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“Place your offering on the rock”

Letter 79

Fr. Henri Caffarel

being present to God; Letters on Prayer

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You write: “I feel I am wasting time during mental prayer.” Do you think it means nothing to waste your time, if you are really wasting it for God? We read in the Gospel: *“He who loses his life will find it”* (cf. Mt 10:39). Now, your time is the very fabric of your life. To “waste” or “lose” a fraction of it for God is, strictly speaking, to offer a sacrifice. Abel immolated a lamb from his flock, and his sacrifice was pleasing to God because he thereby acknowledged the Lord’s supreme dominion over everything he possessed. You, for your part, are offering this hour of your day. You are destroying it, sacrificing it in the religious sense of the word. How can this “sacrifice of mental prayer” fail to be precious in the Lord’s eyes, if through it you mean to affirm his supreme dominion over your whole life? Wasted time? Not at all. Rather, it is time that has been consecrated, made sacred.

You would probably prefer to have rapturous thoughts, fervor, or at the very least, genuine recollection, But then, might not your time of mental prayer become a search for your own personal satisfaction, rather than time consecrated for God?

When, during mental prayer, you are incapable of reflection, fervor and interior silence (in spite of your excellent intentions), then willingly acquiesce in this gift of a portion of your life. And banish all regret: that would amount to taking back with one hand what you are giving with the other.

You say that your mental prayer is of no use at all to you? Well then, it is truly the most excellent of sacrifices. It is a holocaust whose flames devour the victim to its last fibers, in contrast to a “sacrifice of communion,” which involves the taking by the sacrificer of a portion of the sacrifice for his own use.

Your letter reached me as I was reading an intensely religious page of Scripture, which relates Gideon's sacrifice:

The angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and unleavened cakes and lay them on this rock; then pour out the broth." When he had done so, the angel of the Lord stretched out the top of the staff he held, and touched the meat and unleavened cakes. Thereupon a fire came up from the rock which consumed the meat and unleavened cakes, and the angel of the Lord disappeared from sight (Jg 6:20-21).

When you come to mental prayer, place the offering of your time on the rock (St. Paul informs us that the Rock is Christ), and ask the angel of God to touch it with the tip of his staff. And then rejoice if the fire devours it, without leaving anything at all for you.

Is this to say that we should belittle the graces (silence, peace, joy, thoughts of a divine savor) that the Lord gives us during mental prayer? Of course not. If we knew how to be totally attentive to the Giver, rather than to the gifts received, the Holy Spirit would probably visit us even more frequently. But too often, God's gifts turn us away from him. So why be surprised that, out of love for us, God offers us famine rather than abundance? He doesn't want us to be satisfied with anything less than himself. And even so, how great is his impatience to satisfy us completely, by giving himself to us!