

“DEDICATION TO PRAYER AND MEDITATION”

TEXTS:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” (Jn 1:14)

“Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” “And his mother kept all these things in her heart.” (Lk 2:19.51)

“Who is my mother? ... Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

(Mk 3:33-36)

GRAMMATICA, N. 12, (from “Summary of Rodriguez”, MS 8811-8812)

Let us observe this principle faithfully: that spiritual tasks, regard to progress in holiness must always occupy first place, and should not be neglected for any reason. No matter how many and how substantial are the works concerning our office, or even imposed by obedience, it is never in conformity with the will of God that our spiritual duties be neglected. It is not obedience to the will of God that places obstacles to this faithfulness, but negligence or insufficient care that we often have regarding matters of the spirit.

GRAMMATICA, N. 225, (from “Retreat-Instructions”, MS 3412)

Prayer is the life of our life, and the soul of our soul; it is like breathing: *“I gasp with open mouth and I draw in the Spirit.”* (cf. Ps 119:131). Just as we receive gifts of divine bounty every moment, so in a like manner, it is proper that our hearts be raised to God constantly.

GRAMMATICA, N. 226, (from “Retreat to the Acolytes (on Sloth)”, MS 4448)

Let us accompany every action in this spirit: we can be in school, but our heart is with God; in church and our heart is with God; we can be singing at table, walking, studying, sleeping, but our heart is always with God.

GRAMMATICA, N. 234, (from “Retreat-Meditations”, MS 3152)

Spiritual people who have dedicated themselves to prayer cannot always expect to be like sailing ships with the wind at stern, cruising along effortlessly. However, it is well that they adapt themselves rather like galleys, who are moved along both by the wind and with the power supplied by oarsmen. When the beneficial wind of Divine inspiration is lacking, they have to navigate with the oars of their own soul’s faculties,

aided by Divine grace. This method of praying often is more fruitful even though it does not always please us.

FOUNDER'S CONSTITUTIONS 49

In hac religiosa clericali sodalitate, cujus finis est non solum **contemplari**, sed etiam **contemplata aliis tradere ...**

In this religious, clerical Institute, the purpose of which is not only to contemplate, but to hand on to others what has been contemplated...

CONSTITUTIONS 38

Progress in the spiritual life finds particular strength in prayer. Prayer is expressed in liturgical, community and personal forms. It tends to nourish a habitual spirit of prayer; so that prayer itself becomes life and life becomes prayer, in a constant search for growth.

WHY WE PRAY

As I am about to begin my reflection, I'm experiencing a severe toothache. And I wonder: can one pray, can one meditate with a toothache? And I recall about many people who were with a disease for many years, like our Founder and many others, both confreres and lay people. And again I recall that the Lord, on the cross, among excruciating sufferings, uttered profound words in a spirit of prayer, he prayed with the Psalms, he offered intercessions and forgiveness, gave comfort and entrusted people with commitments...

It is clear that everything depends on the inner disposition. It is from within that we must begin, revisiting what is most relevant to us: we can love and pray even when everything seems against us.

We know that prayer is a meeting with the Lord, and we teach others on that: but we may be "seduced" by other matters instead of letting us "being seduced" by the Lord.

When though we present our problems to him, they acquire their correct dimension, they become prayer and get a new light.

Times and directives for prayer and meditation are helpful. However, if one loses sight of the reason for prayer and meditation, he runs the risk of losing zeal and interest. And the reason is only one: God loves us and we are called to love him.

There is not a time set for loving; even though signs and special moments are significant.

It happens that we have to change ministries and daily timetable, especially when we move to a new community, and it is difficult to find a new rhythm of prayer. Only if we do not lose our point of reference we can go through these moments of discomfort and remain faithful, not to a program but to a profound relationship with the Lord.

INTIMACY WITH CHRIST

Mary and Joseph became a family around the Word made flesh; they had already opened their hearts to listening to the Word of God individually.

Mary said her unconditional "fiat" to God, totally ready to do God's will.

Joseph needed some time, but he was also searching for God's will (Mt 2,19-24): "*Joseph thought in his heart ...*": he uses his faculties, but his heart does not condemn: he keeps his decision 'open'; "*While he was looking at these things, an angel appeared to him ...*": he listens; "*Joseph did as the angel told him ...*": final decision.

Within their marriage - when they are no longer two, but one flesh - together they are contemplating the Word made flesh, understanding what "God with us" means, meditating on the humanity created in the image and likeness of God. Jesus, God's Word, was growing in age and grace, and even the two Spouses of Nazareth grew up about listening, contemplating, deepening and intimacy with Jesus. They discovered him not only as a son, but also as the Master and the Lord; they learned that doing God's will is a stronger bond than the bond of blood, since it binds us to Christ in a unique way, it makes us participate in his true mission, in his total obedience to the Father.

At times, we say that we are "in love" with Christ. Each one lives this love in a personal way, with very different accents, shades and depths.

Logic says that when you fall in love, you are happy with the loved one, you go out and search, you arrange time so to stay with the other as much as possible. So why is it difficult to do this with our beloved Lord?

We have to learn to take the right decisions. As a man and a women, who feel for each other, grow in love and take decisions which helps them to mature; so it is for us: in our intimate relationship with Christ, we have to take decisions.

The Lord, on his part, has already made the choice: he has given himself fully for each of us, for me. On my part: did I accept to fall in love with Him? And then, did I make steps towards a maturity of love? Have I made decisions that help me approach the Lord? Have I decided that He is all for me, that I cannot live without him?

I think we have all gone a long journey, but we probably need to renew these decisions from time to time, especially when we do not feel "the wind in the stern" and we need to pull the oars, as San Gaspar says!

We must again make a move and listen to the Word-made-flesh and take Christ seriously, accepting to be surprised by him, as Mary and Joseph were surprised when they no longer found him among the pilgrims, returning from Jerusalem.

Prayer and meditation become the moments when we are together with the Beloved and listen to Him; it is the time when I can lose myself in Him and he makes me feel his presence; it is the time when I rediscover myself by means of the one who "wants my good"; and I review my "project of life" with him, knowing that his project for me, in the end, is my best project.

A COMMUNITY WHICH PRAYS AND MEDITATES

One's personal growth goes hand in hand with the life of the community. The Holy Spouses remind us that our true unity comes from putting Jesus at the first place.

So: I pray with the community and the community prays with me. As in the first community of Jerusalem, where "they were faithful to common prayer." I cannot really come to God if I do not live in unity to his family, if I think I can save myself alone, if I do not adjust my step to the others' steps and together we urge each other to walk better in the ways of the Lord.

Then: I pray for the community and the community prays for me. I cannot love God without loving others, and prayer immediately becomes a point of reference to find out whom I really love, whom we love as a community. Prayer becomes a mutual intercession. And, as a community, it becomes intercession for the whole Church and the whole world.

Again: *we pray and contemplate together so that we can help others to encounter with Christ.* In the Congregation, there is not "my" mission; our apostolate is a community one. Contemplation, which prepares the apostolate, cannot be relegated to the individuals, but we need moments when we "contemplate" together, listen together to the Word of God, listen to each other, communicate what the Spirit suggests to all through this or that confrere; and together, we take decisions which are illuminated by contemplation and bring them to others.

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PS.

“PRAYER AND MEDITATION” or “CHASTITY”?

A confrere wrote to us, saying that Marani's expression: 'application to prayer and meditation,' "indicates chastity in its positive aspect, as a complete devotion to the Lord, not just detached from sin, as the word chastity suggests. To be of the Lord, to be married to Christ, to belong completely to Him, this is the virtue of chastity in the Bertonian idea." And he was expecting that our reflections were addressing Chastity.

We consulted with each other, as a community, and we thought this idea was interesting, but it was new.

At the end we have chosen to stick to the immediate meaning of the text: "Dedication to prayer and meditation".

We leave to others to deepen on this proposal and to write about it.