (Rom. xi. 33).

Recall the words of our Savior, "Whatever you ask in My Name, that will I do" (John xiv. 13). The promise implies future time... "*That will I do.*" Our Lord does not say, "*I will answer your prayer right away.*" He will grant our request *when the time is most suitable*, and *when it will be best for us.* After all, if we really want a thing, and it is worth having at all, one or two feeble attempts to attain

it do not deserve to meet with success. Anything of good quality cannot be obtained cheaply in the ordinary course of events in worldly matters. Why, then, should we expect it in the higher matters of our eternal welfare? God will refuse us nothing that is for our good. He will deny us no grace or temporal favor that will promote our eternal happiness. Having confidence in God, we will be happy in whatsoever way He deigns to regard our petitions.

We may consider the question of unanswered prayer also from the aspect of our *interior dispositions*. If we pray without devotion or with lack of faith, or if we are sunk in sin, or our hearts are not in our petitions, we are unworthy of being heard. God gives the reasons why such prayers are not acceptable to Him in the Book of Isaias. The people of Israel, who had fasted and prayed without obtaining God's help, asked God through the Prophet Isaias why He had not paid any heed to them. And God answered: —

“Behold, in the day of your fast *your own will is found* and you exact of all your debtors. Behold, you *fast for*

*debates and strife, and strike wickedly with the fist.* Do not fast as you have done until this day, to make your cry to be heard on high. Is this such a fast as I have chosen: for a man to afflict his soul for a day? Is this it, to wind his head about like a circle and to spread sackcloth and ashes? Wilt thou call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not *this* rather the fast that I have chosen? *Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the bundles that oppress, let them that are broken go free, and break asunder every burden. Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harborless into thy house; when thou shalt see one naked cover him, and despise not thy own flesh.* Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy health shall speedily arise, and thy justice shall go before thy face and the glory of the Lord shall gather thee up. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall hear; thou shalt cry, and He shall say: *Here I am'*" (lviii).

Let us then support our prayer by a good life and God will surely hear us. Let us strengthen our petitions, too, by invoking the intercession of the Blessed

Mother and the saints of God. Mary is the refuge of sinners, the health of the sick, the comfortress of the afflicted. St. Bernard declares that no one has ever had recourse to her in vain. The saints, too, are the beloved friends of God and will interest themselves in our needs if we seek their assistance. Charity toward the poor souls in purgatory is likewise an excellent means to obtain speedy assistance in our necessities.

## The Power of United Prayer

Let us add a few words also on *united prayer*. It is certain that united prayer powerfully aids the effects of faith and the other qualities that make a prayer worthy of being heard. "Where two or three are gathered together for My sake, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20), said our Divine Savior. He signifies the readiness of God to hear the combined prayers of several persons. He emphatically states it in these words: "I say to you, further, that if two of you shall agree on earth about anything at all for which they ask, it shall be done for

them by My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19).

United prayer is that prayer which rises from hearts that are bound together by holy friendship; it is the mingling of their thoughts and desires, presented by them as one individual prayer before the throne of God. United prayer may be that of several individuals praying privately for the same intentions or it may be public prayer. Public prayer is superior to all. It has the special promise of God's presence, so that the soul can say with assurance, "My prayer ascends to God, borne up by the prayers of others." Taking part in public devotions such as public novenas or monthly devotions, is, therefore, particularly efficacious in obtaining our petitions from God.

### **The Mass, the Most Powerful of All Prayers**

But above all, the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, in which we unite with the *whole Church*, the Mystical Body of Christ, and with *Christ Himself*, our Divine Mediator on the altar, is the most effective means we have of imploring benefits from the

Heavenly Father. The late Bishop Gross of Leitmeritz said of Holy Mass: "Everything good that happens in the world happens through Holy Mass. What you cannot obtain through the Mass, you will attain through no other means; and that which you cannot attain through devout assistance at Mass, you will certainly not attain at all. Our Lord grants you more through the Holy Sacrifice than through any other channel."

It is easy to understand why this is so. Every Mass comprises the sum total of the merits of Jesus Christ, and these, as we know, are of illimitable value. Consequently, the Mass itself is of limitless value. Now, when we assist at Mass in the proper manner, we offer to Almighty God these infinite merits and He receives thereby an infinite worship. We pray "*through* Jesus Christ, and *with* Jesus Christ, and *in* Jesus Christ," and because Jesus is the God-man, our prayer, in being united to His, takes on all the qualities of His own and becomes infinitely powerful. It becomes inflamed with the Divine ardor of Jesus in the worship of His Eternal Father. It becomes permeated

with the sanctity of Jesus. It becomes all-perfect, so that we are able to offer to God a prayer that is Godlike, a prayer that is truly Divine.

Through the Mass we are thus able to exercise a peculiar power over the Heart of Almighty God, so that He is moved to administer His mercies to us. In return for this infinite homage, His Divine benediction streams forth into human hearts. Souls are spiritually uplifted, while God's goodness remedies the evils that afflict them or makes them better able to bear the troubles, cares, sufferings, poverty, etc., under which they labor.

The Mass is not only of infinite worth in itself, but just because it is infinite it is likewise an inexhaustible source of grace, an infinite treasury which we can *never* drain. If men but understood that each Holy Mass is something ineffably great, an inexhaustible treasury from which they may freely draw, if they but knew how much courage, strength and light are to be derived from it, they would strive never to miss even a single Mass, no matter what difficulties might present themselves to hinder attendance thereat. Almighty

God Himself has bestowed on us this sacrifice of prayer, which is *fully adequate* for all our needs of petition, and which gives to Him *infinite* honor, adoration, atonement, love, praise and thanksgiving. Let us then make more and better use of our opportunities of assisting at the adorable Sacrifice. We will experience then in very truth the goodness of Almighty God to His creatures.

So, whatever difficulties may beset us, let us cease weeping and lamenting and have recourse to God in prayer. If we did so, how much less misery there would be in the world. Let us realize that the God of our fathers still lives and that His arm is as mighty as ever. With Abraham let us always *hope against hope*, for "No one has hoped in the Lord and has been confounded" (Ecclus. ii. 11).



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