

1. *You are expected*

We cannot help feeling forlorn when we arrive in a strange city (at the docks, the railroad or bus station, the airport) and know that nobody is there waiting for us. By contrast, if we are greeted by a cheerful face, if others reach out to help us, we have a wonderful sense of consolation. We are delivered from the cruel impression that somehow we have lost our way, that we are completely astray. The strangeness does not matter anymore—the customs, the language, the vast disconcerting city. It is not so hard to be a stranger to everybody else, providing there is one person who thinks of us as a friend.

It is comforting, too, to discover that our hosts were expecting us. Our relatives and children don't need to say very much for us to sense it. Their attitude of welcome, the eagerness of their manner are enough. And when we are ushered to our room, we are finally convinced by the small vase of flowers, the book on art (because they know our tastes).

Dear friend, I wish that whenever you go to mental prayer you may always have the strong conviction of being expected: Expected by the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; expected within the Family of the Trinity. For your place is ready. Remember Christ's words: *"I am going to prepare a place for you"* (Jn 14:3). You may object that Jesus was speaking of heaven. True enough. But that is precisely what mental prayer is. It is heaven, at least in its essential reality: the presence of God, the love of God, God's welcome to his child.

The Lord is always expecting us. Better still, when we have barely made a few steps toward him, he comes out to meet us. Remember the parable: *"While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was deeply moved. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him"* (Lk 15:20). This son had grievously offended his father. He was expected nonetheless, impatiently expected.