

77. *Begging from God*

You seemed to be ashamed to address prayers of petition to God. Isn't this a subtle form of pride? Asking is the attitude of the beggar, offering is the attitude of generous and unselfish persons—and don't you want to be included among the latter?

And yet Christ has recommended the prayer of petition to us over and over again: “Ask, and you will receive” (Mt 7:7); “your heavenly Father [will] give good things to anyone who asks him” (Mt 7:11); “whatever you ask in my name I will do” (Jn 14:13); “I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in heaven” (Mt 18:19).

In the face of Christ's insistence, how can anyone doubt that this prayer of petition is of the highest importance? Besides, it is easy to understand why. What could we offer to God, that we have not received from him? And how can we receive, if we do not hold out our hand? You dream of loving God in a selfless way. But how can you love him except with a love you have received from him? Left to your own resources, you are powerless to love God “with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with your whole mind” (cf. Mt 22:37). You can truly love him only with the “new heart” that Ezekiel has promised in God's name: “I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my Spirit within you” (Ezk 36:26-27).

And that is precisely what we must pray for: that God may teach us to love, and give us the love with which to love him. I don't mean some tepid love, but the love that the New Testament writers express by the Greek word *agape*. This translates as “charity,” a term that has become rather colorless in our modern parlance. Man is basically incapable of such love. It is divine in its origin and nature. It is the mutual love of the Father and the Son in the exultation of the Holy Spirit. It is also their love for men, magnificently manifested by the Father's gift of his Son, and by Christ's sacrifice of his life for our sakes.

“God is Love” (1 Jn 4:16). This love is God's very nature. Outside of God this love can be found only in those whom he begets, that is, in those to whom he communicates his nature and his life. Then these beloved ones love God as he loves himself, and become his intimates and friends.

Do you understand this admirable teaching whose herald St. John became, after meditating on it during his long life? If you do, how can you fail to become the devotee of the prayer of petition? Sustained by indefectible faith and hope, you will beseech the Father to give you *agape*.

It is my fervent wish that you will be a beggar your whole life through. A beggar of *agape*. You must beg from God, whose riches will then become your very own.