

57. *Third letter to Jean Pierre*

To practice mental prayer is to offer oneself to the Lord, as I was telling you in my last two letters. But what is this impetus that impels the Christian to offer himself to his God? There are several constituent elements, but one of them takes precedence over all the rest, and gives self-offering its hallmark: gratitude.

When you come before God, and think about him, you cannot help being impressed by his generosity. He has heaped his gifts upon you, and he never stops. If your heart is in the right place, your gratitude wells up spontaneously to your God. In response to his love that gives, your love acknowledges him and gives thanks.

And if you meditate in greater depth, you soon understand what distinguishes God from other benefactors. They offer you gifts that increase your *possessions*. God, for his part, never stops giving you a more fundamental gift: your *existence*. You become aware that if he interrupted his action, you would immediately sink back into nothingness. And so, gratitude thrills in you once more. But this time, it is more than an intense and impassioned sentiment. It is like a return of your whole being toward God. Suddenly, the river flows back towards its source.

Your meditation has still greater things to discover. God does not only give you your being, your natural life. He also gives you your supernatural life, the one whose seed he implanted in you through baptism, and which he never stops cultivating through his sacraments. When you really become aware of this prodigious gift—God communicating his own life to you—you rush, swept along by grace, toward him in gratitude and joyfully offer yourself to his tender paternal embrace.

So you see that gratitude has welled up at every stage of your meditation. It is the underlying dynamism that inspires the man of prayer to offer himself to God.

Now, let us call it by its Christian name: *thanksgiving*. In response to God's love which is grace, man's love wells up in thanksgiving. Grace and thanksgiving are the two poles of the dialogue of love between God and man.

Thanksgiving is certainly much more than a matter of words and feelings. It is the joyous, loving gift of self, irrevocable and without reservation.