

REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER

"If you ask anything of the Father in my name, He will give it you . . . ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete". [Jn. 16: 23-24]

The essence of the Christian life is union with God! This is a union which cannot be earned but which is given to each of us, by God, through grace in the Sacrament of Baptism. Sadly, it is a union which far too often is neglected; through sin we become distanced from God and the union we were given ceases to be a reality; however, it is still potentially ours. Through our communion with the Blessed Sacrament this potential is deepened and union with God is restored. If this union is to become real in our lives, then we must continue what was begun in Baptism and restored through the Blessed Sacrament by maintaining it through prayer.

It is a sad fact that for many today prayer has no real connection with the daily life of the individual; at best it is an irregular exercise, the 'saying' of one's prayers. The expression 'The Life of Prayer' has lost almost all its meaning. Prayers are 'said', with some vague hope of an answer to a god who is far off, a remote yet benevolent benefactor whom we

placate by the recitation of a set form of words. A far cry from the God of St. John's gospel who has His dwelling deep within us.

There seems to be these days, a preoccupation with intercession, a preoccupation which is really quite dangerous since it leads one into the totally false assumption that one has a full and vigorous 'prayer life': in my opinion nothing could be further from the truth.

Of course intercession is right and it should be encouraged but we really must get away from this 'Benevolent uncle' image of God.

No doubt these and other misconceptions are the result of bad teaching, or no teaching at all. Much of what we learn about prayer comes from well meaning but inadequately trained Sunday School teachers and lingers on from our childhood. Prayer is not the natural act which many would have us believe it to be; no more that is, than walking, or speaking, or eating. These are skills which, though taken very much for granted, have to be learned and prayer is no different, it must be learned in the same laborious way. Once learned at a basic level then we must develop the gift through constant use. A classic definition

of prayer has been given by St. John Damascene: "Prayer" he says, "is the lifting up of one's mind to God". Usually our minds are elsewhere, occupied with the ordinary things of life, in prayer we deliberately put these to one side and, 'Lift up our hearts' to God Himself: with our whole being we enter into union with God. This is what Thomas Merton called the, "Communing of the Soul with God".

This "Communing of the Soul with God", Prayer, can be divided into four part. These are not four different kinds of prayer but rather, the four constituent parts of 'True Prayer' which has as its pure intention union with God..

The instinctive response to God who is the Creator of all things and the redeemer of mankind, the God who is greater than even one's wildest imaginings is one of Adoration; this, simply because God is God, the great 'I AM' in whom we live and move and have our being. We come before God first as His creation, yet at one and the same time sons by adoption, how can we fail to fall on our knees and Adore the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Having perceived God in all His glory serves only to make us aware of our own failings and inadequacies, this being so we must offer these to God in all humility. Throwing ourselves on His great and immeasurable mercy we make our Confession, without which we remain separated by sin, from Him with whom we seek to be at one.

Thus cleansed, we have much for which to be Thankful and so out of Adoration and Confession springs Thanksgiving.

Our Thanksgiving is for the fact that God is God; then follow Thanks for the great many

things he provides for us. This aspect of prayer is something which is regularly neglected, particularly when things are going well for us. Far too often the only things we remember to Thank God for are those thing which we perceive as being answers to prayer, those things which effect us personally when in all truth we have Blessings in abundance for which we should give hearty Thanks.

So it is we come to intercession or, Supplication as I prefer to call it. Only after we have entered into the nearer presence of God and acknowledged His all powerful being, fallen down on our knees and offered Him our Adoration: only when we have recognised our own unworthiness to be in His presence and so made our humble and sincere Confession: only when we have acknowledged the great many Blessings bestowed upon us and given to God the Thanks which are His due; then and only then are we in a position to present our Supplication to He who is **all merciful.**

Supplication is an act of homage: in the presence of God we place ourselves into His loving care, we ask that He provide for our needs. Through our prayer we open the window of our heart and He showers us with gifts like the fresh spring air.

Through these **A.C.T.S.** of prayer we maintain our union with the living God and in union with God our lives truly become lives of prayer. Filled with His grace, in prayer, we live in His peace and dwell in the unity of His Spirit.

Adoration !

Confession !

Thanksgiving !

Supplication !