

God Who is Love, and Prayer

We continue with Foresi's series of articles, in which the author leads us along the fascinating journey of the "choice of God," beginning with the discovery of his love.

BY FR. PASCAL FORESI

THIS TIME WE WILL TAKE A LOOK AT the different ways in which our filial relationship with God can be developed through prayer.

There are several forms of prayer. One, from all appearances, may not look like a formal prayer. It is the **prayer of offering** in which the person who, prostrated by physical or spiritual sufferings, unable to do anything, even to speak, offers to God, even in the space of an instant, his or her entire existence. This form of prayer may be considered the most profound because it engages the soul at that point where the contact with God is immediate and direct.

But **work** can also take on the form of a prayer of offering. I'm thinking in particular of those whose day is marked by physical fatigue to the extent that it is almost impossible for them to gather the energy necessary to dedicate themselves to prayer. If in the morning they offer their day to God by formulating a simple intention, they too will spend the following hours in a continuous relationship with him, and in the evening, in a moment of silent recollection, they will find union with God. It is this, after all, which humanity today is particularly sensitive to, namely, that the whole universe and all that one accomplishes in it, can be transformed into one great prayer raised unceasingly to God.

On the other hand, those who consecrate their lives to the Lord have the opportunity to dedicate part of their time to explicit

dialogue with God through the exercise of certain practices of devotion. For these people, however, there always remains the decisive and fundamental admonition of Jesus: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21) to emphasize that what counts is to have an authentic relationship with God and not just to multiply the number of purely external formulas recited.

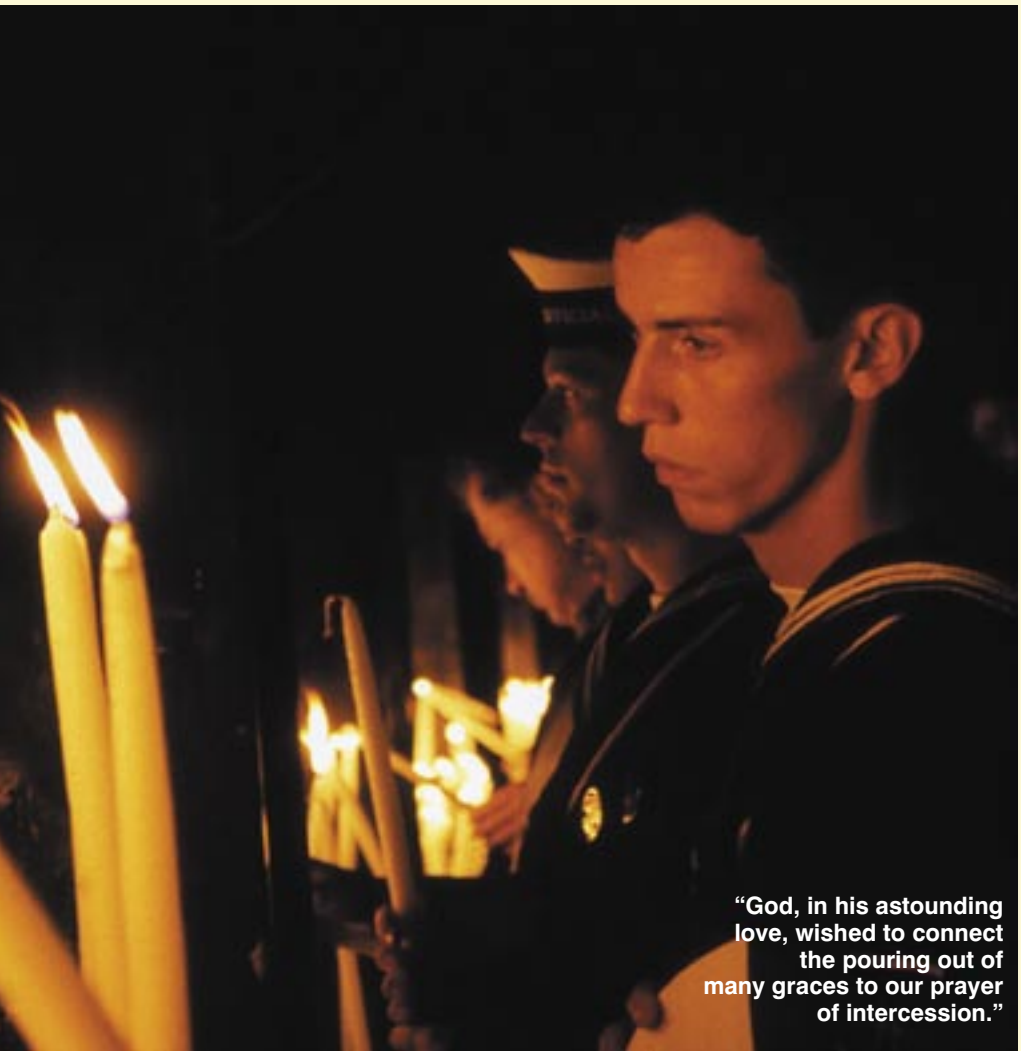
Among the various classical forms of prayer, that of the liturgy represents the prayer par excellence, since in it the Church prays. **Liturgical prayer** has, in fact, a fundamental characteristic: it is communitarian prayer wherein each person together with others enters into a relationship with God. And this happens not simply because everyone gathers together in assembly at the same time, but rather because it is then that the mysterious encounter between humanity—symbolized by the Church—and God is once again renewed. It is an encounter that God himself seals with his Presence, culminating in the Eucharist, so as to make us one with each other and with him—"deifying us."

Another masterly way of growing in our relationship with God is offered to us through **meditation**. It is like an itinerary that helps those of us who follow it regularly (aided by spiritual writings) to enter into intimate conversation with Jesus, to sense in the depths of our souls the living presence



of God who fills us with himself, who burns away our unworthiness, shows us the direction to take and gives us peace. It is our contact with him that strengthens and heals just as Jesus once healed the woman afflicted with hemorrhages, mentioned in the Gospel, who was sure that if she only touched Jesus' cloak she would be healed (see Mk 5:25-34). He, in fact, really loves those who come before him in a similar way, even if they are burdened by the weight of the most serious sins.

God, in his astounding love, wished to connect the pouring out of many graces to our prayer of intercession. This is called the **prayer of petition**. God wants it from us in order to give us the joy of cooperating with him in the salvation of the world. Such prayer becomes highly efficacious when, reliving in ourselves the mystery of the death and resurrection of



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his incarnate Son, we reach the point of making our own the words of Paul, “In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col 1:24).

Vocal prayer is another form of prayer, one that the Church strongly recommends to help us immerse ourselves fully in that spiritual intimacy with God that is a foretaste of Heaven. It finds perhaps its most beautiful expression in the prayer of the rosary in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As John Paul II magnificently affirms, through its voice is given to “that love which tirelessly returns to the person loved with expressions similar in their content but ever fresh in terms of the feeling pervading them” (*The Rosary of the Virgin Mary*, n.26).

In conclusion I would like to point out a particular form of prayer, that which arises when a rapport of true Christian

love unites person to person. It is then that Jesus, drawn by that **mutual love**, mysteriously but truly, becomes present in their midst (see Mt 18:20). Every veil seems to fall and the relationship with him becomes almost tangible. One understands, then, why this presence of Jesus reaches the essence of prayer. It is itself prayer, implied but essentially still a prayer. In the family of Nazareth, with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, this prayer reached its apex. While we know it is unreachable, it is up to us to draw always closer and closer to that model.

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