

# ‘Where the Spirit Breathes Prayer and Action’

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## The Perfect Contemplative Prayer of Christ

We shall now consider the perfect contemplative prayer of Christ.

### *The Our Father*

Our Lord prayed much in the course of His public life, and His Apostles, who lived with Him constantly, were aware that He was praying. They saw Him go off to a distance, sometimes during the daytime, frequently at night, and give Himself to prayer, very lengthy prayer. They were evidently quite surprised at this, and one day they hazarded a request: “Master, teach us to pray.”<sup>1</sup> And as He generally did during His public life, our Lord answered in a way that was certainly perfect, but at the same time brief. He proclaimed His message, and left His Apostles, and later His Church, to explain it and adapt it to various souls and different generations.

You know Christ's answer. Our Lord said to them: "When you pray, pray thus," and He taught them the Our Father. "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...." This prayer, the Our Father, gives a summary of all the requests we can make to God, and indicates as well precisely what our attitude should be when we address God.

In the course of the centuries the Church, and great spiritual masters such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and St. Teresa of Avila, wishing to teach us about prayer, commented on the Our Father. St. Teresa especially, in her *Way of Perfection*, which is her treatise on prayer, comments on the Our Father and draws from its formulas a complete teaching on prayer and contemplation.<sup>2</sup>

And yet this answer of our Lord's seems rather brief. Jesus was teaching His Apostles vocal prayer, which is the prayer of beginners. It is not however exclusively for beginners. St. Teresa will tell us that it is very good, necessary even, for great contemplatives who have reached the heights of contemplation. Vocal prayer is also the prayer of the masses. But this prayer which is expressed exteriorly by the body and by formulas learned and recited in common, opens up before our eyes almost the entire mystery of the prayer of Christ.

Nowadays, we want something more than the recitation of a formula. We know how to pray vocally. We want to know how Christ prayed inte-

riorly. Nowadays the Church invites us to pray liturgically together with the priest, reciting the Mass formularies and even joining in the Divine Office. But this does not entirely resolve the problem.

## I — THE MYSTERY OF THE PERSON OF JESUS

How could Christ pray interiorly? To resolve this problem, we need to enter into the mystery of Christ, which is the hypostatic union.<sup>3</sup> We have tried to study, in our earlier discussions, the human mechanism of prayer: our part, the activity of the senses, of the intellect, of faith, and the coordinated activities of all our energies, energies of our physical and intellectual life and our spiritual life of grace.

In our second conference we studied the activity of God. God not only responds to this contact effected by our supernatural energies, our supernatural faculties or infused virtues, especially the virtue of faith. He also collaborates with our powers, especially with the virtue of faith, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He perfects our faith in its exercise, calming our intellectual powers and senses.

In the prayer of Christ there was both human and divine activity. If it is possible for us to study the prayer of Christ as the prayer of a man, and to consider the activity of His human faculties one after another, and then the activity of God upon these

faculties, the fact remains that between the activity of the human faculties in Christ and in us there is still only an analogy. And again, there is only an analogy between the activity of God in Christ and in us, because Jesus Christ holds a unique position through the hypostatic union.

### *A transcendent mystery*

We know from our catechism that Jesus is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word, obviously God. He has a divine nature; He is God. In us there is grace, but this participation in the life of God is a created participation, which remains finite. In Christ there is the divinity itself, therefore infinite. And this infinity is not something external to Him, it is part of Him. The second Person of the Holy Trinity is God.

The apostle St. Paul will say that the divinity in Christ was emptied out, but this emptying out of the divinity in Him is only apparent. The divinity, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, only renounced the external manifestation of the infinitude within Him. The divinity in itself was in no way diminished. Jesus is God. He is infinite.

At the same time, Christ possessed humanity, a humanity like ours, a complete humanity in which we can distinguish a physical life like ours. Christ

had members, sense powers. He had a soul like ours, a human soul. But this human soul, this human nature in Christ, identical with ours, was wholly penetrated by the divinity.

It had its own operations, its human operations, but these are qualified in the catechism and in theology with a special name, because of the union of the human nature with divinity in Christ. Owing to the fact that Christ's human nature did not subsist in itself but in the Person of the Word, its operations were attributed to the Person of the Word. Hence the name given to the operations of Christ's human nature is "theandric."<sup>4</sup> Christ therefore possessed something totally unique. This is an unmitigated mystery for us.

How did the hypostatic union come about? How was this union of the human and divine natures effected? We can hardly conceive it, and religious souls, who are penetrated by the transcendence of God and have a certain perception — if it be true that one can perceive it at all — of the infinity of God, are disconcerted by the hypostatic union, the union of the divine and human natures.

When we read the history of the first centuries of Christianity we see that the faithful at that period were wholly penetrated with the Pauline teaching, that is, with a living doctrine which had nothing formalistic about it but which went to the essence, to the Holy Spirit dwelling in the soul, to the grace

which established unity throughout the entire Mystical Body of Christ. These Christians, whose ardent, living faith was frequently, even daily exercised in meditation and the realization of these lofty truths of Christianity, engaged in passionate discussions of the divinity of Christ and His human nature.

The discussions on the reality of Christ's humanity were not limited to controversies among theologians, such as still occur, but they extended to the masses of the Christian people. One of the most successful errors in the first centuries was the denial of Christ's true humanity. Christians were so gripped by the concept of the transcendence of the divinity that only with great difficulty could they comprehend the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ.

The Church has taken a clear stand and affirmed for us the true existence of humanity in Christ, of two natures in Christ, divine and human. Yet it remains a mystery.

### *Luminous ridges*

In the landscape of this mystery of the humanity of Christ, which is the mystery of Christ Himself, we find so to speak luminous veins. Like every mystery, like God Himself, this mystery looks to us like a dark cloud, yet a cloud with a luminous face. It is like the cloud which guided the Hebrews in the

desert.<sup>5</sup> There is in the mystery of Christ Jesus not only a luminous face, that of His humanity, gentleness, goodness, His love for humanity, but there are luminous ridges or veins which plunge us into the depths of the infinite and of God.

We are separated from these by a darkness, an obscurity which heaven itself will not entirely dissipate. We shall see more clearly there because we shall have the light of glory, the *lumen gloriae*<sup>6</sup> by which to penetrate this mystery, but there are depths which we shall never plumb completely. St. John of the Cross tells us that in this world the reward of the contemplative arriving at the summit is to discover in the mystery of Christ precisely these luminous ridges — “luminous veins” he calls them — which reveal the richness of the mystery of Christ.<sup>7</sup> These luminous ridges are obviously the affirmations of the existence of the divinity and humanity and at the same time certain privileges of Christ's humanity.

When we enter upon a study of the prayer of Christ, we learn that His intellect was endowed with several forms of knowledge. By His knowledge of intuitive vision Christ already had the *lumen gloriae* in this world and perceived the divinity which was in Him, that divinity which is compared to an unction penetrating both His body and soul profoundly. He enjoyed this vision of the divinity in full light, already, not to an infinite degree, since His humanity was created and therefore finite, but yet

He enjoyed it continually. He contemplated this divinity within Him, since it penetrated Him entirely.

To this knowledge of intuitive vision, in the light of which He beheld the divinity, God Himself, and saw also all created things in God, there was added infused light, that is to say ideas, lights, which God Himself placed in His human intellect. These included all the lights and all the knowledge required for Him to exercise His various functions, and particularly His function as priest and mediator between God and man.

To this infused knowledge was added, finally, an experiential knowledge, a knowledge which Christ acquired through the exercise of His faculties. His intellect, which penetrated God thanks to the intuitive vision of light, still exercised itself and, like every human intellect, discovered new ideas and worked on sense data and on the light which came to Him either from without or from within. Hence it was an experiential knowledge which implied, in Christ, true growth.

When the Gospel tells us that Christ grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and man,<sup>8</sup> this does not mean, as some have rather naively suggested, that He merely allowed the knowledge He already possessed to show. No, this was new experiential knowledge over and above what He already possessed.

People sometimes say: "He possessed all knowledge, and so from time to time He showed men that He knew." They seem to be saying that Jesus Christ played at being a man — that He knew everything, and from time to time manifested it. No, it was not at all like that. He had experiential knowledge, and it increased. The Letter to the Hebrews tells us that He learned obedience through what He suffered.<sup>9</sup> It is clear therefore how this experiential knowledge resembled the knowledge which we acquire.

Thus we see the two extremes, human nature progressing, almost painfully, as in the Letter to the Hebrews, learning by what He suffered; and at the same time a complete knowledge through intuitive vision. How is this latter added? How do the two fit together? This is the mystery. There is no way we are able to understand and resolve the mystery of Christ by our own reasoning.

It is like our knowledge of God Himself. We have to recognize before God that we are finite and He is infinite; that God made many things greater than we, and that it is very good of Him to reveal to us even a little of what takes place in His intimate life and in Christ. We have no right to demand — it would be foolish to do so — that He explain everything to us, since it is all far beyond us. God Himself exceeds us infinitely. But it has pleased Him to reveal enough to enable us to imitate Him.

## II — THE PRAYER OF JESUS THE MAN-GOD

After this simple glance at the mystery of Christ, let us try now, with the help of the brief, but I think sufficient, ideas we have formed, to see how Christ prayed.

### *A prolonged prayer*

One truth stands out clearly when we study our Lord: He prayed much. When we consider His life, the life of the Word made flesh, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, and ponder on how He descended into our world to assume humanity in the womb of the Virgin Mary through the work of the Holy Spirit and became like us, we see that of the nearly thirty-three years He spent among us thirty were spent in Nazareth. Why? So that He might live an ordinary life, the kind of life we live ourselves. We might stress the fact that He was a workman, but I believe we should emphasize above all precisely the hidden setting which He chose.

Let us try to enter into the soul of Christ. He knows that He is charged with a mission. Thanks to His knowledge through intuitive vision, His infused knowledge, He knows that He is a mediator, a priest, and that He has come to bring us a message from God, to tell us what takes place in God. He comes,

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at the same time, to teach us the way to God, and to institute the sacraments so as to give us the life which is in God and in Himself.

He has not come merely to create a new civilization but truly to bring the life of God into this world and to transmit it effectively through His teaching, His suffering, and His sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist. Never was there a man with such a mission to fulfill. His mission was not only the establishment of a new order but the overturning of the old — a mission obviously beyond any human power.

Now, to fulfill this mission, what is Christ going to do? What should we have done? We should have been in a great hurry, of course, to get to work. Thirty or thirty-three years would be little enough time to accomplish such a mission. But what does Christ do? For thirty years He remains in solitude. From a purely human viewpoint of external activity, He is wasting time.

Why does He go to Nazareth? In order to carry out His mission as Man-God, His mission of mediator. Let us not say, "Well, He knew He was all powerful, that He had omnipotence at His disposal, and so He said to Himself, 'I can do it all in an instant.'" No, that was not it. All His actions, the very ordering of His life, the organization of His time, a God-given treasure, hold a lesson for us. He spends almost thirty years in Nazareth, because He judges

that the most important role He has to fulfill is that of an ordinary, hidden life, which will leave Him free for the primary duty of prayer.

What is the role of Christ? To all appearances He works with His foster father, St. Joseph. Looking below the surface, we perceive that He is carrying out effectively the exercise of union — if we can say that He needs an exercise for this.

What is this prayer of union of Christ's, which He begins at Nazareth and will continue? After having spent nearly thirty years at Nazareth, He will enter upon His public life and will deliver His message over the next three years. Before beginning His public life, he will spend forty days in the desert in prayer.<sup>10</sup> In the course of His public life, from its very beginning, after His first success at Capernaum, He will leave His Apostles and hide Himself during the nights in the desert, on the mountains, to pray.<sup>11</sup> When He wishes to choose His Apostles, He begins by praying.<sup>12</sup>

The evangelists are unanimous on this point. Throughout His entire life, Christ repeatedly retires into solitude to pray. At the end of His life, during the final days, He spends the night in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.<sup>13</sup> Judas, planning to betray Him, knows well where to find Him. He has no need to send out spies to see where He, the Christ who knows His Passion is drawing near, is on this night. Judas leads his troop unerringly to the Garden of

Gethsemane, where Jesus is accustomed to pray every evening and to spend His nights.

On Calvary Jesus continues to pray, and the apostle St. Paul tells us that now that He is ascended into heaven, and dies no more, He ever lives to make intercession for us.<sup>14</sup>

We can say, therefore, that the principal function of Christ in this world, to which He has devoted the greater part of His time, whatever His external occupations might be, is clearly prayer.

### *The perfect prayer of union*

What is this prayer of Christ?

In order to understand it, we need first to consider Christ Himself. How is the union of divinity to humanity effected in Him? Contemplation is the union of humanity with divinity. In Christ, divinity penetrates humanity. Humanity itself is plunged into divinity by a very simple gaze, a gaze which is an intuitive knowledge of God, the *lumen gloriae*, the light of glory which we shall enjoy in heaven. The union, then, is perfect: God's penetration into man, and at the same time man's penetration into God, humanity's penetration into God, by the very simple gaze of the intuitive vision.

Thus this prayer of Christ plunges into God. And here, "into God" means not only into the unity

Page 144, after the first paragraph and before the following one (What is the role of Christ?...) the following paragraph is missing. It is a key paragraph:

"What is Christ's function? It is a priestly function of mediation. He came down here carrying humanity and Divinity precisely to bring about this union of the two extremes. Sin separated man from God: Christ came to bring the two extremes together [to join de two extremes], to unite all that sin had separated. And how is he going to do that? He is going to achieve - allow this repetition of terms - he is going to achieve the union and what is it to achieve union between humanity and Divinity? It is prayer, it is contemplation. Prayer is a contact, contemplation is a union."

The original in French:

"Quelle est la fonction du Christ ? C'est une fonction sacerdotale de médiation. Il est venu ici- bas, portant l'humanité et la Divinité précisément pour réaliser cette union des deux extrêmes. Le péché a séparé l'homme de Dieu : le Christ est venu pour faire se rejoindre les deux extrêmes, pour unir tout ce que le péché avait séparé. Et comment va-t-il faire pour cela ? Il va réaliser — permettez cette répétition des termes — il va réaliser l'union et qu'est-ce que réaliser l'union entre l'humanité et la Divinité ? C'est la prière, c'est la contemplation. La prière est un contact, la contemplation est une union."



of God, but into the intimate life of God in the Blessed Trinity. The Word in Christ contemplates and loves God the Father, the Father loves His Son, and from the two together, from this knowledge, this light, this infinite perfection which they discover in each other, or rather in the divinity which is common to them both, proceeds the Holy Spirit, substantial Love, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity.

There is a scene in the Gospel which gives us a visible picture of this prayer. The evangelists tell us that when Jesus is baptized He is at prayer.<sup>15</sup> At this moment the Holy Spirit descends upon Him in the form of a dove. John the Baptist, on the banks of the Jordan, sees this manifestation of God above Jesus and thus recognizes Him as the Messiah. The Holy Spirit has given him to know that the Messiah is the one over whom He will descend in the form of a dove.<sup>16</sup> And at the same time the Father speaks: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

We have here an outward portrayal of the prayer of Christ. God the Father engenders His Son: "This is my beloved Son." Christ Jesus is the Son of God, and God expresses Himself thus in Christ. At the same time the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, or rather He is in Him, He manifests Himself in the form of a dove. In reality there is a spiration of the Father and a spiration of the Son, which produces the Holy Spirit.

In this spiration Christ Jesus finds a beatitude, a joy which inundates all His powers. The bliss is infinite for His divinity and finite of course for His humanity — for this humanity of Christ, since it is created, is not capable of the infinite.

One day on Tabor our Lord will manifest His prayer to the Apostles by associating them with it.<sup>17</sup> As often happened, Christ begins to pray. The Apostles are near Him. On this occasion He has taken Peter, James, and John with Him, and they, scarcely comprehending the mystery, are asleep. Then they awaken, to enter, so to speak, into the prayer of Christ. There is an outpouring of His divinity into His humanity, and this outpouring, this light, envelops them too. They are covered, the Gospel tells us, in a "luminous cloud,"<sup>18</sup> which is an emanation, a radiation from God pouring into the humanity of Christ. They experience in their senses, in themselves, in their souls, something of the prayer of Christ.

We are told that Peter, inebriated by this radiation of the prayer of Christ which he is experiencing, wishes to build his tent on Tabor. This is what the prayer of Christ is: the shining of the divinity through His humanity; while at the same time His humanity penetrates the divinity with a gaze. It is a perfect union, therefore, the perfect and experienced realization of the hypostatic union in Christ.

We can well understand, now, why Christ spends His nights in prayer. All His faculties, His whole body, rest in this supernatural bath of the divinity which penetrates Him, strengthening and refreshing Him more than physical sleep. Such is the prayer of Christ, the prayer of union.

### *To share in the life of God*

This prayer of union clearly has value in itself. For why did the Word become flesh? To reestablish union. Often when we read the Gospel we linger over details, which of course have their importance; but a detail must not cause us to forget the whole, the end, the principal work, which is the union of humanity with the divinity; the leading of man to God, the bringing of man to his ultimate goal.

We come from God and we are returning to God. Our true vocation, our goal in life, is not only the perfect development of our human nature, accompanied by a spiritual enhancement which would make us children of God but at a distance, and would be designed to insure a certain balance, a certain happiness for our human nature. No! The divine vocation which God has given us, beginning with grace and the divine sonship it assures us, is to return to God.

Our end is not any happiness whatsoever,

which would be the lot of a person who has behaved well and fulfilled the moral law, who has been an honest man, a perfect Christian, even going to Mass. Our vocation, the end which God has assigned for our life, is to return to Him, to the divine life from which we came forth without knowing it, that is, without having experienced it. Our vocation is to return to God, to share in His divine life, to enter into His rhythm and to be united with Him forever.

The immortality of our soul is not the simple immortality of a soul which has developed, enjoys itself, and thanks to its faculties and perfections can attain to a certain enjoyment of God. No, our object, our end, is to enter into God. There are only three Persons in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; but through grace we are God's children. We are identified with the Word incarnate, with Christ Jesus, and it is He who causes us to enter into the rhythm of Trinitarian life and to share in its works, its light, its privileges and its happiness. This is our end: the Blessed Trinity.

Our prayer in this world should be the prayer of union, a prayer of union with Christ who takes us in charge, who wills that we should identify with Him. He gives us His life, His grace, all that He is, and He then asks to take charge of us, He asks that we attach ourselves to Him. At the moment of death, if we are united to Him through the development of the filial grace which has been given us and binds us

closely to Him, we shall enter into the rhythm of the Blessed Trinity and share in its works, privileges and happiness.

This is our end, this is the happiness of heaven; not only to see God from a distance but to be God by participation, to perform the works of knowledge and love which are the works of the Word, and in this way to share the happiness and life of the Word. In other words, our destiny is to enter with Him as *actors*, not merely spectators, into the rhythm of the Trinitarian life and to share the happiness of God Himself, in sharing that of the Word incarnate.

#### *Essential exercise of the Christian vocation*

For us, this is what prayer is: our essential duty. We can see now why it should be an obligation for us, and why Christ taught us this by His example. He gave the greater part of His time in this world to prayer, the exercise of union. Did He need it for Himself? No, since He possessed the hypostatic union. But He wanted to instruct us by His deeds and example, by His attitude and activity, as well as by His words.

In this world Christ Jesus gave Himself primarily to the exercise of union. Our life in this world, our Christian life, even our earthly life — let us not distinguish between the Christian life and human or

earthly life — should also be an exercise of union like that of Christ, and consequently our prayer should be a prayer of union, a contemplative prayer. This is the truth: our duty lies here.

It is sometimes surprising to see, in works which are otherwise truly inspired and which bring us precious truths, that prayer is presented as accessory, so to speak, something for feasts days or reserved to certain souls who have the time for it, or as they say, the vocation. Prayer is the essential exercise of every Christian's vocation. It has sometimes been said that contemplative prayer is egotistical, turning the soul in upon itself. This is to forget the catechism definition. The prayer that focuses the soul upon itself, in order to analyze its impressions, is not a prayer. Prayer is an exercise of union, a lifting of the soul to God, union with God; to think it merely accessory is to be ignorant of the essence of the Christian life.

From this point of view, then, the prayer of union remains for us a basic, fundamental obligation. And if certain souls are especially dedicated to contemplative prayer because of their vocation, if our Lord gives them a vocation to that, if He has even willed that certain Institutes or religious Orders should be especially dedicated to this kind of prayer, it is because He has willed that His teaching should always remain alive and actual before the eyes of the Christian faithful. But this does not exempt any

Christian from the essential obligation of prayer, contemplative prayer, the prayer of union.

### III — THE PRAYER OF JESUS, HEAD OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

Christ Jesus is not only the Man-God. He is also the Head of the Mystical Body. Jesus has redeemed us by His suffering, given us divine life through His sacraments; and in thus sharing His divine life, He has redeemed us.

#### *His life in us*

The grace which we receive in baptism is the life of Christ, which is given to us through our participation in the mystery of His suffering and death. When we receive Communion the divine life of the risen Christ penetrates us. He causes it to penetrate us through the Eucharist in which He is at once living and immolated. This divine life which Christ pours into us unites us with Him: it is the life of Christ. You remember what St. Augustine said of Christ giving Himself in the Eucharist: we consume Him, but in reality it is He who absorbs us.<sup>19</sup> He puts His life in us and we become *Him*. Through this life which He gives us, a union is realized between Him and ourselves.

In this way Christ constitutes a new reality. His overflowing life, which gives and diffuses itself, and the new reality constituted by this diffusion of divine life in our souls, is the Church, the whole Christ.<sup>20</sup> He gives us His life, we receive the Holy Spirit, we become other Christs, we become Christ. We enter into Him, He enters into us, we are possessed by Him. That is the Church.

By this diffusion of divine life, particularly through the Holy Eucharist, we enter into Christ, we become Him. But at the same time Christ possesses us. In the Church there is not only the union of ourselves with Christ, but also the union of Christ with us: the union is mutual. We receive His life and He assumes what we are. Christ has taken on humanity, and in taking on humanity He has taken on all humanities. He especially takes on the humanity of those who are united with Him through grace. He gives us His life and He takes our human nature. Consequently there is an intercommunication between Christ and us.

#### *Our sin is laid upon Him*

This mutual communication which enriches us with Christ and His life, which identifies us with Him and makes the presence of the Holy Spirit in our souls more vital — as it is vital in Him — all this

means that Christ takes on our misery, our human nature with all that it is. He has taken on everything but sin,<sup>21</sup> but He has taken on sin's consequences. This is precisely how the Redemption took effect.

How are we ourselves purified? We are purified because Christ *assumes* the consequences of sin which are in us. This is affirmed by Isaiah.<sup>22</sup> He has taken on our infirmities, our miseries. When St. John the Baptist sees Christ Jesus, he names Him, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who *takes away* the sin of the world."<sup>23</sup> Jesus wipes out sin by taking it upon Himself.

We could say, to use a comparison which seems a bit common but is to my mind very expressive, that Christ, in making contact with us, becomes like a sheet of blotting paper. We are stained, we bear the consequences of sin. Christ is an immaculate sheet which places itself upon our humanity and thus takes away our misery. He has taken on our infirmities.

### *The struggle in Jesus*

This infirmity of ours which Christ has taken upon Himself causes Him suffering, and this gives us the opportunity to study another form and consequence of the prayer of Christ.

Christ, coming into this world, takes upon His

own humanity the sin of our humanity — His divinity cannot be weighed down by it — and suffers the consequences of this sin. This is why the drama of the Passion begins from the very first moment of Christ's existence. As He assumes the sin of humanity — not this or that sin, but *peccatum mundi*, the sin of the world — immediately there is set up in Him, by the fact of His hypostatic union, a painful opposition between the sin, which is not His but ours, and the divinity, the holiness which is His. Immediately He becomes a victim.

This is the suffering of Christ, the suffering of the Passion, to which the Letter to the Hebrews alludes when it says that He learned the value of obedience through suffering.<sup>24</sup> God willed Christ to be our redeemer and He obeyed: He accomplished this by taking upon Himself our sin. And this suffering was a form of experiential knowledge.

Two contrary movements are set up — yet not contraries, since the divinity penetrates Him continually: on the one hand His humanity receives floods of the divinity which penetrate Him, and on the other hand there is this movement of sin which mounts in Him, this stain He has taken on with His extreme sensibility. There is no cloth so efficient in touching and removing a stain as the sensibility of Christ in coming into contact with our sin. There is therefore this opposition, these contraries, this struggle within Him.

*Agonized prayer in Gethsemane*

The peak, we might say the crucial point in this struggle, will be Gethsemane. Until now, Jesus has endured both elements, but in a kind of balance. As they cross the brook Cedron and enter Gethsemane, Jesus says, "This is the hour of the power of darkness."<sup>25</sup> He allows free scope now to all the power of evil, to sin itself as stain, hatred, opposition to God. Does He not still enjoy the hypostatic union and the vision? Yes, but He allows sin its full force, allows all its power to invade Him, to flood His senses, His body, His sensibility, His imagination, His intellect, in brief, His whole human nature.

We may say that at this moment Christ Jesus enjoys the happiness of the intuitive vision of God and at the same time suffers the pain of hell. It is hell assaulting heaven, and in this combat the field of battle is the humanity of Christ. Clearly there must be an explosion. It is the humanity of Christ that bursts open, hence the sweat of blood.<sup>26</sup> Jesus falls with His face to the ground and utters loud cries. This is the prayer of Christ.

The agonized prayer of Gethsemane reduces Christ to loud cries. He who could bear the weight of divinity feels His weakness and falls with His face to the earth. He goes to seek help from His Apostles: "Could you not watch one hour with Me?"<sup>27</sup> He staggers as it were between the grotto where He is

praying and the place where He left them, seeking help; and God sends an angel to strengthen Him.<sup>28</sup>

*Prayer continued in the Church*

It is this prayer of suffering, this grief-filled prayer whose agony is caused by contradiction, of hell's assault on the heaven within Him, it is this prayer that is redemptive. Christ, now in heaven, dies no more, the apostle St. Paul tells us,<sup>29</sup> but He has left to His Church the anguish resulting from the opposition between sin and divinity. He has left to Christians the responsibility of realizing the prayer of union; He has left to us also the role of continuing the agonized prayer of Gethsemane.

Here we are not speaking of any torment which we might endure solely for our own purification. This is a suffering which continues the Redemption, a suffering by which the Church and souls fill up what is lacking to the Passion of Christ.<sup>30</sup> The merit of Christ's Passion is infinite; what is lacking is its application to souls.

The Church is in Christ. She must live the whole Christ, realize the whole Christ, His state of union, His state of prayer. She must also realize His activity and His principal function, His redemptive role. She does this painfully, through prayer. If the Church is destined to continue Christ's life through

His activity, she must also continue His agonizing prayer in a still greater measure. The proportion is indicated to us by the time Jesus devoted to prayer and by the efficacy of this role of His.

Here we touch on the drama of contemplative prayer and the need for monasteries and for contemplative prayer. What did the great contemplatives such as St. Teresa of Avila and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus do? They continued the prayer of Gethsemane. St. Teresa of Avila says that for long years, every evening before going to sleep she contemplated Jesus in Gethsemane and prolonged His prayer.<sup>31</sup>

St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus did the same thing. She endured, especially at the end of her life, the struggle between the modern sin of unbelief and pride and the holiness and grace she bore within her.<sup>32</sup> Obviously she did not do this as Christ Himself had, for she did not possess the hypostatic union. However lofty her sanctity, she did not bear the sin of the world. But she bore the sin of our times. And because of this, because she too was a "cloth" wiping this sin from souls, she was redemptive, a co-redeemer.

In our day we admire the fact that she is a great wonder-worker, that she can enlighten and save so many souls, and that she is the great missionary and apostle of modern times. Yet all this is so, not because she engaged in activities but because she

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engaged in Christ's essential function, the redemptive role of taking away the sin of the world.

### GREAT CHRISTIAN TRUTHS

This brings us to the close of these discussions. It is not for me to explain the mystery of Christ exhaustively. I have spoken to you of luminous clouds, luminous rays which pierce the night at least momentarily and allow us to advance further into the prayer of Christ and to see what we need to see of its nature and usefulness. From this, I propose to draw some practical conclusions.

### *Fundamental activity*

The first is, that we ought to pray much. We must not be Christians who think that reciting our morning and night prayers and assisting absent-mindedly, or even fervently, at Sunday Mass, is all and more than we are obliged to do, since some of our neighbors do even less.

Our true life, which will never end, will be a life of union with God, and we are here on this earth to prepare for it. If we reach heaven and do not know how to pray, we will probably have to learn, and we may not make the grade because we will not know

where to begin. Prayer is an art we cannot acquire in heaven! God will say, "For fifty, sixty years, maybe more, you have had the means at your disposal for praying and uniting yourself to Me, and you haven't done it? You have buried this precious talent? You have not traded with it?"<sup>33</sup>

The Christian life is not only a moral life, it does not consist merely in avoiding this or that sin. It consists primarily in doing something positive. We do not develop our physical life by avoiding microbes; we develop it by the exercise of our vital functions and by nourishing our vital energies with proper food. Our vital Christian energies are grace, and sonship of God, and the consequent carrying out in this world of our role as His children. Our performance will be imperfect, but we carry on in faith and in reality. Our role as God's children consists in uniting ourselves to Him, and, with God the Father, breathing Love, as St. John of the Cross says,<sup>34</sup> breathing the Holy Spirit.

Allow me to insist on this point. In our day even good Christians are sometimes oriented to roles which are important but secondary. It is sometimes suggested that the exercise of charity means primarily the exercise of social charity. This is not true. Social charity is included among our duties, but it is a false interpretation of the Gospel to think that being a Christian means primarily exercising social charity.

Charity is what unites us to God. Our Lord asks us to exercise charity toward our neighbors by supernaturalizing what we do, by seeing in them images of God, or performing acts of charity with the object of drawing them to the essential functions of children of God and thereby leading them to the Blessed Trinity. Our charity should have an apostolic aim: to lead others along the way, not just to Sunday Mass, but to the Blessed Trinity.

This is not reserved to a few specialists who have the time, or to a few monks or religious who have the taste for it. It is a Christian truth. It is our family life, our intimate life. Quite simply, it is our Christian life. We need therefore to give our children the means, the instruction, which will orient them to this Trinitarian life in which we should all share and which is our goal. We should exercise ourselves in union and orient our personal, family, and social life to this goal of participation in Trinitarian life.

### *Prayer which saves*

If we wish to save the world, we must do it, certainly, by our actions and our apostolate, as Christ did: He devoted three years to that. But in the end He saved the world through His sufferings and agonizing prayer. The great means of saving the



world is to take on its sin in an efficacious way. Our compassion should not be merely humanitarian, but Christian. We ought to impregnate ourselves with God, tending toward the hypostatic union not in order to bring it about in ourselves, but in order to bring about union with Christ. This union enables us to take on the sins of others in a way that is effective and fruitful. We become capable of taking on ourselves the sin of the humanity which surrounds us, these brothers and sisters of ours who are so close to us.

We do indeed have the duty of relieving misery, feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, and sheltering the homeless. But I believe that our greatest concern should be to give souls the true nourishment which is Christ, God, and the true drink flowing from the rock which is Christ.<sup>35</sup> We ought to provide for souls, not so much a shelter for the few days or years they will spend in this world, but rather the shelter and refuge of the Blessed Trinity, where they will spend all eternity.

This is what Christian truth makes plain to us. This truth is not meant to be preached to individuals here and there or to some specially favored group of people. It is, in a word, Christian truth.

Let us remember this. I ask it of the Blessed Virgin, who lived this truth profoundly. Pondering on the teaching of our Lord, she buried herself in solitude when there was a whole world to be con-

verted. She set out on her mission as mediatrix, she set out into solitude to continue the true and profound life of Christ, the life of prayer in silence.

I also ask St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross, who pointed out this way and recalled for us these great Christian truths, to root them deeply in our souls through this word which is spoken to us in the name of the Church in the difficult times through which we are passing.

We feel the world invaded by the powers of evil. Sin is very near, rising on the horizon with admirably organized human power. At physical, psychological and intellectual levels, the devil himself utilizes a power higher than ours, and normally it assures him at least apparent victories. How can we overcome him? We can only do it by supernatural means. Before His death, Jesus said to us: "I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, and they will put you to death...."<sup>36</sup> He gave His disciples a program. He made predictions which at first sight seemed hardly encouraging, but He also said to them, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."<sup>37</sup> How did He overcome it? By taking its sin upon Himself, by prayer.

In these times, in face of the dangers threatening us, what is our reason for hope? It is of course Christ, the prayer of Christ who ever lives in heaven to intercede for us.<sup>38</sup> Our prayer rests upon the

prayer of Christ. He is ever living in His Church.

As for the Holy Spirit dwelling in our souls, what does He do? The apostle St. Paul, with his keen ear, has heard Him, apprehended Him, ever praying, uttering unspeakable groans.<sup>39</sup> What is left for us to do ourselves, to assure not only the salvation of our own souls but the salvation of Christians, of the world? We are to unite our personal prayer and our activity with the prayer of the Holy Spirit in our souls and with the ever efficacious prayer of Christ in heaven. This is how we shall carry off the victory, for ourselves, our brethren, for the whole world.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lk 11:1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, chs. 21-44.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus Christ is true God and true man. The Son of God, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, united Himself to our human nature while retaining His divine nature. To explain this mystery, theology uses the expression "hypostatic union," or union according to the Person (in Greek, *hypostasis*). Realized at the moment of the Incarnation, this union is henceforth indissoluble, that is, permanent and definitive.

<sup>4</sup> From the Greek, *theos*, God, and *andros*, man.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ex 13:21-22.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. "The Mystery of God," 28, n. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Spiritual Canticle*, str. 37, 549-553.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lk 2:52.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Heb 5:8.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mt 4:1ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Lk 5:16.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lk 6:12.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lk 21:37.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rm 8:34 and Heb 7:25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lk 3:21-22.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jn 1:33.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lk 9:28ff.

<sup>18</sup> The expression is found in Mt 17:5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Bossuet, 4th Letter, "To a Young Lady of Metz," 28.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Heb 4:15.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Is 53:4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jn 1:29.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Heb 5:8.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lk 22:53.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lk 22:44.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Mt 26:40.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Lk 22:43.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Rm 6:9.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Col 1:24.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, ch. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Manuscript C*, 5 r<sup>o</sup> ff.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Mt 25:14ff.

<sup>34</sup> *The Spiritual Canticle*, str. 39, 557-558.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 10:4.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Mt 10:16ff.

<sup>37</sup> Jn 16:33.

<sup>38</sup> Rm 8:34.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rm 8:26.