

18. *You are asking me too timidly*

Praise, adoration, abandonment to divine love—you tell me—are the great wellsprings of your mental prayer. I am delighted to know this. But don't neglect the prayer of petition, as if it were inferior, or a developmental stage that you have already passed. We must never abandon a single one of the so-called ends of prayer: adoration, thanksgiving, repentance, and petition. They make up the fabric of the Church's Liturgy. They must likewise constitute the fabric of your private mental prayer.

I have often noticed that prayer of petition is a sure criterion by which to judge the authenticity of a spirituality. False mystics scorn it, true mystics delight in it. A saint is always a beggar, not necessarily at the door of men's houses, but at God's door. He takes pleasure in expecting his daily bread from the Lord. Above all, he begs from him the spiritual riches which he craves even more: an increase in the theological virtues, the knowledge and love of the Cross, humility, compunction, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Besides, the truly spiritual person remembers the Master's saying that inspires us to this prayer of petition: *"there is more happiness in giving than receiving"* (Ac 20:35). He discovers in these words a secret of Christ's heart, and even more, a strict command and a confidential disclosure. It is this joy of giving that he wants to provide to his God, by becoming a petitioner before Him.

Examine your own heart as a father. Does it not witness to the same thing?

I discovered an echo of this need to give and this joy in giving, in a letter of St. Thomas More to his daughter Margaret. In reading it, we clearly see that holiness does not eliminate paternal sentiments. Rather, it refines and deepens them so that they become, as it were, a mirror that reflects the sentiments of God. When you read this text, in which this admirable father expresses his need to give and his joy in giving, understand that in God your Father these feelings are far more vehement:

*"You are too bashful and timid in your request for money, from a father who wants to give it and when you have greeted me with a letter such that I would not only repay each line of it with a gold Philippeus (as Alexander did with Choerilos), but, if my means were as great as my desire, I would reward each syllable with two ounces of gold. As it is, I have sent only what you have asked, but would have added more, except that as I am eager to give, so I liked to be asked and coaxed by my daughter, especially by you, whom virtue and learning have made so dear to my heart. So the sooner you spend this money well, as you always do, and the sooner you ask for more, the more will you be sure of pleasing your father. Farewell, my dearest daughter." **

* *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, edited by Elizabeth Frances Rogers, Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 109-110