

59. *Shoulder to shoulder*

If we want to find God, we must go to the place where he is waiting for us. For he has chosen certain meeting-places. For the Hebrews, during their long sojourn in the desert, it was “the Tent of Meeting.” After their settlement in Canaan, it was Jerusalem, and within Jerusalem, the Temple. Sacrifices were not to be offered anywhere else. The Temple was the “House of God,” also called the “House of prayer” by the prophets. The prayers that each individual offered in his home or in the synagogue were directed toward the Temple. Thus, the prophet Daniel always kept open the window of his upper room that faced towards the Holy City.

But the Temple was only an image, an anticipation of the definitive house of God that is the Church, the great gathering of all the faithful of earth and heaven. The Church is indeed the “Holy Temple,” as St. Paul says, “the spiritual dwelling,” the new House of prayer.

Whenever we want to pray, we must go to the House of God, we must enter *into the Church*. By this, I mean that we must become aware once more of belonging to the Church. Any one of us who isolates himself will never encounter God, because it is within the Church, the Mystical Body of his Son, that he awaits us. “Outside the Church there is no salvation” because outside of Christ, outside God’s family, outside the House of God, we have no way of finding God.*

*We should not conclude from this, that the prayers of non-Christians are devoid of value. But it is through the Church, which assumes and offers them, that they find their way to God.

I fear that you are experiencing the temptation of spiritual individualism. This may be the explanation for your bouts with discouragement. I invite you to pray within the Church, spiritually united to all your brothers and sisters.

Pray *in the midst of them*, join your voice to the prayers of the priests and the faithful, of the men of yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Pray also *in their name*. Consider yourself deputed to pray. Lend your voice, your soul, to the entire community which wants to address itself to the Father through you. Did not Christ invite us to say: “*Our Father...give us...*”? The Christian should not pray only in his own name, or petition only for himself.

And that is not all. You must also pray *through* all your brothers and sisters. Know that in the great fraternal communion they are at your service. Claudel has expressed it in his own inimitable way in *Un Poète regarde la Croix* (A Poet Looks at the Cross). Listen to what he has to say:

“We have much more than our own faculties to love, understand and serve God. We have everything available to us all at once, from the Blessed Virgin Mary at the summit of the heavens, to the miserable African leper who, holding a bell in his hand, exhales the responses of the Mass

through his half-rotted lips. The whole of the visible and invisible creation, the whole of history, the past, the present, and the future, the whole of nature, all the riches of the saints multiplied by grace; all, absolutely all of this is at our service. It is an extension of ourselves, to be used for noble purposes.

“All the saints, all the angels belong to us. We can use the intellect of St. Thomas, the arm of St. Michael, the hearts of Joan of Arc and Catherine of Siena, and all those latent resources that we have only to touch to make them overflow. It is as if everything good, great and beautiful that is done from one end of the earth to the other, everything that holiness accomplishes, were our own doing. It is as if the heroism of the missionaries, the inspiration of the doctors, the generosity of the martyrs, the genius of the artists, the spirited prayer of the Poor Clares and the Carmelites, were all in ourselves. In fact they are us! From the North to the South, from Alpha to Omega, from the East to the West, all things are one with us. We are clothed with all of this and we set all of this into motion.”

Play the game honestly and generously. Never begin your mental prayer without uniting yourself to the “total Christ,” to the multitude of believers, in adoration before the Father. Always feel that you are shoulder to shoulder with your brothers and sisters everywhere.

And then pray with them, through them and for them. Very often you will be surprised to discover that you are rich and strong, although you had come to prayer overwhelmed with your weakness, your poverty, and your solitude.