

#### 46. *It is Christ who prays within me*

At the very beginning of your mental prayer, make an act of faith in the mysterious presence of Christ within you, which is affirmed in Scripture: “*On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*” (Jn 14:20); “*May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith*” (Ep 3:17).

If Christ is living within you, he is praying within you. For Christ, to live is to pray. Join him, take hold of him, and make his prayer your very own. Or rather (for the terms I have just used place too much emphasis on your own activity), let this prayer take hold of you, permeate you, raise you up, and carry you toward the Father. I do not promise that you will be aware of all this. I ask you only to believe in it and, during mental prayer, to renew your union with Christ’s prayer. Make room for Christ’s prayer, so it can take possession of every fiber of your being, the way fire penetrates wood and makes it incandescent.

To pray is to grant the request that Christ makes of us: “Lend me your intellect, your heart, your whole being—everything that, in a human person, has the capacity to become prayer—so that I may call forth within you the great praise of the Father. Did I come for any other reason than to kindle fire upon the earth, that it might transform all the trees in the forest into flaming torches? This fire is my prayer. Consent to the fire.”

Christ is present within the tiny baptized child, just as he is in the great mystic. But the life of Christ in each of them is not at the same stage of development. While the prayer of Christ already vibrates within the soul of the newly-baptized, it is still only rudimentary, a fire barely kindled. It is during the whole course of our life, in the very measure of our cooperation, that Christ’s prayer intensifies and gradually takes possession of our whole being.

Our cooperation consists first of all in cleaving with all our will to Christ’s prayer within us. But note the very strong sense I give to the word “cleave.” It does not indicate a halfhearted consent, a superficial acquiescence. It signifies a total gift of self, the way a log surrenders to the flames to become fire in its turn. Our cooperation also consists in seeking with our whole mind to know the components of Christ’s prayer within us (praise, thanksgiving, oblation and intercession), so that we can espouse them more perfectly. You ask me for subjects for meditation. I don’t know of any better than these.

The man of prayer does not at first perceive this prayer of Christ within him. He does not see that his faith guarantees it, and that his meditation makes him understand more deeply. This can go on for a long time. Then a day comes—and it is not necessarily during mental prayer—when he discovers Christ’s prayer within his soul. Then he is silent. He fears to frighten it off, just as one fears to scare away a bird perched on the windowsill.

Then suddenly he realizes that Christ’s prayer has disappeared. He doesn’t know quite how it happened—perhaps during a second’s inattention on his part. He is sad. It had been wonderful to discover this prayer in the depths of his being. He hopes that he will find it again, perhaps the very next morning when he awakes or during the day when he takes a break from his work.

He should not grieve over it. Christ’s prayer is always there, even when we do not perceive it within us. We must return to it through faith. Above all, we must not make an

effort during mental prayer to experience it again. To go to prayer for the sake of God's gifts, and not for God himself, is to fail to honor God as is his due. In accordance with his promise (Jn 20:29), the Lord would manifest himself much oftener to us if we were hungry for God himself, and not greedy for his gifts. Most probably, the grace of perceiving Christ's prayer will be given to us again. Perhaps when we know this prayer better, it will no longer slip away from us. Until then, we must not try to seize this prayer, as we would a fleeing bird.

When at last the soul is perfectly stripped of self, it will experience what St. Ignatius of Antioch described in unforgettable terms in his *Letter to the Romans*. This letter was written toward the end of his long apostolic life, on a ship taking him to martyrdom. "My passions have been crucified, and I no longer have any appetite for the things of earth. But I hear within me as from a spring of living water the murmur: *Come to the Father.*"