

Life of the Spirit

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P R A Y E R

BY

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THE purpose, then, of our life here is union with God, the one thing that gives meaning to our existence; and this union has been made possible through the coming of our blessed Lord. In that work of union we shall find our peace. We speak of the attempt as *prayer*. Prayer is the raising up of our hearts and souls to God, and this is the work of union to raise the heart and soul. Whenever you have got this you have got prayer, for prayer means getting into communication with God. Prayer is not simply acquiescing, not simply kneeling, or speaking words, but lifting up, getting into God's presence. Heaven is prayer eternal. Rest is prayer when the union is present. By prayer we come into contact with God. God is infinite and we are finite.

Our minds are so constituted that we cannot think of many things at once without getting tired and flustered. Sight-seeing is tiring, so many things to see at once that we are fatigued. We can't understand God. The real knowledge of God is a supernatural power. Some day we shall see God, here we must live by faith. If we understood God it would cease to be faith, wouldn't it? Prayer isn't feeling or loving, at least not the feeling of loving. The saints only experienced this feeling for short periods in prayer. St Teresa says half an hour, St Bernard the space of an *Our Father*. When we experience it we must be grateful for it, as we are grateful for the sunshine, for flowers, not despising it; never, St Teresa says, asking for it—it is not prayer.

In prayer the heart touches God. It is living on the heights and it is a little bleak, a little cold on the hills. Prayer is a doing without—can you dare that? Perseverance is difficult. We find it difficult to persevere in anything. We can hold out our arms for a minute easily, but for an hour we cannot. Yet to persevere is what we have to do in prayer in spite of lack of feeling. Life is an obstacle race, all sorts of difficulties to be overcome and we must ask God to enable us to

¹ From a retreat preached in Edinburgh in July, 1932.

get over the difficulties. He dreaded death and triumphed over it on the cross. He makes us walk in darkness. Without perseverance our lives are failures. Satisfaction of heart and intelligence are withheld.

What do I hope for in prayer? What do I talk to God about? People I am interested in, my shortcomings, my work uninteresting and tiresome, the things I want, spiritual gifts, and I ask God to give me my desires. I can't alter God. Only created things change. He does not alter his mind because I ask him, it were blasphemy to think so. How can I affect God? He intended from the beginning to give and intended that I should ask, *should pray*. While I pray there has been a changing of my heart, I have given up my will. Prayer forces me to climb, to catch a glimpse of wisdom; you see, not pulling God down but climbing up through the one Mediator. Prayer makes us in a sense divine. It is the magic wand of the fairy tale which changes the ugly duckling into a prince, and we seem, as indeed we are, of the blood royal. Prayer gives peace, strength, takes self away and puts in its place God—takes my own heart out of me, 'My child, give me thy heart'. David was a man after God's own heart—not God after David's. We shall have peace if we keep in step with God. Tranquil, rest on God. Life is a changing, a growth, God is unchanging.

Prayer brings its own reward even here; it gives strength and endurance and peace beyond belief. It calms when we are irritated and flustered. Prayer carries us right away from the worries of life and gives us rest, takes us right into the very presence of God. We have left this world and wander in the meadows and on the hills of God—the reward of those who forget self and remember God. Out of prayer come courage, strength, power to meet life's trials and troubles. Intercourse with God makes us like to God, even as unconsciously we are affected by the personality of one whose speech is essentially refined and delicate, so that we instinctively drop our slang and become more gentle in their presence, or we cease to grumble in the presence of certain others. If our fellow beings can thus affect us, won't God's presence affect us a little more strongly, shall we not lose a little more of ourselves, forget the ugly things around us when in touch with the beauty ever new of our God? 'Too little have I known thee, O Beauty ever ancient and ever new.' Union with God will lift us up into a peace beyond this life, that peace which comes from union with his will but is compatible with suffering. It will also give us strength and make us more intensely *alive*, responsive, always, as we say, on the spot. Our Lady was intense in everything she did, so in an even greater degree was our Lord. The world to him was God's beautiful world, to him the spar-

rows and the lilies and the fields white for the harvest were lovable because he saw and loved their beauty. We want to be alive and not tired—half dead, don't we? And that is what prayer does for us. Isn't that worth while? This little mind and heart lifted to the ancient Beauty, he is ours to see with the mind of faith, to love with the heart, but we must clamber up above ourselves and the turmoil of the world if we would hear the gentle wind of his approach, feel the stir of his presence. By our *faith* not *feeling*. His powerful personality overwhelms us.

We shall have constant peace, that peace which is strength, not the listless peace of sitting with our hands in our laps, but strength to walk in stride with God, no longer walking tired but with a swing as the Master walked in the cornfields and the cobbled streets. If we lead a life of prayer in faith we shall be strong, able to meet whatever the day brings.

CONCERNING PRAISE

BY

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RELIGION', says St Thomas, 'denotes properly a relation to God' and 'consists essentially in those acts by which man worships God by subjecting himself to his lordship'. (*Summa*, II-II, 81, 1). Whenever there is a special kind of lordship, there must be a special kind of service, and it is evident that lordship belongs to God in a special and singular way, because he made all things and has supreme dominion over all. Therefore a special kind of service is due to him, called 'religion', 'piety', or 'worship' (*Ibid.* ad 3. Cf. *In Boeth*: 3, 2).

But this worship must be of a fitting nature both as regards its object and as regards the one by whom it is offered. Its object, God, is a spirit, and therefore his worship must consist essentially in acts whereby the mind or soul is directed to him. But the worshipper is man composed of body and soul; wherefore his acts of worship must include a bodily element, both to give God the service of the whole man, and to incite himself to internal acts of religion by external ones—'from things seen to the love of things unseen'.

Thus by acts of religion man bears witness to the excellence of God and to his own subjection to him, his Creator, Conserver and Redeemer; and the proper and immediate interior act of religion is devotion in its theological sense, while the exterior acts are *adoration*,