



Rob and Sharla Walsh
Provincial Couple
Teams of Our Lady
emmettwalsh@me.com
503-939-8577

“The glory of God comes first”

Letter 78

Fr. Henri Caffarel

being present to God; Letters on Prayer

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I never intended to imply that, in order to arrive at a more perfect mental prayer, one has to banish the prayer of petition. If my recent letter gave you such an idea, then I didn't express myself very well.

Regarding the sentiments of joy, fervor, and love, that you have often experienced during mental prayer, I was suggesting that you not ask for them and even renounce them insofar as it is God's good pleasure. In fact, we must learn how to renounce the sensible presence of God, to arrive at a more perfect intimacy with him. We must consent to the night, in order to emerge into the true light. Doesn't human love offer us an analogy? "Beloved, extinguish the lamp that does not allow me to see your face." Even though I advise you not to desire or ask for sensible graces, do not conclude that you are to abandon the prayer of petition.

Christ himself has taught us to ask the Father for what we need: our daily bread, forgiveness and protection. But he taught us to pray first that the Father's name be hallowed, that his Kingdom come and that his will be done. Yes indeed, the glory of God comes first. Not by a mere priority in time—as if, once we have prayed for the Kingdom of God, we have the right to petition for our own personal interests—but by an absolute priority. Our very petitions for bread, forgiveness and even for graces, must be made with God's glory in mind, and not primarily for our happiness or even for our salvation. We must pray that we may hallow his name through our whole life, so that in us and through us his Kingdom may come and his will be done. Seen in this light, prayer of petition is perfectly pure and truly great.

Returning to the matter of sensible graces, do not conclude, from what I have said, that you must dread or scorn them. The point is that you shouldn't engage in mental prayer for the sake of enjoying these graces, or imagine that fervor is better than pure faith. Once you understand this, be ready too welcome God's gifts with a simple and

thankful heart. Learn to adapt yourself to abundance, as well as to famine. In the words of St. Benedict: "May God be glorified in all things!"