

## 55. Letter to Jean Pierre

I agree that there is an ever-present danger that our mental prayer may be reduced to a superficial activity that does not commit our innermost self. You are right to dread such a thing.

I am inclined to think that for quite a few people, mental prayer is simply the gentle purring of a cat in front of a fire. For others, it is a torrent of words devoid of substance. The latter deserve Christ's reprimand: "*None of those who cry out, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*" (Mt 7:21).

The truth is, that we can talk to God without committing ourselves to him. We can engage in subtle meditations, experience great spiritual emotions, and still not commit ourselves.

What interior act during mental prayer will involve you deeply, make you commit yourself, and make you surrender your past as well as your future to God? What act will make you put your life on the line? One word describes this act: *self-offering*. Yes, mental prayer is first of all the offering of ourselves to God.

Perhaps you will ask me, "Why don't you speak instead of loving?" Actually, loving and offering oneself are not separable. Self-offering is to love, what fruit is to the tree. The patient, secret labor of the tree during the long winter prepares the delectable fruit that the June sun ripens on the branch. The same is true of self-offering, the fruit of love patiently developed during many periods of prayer. One day during mental prayer, it falls off of its own weight into God's hand, as he reaches out to pick it.

St. Paul has a wonderfully powerful sentence to invite us to this self-offering. I would like you to know it by heart, to repeat it slowly and with great attention at the beginning of your mental prayer: "*And now, brothers, I beg you through the mercy of God to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, your spiritual worship*" (Rm 12:1). Is there a better definition of mental prayer?