

Eleven Addresses during a Retreat of the Companions of the Love of Jesus,
engaged in perpetual intercession for the conversion of sinners.

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ADDRESS IX.

Necessity of Intercession.

To pray for others is an indispensable duty. It is a very grave part of our self-examination. It is a duty which we were, most of us, taught when we lisped our first prayers. As soon as we were taught to pray, as soon as we knew that there was a God to pray to, and that He heard prayers, we were taught not to pray for ourselves alone.

We should have felt it unloving then, not to have included others in our prayers. It was an instinct, on which our childish minds acted, as soon as it was put before us, to add, father, mother, brother, sister. Every childish duty, every childish prayer ought to have expanded with our growth. It is a graver thing, if a duty, impressed on us in our very earliest childhood, which became a part of ourselves, so that we could not even imagine saying our morning and evening prayers, without praying for those natural objects of our affection, remained stunted to its then measure. We were taught too, why our dear Lord bade us say, "our Father," not "my Father," that we prayed to Him, as the common Father of us all.

We cannot be Christians without intercessory prayer. For we should be breaking a primary law of love, which our Lord has given us. He has hedged us in by His prayer which He has given us. We cannot say an "Our Father" without doing it, at least with our lips. We must have emptied our Blessed Lord's prayer of its meaning, before we can have ceased intercessory prayer. We ask in it for exactly the same gifts for others as for ourselves.

I fear that there is a very heartless way of saying our Lord's prayer, and so also of many of the common public prayers, which have been framed upon it, that people rather use one prayer in common, each praying for himself in it, than one common prayer, each for all. This is, of course, a great loss, as all unloving things are. For if five hundred people pray together, then, if, each time they say "Forgive us our trespasses," or "Give us this day our daily bread," or "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," each prays for all those present, under the word, "us," then each will have had five hundred prayers for himself; for each, five hundred voices will have gone up to the Throne of God; for each, in those five hundred prayers, the Holy Ghost will have interceded with those unutterable Divine groanings; for each, those intercessions will have been united with the Perpetual Intercession of *the* Intercessor. And if any one has so prayed, he will have set to his account the love with which he so prayed, whatever others may have done. So that in all intercessory prayer there are these three things; 1) we shall have fulfilled so far a duty, commanded to us by Jesus; 2) we shall become sharers of the prayers of others; 3) we shall obtain grace for our own act of love; according to that, "my prayer returned into my own bosom." But, however people may evade it in common prayer, it seems hard to think how they can use the Lord's Prayer for themselves alone, when they use it, as our Lord bids, in their private devotions. And in the public use of it, we cannot tie it down even to that particular congregation, with whom we pray. For those great words, which we have to take first into our mouths and hearts, "Hallowed be Thy Name,

Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done in earth as it is in heaven,” are manifestly coextensive with the whole world. They pray for the extension of the Church, and, which is one, for the conversion of the Heathen, of Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics; they pray for the well-being of the Church, that Christ may indeed reign in the hearts of all those whom He has made members of Himself; that all hindrances to the coming of His Kingdom may be removed; that all may live as they believe; we ourselves lose ourselves in the deep compass of those three notes from the seven-stringed harp which make such beautiful music in the ears of God. We are taken out of ourselves into the society of Saints and Angels; we are borne along with the interests of Jesus throughout the world. We were taught that His Glory, the fulfilment of His Will, were to be the primary object of our prayer; that the Angel-like fulfilment of His Will in each was to occupy our thoughts and prayers, before we asked for any thing directly for ourselves; that we were to desire that His Name should be hallowed; that His Kingdom in the heart of men should be expanded and should grow, prior to all besides. His Glory, in the fulfilment of His Blessed Will and salvation of mankind, came (we were taught by the very form of prayer which was put into our mouths, as our Lord’s own teaching and bequest) before all besides, all of our own, except as we were included in it.

Again, when our Lord bids us “pray for them, which despitefully use us and persecute us,”¹ it cannot but presuppose all the rest of intercessory prayer. He singles out those whom we should be most inclined to except, and, when removing the exception, confirms the universality of the duty of intercession. This became the habit of His disciples. Every thing, good or bad, became the occasion of intercessory prayer. “Being reviled, we bless; being defamed, we entreat.”² What our Lord provided for in general, the Holy Ghost, Who was to teach those self-same things which He taught, bringing to the Apostles’ remembrance whatever He had said, taught in more detail. “I exhort that, first of all, supplications prayers intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority;—for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”³ Here, besides, the duty of the universality of the prayer, we have the acceptableness of it. “It is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.” How devotedly things ought to be done, of which we are told, that they are “good and acceptable” to Him! And besides this, we have the ground of that acceptableness, “Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

See how He admits us into a part of His own office. He has bequeathed to us a portion of His work to do. He has made us “fellow-workers with God.” He has left part of “the travail of His Soul,” to behold which is a part of His satisfaction, to be filled up by us, as St. Paul says of the afflictions, which He endured for the Gospel’s sake, “fill up that which remaineth over of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body’s sake, which is the Church.”⁴ He wrought our salvation Alone: He Alone atoned: He Alone gives grace; all creation, all creatures, the highest which He could form, could not give us one grace from themselves. For all grace is the direct creation of God the Holy Ghost. It is His creation for the heart alone. The heart is so God’s own, that we all can indeed, by

¹ St. Matt. v. 44.

² 1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.

³ 1 Tim. ii. 1-4.

⁴ Col. i. 24.

His grace, pray for His enlarged gifts for it; but God Alone can dwell in the heart. He so loves the heart, that He reserves it as His own prerogative, to pour grace into it; He admits us to a part of His office in asking Him for it: the last act of love in bestowing it He, for love of us, reserves to Himself. He seems, so to speak, jealous of it and His own relation to it. As we like to reserve to ourselves the special gift of some great token of our love to those whom we love, so this last final gift God keeps for Himself. It is good for us that we should receive and hold it from Him Alone; He makes it part of His loving relation, Alone to give grace to the soul, as He Alone can dwell in it.

We have from Him the grace, whereby to do any thing acceptable to Him: but still He has left us something to do with Him and for Him, through His grace. "Not I," St. Paul said,⁵ "but the grace of God which is in me"; "not I," not my natural self, "not I," as if what I had received were mine own, or held of myself, and not of God only; "not I, but the grace of God," beginning, continuing, ending; yet that grace of God, where was it? where resided it? "the grace of God which was *in me*." All was of God, but it came, it energised, it put itself forth, was effectual, through man. Man was the conductor which brought the lightning of Divine grace down into the soul; man was the instrument, which grace attuned, upon which it played, and through which it brought others into harmony with itself.

2. But then too He not only commandeth intercessory prayer; He takes away the only forcible temptation against it. God's command ought to have been enough to remove temptation. For what He commands, His Wisdom will provide for, His Omni-potency will fulfil. Yet the one only temptation, which, in any loving heart, would have any force, is this, our own unworthiness. What are we, that we should ask for such a great thing, as the salvation of a soul, the checking of a sin, the conversion of a soul from Satan to God? We are compassed with infirmities; we have been ourselves, perhaps, once lepers as white as snow, with that horrid leprosy of sin: we see the marks and stains of it upon us: we are giving way to lesser sins ourselves, if not such as to cut off the grace of God from us, yet we fear, so as to clog our prayers: we fear that we are lukewarm ourselves; any how we are very dry; we do not obtain grace enough for ourselves; we do not pray enough for ourselves: we are not earnest enough about ourselves: we have something else to begin with. St. James says, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;" and *we are not* righteous, nor is our prayer fervent or effectual. It belongs to such as "faithful Abraham"⁶ to intercede for the cities of the plain. Intercessory prayer belongs to saints, not to sinners.

Now it may be very true that we ought to be about something else *also*. And if we do God's bidding in this, He will the more give us grace for our other needs. But as for the temptation of its being useless for us to pray for others because we are unworthy to be heard, we are only making too much account of ourselves, if we feel it. It is but a wrong humility, which is real pride. God does not give what we ask for, for our unworthiness, but for the worthiness of Jesus. The Church ends every prayer, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," which is one with the fuller, "for the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour." It teaches us to say, "We do not presume to come to this Thy table, trusting in our own righteousness, but in Thy manifold and great mercies." "We be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto Thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech Thee to accept this our

⁵ 1 Cor. xv. 10.

⁶ Gal. iii. 9.

bounden duty and service, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So Daniel prayed through the Holy Ghost inspiring him, “We do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousness, but for Thy great mercies.”⁷ And then too, it is not we alone who pray. “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the Mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to God.”⁸ As then our Lord forbade His Apostles to take thought what they should speak, for “it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father Who speaketh in you,”⁹ so it may be said of us, in a manner, “It is not ye who pray, but the Spirit of your Father Who prayeth in you.” We pray, as best we can: we know not what to ask for, as we ought: we pray in broken syllables or timid words or half-formed thoughts; but He Who made our hearts, knoweth what the Holy Ghost Who prayeth in us meaneth, “when He maketh intercession for the saints,” and He is heard. For it is God Who speaketh with God, although in us, and what He saith is according to the mind of God. It is again “in the spirit” that the Apostle bids, “pray always with all prayer and supplication.”¹⁰ It is “with the Spirit” that he bids us “be filled” (and he would not bid us do what did not depend on ourselves to do), and so to “speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”¹¹ What an office for us, to make sweet music in the ears of God!

3. Another difficulty, I think, comes to some of us, as if some great effort was necessary to reach God. They think of God, as far away, in the Highest Heavens, in some place where Jesus is, high above all Heavens, and so they go up and up in their thoughts and they send up their prayers, and they can scarce believe that such prayers as their’s can go up on high. God seems to them as One Who had “covered Himself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through.”¹² And yet prayer has no strain; least of all, of imagination. We pray in the midst of God. For “in Him we live and move and are.” His Ear is ever near us. It is at our heart. The lowest whisper reaches it. It is open to the faintest velleity of the soul. What a great thing it is which is open to us, and at what small cost! God has laid it upon us as a duty, that we may not give way to sloth or unlovingness or self-deceit under some disguise of conscious unworthiness. It is often a gain, not to be able to help ourselves. It is like being plunged into water out of our depth, that we may learn to swim. We must strike out for our lives, that we sink not. But then there is an Almighty Arm under us. We must do every thing badly, in order to learn to do it well. You did not get impatient with yourselves in learning any accomplishment of this world, music or drawing or languages or composition; or, if you did, you found that it only made matters worse; and so you laid the impatience aside, perhaps out of a sense of duty in part, and partly because it did no good, but harm. God is very patient with us. If we brought on our own incapacity to pray by our own fault, He is only the more patient with us, and makes the more allowance for us, because it is not our own fault now, and we

⁷ Dan. ix. 18.

⁸ Rom. viii. 26, 27.

⁹ S. Matt. x. 20.

¹⁰ Eph. vi. 18.

¹¹ Ib. v. 19.

¹² Lam. iii. 44.

have difficulties, which we might have escaped, had we been faithful and fixed, and been afraid to let other thoughts come in, when we were in His Presence; but which we cannot help now.

What have we to do with estimating the value of our prayers? As if we could keep a debtor and creditor account with God, and, if we thought our prayer earnest, then God was bound to do something in return for it; if otherwise, then little or nothing! O that weary endless round of self! shall we never be free from that sickening contemplation of self? Prayer is especially the province of faith. From first to last, it is inscrutable. It is part of that wondrous harmony, whereby He has bound up our free-will with His own Omnipotence. It is part of that love, whereby He would bind in one the work of the creature with His own Omnipotence! Men stumble at prayer, because they sever what God has united, the Will of God was the God-enabled will of man. What were the will of the highest seraph, that he should change the mind of the Author of all? But does the fire burn less mightily, because God has assigned it the fuel which it should convert into itself? Does the river sweep to the ocean less strongly, because God has appointed the channel for its tide? We are the fuel; the fire is the love of God: we are the channel; the tide is His perpetual flow of grace. Only let us be persuaded, that it is God's voice in us. Only remember we, that our Dear Lord has pledged His own Almighty word, "Ask, and ye shall receive!" We spoil and defeat our prayers by thinking of ourselves. Apart from the waste of time, in which unknown graces might be won, we are forgetting the All-prevailing Intercession of Christ at God's Right Hand, the Intercession of God the Holy Ghost in us, in the thought of our miserable selves. God's command is, Pray! This is our's: the rest is His. Be we the tiniest wheel in the wondrous compass of the creation, He has assigned us our place. We have no imagination to measure the profuse munificence of our God. Only, since He has said, "Ask, and ye shall receive," we know that we cannot ask things according to His Will, without receiving. Every petition, which is put into our mouth, is a treasure of grace to us. We have admired the marvellous imagination of Eastern tales, how the touch of a common household instrument at once unlocked all inconceivable treasures of lustrous beauty and wealth. Faint image of the omnipotence of prayer! For it is gifted by God with power over Himself; it unlocks all the treasures of His grace and love. The doors of heaven fly open at His word, to receive the penitent stricken soul, or to pour down graces upon us. Every prayer may gain a grace. How differently would the Litany sound in our hearts, if we had more faith in the rich profusion of God's love. As many prayers, as there are, so many graces we might obtain. But our comfort is this, that we must do it. His love and His commands have bound us. Say we the words, "Forgive us our trespasses, lead us not into temptation, Deliver us from evil," and leave the rest to Jesus! O that we could, more and more, go forth out of ourselves and go to Jesus! He will not defeat His own end. He will not let His own word fall to the ground. We have done His bidding, in what poor miserable way we could.

The Omnipotence of His love will accomplish the rest.

Only, then, do we what we can. God Himself wishes to hear us. He wishes to give, more than we to pray. It is His own plan, which He has given to us, in part, to carry out. It is not for ourselves that we are asking: it is for God. They are His interests more directly than our's, and our's because they are His. He is waiting to be gracious to those souls. He longs to give Himself to them. But it is part of His love, that He would give us inestimable things, even the salvation of souls, on our asking. Our prayers which He will

inspire, are part of the plan of His eternal predestination for the souls, for whom He puts it into our heart to pray. We are, in praying, only fulfilling a purpose of His love. It is, as when a king, wishing to forgive a rebel, suggests to one of his friends or trusted advisers, to ask for his life. When God puts it into our hearts to pray, He is admitting us into the near relationship of friends to Him. He might have contrived other ways, but they did not satisfy His love. Nothing would satisfy Him, Who “arranges the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order,” but to employ His creatures, as far as they could be employed, and associate them with Himself. Think we then nothing of ourselves. If we could feel but as that organ which peals forth the praises of God, yet yields no note, but as it is attuned and as those notes of joy are elicited from it, then we should indeed pray as God wills, then God would thank us, that we had done what He longed for us to do, and had been the last link in the salvation of the soul which He longed to save.

Set we the value of souls before us, how God, Father Son and Holy Ghost love them, ourselves included; how sin dishonours God; what a misery it is in His creation; how souls are perishing every clay; how they are for ever losing God; and how God wills that our prayers should cooperate to their salvation. “Hath He said, and shall He not do it?”¹³ He has said “Ask, and ye shall receive; that your joy may be full.” “Ask;” so ye shall have part in the Saviour’s joy “over each sinner that repenteth,” and, in helping to save the souls of others, shall the more save your own. So in the Heavenly court shall our Saviour say to His friends the Holy Angels, “This and that soul has he and she, and she, and she, (naming you) won for Me;” so shall we together rejoice before Him, Who redeemed us together, has together called us, hath together given us perseverance to the end, and will together glorify us.

¹³ Num. xxiii. 19.