

40. “I have prayed for you” (Lk 22:32)

I am apprehensive about writing to you. In the face of certain griefs, there is little one can do but pray and be silent. The slightest advice runs the risk of doing more harm than good. It is so easy to give advice.

I shall therefore limit myself to relating to you what an aged missionary once told me, after he had spent more than forty years in the bush.

He was then taking a needed rest on his brother’s farm in the mountains of France’s Haut-Jura. As we sauntered through this austere and beautiful region of pastures and pine woods, he would tell me with amazing verve of his memories of the bush country, memories more exciting than an adventure novel. One day, he suddenly turned serious as he recalled a particular episode of his life. He might never have divulged it to me, if I had not questioned him about the role of mental prayer in the life of a missionary.

He began to speak.

“I had been at the Mission about six years, when suddenly the rising tide of temptation took hold of me like a boat abandoned on the beach. Irresistibly, it grabbed me, lifted me up, threw me back, and grabbed me again. I tried to pray but couldn’t. The desperate child was trying to reach his Father, and was powerless to do so.

“I don’t know how or why, but after several days of exhausting struggle, a prayer literally came out of me, as suddenly as a partridge flies out of the bushes. I cried out to Jesus Christ: ‘You see I can’t pray anymore! Well then, it’s up to you. Pray for me, come now, pray for me!’

“Almost at once, calm returned to me. I couldn’t believe it. At first, I thought it was a calm before a more terrible attack. Then, I soon became convinced that I have been heard, and that Christ was saying to me, as he had to Peter, ‘*I have prayed for you that your faith may never fail. You in turn must strengthen your brothers*’ (Lk 22:32). Certainly, I have experienced other hours of temptation since then, but never again the anguished feeling of being the plaything of a violent and all-powerful tempest.

“It is hard to find words to translate the intensity of this experience. I can’t express the spontaneity, the vehemence, and the imperiousness of my cry to Christ: ‘Come now, pray for me!’

“If you only knew what it is like, after having learned in books that Christ prays for all men, to discover all of a sudden, in the midst of a desperate situation, that he is there. Someone real is by my side, and in place of my faltering prayer, he, the beloved Son, prays for me, interceding personally before the Father for me!

“‘*I have prayed for you.*’ In the most desperate moments, it sufficed to recall these words, for peace to reign within my soul.”