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## **“The mental prayer of a woman of the people”**

### **Letter 94**

**Fr. Henri Caffarel**

**being present to God; Letters on Prayer**

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If this woman of the people heard me speak of her *method of mental prayer*, she would smile that serene and timid smile that was a characteristic of her. And she would be right. I could even imagine a nuance of gentle irony in her smile.

How poor we are, for all our wealth of technology and methods! This woman didn't have a method of prayer, any more than she had a method of smiling.

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She came to seven o'clock Mass almost every morning. When I distributed Holy Communion, she stood out from the others by the quality of her recollection. Indeed, it is impossible to define this quality. She seemed to experience something so delightful, deep within her, that a mysterious radiance emanated from within and made her face flush. I was also impressed by her recollection when she knelt in the chapel, head held high and hands joined.

One day as we chatted, I took the liberty of asking her how she prayed. At first she seemed surprised. But since for her a priest's question was something to be taken seriously, she reflected for a moment and answered: "At the start of my mental prayer I think of the fact that God has his own ideas, and wants something from this moment that I have come to spend with him. Then I want what he wants, and seek no further. That's my whole prayer."

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Well, I can tell you that this is a very authentic, sublime and perfect kind of mental prayer. If you reflect on the modest words you have just read, you will find that they contain

the highest virtues in a very exceptional degree: faith, abnegation, surrender and love. There is faith in the living God who is fully attentive to his child, and who will certainly make this mental prayer serve the intentions of his glory. Abnegation: there is no self-seeking or self-oriented desire here, not even the most purified desire. Adherence to God's will is certainly sufficiently present in her prayer. For her, it is a surrender to whatever the Lord will do, an unconditional acceptance of everything he will ask. And finally love is present. It is a love close to adoration and consists in yielding all the room within us to the God whom we love.

On another occasion, she confided to me how she had arrived at this form of mental prayer. I'm sorry that I can't reproduce the exact words she used, but hers was the simple, down-to-earth speech of a woman of the people. But here is the substance of what she said:

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"I went through a very painful phase. During my mental prayer my desire to know and love God became so strong and so compelling, that it left me completely shattered and exhausted. This desire didn't seem right to me. I thought I ought to repress it, because it might involve self-seeking. I knew I should come before the Lord empty of any desires. That didn't bring me any peace, either. Then I tried to think of great intentions that would be pleasing to my God: the conversion of unbelievers, the reunion of the Churches, an end to war. But I was never quite sure that the intention I had chosen was exactly the one God had in mind. Weeks passed. I still felt that my mental prayer failed to meet the Lord's expectations.

"Finally, one day an idea came to me that was so simple I was surprised I hadn't thought of it sooner. Since I was never sure of acting according to God's preference, why not be content to want with all my strength whatever God wanted deep within me, communing with all my will to God's will? Or better still, why not let the divine will envelop me totally? Then I would be sure of not making a mistake, of not disregarding God's wishes with respect to others and myself. Then I could be sure of offering him exactly the prayer that he was expecting of me. This time I was at peace deep inside of me. Since then, whenever I don't find inner peace, it is a sign that I have allowed myself to be distracted from God's will. And so I turn back to it at once."