

SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER
OF SAINT JOHN OF JERUSALEM
OF RHODES AND OF MALTA

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**Introduction
to Prayer**

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FOREWORD

A Journal of Spirituality dedicated to prayer has no need for a preamble.

My thanks go to the Pro-Patron of the Order of Malta, H.E. Msgr. Paolo Sardi, for having accepted to contribute to this issue.

The Knights and Dames will be able to find inspiration for their spiritual life in these reflections on the various aspects of prayer. They can also serve as an aid to the recommendations contained in the forthcoming document “*Regulations and Commentary*”, the result of a long and painstaking work by the Spirituality Commission established following up the International Conference held in Malta in 2004.

Throughout its history, the Order of Malta has always united prayer and deeds. In modern society it is very necessary for the spirit of prayer to animate those who devote themselves to serving the needy. It is very significant that prayer was one of the key topics of the International Seminar in Venice last January, where the Order of Malta’s future was outlined.

A.A.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

FOR THE JOURNAL OF SPIRITUALITY N. 10

(translated from Italian)

At the beginning of the 17th century, and specifically in 1608, the famous painting of the Beheading of St John the Baptist, a masterpiece by St Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio, was placed in the Oratory of the Novices in Malta. The great artist, who had received for this painting the insignia of Knight of Grace from the Order's Grand Master Fra' Alof de Wignacourt, had wanted to depict the fulfilment of a brother of St. John's vocation: a generous devotion to Christ up to, if necessary, the supreme test of shedding his blood in defence of the faith. This singular type of religious Order had already been in existence for centuries. Its origins date back to the Bull of 15 February 1113 with which Pope Paschal II recognised the group of brothers, gathered a few decades earlier around Fra' Gerard, as a religious family under his direct patronage. These monks had established a hospital close to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in which the sick and pilgrims visiting the Holy Places were housed and assisted. The new

group of religious dealt mainly in charitable actions, but the difficult conditions in the area meant that they soon had to take up arms to defend their guests. The new Order thus assumed the military features that St. Bernard was theorising at that time for the “*nova militia*” of the Templars¹. The sword was placed at the service of the Gospel and it was not without bloody consequences for the brothers of St John. The Precursor’s journey that ended so dramatically with his martyrdom thus became emblematically eloquent for them all.

Over the centuries there were many situations in which the hospitaller monks had to take up arms. On numerous occasions they demonstrated exceptional courage and rare abnegation, even arousing the admiration of their enemies, who conceded the honours of war to the Knights of St John when they were finally forced to surrender after their epic defence of Rhodes. However, as time went on, it slowly became clear that it was no longer appropriate to use the sword to defend Christian values. The only truly

¹ Cf *De laude novae militiae*, in: *Opere di San Bernardo*, vol. I, Milan 1984, pp. 438-482.

effective weapons were the spiritual ones evoked by the apostle Paul: the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith and the sword of the word of God (cf Eph 6:14 ff.). A long and patient training in the use of these arms is also needed. As far back as the 16th century, spiritual treatises started circulating in the Order in which the more erudite Knights illustrated the path towards authentic Christian perfection. These writings include *Ricordi ovvero ammaestramenti* (*Memories or Teachings*) by a Faenza Knight, Fra' Sabba da Castiglione († 1554). In describing the features of the “true religious Knight of St. John” (proem.) to the young novice, he advises him: “*In all your actions and operations you must attempt, since this holy and glorious habit of St. John the Baptist – which you are wearing – honours and ennobles you, to honour and adorn it with the honesty and goodness of life and with virtuous works*”². Also worthy of mention is the *Istruttione per li Cavalieri di Malta* (*Instructions for the Knights of Malta*) by a noble from Brescia, Alessandro Luzzago († 1602). The author exhorts the Knights to look after their religious practice, since from this “*is born His Divine*

² P. 45; Ed. S. CORTESI, Faenza 1999.

Majesty's love for the person who is most subservient to Him, and with this subservience he receives a greater flow of grace, a greater light to guide others and greater strength to overcome all difficulties"³. And Luzzago adds: "*It would be expedient for the spiritual father to make the Knight study not only the treatise on the ceremonies for creating the Knights of St. John, but also the rules or constitutions which must be observed by all*". Only in this way can the Knight learn about the code of conduct which, as a religious of the Hospital, he has to follow. Of particular interest in this regard is the *Istruzione* (Instruction) written by a Chaplain of the Order, Fra' Fabrizio Cagliola († 1665) "*to help regulate the consciences of all the Knights and of the other people subject to the Holy Order of Jerusalem*"⁴. This volume describes the specific principles and regulations of a brother of St John's vocation: a vocation of active life, because it involves military action and charitable service, but not without its contemplative side, "*to allow its religious much time to devote to prayer and meditation*", so that they can spend at least part of their day "*in contemplation and in praying to God*" (pp. 39-40).

³ VATICAN LIBRARY, *Urb. Lat. 867*, f. 358r-360r.

⁴ MAGISTRAL LIBRARY IN ROME, ms. n. 31.

When educating a brother, therefore, one has to teach him “*how to love, fear and pray outwardly to God, have him partake of the holy Sacraments daily and also attend the Hospital daily*” (ibid., p. 257). *Istruzioni intorno agli obblighi del proprio stato de’ Cavalieri di Malta* (Instructions on the Duties Inherent in the Status of Knights of Malta)⁵, a book by a French professed knight, Fra’ Giovanni Battista le Marinier de Cany († 1689), follows similar lines. The author starts with the assumption that those who want to enter the Order also want “*to renounce the world and its pomp, to consecrate themselves to a humble, abject and hard life in the service of the Poor and the Sick*” (p. 88). This commits them to “*continually living their life in the service of others, both in the war against the infidels and in the hospitals attending to the sick. A sacrifice that is no less than any other sacrifice that a simple man can offer to God*” (ibid.). Fra’ le Marinier draws the obvious conclusions from this consideration: “*He would be doing himself [the aspiring Knight] a great disservice if, in undertaking the religious life, (...) he were to enter this arena for any other reason than that of the supernatural and the divine*” (p. 9). He is thus required to have an intense

⁵ MAGISTRAL LIBRARY IN ROME, ms. n. 86.

spiritual life, indispensable for following a path of evangelical perfection in the footsteps of Christ.

Guided by these writings, the Knights of St. John continued to fight the good fight of the faith by taking up the spiritual arms of personal testimony, nourished by reflection on the Word of God and on prayer, both private and liturgical. They were thus able to persevere in their charitable commitment, usually expressed in the modest, but often heroic, terms of everyday life. This prepared the Order for the tumultuous vicissitudes of the following centuries, when the 19th century laws irreversibly demilitarized its members, obliging them to become Knights without any specific political connotation. Hence the image of the *miles Christi* turned into that of the *servus pauperum* and the Order became a subject of international law in relations with the Church and with States. Its Members were dedicated to serving the sick and helping the poor, drawing their strength from a personal and ardent religious practice. Not long ago, Pope Benedict XVI, during his visit to the St John the Baptist Hospital in Rome, emphasized this aspect when he exhorted the Knights to “*put on the armour of light*” (cf. Rm 13:12) “*which consists in the*

Word of God, the gifts of the Spirit, the grace of the Sacraments, the theological and cardinal virtues”⁶. Today the Knights of Malta are well aware that the cause of the Gospels cannot be promoted by a metal sword or other offensive weapon. The world needs to meet the living Christ, present in those who believe in Him. This is, in the end, the great mission and also the historic responsibility of the Knights of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in the modern world. Unlike their actions in a now distant past, they must now aim to “win over” those they meet along their way rather than “conquering” them. In this task they are sustained by the certainty of effectively contributing to the advent of a fairer and more united world, characterised by the shared values of the “civilisation of love”.

H.E. Msgr. Paolo Sardi
Archbishop tit. of Sutri
Pro-Patronus of the Order of Malta

⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily on the occasion of the Visit to the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at La Magliana (Rome) - December 2, 2007*, in: SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM OF RHODES AND OF MALTA, *Human Virtues – Christian Virtues, Events, The Young*, «Journal of Spirituality n. 8», Rome 2008, pp. 115-121.

PRAYER IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURE

(translated from Italian)

Vocabulary

The Bible has a rich vocabulary to indicate prayer and the action of praying. There are two specific terms in the Old Testament (the Hebrew *'atar* and *tepillah*) usually translated by *praying/prayer* and by a series of similar words: *to say, to speak, to cry out loud, to sigh, to lament, to desire, to praise, to glorify, to bless, to rejoice, to sing, to seek God's face and to bow deeply* (this stance prompts us to honour an important figure). This extensive terminology not only highlights the different meanings of prayer (a petition, a prayer for grace, prayer as dialogue) but also demonstrates that prayer is a “daily routine” since the words used refer to everyday life (speaking, crying out, hoping, enjoying, being content and happy...).

The New Testament prefers the noun *prosenchomai*, in the sense of *invoking the divinity* and *making a promise/taking a vow*. This demonstrates both faith in God's intervention and personal commitment in this relationship between people and God.

In the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, belief in the effectiveness of prayer comes from the knowledge that God has made an alliance with Israel. An alliance that divulges the divine power and wisdom but also the moral requirements (commitment, acceptance of the Ten Commandments and worship). Unlike pagans, prayer does not captivate God with magical formulas. But for the people of the Bible, prayer demonstrates *faith* in the certainty of being listened to, so that it often becomes an action of anticipated grace. Prayer covers every area of life and is used to request both material and spiritual goods. One might ask to be healed from disease, to be saved from the risk of death or natural disasters; to annihilate one's enemies or to be forgiven one's sins, to be able to see God's face and to be faithful in observing the law.

The Bible contains many references to prayer and to people who pray. There is also an entire book of Psalms with 150 prayers. It contains prayer inspired by the Holy Spirit and is the official book of the dialogue between God and Israel. The Psalms also came to regulate the prayers that mark out the

days for the monk and for every Christian. The Psalms are the finest testimony to the richness of the conversation with God: psalms of praise and thanksgiving, of adoration and pleading for mercy. Prayer is not only asking but it is also thanking, adoring and requesting forgiveness.

The Bible also bears witness to important figures who pray; from their lips one can find illumination on what is meant by conversing with God.

Abraham prays for God's intercession for the inhabitants of Sodom: *"Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?..."* (Gn 18:30). Moses also prays to intercede for the people of Israel *"Lord, let your blazing wrath die down; relent in punishing your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, and how you swore to them by your own self, saying, 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky; and all this land that I promised, I will give your descendants as their perpetual heritage' "* (Ex 32:12-13). David, after Nathan's prophecy, says in adoration: *"And now, Lord God, you are God and your words are truth; you have made this generous promise to your servant"* (2Sm 7:28).

Salomon confides in God: *"O Lord, my God (...)"*

I am a mere youth, not knowing at all how to act..(...). Give your servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge your people and to distinguish right from wrong” (1Kgs 3:7,9). Judith prays for herself and for all her people “*But you are the God of the lowly, the helper of the oppressed, the supporter of the weak, the protector of the forsaken, the saviour of those without hope. Please, please, God of my forefather, God of the heritage of Israel, Lord of heaven and earth, Creator of the waters, King of all you have created, hear my prayer! Let your whole nation and all the tribes know clearly that you are the god of all power and might, and that there is no other who protects the people of Israel but you alone” (Jdt 9:11-12, 14).* Esther, faced with Haman’s iniquity, says humbly and trustingly: “*My Lord, our King, you alone are God. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand. (...) Save us by your power, and help me, who am alone and have no one but you, O Lord” (Est C:14-14, 25)*

The prophets do not only report the Word of God but also voice the expectations of the people to whom they are sent. Isaiah proclaims: “*Yet, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay and you the potter: we are all the work of your hands....” (Is 64:7).*

But prayer is sometimes also silence. “*Behold, I*

am of little account; what can I answer you? I put my hand over my mouth. Though I have spoken once, I will not do so again; though twice, I will do so no more": Job (40:4-5), after God's intervention can only remain in silence and "adore" (whose Latin etymology recalls the gesture of bringing one's hand to one's mouth).

The words of the important figures in the Bible show us the essence of prayer. It is a natural and spontaneous communication with God, the communication of sinful people, of grateful people, of suffering people and contemplative people. Prayer in the Old Testament is an intimate, vital, sincere and profound relationship with God which is also expressed through silent communication. It is an act of love.

In the New Testament

The New Testament gives us the example of Jesus praying to his Father. But it also shows him as someone who teaches us how to address God as our Father. The Lord's Prayer with its seven requests summarizes the biblical prayer. There is preoccupation about implementing God's plan, expectation of His Kingdom, an appeal for bread to nourish body

and soul, to receive and give forgiveness and finally the awareness of needing grace in order not to fail the final test.

It is Luke who, more than the other evangelists, shows Jesus as the model and master of prayer. Jesus is first of all the model. He prays often, whether it be the customary grace before eating or that before important decisions. It is Luke who tells us that Jesus prays when being baptised, all night before calling the Twelve, before Peter's confession, before his Transfiguration and when teaching the Our Father. In the garden of Gethsemane before the Passion *"After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done'. [And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.] When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples, he found them sleeping from grief"* (Lk 22:41-45).

Luke pays particular attention to Jesus' prayer during the Passion of Christ. The third evangelist delicately recalls the two prayers that Jesus makes while on the Cross: *"Father, forgive them, they know not what they*

do” (Lk 23:34) and “*Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*” (Lk 23:46). These are two prayers, one of intercession and one of abandonment that substitute the incipit of Psalm 22 recorded by Matthew and Mark “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?...*” (perhaps the beginning of the Psalm’s recitation... or words that share the suffering of every person who has sinned?).

Besides being a model for prayer, Jesus is also a master of prayer. Luke talks about the act of requesting: “*If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?*” (Lk 11:13). In prayer the Christian does not try to change God or persuade Him to do something; authentic prayer asks the divine spirit to have the same state of mind as God and to want what He wants. In other parts of his Gospel, Luke recalls that you also have to pray for those who treat you badly and to have labourers for the harvest as well as the strength to avoid evil and not to undergo the final test.

Luke gives three parables to illustrate Jesus’ teaching on prayer, peculiar to him and each with a particular characteristic. *The parable of the two friends*

(Lk 11:5-8) teaches us that prayer must be *trusting*, because it is a dialogue between friends. *The parable of the judge and the widow* (Lk 18:1-7) shows that *persistence* and *constancy* are fundamental characteristics of prayer. *The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector* (Lk 18:9-14) offers two models of prayer, one presumptuous and insincere, the other *humble* and genuine.

The disciples of the Resurrected one continue Jesus' type of prayer. Luke's Gospel ends in the temple where the apostles were continually praising God (Lk 24:53) and one of the distinguishing features of this first church is assiduous prayer "*with one accord*" (Acts 1:14). Paul in his letters specifies "*continually*" and "*at all times*", "*night and day*" when talking about praying. In Rm 15:30, Paul presents prayer as a fight: "*I urge you, (brothers,) by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in the struggle by your prayers to God on my behalf...*". But the kind of prayer most often found in his Epistles is that of praise, of thanksgiving and of petition as we see in their introduction. The prayer of believers is prompted by the Spirit of adoption that makes them pray through Jesus Christ and makes us cry out "*Abba, Father*", inserting Jesus' disciples in a constant attitude of dialogue and love

with God and the Resurrected one.

It is the last verses of Revelation and the Bible as a whole that demonstrate the profound meaning of prayer inspired by the Spirit. This is an appeal, a call to expedite the encounter: “*The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ Let the hearer say, ‘Come!’ (...) The one who gives this testimony says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rv 22:17,20).

Msgr. Davide Bernini
Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem*

LECTIO DIVINA

*“I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people and his friends
and those who turn to him in their hearts.” Ps 84*

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Ps 34

From the very beginnings of monasticism, monks living in community have practised *lectio divina*. In his Rule, Saint Benedict makes extensive provision for daily reading not only during the liturgy but also for private reading by the individual monk, a practice that is intensified during Lent¹. Throughout history, monastic reform movements have emphasised the importance of a return to *lectio divina*.

These references to monastic *lectio divina* do not, of course, imply that it is only within the monastic context that *lectio divina* was or is practised. They do suggest, however, that there is a way of practising *lectio divina* which is monastic in origin but which in

¹ See Chapter 48 of the *Rule of St Benedict*, where reading is closely associated with and complementary to the manual work which all were expected to perform. See also Chapter 49 on the observance of Lent.

recent decades has become available to a wider Christian public. The wider access to and practice of *lectio divina* is particularly associated with Cardinal Martini, former Archbishop of Milan, and has become a veritable movement within the Church².

For nearly a century now it has been the Church's concern that all the baptised, lay and clerical, should have greater access to the riches of the Sacred Scriptures. In particular since the Second Vatican Council, the Church's liturgy has offered a wide selection of scriptural readings both in the Divine Office (i.e. the Liturgy of the Hours) and in the celebration of Mass. Over a three-year cycle, the Sunday readings provide the practising believer with a basic ration of essential Scripture readings while this ration is fleshed out in a two-year cycle of daily readings.

Over and above this it is the Church's desire that the individual believer should become even more familiar with the Scriptures through personal

² See C. MARTINI, *The exercise of Lectio Divina*, in *The Joy of the Gospel*, Collegetown 1994, pp. 1-9. See also E. BIANCHI, *Praying the Word: An Introduction to Lectio Divina*, Missouri 1995.

prayerful reading, shared or private³. While it is possible to approach the public liturgical reading of Scripture with a *lectio divina* mentality or disposition of heart, *lectio divina* as such differs from public liturgical reading in its technique. The primary aim of public liturgical reading is the proclamation of the Word for instruction in the mystery of that Word and in the celebration of the mystery of that Word. This proclamation needs to be complemented or deepened not only by preaching but also by a private prayerful appropriation or a making-one's-own of the message of Scripture. The essence of *lectio divina* consists in this prayerful appropriation.

³ 'The Sacred Synod [i.e. Vatican Council II] also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful, especially Religious, to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures the "excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:8), "For ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ". Therefore, they should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself, whether it be through the liturgy, rich in the divine word, or through devotional reading, or through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere. And let them remember that prayer should accompany the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that God and man may talk together; for "we speak to Him when we pray; we hear Him when we read the divine saying". SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, Apostolic Decree *Dei verbum*, November 18, 1965, 25.

Prayer is primarily a way of listening and has less to do with our words to and about God than with a growing ability to listen to what that God is saying to us about himself, speaking in and through his Word made flesh, through his Son, Jesus Christ. One of the main places where this Word speaks to us is in the Scriptures. But we cannot know what the Word is saying unless we learn to listen properly. This listening is not primarily – or at all – a means of gathering information or of the academic-scientific investigation of a text. It is a kind of tasting. One of the images frequently associated with *lectio divina* is that of a cow chewing the cud or ruminating. The text is “regurgitated” again and again until it becomes part of the reader. Over time, the message and values contained in these texts become part of the reader, inspire that reader’s prayer, inspire that reader’s attitudes, inspire that reader’s actions.

While there is no single, binding, “technique” for the practice of *lectio divina*, many writers on the subject are agreed that it should contain three elements. These are:

1. Attentive reading; 2. Meditation and 3. Prayer.

These three elements need not be regarded as a step-

by-step recipe and the practised reader may experience *lectio* as an interaction of all these elements at once. For those less practised, however, it may help to distinguish these elements. For those living in the world, but not only for them, another element, i.e. action, can be added.

Reading

The text can be long or short. It is usually taken from the Scripture but – particularly for the more practised reader – can even be taken from the writings of the Fathers of the Church or other spiritual writers. For beginners it is probably better to confine oneself to the Scriptures. The text can be taken at random or, if the reader practices *lectio* every day, the passage can be taken piece by piece from a continuous reading. A good starting-point could be the cycles of readings from the Lectionary. The reader reads the text either silently or, preferably, aloud, several times, lingering over the text, allowing it to sink into the memory, listening to the sound of the words. There should be nothing forced in this, no feeling of having to get results of having to cover a certain

amount of ground every day, no tension.

Rumination or meditation

Having read in this way for some time, the reader stops and let the passage work on him or her. In this rumination the text moves from the memory into the heart, becoming part of the reader's being.

Prayer

The response in prayer to what has been read and reflected on can take many forms. Sometimes the reaction or thought will be immediate, sometimes it will take longer, sometimes, indeed, nothing may seem to happen. Since the reading is intended to be a meeting with the one who inspires the text, there are no rules governing the thoughts that will occur to the reader. Even if no thoughts occur the meeting is taking place at a deeper level while the text becomes part of the reader. Equally, there can be dramatic reactions. In the words of one contemporary expert, *"Spontaneous acts of adoration and supplication leap like sparks from the iron of the heart as the word of God strikes*

upon it”⁴. Some may even find themselves graced with the gift of contemplation. Some writers on *lectio* regard this a fourth step to be added to the three described above. Reference has already been made of the step of Action. Some writers regard this as the fourth step while others regard action as something that overflows from contemplation, the message of the text having become part of the reader and inspiring his or her thoughts and actions.

Preparation for Lectio

In the monastic tradition and in the general liturgical tradition of the Church great value has always been given to routine. There is, of course, a constant danger that routine will become just that, a mechanical

⁴ G. COLLINS, OSB, *The Glenstal Book of Icons*, Dublin 2002, p. 7. Despite what was said above about forcing and the lack of rigid rules, see also the author’s following remark, “*The whole process is a strenuous one involving eyes, ears, mouth and mind*” (*ibid.*) The American Jesuit writer, DANIEL HARRINGTON, SJ, sums up the three “stages” thus: “...reading (*What does this text say?*), meditation (*What does this text say to me?*), prayer (*What do I want to say to God through this text?*)”. He adds a fourth stage, contemplation or action which he describes as, “*What difference might this text make to my life?*”. See “American Magazine”, 31st March, 2003. It is interesting that Harrington regards contemplation and action as jointly making up this fourth stage.

habit which gradually ceases to have any real effect on the individual. Nevertheless, as all those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours will know, routine can also be positive. Routine can have a ‘carrejing’ function, helping one to cope with periods of apparent boredom, dryness, lack of excitement. Speaking of the monk’s faithfulness to the liturgical prayer of the community even when working outside the monastery, St Benedict speaks in Chapter 50 of the Rule of his *servitutis pensum*, or his due measure of service which he owes to the Lord. The same can be said about *lectio divina*.

It is no exaggeration to describe the time spent at *lectio divina* as “quality time” with God, just like the Liturgy of the Hours. Thus, it is helpful to lay aside a specific time in the day or the week for this exercise. Again, while there are some people who can pray under any circumstances and are not distracted by noise and other interferences, most of us need a modicum of peace and quiet in order to concentrate. We need to find the position with which we are most comfortable – sitting or keeling etc. – for performing the exercise. When *lectio* is practised in common, these requirements of quietness of atmosphere and convenience of posture are even more important.

Mention was made earlier of the fact that *lectio divina* is not primarily an academic examination of the text in question but, rather a prayerful and profoundly personal meeting with the text. Nevertheless, the reader will gradually feel the need to know more about the text, will want to know more about the language used, the context in which the text was written, the images used etc. Here, a good commentary can be very useful⁵. The knowledge gained from such a book can sharpen the reader's senses, prepare the ground of the reader's heart for a new encounter with the actual text itself and with the Word who is speaking to us in that text. As time goes on, the reader will also come to realise that the best preparation for *lectio divina* is *lectio divina* itself.

...As we listen to the voice of your Son, help us to become heirs to eternal life with him...

(Collect of the Feast of the Transfiguration)

Fr. Henry O'Shea O.S.B.
Magistral Chaplain

⁵ For English-speaking readers, one of the best among many commentaries is: R.E. BROWN and others (edd.), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, London, 1993.

THE EUCHARIST, SOURCE AND SUMMIT OF THE ORDER'S LIFE

(translated from French)

A few weeks after his election to the Pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI reminded participants in the Eucharistic Congress in Bari of the words of the martyr Saturninus of Abitene (in present Tunisia) at the time of the persecution of Diocletian (304). When the judge asked him why he had gone against the emperor's orders and gathered people for the Eucharist, the martyr replied: "*Sine dominica non possumus*: we cannot live without joining together on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist". For Christians, the celebration of the Eucharist is unlike any other devotional practice: it is at the very heart of the baptised's life. II Vatican Council has recognised this with a single phrase: "*the source and summit of the life of the Church*"¹. Obviously when the Council talks about the Church in general it also means that part of the Church formed by the Order of St John of Jerusalem. Whatever their position or function all its

¹ SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, 10.

members, first of all as baptised and even more as members of a hospitaller order, must experience the Eucharist as the source and summit of their activity.

Our Participation in the Eucharist

This requirement, or rather necessity, can be read in all the texts regulating the life of the Order's members. The *Spiritual Recommendations for the Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta*, for example, tells the Members of the Third Class to “*frequently approach the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist*”; the Members in Obedience to “*participate in them regularly*”; the Knights of Justice to “*assist daily, or at least frequently*”². Obviously, these texts do not have to be interpreted in a mathematical sense, as if a Member in Obedience would have to go to Mass twice as much as a simple Member of the Third Class, and the Professed thrice as much! For the Knights of Justice, the *Spiritual Recommendations* refers to canon 719 of the Code of Canon Law. It talks about secular institutes “*in which the faithful who live in the world strive for the*

² *Spiritual Recommendations for the Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta*, Rome 1993, pp. 10, 14, 35.

perfection of charity”³. Canon 719 §2 (to which it alludes) stresses that their members celebration of the Eucharist, “*daily if possible*”, is to be “*the source and strength – fons et robur – of their whole consecrated life*”. These words have a special meaning for those who, having taken religious vows, seek to achieve this perfection of charity in the world. They are equally pertinent for all who serve in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem: the source and strength of their Christian life is also celebration of the Eucharist. The Church is realistic: the celebration of the Eucharist is to be *quantum fieri potest cotidiana*, daily if possible; regular attendance at Mass during the week as well as on Sundays can depend on geographical position, professional activity and family duties. Nonetheless, there is no other practice that can offer such a source of strength for a Christian life.

The II Vatican Council completes this reflection by insisting not only on the regularity but, above all, on the quality of our celebration of the Eucharist: “*it is necessary that the faithful come to it with proper dispositions, that their minds should be attuned to their voices, and that they should cooperate with divine grace lest they receive it in vain*”⁴.

³ *Codex Iuris Canonici* (CIC) 710.

⁴ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11.

The text of the Council ends with these familiar words: “*Pastors of souls must therefore [...] make it their duty also to ensure that the faithful take part fully aware of what they are doing, actively engaged in the rite, and enriched by its effects*”⁵. We should give these words their true meaning, which is spiritual and interior. “Actively” engaged in the Eucharist does not mean that it is necessary to act physically as in a liturgical animation, but rather that each time we participate in the Eucharist we must engage all our intelligence, attention and love to live more intensively what happens in every celebration, to understand better the Word of God proclaimed in it, to receive more fruitfully the graces involved in this Sacrament. This does not mean that we should not play our rightful part in it; the Knights of Malta’s discreet and effective help and assistance will be appreciated by a pastor who would find it hard to understand a passive attitude from the members of a religious order while attending Mass.

A Splendid Tradition

The Order’s tradition consists of a charisma that

⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 11.

is acted out rather than studied in texts on reflections and spirituality. Hence we have no books theorizing how the Order experienced the Eucharist during its almost millenary tradition but we can ask ourselves about its practice. Wherever the Order of St John of Jerusalem installed itself – whether in Jerusalem, in St Jean d’Acre, on Rhodes or on Malta – it always built a church or a hospital. A church in which to preserve Our Lord’s sacramental body, a hospital to treat His suffering through that of Our Lords the sick. The magnificence of the churches was echoed by that of the hospitals. It is significant that the Order’s oldest regulatory text, the very brief *Rule* of Raymond du Puy, contains explicit references to the celebration of the Eucharist. For instance, the light must shine day and night in the church, the priests must be assisted at the altar by a deacon, a sub-deacon and servers in white vestments; there must be a sung high Mass on Sundays, with a procession in the house⁶. As time went on, the liturgical celebration became more

⁶ « Raymond du Puy, grand-maître de l’Hôpital, promulgue la règle de l’ordre », in *Cartulaire Général de l’Ordre des Hospitaliers de St. Jean de Jérusalem* (1100-1310), by J. Delaville Le Roulx, Paris, Ernest Leroux Editeur, 28, rue Bonaparte, 28, M DCCC XCIV, Tome Premier (1100-1200), pp. 62 -68.

splendid: ancient studies and various remains prove the richness of the sanctuaries on Rhodes; the conventual churches of La Valletta or the Priory's church on the Aventine Hill still bear witness to the magnificence in which the Knights wanted the Eucharist to be celebrated.

Monsignor Scarabelli has written a book on the Order of Malta's liturgical traditions showing that the grandeur and fervour of the ceremony lasted up to the end of the 18th century⁷. This emphasis on the splendour of divine worship is part of the Order's tradition. Still today, our pilgrimages to Lourdes and Loreto, our Masses and Eucharistic Processions and the celebrations for the Feast Day of St John in our Pories or National Associations evoke this atmosphere of pomp and devotion. Without forgetting, however, the warning of the II Vatican Council in its Constitution on the Liturgy. It reminds us that in sacred furnishings we should always "*strive after noble beauty rather than mere sumptuous display*"⁸. This signifies that we should not be attracted by exterior trappings

⁷ G. SCARABELLI, *Culto e devozione dei Cavalieri a Malta*, Malta University Press, 2004.

⁸ *Sacrosantum Concilium*, 124.

alone. We all well know that the spiritual profundity of the Eucharist can also be felt in the simplest celebrations: morning Mass in the chapel of an Order's house or that attended with and for the sick, can take on the greatest splendour for us because both will be full of the mystery of God.

Eucharistic Body and Suffering Body

Even more than in the magnificence of its great conventual churches the Order's relationship with the Eucharist can be understood by going to Rhodes, in the Great Infirmary – “the Palace of Our Lords the sick” – where the apse of the chapel opens directly onto the room where the sick lie. The same situation can be seen in the Order's Commendary in Genua. In Malta, every room of the *Holy Infirmary* has its own altar where Mass is celebrated for the patients⁹. This custom was not unique to the Order; in medieval and modern times the majority of the hospitaller residences of Christendom adopted it¹⁰. Nothing

⁹ G. SCARABELLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 749-750.

¹⁰ Examples can be seen in the Santo Spirito hospital, Italy, and in the *Hospices de Bearne*, France.

expresses better the relationship between the Body of Christ offered in the Eucharist and the suffering of the sick, who must be welcomed and treated as if they were Christ himself, according to the words of the Rule of St Benedict. If we want to fully live the Order of Malta's charism, all our Eucharistic celebrations – whether or not performed amid the sick – must be a source of strength for us, a source of charity for all the suffering members of Christ's body, of strength to accomplish our mission among them.

An ancient story – not directly linked to the Order, but very close to its spirit – expresses this concept in a special way. Blessed John Colombini was a Sienese merchant living in the first half of the 14th century, who died in 1367. After having lived in luxurious style, he converted and started to serve the poor in the Hospital of Santa Maria della Scala. In his “*Life*” he recounts that he was going to Mass one morning with one of his disciples when he encountered a man lying on the ground covered in sores and fleas. John Colombini said to his companion: “*Shall we take him home and for love of Christ look after him? We were going to hear Mass, but this will be like*

doing so”¹¹. Then the Blessed and his disciple, after having placed the sufferer on a bed, returned to church to hear Mass. But when they came back home he had disappeared and the room was permeated with an indescribable fragrance – that poor unknown man was Christ in person.

This is a touching story, but over and above this “Golden Legend” Blessed Colombini’s reflection is very profound. “*This will be like doing so*”: what significance can our participation in the Eucharist have if we do not pledge to follow Christ, if it does not bring us closer to the total gift of himself on the Cross so that we can also put ourselves, a little more each day, at the service of our brothers and sisters? As Hospitallers of Malta, we cannot be content with “hearing” the mass from outside; we have also to “perform it” with our service.

Fr. Bruno Martin
Conventual Chaplain *ad honorem*

¹¹ “*Vita del Beato Giovanni Colombini da Siena, fondatore dei poveri Gesuati, con parte della vita d’alcuni primi suoi compagni*”, Verona, Tipografia Errede Merlo, 1817, p. 34.

THE PRAYER OF LISTENING: EUCCHARISTIC ADORATION

(translated from German)

The old peasant had been sitting in the church pew since early morning. In the late afternoon, when, after taking a short break, the parish priest went back to the confession box with the long queue of people waiting, the man was still sitting there. “*What are you doing there all day*”, the priest asked him. “*Well, Reverend*”, the old man replied, “*He looks at me, and I look at Him. That’s enough*”. This episode is one of the many stories told of the life of the holy Curé of Ars, John-Mary Vianney, who has been chosen by Pope Benedict XVI as patron saint of the “Year for Priests” 2009/2010. I often think of the words of that peasant, when I make my way for Eucharistic Adoration to the Chapel of the Commendary here in Ehreshoven. And even right now that I’ve been asked to write an article on Adoration I think back to these words somewhat puzzled. Hasn’t the peasant of Ars already said everything there is to say? If I try to say something more about Adoration, wouldn’t I be writing about something I know too little about? What

am I to do? I go sit side by side with the old man in the church bench in Ars. What did he really mean?

I Look at Him... – “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (Jn 1:29.36)

What did the peasant of Ars see? What does an adoring person see? A tabernacle. A piece of bread behind a piece of glass. Nothing else. *Sensuum defectui*, we sing in the *Tantum ergo*, the senses fail. But we also sing: *praestet fides*, which means that faith overcomes such failure, because the faithful sees more than the eyes do. He believes that the Word, which was once said about this bread (“*This is my body*”) is true and remains true. And he retains the direction of view that the priest demands from the people of God during the Eucharist: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”. In front of the Consecrated Host, the liturgy of the Church quotes John the Baptist, the patron saint of our Order: when he saw Jesus approaching, he said precisely that: “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (Jn 1:29.36). Two bystanders look towards Jesus and go with him. They ask the Lord where he lives, and are again invited by him *to see* and

to look: “Come, and you will see” (Jn 1:39). The one who says that is the *same* that is really present in the Eucharist. He is the same Who’s worshipped by the angels (Hebr 1:6), before Whom the Magi prostrated paying homage (Mt 2:11), and Who was worshipped by the Apostles (Mt 28:17). This point was reaffirmed by the Council of Trent against all those who set a limit in time to Christ’s presence in the Eucharist or considered it to be merely symbolical.

During Adoration, the person praying accepts the indication of the Baptist and the Lord’s invitation to stay with him, which in fact permeates the whole Gospel: the invitation to all those who labour and are burdened, so that He will give them rest (Mt 11:28), to the tired messengers of the Gospel so that they may rest a while (Mk 6:31), to those He took with Him in the hour of mortal anguish (Mt 26:38), and in the judgement to those who served Him in the least brothers of His (Mt 25:34). “*Come!*”; “*Stay!*”; “*Behold, the Lamb of God!*”. He who looks in this manner, may perceive how God (in Jesus Christ) wants to be there for us: as nourishment for the soul and the body in view of eternal life. He who looks in this manner senses how far God’s love is willing to go – down to

the lowliness of my ant-like life, inside my body and into every single one of its cells.

... And He Looks at Me – “*I Saw You*” (Jn 1:48)

After the encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist, the number of the disciples begins to increase. Andrew brings Simon Peter; Philip brings Nathanael. When he approaches Jesus, the Master says: “*Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him*“. Nathanael asks him amazed: “*How do you know me?*“. Jesus answers: “*Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree*” (Jn 1:45-48). I know you, says the Lord; I saw you even before you set out to see me. Jesus has long been seeing all those who set out to be with Him, to look at Him, to listen to Him, to learn the meaning of life from Him. And they may let Him look at them; in fact, being looked at by Jesus and having nothing more to hide from Him is their only desire and aspiration. Adoration means a training in being looked at in love, without being judged with a raised brow, without having to justify oneself, without having to fear to be stripped with a stare or humiliated in any other way.

When a Tabernacle is far or it is only seldom exposed, we can perform this training also under the Cross or in front of a sacred image of the sight of Jesus: We have to let ourselves be looked at by the glance of God's merciful love, which bears all things, forgives all things, cures all things that we bring before It and do not try to hide. This is what the psalmist meant, when he prayed: *"Lord, you have searched me, and you know me. You know my sitting down and my rising up. You perceive my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways"* (Ps 139:1-3).

Keeping Silent and Hearing Who He is for Me...

What does the praying person hear before the Sacrament apart the coming and going of others, the sound in some other pew a little further behind or the running nose of the elderly man who always has a cold, even in summer? I sometimes get the impression that His Word lingers on in the room as though it wanted to remain as a word said once and for all with this little piece of bread: *"This is my body"*.

Among all Sacraments, the Eucharist is in fact the one most directly connected with the Lord's own words. It is *His* powerful and effective Word that is expressed by the Church (acting as His messenger) and that transforms reality: "*This is my body*" (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). On the Tabernacle of the Commendary in Ehreshoven there is an image of the Burning Bush from where God spoke to Moses. The Eucharistic Body of the Lord is the complete fulfilment of the promise made to Moses by God from the Burning Bush (Ex 3): the *I am who am*, Who frees His people from the slavery in Egypt (and in fact from the slavery of death), is actually present: "*This is my body*". *This* is me for you. In *this* way I am here for you.

Not only the words of Jesus instituting the Eucharist, but the Word of God as such may be heard in a wholly new manner during Adoration. For many persons it has proven useful to perform Adoration on the basis of a word taken from the day's readings or the Scripture readings from the past Sunday. Perhaps a single phrase from the Gospel or from an Apostolic Letter will be sufficient. The One, Who's alive and present before me and inside me, will

say it to me. If I stick to this word, if I repeat in inhaling and exhaling, if I let it sink in deeper and deeper in the layers of my life and thoughts, in the “cellar of my awareness” I would say, then I learn to listen in a new way, and for me adoration turns into the Prayer of Listening.

...And Who I Am for Him

This method of adoring contemplation (*contemplation* means reflection, inner orientation towards something or somebody) at the beginning only leads to outward silence. However, in this silence I hear not only who He is for me, but who I am for Him. Perhaps at the beginning it is in the middle of the noise of my restlessness, of apparent or real distractions and diversions, that I can sense who I am for Him: perhaps a distracted companion (like the Disciples, who – on their way back after Jesus’ annunciation of His passion argue over the question who may be the greatest among them – cf. Mk 9:30-37), perhaps hurt, overburdened, feeling guilty, afraid, in love or whatever. But this, too, is how I am, and all this can find a place before God, where I can dis-

charge it – always arriving and releasing my load over and over again. To a friend, who had complained about being distracted during prayer, the holy bishop Francis of Sales wrote: *“If your heart wanders or suffers, bring it gently back to its proper place and place it tenderly in the presence of your Lord; and even if in your life you have done nothing else than bringing back your heart and placing it back in the presence of our God, although it escaped again and again after you had brought it back, you will have well fulfilled your life”*.

If, then, in such calmness a silence emerges, deeper than I ever experienced, then it may well be that I am able to perceive something more: the inexpressible response of my soul. Since already a long time the soul has known the One who loves it at all costs and Who has taken His dwelling in it. The soul wants to be with God, it desires to establish the communion with Him that is so deeply buried in most of us, it seeks to make Him present and alive. *“O soul, search for you in me, and search for me in you”*: this is what St Theresa of Avila makes God say to the soul. Our soul knows more than our memory does, and it forgets none of the things that are important in our lives. This is why St Claire of Assisi instructed her sis-

ters: “*Always be lovers of your souls*”, because the soul is the place where Christ has already reached us and where He wants to be ever better accepted and welcomed.

And what is true in me – i.e. that my soul is loved and inhabited and transformed to His likeness – is also brought before my eyes in the Eucharist. In fact, the Eucharistic Body of the Lord speaks to us of Him *but at the same time of us*. He speaks of us individually and of the community of the Church. “*Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it*”, writes Saint Paul (1Cor 12:27). Thus, in Adoration the Eucharist also shows us who we are and in which way we should further develop: towards truth transformed in correspondence with God. This refers us to our brothers and sisters, because “*a person receiving the body of Christ also receives those who are parts of the body of Christ*” (Pope Benedict XVI). Those who look at the body of Christ, actually look at what they themselves are in the community of the Church in compliance with God’s will: “*If you are the body of Christ and his part, then it is your mystery that’s put on the altar. You receive your mystery! Be what you see, and receive what you are*”, says St Augustine to the Christian community, which

receives Christ and is moulded by Him. The Christian community carries Him inside itself, and it also carries Him into a world that hungers for God through His Word, through the Sacraments and through the works of charity. The Church is always included into the self-dedication, the Eucharistic sacrifice of Christ for the disciples as well as into His mission to the world; it receives Christ not only for itself, but at the same time also (and always) for those who He himself wants to reach through the Church.

***Tu solus...* – The Decision for Salvation**

During Adoration, the faithful assumes the attitude of an inward and outward orientation towards the almighty Creator-God, the very essence of being, who in Jesus Christ became one of us and like us in everything – except sin (Hebr 4:15; VI. Canon). In this action of directing himself toward God, the faithful always renews his decision for the One, Who *alone* deserves Adoration. The whole Revelation is permeated by this exclusive entitlement of God to receive Adoration. This prerogative is the First Commandment: *You shall not have other gods besides me*

(Ex 20:3). It applies both to the Father and to the Son (Lk 24:52; Ap 5:14), at Whose name every knee should bend of those in heaven and on earth (Phil 2:10 f.).

This emphasis has its reason in the fact that – from the fall of Adam until our days and our latitudes – the “other gods” mentioned in the First Commandment have certainly not kept silent. They are not just archaic remains of pre-Christian paganism, and they assert their will loudly and clearly: through people, through passions, through the consumption of goods, through ideologies, through estranging images of man and through apparent needs that pretend to be the true, authentic expression of the love due to mankind. The more massive and plausible this variety of enslaving demands on man grows, and the greater a scandal becomes the exclusive nature of God’s right to adoration, as asserted by the old and new people of God. And that is the reason why it has to be done all the more plainly.

The Gloria says *tu solus* about God as much as three times: “You alone *are the Holy One*, you alone *are the Lord*, you alone *are the Most High*”. You alone – not my social position, my home, my possessions. You

alone – not my performance, my sexuality, my reputation with my fellow men. You alone – not the law, not economic growth, not the international financial markets. In performing Adoration, the faithful makes a decision; he actually renews the most important choice of his life, the decision to belong to God in Jesus Christ through Baptism. This decision acquires the highest visibility when we renew our Baptismal promises during the Easter Vigil. In that night, the faithful express (three times as well) their decision as follows: “*Abrenuntiatis? – Abrenuntiamus!*” Do you reject? – We reject! “*Creditis? – Credimus!*” Do you believe? – We believe! – and each is repeated three times. Our Yes to God is on the face of a medal, which on the reverse carries our No against the estranging demands and relationships in the world and against their gaining power over us. We indeed have to perform this “rejection” every day. However, we get the strength to say our No only from that still greater Yes that derives from believing; it comes from our always renewed decision in favour of an adoring aspiration and orientation toward the One Who is the origin of life and Who *alone* can balance out the existence of man and of the entire world.

***Semper et ubique...* – An Attitude in Which Life Finds Its Balance**

Just as the Eucharistic Body of the Lord is the strongest expression of His holy presence, the Eucharistic Adoration is the densest and most concrete expression of the adoration due to Him. However, this inner attitude is due to the omnipresent and almighty God at any moment and in any place. In the same way as the Church thanks God and joins in heavenly praise to Him not only in the Eucharist, but *semper et ubique* – always and everywhere (Preface of the Holy Mass), the Christian, too, may not restrict his adoration to the space of Eucharistic Adoration. Eucharistic Adoration is the highest expression, but in everyday life we have to train it, so that it becomes an attitude characterising our entire existence. We train what Jesus instructed the Apostles to do (Lk 18:1) and what Saint Paul time after time exhorts the Church to do: “*Pray without ceasing*” (1Thess 5:17; cf. Rm 12:12; Eph 6:18; Col 4:2).

This attitude, in which man bows before God, the creature bows before its Creator, is not the distorted, knave-like attitude of a weaker person who

goes down like an inferior dog before a stronger person. It has nothing to do with the “*instincts of the subdued and oppressed*” that Nietzsche said he recognized in the Christians, who – in his opinion – were just “*little abortions of bigots and liars*”; on the contrary, while adoring the things of the world, “*the work of our hands*” (Hos 14:4) enslaves us, the adoration of God is a chivalrous deed of freedom. It is an expression of that royal dignity with which the twenty-four Elders mentioned in Revelation throw down their crowns before the throne, adore the Lord and exclaim: “*Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honour and power*” (Rv 4:10 ff.).

Adoration means orienting one’s whole self towards the One that allows man in his entirety to find his balance and his order. Before God and oriented towards Him man becomes truly man – in his dependence and his greatness, in his freedom to say Yes or No and in his inalienable dignity, in his earthly heaviness and in his vocation to eternal life within that special community, whose archetype is God himself. In a book worth reading (“*The Art of Praying*”), the German Philosopher of Religion Romano Guardini writes that in Adoration, the very truth on

which the whole existence is based on, becomes apparent: *“That God is God — he alone; and that man is man, God’s creature”*. He stresses that *“Adoration is the act in which this truth continuously becomes apparent, is acknowledged and consummated”*. Adoration thus means *“to collect one’s thoughts and in this meditation to envision the greatness of God, and bow in devotion and in the freedom of our heart to this greatness. Then, truth will develop within us, the truth of life. Everyday cares will find their proper place and our standards will become rightly adjusted”*.

Tomorrow morning, when I will return to the Chapel to spend some time in Adoration before Holy Mass, I want to sit down once again beside that old man from Ars. In fact, where he is now and where I am in the Chapel we are both gathered together before the Almighty. And the words he taught me about adoration remain true for us both: *“He looks at me, and I look at Him. That’s enough”*; I cannot say more myself. And the essence of Adoration, which I am only able to sense, that special interchange from Me to You, of which Saint Paul speaks (cf. Gal 2:20) — well, I am only able to sense it from far. It is still too early to speak about it. For today, I shall remain here, looking and looked at. Together with all faithful at

any time and in any place – and together with the old peasant of Ars.

Rev. Fra' Georg Lengerke
Professed Conventual Chaplain

ORA ET LABORA

Most people, not all, who are introduced to the Divine Office are surprised by the many reasons why we stop and pray this Liturgy of the Hours at different times of the day. We pray the Divine Office to praise God, and we do so through, with and in Jesus as He prays. The Divine Office is joined with the Eucharist as the two forms of prayer where Jesus is in prayer to the Father. We are united as members of the Mystical Body of the Church through our intellect and our will, our voices and our emotions, all in us, by the grace we received at Baptism¹.

We are each different components of the Mystical Body; and we are joined to its head, Jesus Himself, as He gives glory and praise to the Father, through the life of the Holy Spirit. The Office is totally God-centered. What it is actually saying is “Thou”². Praise is our response to the glory of God, to the shining forth of God’s presence in every

¹ W. MORK, OSB, *A Synthesis of the Spiritual Life*, Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Co., 1962, p. 139ff.

² W. MORK, OSB, *The Benedictine Way*, Petersham, St. Bede’s Publication Lays, 1987, p. 68.

person and every situation and every thing³.

Historically the systematically praying at set times, what we call the Liturgy of the Hours, has always been a part of the Jewish and Islamic traditions to give God His praise and to break up the day. Jesus would find his peace in the times of the day where He, too, would stop and acknowledge His Father. “*Seven times a day I have praised you*” (Ps 119) would have been a daily practice which was followed by Jesus while living among us. And today we are invited to do the same in the Liturgy of the Hours. For many who pray in Jesus’ tradition, it is a duty to stop and pray the Hours each day. For priests, deacons and religious it is an obligation of their state of life to say this prayer of the Church. So no matter where you are around the world, these prayers united with the Eucharist are always at some time and place praising the Father, uniting the whole Mystical Body, the Church, throughout the world as one in heart and soul⁴.

³ D. STEINDL-RAST, OSB, *Music of Silence, A Sacred Journey Through the Hours of the Day*, Berkeley, Seastone / Ulysses Press, 1998, p. 13.

⁴ SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution on Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, 100.

The purpose now is to not only to encourage those obligated to say the Hours, but also to invite all the laity, in particular all of the members of our Order, to increase their spiritual life. We all need to explore adopting “prayer breaks” as a means of achieving the balance between prayer and work first proposed by St Benedict, *Ora et Labora*, in such a way as to achieve a better balance in one’s life. St Benedict gave our Order its spirituality starting with his influence upon Blessed Gerard at the beginning, nearly a thousand years ago. It is a practical and sound foundation intended to make our lives more complete.

Before continuing further, I think it prudent to clarify a little point of confusion for some. This daily prayer historically and geographically has been, and is, known by several titles in English: Divine Office, Liturgy of the Hours, Office of the Day and Daily Office. All mean the same thing.

My goal is to inspire you, as I have been inspired, by recommending to you this well kept secret to achieve a better balance in your life. By following this path, you can slow down, naturally lower your blood pressure, and bask in the presence of God through Jesus His Son and all who are united in

this prayer around the world, wherever they may be. As we pray, we realize that life is a God-given gift, and *we* are not in control. Instead, it would be easier and more fruitful if life yielded a balance, maybe even a perfect balance to the day: as every day as we begin to realize more that it is *God who is in control and we owe him his due praise and glory*.

Too often we place other gods before us. We must remember that Jesus Himself taught us that the two greatest commandments involve love: love is willing the good of the Father first more than anything or anyone else, and secondly, willing the good for ourselves and our neighbor as we love ourselves. Love is kept alive by communication⁵.

God is God and we are His creatures, and all we have to do is remember in our busy days that He is due homage. It is an expression of our spiritual life as a whole, which is in its essence a life of love, of listening and of responding to God and to one another.... Love is not a solo act⁶.

Yet another reason why we pray the Liturgy of the Hours is that it is a way to fire our faith while at

⁵ W. MORK, OSB, *Synthesis*, p. 138.

⁶ D. STEINDL-RAST, OSB, *Music of Silence*, p. 13.

the same time breaking up the routine of the day, and obtaining peace within the presence of Jesus as He offers praise, thanksgiving, adoration, reparation and even lamentations to His Father on behalf of all of us⁷.

During the prayer, we leave ourselves for a brief time as we approach the Father through His Son. In turn we increase God's life within us. This amazing grace, this gift from Jesus, unites our prayer. *Ora et Labora*. St Benedict, more than 1500 years ago, knew the answer and he still encourages us to balance our lives in order to achieve peace, and he tells us to approach these Hours with humility, reverence, seriousness and respect each time we pray⁸.

Sometimes we become "stuck" in some aspect of our natural life, and this devotion can also provide an ideal remedy to become "un-stuck", as we change a static life into the dynamic: all is in the life of Christ, who now transforms us into the supernatural. In this prayer, Jesus asks for what His members need in order to come to the Beatific Vision⁹.

⁷ General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours, I, 3.

⁸ *Rule of St Benedict*, 47.

⁹ W. MORK, OSB, *Synthesis*, p. 139.

We also have been given a mandate to “*pray always*” (Lk 18:1 ff), and prayer can be the undertone of our whole lives as we pray the Divine Office, our conversation with God. While praising God, we are also united in prayer when we participate in the Eucharist and other moments of conversation with God. “*We talk to God when we pray - we listen to God when we read His words*”, says St Ambrose¹⁰.

Both talking and listening work to energize our resolve to do God’s will. And our intention should be to unite in all of our daily offerings of *ora et labora* with all those who pray the Office. *Ora et Labora* – How do we say the prayers of the Divine Office? As many have commented to me looking over my Office books: “they look so complicated” and “how do you know how to switch back and forth... all those ribbons!”. The simple answer is that like any new task or project we undertake, there is a familiarization process. If you are only able to say the Hours alone, it might take a little longer than as participating in a prayer community; and yet the very nice thing about learning this prayer is that simple

¹⁰ AMBROSIIUS, *De Officiis Ministrorum*, I, 20, 88, PL 16:50.

guide booklets are published each year¹¹.

With a little orientation, these booklets guide you by date and page numbers through the whole liturgical year. Separate guides are available for either the *Liturgy of the Hours* four volume set, or there is another for the one volume *Christian Prayer*, as either is designed to steer you on the correct course for the day.

Saying the *Liturgy of the Hours* is not as complicated as it may seem or sound, and clearly the individual can move through the prayer in short time. One instructional note is that we are not given any license to modify the prayers if we wish to be genuinely connected to this practice. Another note is that if you miss an Office, the mandate is to not play “catch up” and say two Offices at the same time to be “even”. Instead, pray the appropriate Hour at the time to pray the Hours. At the same time, we need to be attentive to the sense of the words and give God due reverence, but must remember that it is not like reciting some magical formula or incantation!

¹¹ The *Guide Book* is a yearly Calendar published in the United States to provide a calendar for the liturgical year to match the published *Liturgy of the Hours* and *Christian Prayer* as published by the Catholic Publishing Company, and it is available in all stores where religious books are sold.

So if the wrong psalms or prayers are said but the prayers were said with your undivided attention and best intention, you succeeded in that session. This again makes perfect practical sense; and less chances for errors occur once a familiarity is achieved simply by “doing it” – this means for the individual to take the times of the day and resolve to feed and nourish the soul.

The Holy Spirit, “*under whose reputation the Psalms were written is always present by His grace to those who use them with faith and good will*”¹². Finally, silence also has its importance as we collect ourselves before we begin the prayer; and stop and deliberately pause between the different segments within each of the Hours.

The two essential Offices of the day are Morning Prayer (sometimes still called *Lauds*) and Evening Prayer (sometimes still called *Vespers*), prayers that are meant to set the beginning praise for the new day (We begin with: “*O Lord open my lips. And my mouth shall declare your praise*”) and end the day with thanksgiving (We begin with: “*O God come to my assistance. O Lord*

¹² General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours, I, 102.

make haste to help me”). “So that at the first stirrings [of the day], our mind and will may be consecrated to God”¹³.

Thus the alpha and omega, the two hinges of the day are revealed. These are comprised of antiphons and psalms, a reading and intercessions. Each psalm is annotated by a line from scripture to unite the Old Testament with some aspect of Jesus’ teaching.

Once you become comfortable with Morning and Evening Prayers, and as proficiency is attained, there is also the Hour of Readings (sometimes called *Vigils*) which are additional antiphons, psalms and prayers that can be said anytime after Evening Prayer until Morning Prayer. The readings are solid Christian instructions on the early writings and interpretations of the Scriptures, often from the Early Fathers of the Church, meant to enhance our understanding not only of what we are reading but also of our faith. The Liturgy of the Hours chooses readings that complement the seasonal readings of the Eucharistic liturgy. Scripture is selected from both the Old Testament and the New Testament to

¹³ *General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours*, I, 138.

emphasize the continuity of the pre- and post-messianic and to broaden our appreciation and understanding of the history of Salvation with a deepening of devotion.

Night Prayer (sometimes still called *Compline*) is the examination of our conscience with some basic prayers that are essentially the same each night. That might have been a response to the monastic night prayers when you could not read much in simple candlelight with the rest of the room being very dark. Centuries ago or today, essentially the same prayers are still said, which makes the rote recitation easy when you start memorizing this Office.

Finally there are the Daytime Hours, which were once called *Terce*, *Sext* and *None* that provide short pauses in the day. For many who read the Office, these are optional.

Each of these breaks to the day provides God his due worship, while contributing to the peace and balance of the day. Pope Benedict XVI repeated this recently when he said “*by praying the Psalms, the Scripture readings, and the readings drawn from the great tradition which are included in the Divine Office, we can come to a deeper experience of the Christ-event and the economy of sal-*

vation, which in turn can enrich our understanding and participation in the celebration of the Eucharist”. And he continues “*Christ does not speak in the past, but in the present, even as He is present in the liturgical action*”¹⁴.

Ora et Labora. Another important dimension of the Liturgy of the Hours to consider is our mental disposition. We need to pause, clear our mind, if even for a few moments, and avoid all unnecessary and controllable distraction. In other words, there is a difference in being in an airport terminal and sitting in front of a television screen. The best recommendation is to sit in a quiet room or chapel.

After a period of saying the Divine Office, we can become dry or distracted more easily. Everyone is subject to this mental state; and the solution, ideally before the situation occurs, is to read the Scriptures and their commentaries in order better to prepare ourselves for the Word of God. Because the more you study and the more familiar they are to you, the more comfortable you become with the repetition of the Psalms, their meaning and how they fit into God’s

¹⁴ BENEDICT XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis*, February 22, 2007, 45

plan for all of us. This step of studying is very important to our personal growth as we participate in the prayers of Jesus; and this in turn is an opportunity to increase our graces for ourselves as well as the entire Mystical Body.

St Benedict also offered another important part of our prayer preparation, through encouraging the practice of *lectio divina*, a form of reading Scripture slowly and carefully, and if you are “grabbed” by a phrase – especially alerted – stop and dwell on it and relate it to your life. Again, we have heard just recently from Pope Benedict XVI the importance of this practice in the growth of the whole life (*ora et labora*) of the Christian¹⁵.

The goal of *lectio divina* is to achieve an awareness of God’s presence. There are many excellent guides to this practice. It is guaranteed that the moment *lectio divina* becomes a part of your life, you have been graduated to a rewarding life on a new plane which will benefit your saying the Divine Office while enriching your life experience, now more qualified to bask in the presence of God.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

As a result of all of these efforts and given a regular participation in the Liturgy of the Hours, you begin to assimilate every potential of seeing the beauty, the harmony and the deepening of the mystical as one immerses self into the Holy Scriptures. Praising God is our telling Him about Himself, and grows out of one's personal experience and *lectio divina*¹⁶. And “*praying regularly at set and specific times helps focus and reorient one to God at other times.... we can [always] know God's presence at all times if we set aside certain times for prayer*”¹⁷.

Ora et Labora. In this exercise, there has been an exploration of why, who, how and where we can pause to participate in the Divine Office as well as what it is comprised of. Thanks to the simplicity and practicality of St Benedict, we are shown that by incorporating this prayer of praise into our day, we are participating in the eternal prayers of the Son, Jesus, to His Father. While praying we learn that this pause can refresh and balance, while raising our lives to new possibilities, through increased graces, in the

¹⁶ W. MORK, OSB, *The Benedictine Way*, p. 59.

¹⁷ A. BOERS, *The Rhythm of God's Grace: Uncovering Morning and Evening Hours of Prayer*, Brewster, Paraclete Press, 2003, p. 33.

life of the Mystical Body with Jesus its head. The practice of saying the Divine Office takes effort, and yet the true beauty of the tradition is that it produces early results. We encourage the reader to better understand that this prayer is not complicated. We pray that the members of our Order will taste and see the benefits of saying the Hours and experience the graces that result from this daily commitment. *Ora et Labora.*

Fra' Thomas N. Mulligan
Knight of Justice

MEDITATION – A SIMPLE GUIDE

It is probably true to say that most Catholics know that there is more to our private prayer than “saying prayers”. We have heard people talk about mental prayer and meditation but do we actually know what it means, or are we happy to continue to in our ignorance with the thought that this is something that need only concern those in a monastery? The Catechism of the Catholic Church makes the bold assertion that “*prayer is the life of the new heart*”¹, thereby teaching us that it is a natural consequence of the process of sanctification that God wills for all the baptized. The Catechism observes: “*It ought to animate us at every moment. But we tend to forget him who is our life and our all*”². Put simply, through prayer our experience of God and our knowledge of Him as a consequence of our intimacy with Him increases. If this is to be any sort of possibility, just as with the entire process of our sanctification, it has to be with our consent – it is God’s work in me but with my active cooperation with His initiative.

¹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH [CCC], 2697.

² CCC, 2697.

St Teresa of Avila, one of the Church's greatest teachers of contemplative prayer, describes mental prayer or meditation as our intimate conversation of friendship with Him who loves us. She also says that it is the royal road to Heaven in that it introduces us to an intimacy with God which will find its fulfillment in the life to come. The Scriptures contain many references to this conscious process of placing oneself in God's presence by faith. Among the best known is the story of the calling of the young Samuel. Samuel learns that it is God who is calling him and Who wishes to speak to him. Samuel's response is the perfect beginning to meditation: "*Speak Lord, your servant is listening*".³ We come to recognize the voice of the Master by training our spiritual ear to the sound of His voice which cannot be heard clearly in the clamour of the world but is more easily perceived in silence and calm, away from the preoccupations of the world and its demands. This is one of the reasons why the great monastic communities rise in the stillness of the night to seek God and to wait on Him.

³ 1Sam 3:10.

We begin by acknowledging that this prayer is entirely dependent on God's grace freely given to those who desire to become more like Christ. We are not like those who use techniques of meditation purely for the relaxation or the sense of well-being that they engender – our prayer is with a specific purpose: our transformation. The great evidence of this truth is the lives of the Saints, all of whom were people of prayer. The proof that their prayer was real is their practice of virtue because prayer makes us resolute in the face of trials. It also gives us a true sense of perspective – all the Saints perceive the emptiness of this passing world in relation to the eternal grandeur of God. True prayer opposes the cowardice which is such a characteristic of our age and teaches us to act in accordance with the will of God. In this way, we become servants of His truth rather than the artificers of a truth that is purely our own.

Given that we accept the desirability of this experience, how do we begin? The initial preparations are all practical – St Paul says we should “pray at all times” – this will not be possible if we do not pray at specific times, consciously willing it⁴.

⁴ CCC, 2697.

We have to identify times which favour this type of prayer, maybe first thing in the morning or last thing at night or perhaps some moment of the day that can be “ring-fenced” and protected from intrusion or other activities. Although there are various schools of meditation, the following pattern is common to most.

1. *Lectio* (Reading)

Prayer has to be fed, we have to listen before we speak, there has to be a spring-board which will help us to be less earth-bound and orientate us in our prayer. We begin by asking God’s assistance, simply and briefly, praying that the Holy Spirit will inspire us. Then we read – either Sacred Scripture or the writings of the Fathers or the spiritual teaching of the Saints. *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading) gives us the subject of our consideration. It is not just reading for the sake of information but must inspire holy thoughts and strong desires which open the soul to listen. St Teresa of Avila says that such reading is a service to recollection. A good starting point would be the liturgical texts of the Mass of the day, especially the

Scripture readings⁵. There are also a number of good anthologies of texts which are particularly suitable for meditation⁶. As Members of the Order, we could read some of the texts that are prepared specifically for our spiritual formation⁷ or a brief section of the Catechism (particularly Section 4 which is devoted to Prayer). If we find reading arid or unhelpful, praying the Rosary can also fulfill the purpose of the *lectio*⁸. We read or pray the Rosary until we feel the need to pause and to stay with a thought or an inspiration allowing it to be amplified within us, rather like the echoes of a voice in a cavernous space. We pause and sample the inspiration as long as it lasts. This leads us naturally to the second phase of our prayer.

⁵ A missal or a calendar listing the daily readings is essential for this. Such resources are now also available online at sites like <http://www.ewtn.com/devotionals/inspiration.htm>.

⁶ I would recommend “*The Bible as Prayer: A Handbook for Lectio Divina*” by Stephen Hough, published by Continuum (2007).

⁷ For example: “*Malta Meditations*” by W. STEPHERDSON ABELL, published by Paulist Press (2005).

⁸ “*The Rosary in Space and Time*” by R. REES, published by Gracewing (2006) is particularly helpful in this regard and includes excellent introductory chapters on prayer.

2. *Meditatio* (Meditating)

This is the a more discursive phase where we are assisted by using our imagination, taking the lead from what we have read or considered thus far. Often the less we meditate on, the richer the meditation: a phrase, a word, a glance at the Cross. We follow a thought to its natural end. It is a time of impressions rather than opinions and should follow the processes of the memory, the understanding and the will. Some methods (like the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius) rely greatly on the imagination suggesting that the person praying tries to insert themselves into the scene, other methods are less demanding in this regard and encourage a prayerful mulling over of the subject. This is essentially a time of the spontaneity of heart, it is an anticipation of Heaven where we shall see God: here we cannot grasp God with our mind but we can love Him with our will. We immerse ourselves in what we find for it must be a personal experience (the quality and content of which varies legitimately from person to person). The Saints recount that it is rarely emotional and we would be mistaken to seek this. It is what the Fathers often

describe as the process whereby the human heart is expanded to receive God himself. This phase comes to an end when we feel ready to abandon words and images and begin to repose in a state of conscious awareness of God's presence with us or in us.

3. *Contemplatio* (Contemplating)

St Thomas describes this goal of all prayer as “*resting in the Divine presence*”⁹. More recently, Père Marie Eugène de l'Enfant Jésus said that God gives us the grace to meet His gaze and in that moment two loves which seek each other give themselves to each other. This wordless state of intimacy leads naturally to a desire to speak to God. This is called by many teachers the *colloquy* as it has the form and character of a conversation and is the greater substance of our prayer. It is essentially conversing with God in secret. We are not talking to or with ourselves in some analytical way but speaking to God honestly and openly, simply and without affectation. As the catechism says: “*the heart should be present to him to whom*

⁹ *Summa Theologiae* II, IIae 180, art. 3.

*we are speaking*¹⁰...here another book is opened: the book of life. We pass from thoughts to reality”¹¹. It naturally becomes a prayer of adoration as we bow before the mystery of the presence of God which we find within ourselves. It is also a prayer of humility in which the soul knowingly expresses its dependence on God, recognizing God’s greatness in contrast to our smallness and our weakness in comparison to His strength. It greatly bolsters our desire to be united with God. It strengthens in us the virtue of hope. We try to sustain this as long as possible until we feel ourselves drawn towards the need to make resolutions which are concrete expressions of our desire.

4. *Oratio* (Praying)

The Catechism says that “*meditation engages thought, imagination, emotion and desire. This mobilization of the faculties is necessary in order to deepen our convictions of faith, prompt the conversion of our heart and strengthen our will to follow Christ*”¹². It is from this hope that we find

¹⁰ CCC, 2700.

¹¹ CCC, 2706.

¹² CCC, 2708.

the courage to ask, but believing must come before asking. It is our resolutions nourished by contemplation that give us a programme for life in the valley after we have left the mountain of our awareness of God's presence. St Teresa teaches that prayer consists more of loving than of thinking and that prayer becomes internalized to the extent that we become aware of him "*to whom we speak*"¹³. Consequently, resolutions grow out of the affections we experience in prayer and become a demonstration of our love for God in action. Prayerful meditation makes us more docile to grace, helping us to overcome sin in concrete ways (that is because it avoids generalities and tends towards the specific, helping us to courageously focus on what we know we must do). For Our Lord, the prayer of Gethsemane was also a purification of weakness, a strengthening of the will. It is at this time that a precise agenda emerges for the path ahead and an itinerary for our ongoing conversion naturally emerges from the riches of our prayer. A brief prayer of thanks concludes this experience and seals our resolutions asking for the necessary grace to put them into action.

¹³ *The Way of Perfection*, 26,9.

The Catechism reminds us that “*meditation is above all a quest. The mind seeks to understand the why and how of the Christian life in order to adhere and respond to what the Lord is asking*”¹⁴. The relative proportions of the various phases of the process can vary greatly from day to day, as can the length, depending on our disposition or the grace of the moment. We shall need to persevere at it and not be discouraged. If we find it tough initially, our perseverance will certainly be rewarded. Such prayer is essentially a skill that has to be learned and then perfected. For all of us, prayer must be a priority if the grace we have received through the sacraments is to be fruitful in us and if we are to be more effective in living out our commitments made in baptism and confirmation which form the basis of our *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*.

Fr. Andrew Wadsworth
Magistral Chaplain

¹⁴ CCC, 2705.

THE ROSARY

(translated from Italian)

*“The Rosary, though clearly Marian in character,
is at heart a Christocentric prayer”*
Rosarium Virginis Mariæ, 1

The Rosary is a prayer beloved of many saints and encouraged by the magisterium of the Church, “*gradually taking form in the second millennium under the guidance of the Spirit of God*” and accompanying the life of the Church. In his Apostolic Letter¹ John Paul II states that the Rosary “*has all the depth of the Gospel message in its entirety, of which it can be said to be a compendium. It is an echo of the prayer of Mary; with the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary*”.

Some Misunderstandings

The Rosary is an ancient devotion that has had an immense influence on the minds and hearts of the

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariæ*, October 16, 2002, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 21, nn. 1167-1250; see also VARIOUS AUTHORS, *Riflessioni sulla Lettera Apostolica di Giovanni Paolo II Rosarium Virginis Mariæ*, Vatican City 2003.

faithful and is just a part of the life of a Christian as work and bread; but when people become uncertain about their beliefs in this restless modern life they risk losing their taste for this habit. This prayer then no longer says anything to them and it would be useless to convince them otherwise.

Some misunderstandings about this prayer have prompted a certain aversion. First of all, Jesus' invitation in the Sermon on the Mount: "*In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him*" (Mt 6:7,8). These words of Jesus are the foundation of every Christian notion of prayer; it could be thought that the Rosary is the very opposite of this, since it consists of a continuous repetition and is sometimes recited so quickly and unthinkingly that one is reminded of Isaiah's reproaches to the Jews who approach God with words only and their lips alone, "*though their hearts are far from me*" (Is 29:13).

Another objection to the Rosary is that it is considered a "pagan" prayer since similar forms exist in Islam, in Hinduism and in Buddhism². John Paul II's

² S. PERRELLA, *Rosarium Beatae Virginis Mariae*, in «Marianum», 66, 2004, pp. 449-452.

Apostolic Letter devotes its entire number 4 to “*Objections to the Rosary*”, highlighting two of them. The first: “*There are some who think that the centrality of the Liturgy, rightly stressed by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, necessarily entails giving lesser importance to the Rosary. Yet, as Pope Paul VI made clear, not only does this prayer not conflict with the Liturgy, it sustains it*”.

The second objection is that it “*is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character*”.

It should be understood that the Rosary is addressed in the great concilia on the Mother of God and in the II Vatican Council that delineated the worship of the Mother of God directed at the Christocentric core of the faith, so that “*while the Mother is honored, the Son [...] is rightly known, loved and glorified*”³.

Origins and Development of the Rosary

The origin of the Rosary⁴ has to be viewed in

³ SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964, n. 66.

⁴ For an ample treatment see R. BARILE, *Rosario*, in *Mariologia*, ed. S. DE FIORES, V. FERRARI SCHIEFER and S. M. PERRELLA, Cinisello Balsamo 2009, pp. 1034-1041 and the extensive bibliography therein.

relation to the ideal of *continuous prayer*, practised by repeating a brief formula, such as : “*God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me*”. Repetition led to numbered prayer with reference to the Psalter. Hence the substitution: one hundred and fifty brief formulas replace the Psalms and a number of Our Father’s replace the canonical hours: “*qui non potest psallere, debet patere*”, those who cannot recite the Psalms should say a number of Our Father’s. At the same time, in the Middle Ages, there was a growing emphasis on the “mysteries” of Christ and on his humanity, as well as on the Madonna’s glories and joys. Enrico Susone (died 1366) proposed various exercises explicitly referred to the Passion of Christ and to the sorrows of Mary. The joys of the Virgin were counted in groups of five to seven or eight or fifteen or even one hundred and fifty. The meditation on the sorrows and joys of the Virgin and of Christ were accompanied by Our Father’s and Hail Mary’s. In the 12th century, Cistercian communities started to use the *Marian Psalters*, sometimes with the addition of a Marian antiphon. Giovanni de Caulibus’ meditations on the life of Christ contributed to the formulation of the Rosary, and even more the *Life of Christ* by Ludolf of Saxony

(died 1377), instrumental in incorporating the reference to the mysteries of Christ into personal prayer.

In the beginning, the most customary formulation was the Our Father, which became the tool for counting the prayers; later on the Hail Mary began to prevail. St. Peter Damian (died 1072) testifies to the frequency of the Hail Mary and already in the 13th century there was a “Rosary” of fifty Hail Mary’s or a “Psalter” of one hundred and fifty Hail Mary’s recited by individuals or by devout groups such as the Beguines of Ghent.

These different practices led to the gradual organization of a method of prayer up to the current arrangement of the Rosary. Three monks – two Carthusian and one Dominican – were involved in this evolution. Heinrich Eger von Kalkar (died 1408) divided up the Psalter of one hundred and fifty Hail Mary’s into fifteen decades, each preceded by an Our Father; the Hail Mary’s did not include the present second part nor the “mysteries” on which to mediate. The second arrangement dates back to Dominic of Prussia (died 1460) who added to the Rosary composed of fifty Hail Mary’s a “clause” in the name of Jesus at the end of each, thus forming a Rosary of

fifty Hail Mary's and fifty clauses taken from Rudolf of Saxony's *Life of Christ*.

The definitive contribution was that of the Dominican Alan de la Roche (died 1475) who established the Rosary as a pastoral tool. For this purpose he set up the first confraternity between 1464 and 1468, officially approved by the Dominican Order on 16 May 1470. He based it on older confraternities organized around a monthly meeting, singing of praises to the Virgin, the sermon and the Mass. Up to the 13th century this type of confraternity continued to prescribe vocal prayers following the pattern of the canonical hours; Alain de la Roche replaced it with the Psalter/Rosary of one hundred and fifty formulas. He knew of and recommended many Psalters or Rosaries, but preferred the fifteen decades based on the fifteen Our Father's. Among Alan's many proposals there is also our present Rosary: "*the first fifty are prayed to honour Christ, Incarnate Word. The second, Christ who suffered the Passion. The third in honour of Christ who rose, ascended into heaven, who sent the Paraclete, who sits at the right hand of the Father, who will come to judge*"⁵.

⁵ ALANO, *Apologia*, IV, 14, 20.

After the death of Alan, the confraternity that the Dominican prior Johann Sprenger founded in Cologne on 8 September 1475 reduced the one hundred and fifty prayers from a daily to a weekly obligation, proposing their division into sets of fifty, and substituting the name Rosary for Psalter; it was the birth of the modern Rosary. It was probably in 1481 that the term “mysteries” appeared for the first time, a term that Alberto da Castello takes up, publishing in Venice in 1521 the *Rosary of the Glorious Virgin Mary*, where the one hundred and fifty clauses are replaced by meditations on moments of Christ’s life, linked to the Our Father and called “mysteries”, characterizing the “groups of ten”.

The Rosary in the Magisterium of the Church

When the modern Rosary had almost taken form, Pope Pius V contributed the Bull *Consueverunt* of 17 September 1569. After him, many pontiffs attributed great importance to the recitation of the Rosary, and in particular Leo XIII who, on 1 September 1883 issued the Encyclical *Supremi aposto-*

latus officio, which inaugurated almost annual references to the Rosary. Among the more recent popes, Pius XI promoted the Rosary in his *Ingravescentibus malis* of 29 September 1937 in which, outlining the evils leading up to World War II, he urged people to recite the Rosary to triumph over them. Pius XII does the same in a different context in his *Ingruentium malorum* of 15 September 1951. John XXIII re-evokes Leo XIII's teaching, promoting the Rosary in various instances and especially in his Apostolic Letter *Il religioso convegno* of 29 September 1961 and in the document *Œcumenicum Concilium* of 28 April 1962, in which he asked that the Rosary be recited for the Council.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*⁶ Paul VI stresses, in line with the teaching of the II Vatican Council, the Gospel inspiration of the Rosary and its Christological and Paschal orientation. Paul VI's Magisterium on the Rosary mainly refers to the use of its clauses, its relationship with the Liturgy, the appreciation of its pious practice and the recommendation that is not to be propagated in an exclusive manner.

⁶ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, 2 February 1974, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 5, nn. 13-97; on the Rosary, numbers 42-55, 73-87.

In John Paul II's *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, the Pontiff first of all points out that the profound meaning of the Rosary consists of the contemplation of the face of Christ through Mary's eyes and explains the behaviour to adopt when praying. A new series of five "mysteries of light" is proposed: the baptism of Christ, his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with the call to conversion, the Transfiguration and the institution of the Eucharist. Finally, various "techniques" are suggested for reciting the Rosary: a suitable icon could be used to portray each mystery when announcing it; a related Biblical passage could be proclaimed followed by a brief pause; in the Hail Mary's, a clause highlighting the name of Christ could be added referring to the mystery being contemplated; the *Gloria* could be sung in public recitation; instead of the ejaculatory prayer, one for achieving the fruits of meditation would be more suitable.

The Gospel Inspiration of the Rosary and its Relationship with the Liturgy

The Rosary is evangelical because the Our

Father, the Hail Mary, the Gloria and the mysteries are evangelical. The Rosary helps us to *concentrate* on some short verbal formulas from the Gospel and on some mysteries of the life of Christ: childhood, public life, Passion and Resurrection. In this regard, there is a well-chosen formula that Paul VI takes from Pius XII: the Rosary is “*totius evangelii breviarium*”, a compendium of the entire Gospel⁷.

Paul VI also effectively describes the *misunderstanding* that I mentioned earlier regarding the relationship between the Rosary and the Liturgy. Given that Liturgy and Rosary “*must be neither set in opposition to one another nor considered as being identical and that they both address the mysteries of Christ*”, Paul VI establishes the basic difference between Rosary and Liturgy. The Liturgy presents new (*efficit*) the mysteries of the redemption, the Rosary “*by means of devout contemplation, recalls these same mysteries to the mind of the person praying (in mentem orantis revocat) and stimulates the will to draw from them the norms of living*”. The Rosary thus naturally leads to, although “*it does not, however, become part of the Liturgy*”⁸.

⁷ *Marialis cultus*, 42.

⁸ *Marialis cultus*, 48.

John Paul II takes up the same vision and the same teaching: the Rosary “*sustains*” the Liturgy, “*since it serves as an excellent introduction to and a faithful echo of the Liturgy, enabling people to participate fully and interiorly in it and to reap its fruits in their daily lives*”⁹. In the same letter (n. 13) the pope stresses that “*the spiritual life is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. Christians, while they are called to prayer in common, must also go to their own rooms to pray to their Father in secret (Mt 6:6); indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle, they must pray without ceasing (1Thes 5:17). The Rosary, in its own particular way, is part of this varied panorama of ‘ceaseless’ prayer. If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, is a saving action par excellence, the Rosary too, as a ‘meditation’ with Mary on Christ, is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer’s life, it ensures that what he has done and what the liturgy makes present is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence*”.

Jesus Essence of Mary’s life

The Gospels are very discreet when they talk

⁹ *Rosarium Virginis Mariæ*, 4.

about Mary; John's Gospel only mentions Her twice, at the beginning of Jesus' public life in Cana and at the end at the foot of the Cross. From the outset, the disciples showed a particular love and respect for Mary and Christians have always borne a special love for Her, based on Jesus' words from the Cross to the disciple whom He loved, but after him to every disciple, that is to all of us: "*Behold, your mother*" (Jn 19:27). Mary is the mother of Jesus, but She is also our mother and it is to Her, as at Cana, we turn so that She can intercede for us with Her Son.

Jesus Christ was the substance of Mary's life: certainly a human heart, albeit with the most profound sentiments, can never enter into a relationship with Christ equal to the one that unites us to another human being. The deepest roots of His being are human but they are also and above all divine.

Romano Guardini¹⁰ states that you can be great in two ways: personally as a creator, a hero, a precursor, a person of singular destiny or by loving this great person. The second way is as noble as the first, because to understand and incorporate the existence of another you have to have a strength of mind equal

¹⁰ R. GUARDINI, *Il rosario della Madonna*, Brescia 1994, p. 29.

to the figure and destiny of that person.

Mary was the mother of Jesus, but the Gospel speaks of Her not only as the woman who gave birth and brought up the child Jesus, but also as the person who gradually and often laboriously entered into the *mystery* and *mission* of Her Son's life: "*But they did not understand what he said to them*" (Lk 2:50); "*And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart*" (Lk 2:19,51).

The life of Mary as narrated in the Gospels is an entirely human life, but Mary's humanity is full of the mystery of communion with God and of love of Him, the profundity of which we can only imagine.

In this sense Jesus is the essence of Mary's life: He is Her Son, but at the same time Her Redeemer. Her relationship with Jesus does not only involve Her maternity, but also Her redemption: as She became a mother so She became a Christian; as She lives with Her Son, so She lives with that God of Whom He is the living manifestation, as She grows humanly with Her Son, as every mother does, as She opens the way to life for Him by accepting the sacrifices and sorrows that this involves, She herself becomes humanly free and grows in the grace and truth of God. This is why Mary is not only a great Christian, not just one of the

Saints, She is Sole and Unique. No one is like Her because no creature has experienced what She has experienced.

The recitation of the Rosary is inspired by all this. In the Rosary we live within the arena of Mary's life, whose substance was Christ, and the Rosary is actually a prayer to Christ: the first part of the Hail Mary ends with His name "blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, *Jesus*".

When reciting the Rosary we contemplate the figure and life of Jesus, not directly as in the *Via Crucis* but through the eyes and life of Mary, as She saw it, as She felt it and "kept in Her heart".

*"A breath of holy compassion pervades all the Rosary. When we are very fond of someone, we are happy to meet another person who is linked to them. We see their image mirrored in another existence, as if through new eyes. Our gaze meets a gaze that is equally loving and thus acquires a greater strength of penetration. Our vision widens and we see every facet of the beloved figure and not only the one facet as before [...]. The essence of compassion consists precisely of the fact that the other person places his life at our disposal, so that we become capable of seeing and loving with his eyes and his heart as well"*¹¹.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34. The entire paragraph, with a few adaptations, is taken from R. GUARDINI.

Something similar, but in a different and “higher” way, as the apostle John would have said, happens in the Rosary: also for us, through Mary, the life of Jesus Christ can become the subject and essence of our life.

The Repetitions and the Mysteries

The Rosary is a simple prayer but it nevertheless needs to be learnt.

Praying means communicating with God and this communication is life. There are different forms of prayer, of which the Psalms propose two main kinds, the request and the thanks: requesting then thanking and once again requesting and after which thanking.

There is another form of prayer that gives preference to being in the presence of God with a single word or in silence. St Francis spent entire nights invoking: *My God and my all*. The Fathers of the Church speak of a *prayer of fire*, in which even the few words disappear to stand silent before God.

Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as the eastern Christian tradition have what they call the

prayer of the heart, which in western Christianity comes in the form of litanies, ejaculatory prayer or repeated Biblical passages; in the medieval tradition this latter form was called *orationes secretae*.

Before starting the Prayer of the Hours, the monks mechanically repeated in chorus many Our Fathers and many Hail Mary's to pass from their work and daily tasks to the inner space of prayer. The repetition is then only the exterior form of the prayer, almost a technique, and has the task of making the interior moment calmer and fuller. The Rosary belongs to this type of prayer. The Rosary is a *numbered* prayer which to the one hundred and fifty of the Psalter adds the reference to groups of tens, the most practical division because it is based on the fingers. The alternation of the groups of ten and a set number to be reached creates rhythm and serenity.

The Rosary is a prayer in which you meditate by repeating, according to the Biblical category in which meditation is the repetition of words and above all according to the specific form of the Liturgy that strengthens by *repeating and amplifying* and not by *explaining*.

Our mind rarely concentrates on one thing, we usually think of two things at the same time, even when we are reading, listening to a lecture, a sermon or the like. The repetitive techniques take into account this way of functioning of our minds: the repetition of the ten Hail Mary's occupies a "part" of our mind, leaving another "part" freer to meditate on the *mystery*. The repetition thus acts like the bed of a river that channels the water and becomes, in the Rosary, the "bed" on which the meditation runs.

The mysteries can be recited in two principal ways: at the beginning of the group of ten, before the Our Father, or with the clause after the word Jesus at the end of the first part of the Hail Mary. The Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariæ* proposes the use of the clauses as follows: "*The centre of gravity in the Hail Mary, the hinge as it were which joins its two parts, is the name of Jesus. Sometimes, in hurried recitation, this centre of gravity can be overlooked, and with it the connection to the mystery of Christ being contemplated. Yet it is precisely the emphasis given to the name of Jesus and to his mystery that is the sign of a meaningful and fruitful recitation of the Rosary.*"

Pope Paul VI drew attention, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, to the custom in certain regions

of highlighting the name of Christ by the addition of a clause referring to the mystery being contemplated. This is a praiseworthy custom, especially during public recitation. It gives forceful expression to our faith in Christ, directed to the different moments of the Redeemer's life. It is at once a profession of faith and an aid in concentrating our meditation, since it facilitates the process of assimilation to the mystery of Christ inherent in the repetition of the Hail Mary.

When we repeat the Name of Jesus – the only name given to us by which we may hope for salvation (Acts 4:12) – in close association with the name of his Blessed Mother, almost as if it were done at Her suggestion, we set out on a path of assimilation meant to help us enter more deeply into the life of Christ. From Mary's uniquely privileged relationship with Christ, which makes her the Mother of God, Theotókos, derives the forcefulness of the appeal we make to her in the second half of the prayer, as we entrust to her maternal intercession our lives and the hour of our death”¹².

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Spiritual Assistant in the Italian Pilgrimages

¹² *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 33.

PRAYER FOR VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION

“The exhortation of Jesus to His disciples: ‘Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest’ (Mt 9:38) has a constant resonance in the Church. Pray! The urgent call of the Lord stresses that prayer for vocations should be continuous and trusting. The Christian community can only really ‘have greater trust in God’s providence’ (Sacramentum caritatis, 26) if it is enlivened by prayer”¹.

These words of our Holy Father, Pope Benedict, most surely apply to the discernment of vocations and their formation in our Order. In the Daily Prayer of the Order we say, “*Lord Jesus, Thou hast seen fit to enlist me for Thy service among the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem...*”: we therefore recognise that it is a calling from God which is the reason for our belonging to the Order, a calling which should be the result of a process of discernment.

¹ Message of the Holy Father for the 46th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 3rd May 2009

Discernment and the Call to Holiness

What do we mean by discernment? Etymologically, discernment means to “separate apart”, so that we might distinguish something in order for it to be perceived clearly. It is the way in which each identifies God’s will for us within the context in which we live. Most of us know God’s will in a general sense because it has been revealed through the teaching and life of Jesus. God calls every Christian to be holy, that is to love Him above all things and to love and serve others for His sake. St Paul assured the first Christians that God had chosen them in Christ “*before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish in his sight in love*” (Eph 1:4) and the Second Vatican Council reminded us of this truth when it stated that “*all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity*”².

However, God does not limit Himself to issuing a general invitation to holiness and apostolate addressed to all. He has a specific plan for each

² SECOND ECUMENICAL VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964, n.40.

human being. He calls each one of us to play a definite role that He has foreseen from all eternity. Our Lord assures us in the Gospel that God's plan for each one of us encompasses every detail of our lives. The very hairs of our head, He tells us, are all numbered (cf. Mt 10:30). For each man and woman the universal vocation to holiness finds expression in a unique, absolutely personal vocation to holiness in the totality of the specific circumstances that make up a person's life.

Discernment and Prayer

Discernment is learned by doing, not just by reading about it. It is a function of an individual's loving personal relationship with God, and when we desire to do God's will, are willing to be open to God and have a solid knowledge of God, then discernment is possible. Therefore, prayer is an essential component in the process of discernment. As we become more familiar with the Lord in our prayer, we will come to know how we ourselves are called to live out this universal call to holiness in our own lives. This is what may draw us towards the Order.

Men and women should want to join the Order because they are convinced that God wants them to respond to this call within the traditions and charism of the Order, summarised in fidelity to *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*. A desire to be faithful to this commitment “*renders it a profound example of Christian life in the world and marks out those who really belong to the Order from those who join for worldly motives*”³. It is therefore to be hoped that this calling will have been the result of prayerful discernment *before* candidates are put forward for membership.

Prayerful Formation

As prayer is not only the *means* whereby a vocation can be discerned, but also the *response* to one, during the process of formation there should be an emphasis on a regular and developing prayer life. Whilst formation in the religious sense includes “education”, for example in the Constitution, structures, charisms and history of the Order, it should be so

³ M. COUVE DE MURVILLE, *SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM, OF RHODES AND OF MALTA, Human virtues – Christian Virtues, Events, Young People*, «Journals of Spirituality No 6, p.20.

much more than that. It is about “*the activity within the human learning process of a mind that can have direct access to human activity, i.e. the mind of God*”⁴. It is a spiritual formation. As has been said many times before, all candidates must realise that they are joining a religious order. Even if they themselves do not have a vocation to become ‘professed religious’ by taking the 3 Vows, all nevertheless have an obligation to live the spirit of the 3 Vows as it applies to their state of life. All Members are called to a life of prayer, and candidates should be introduced to particular features of the prayer life of the Order. During the formation programme, they should be introduced to our special devotion to Our Lady, especially under the title of Our Lady of Philermo, St John the Baptist and the other Saints and Beatified Members, and most especially its founder, the Blessed Gerard. They should attend days of recollection and retreats, participate in the liturgical life of the Order and its pilgrimages, and frequent recitation of the Rosary. The Order may also help them discover the Divine Office, through the hours of the Roman Breviary or the

⁴ *Spiritual Recommendations for Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta* Rome 1993, p. 6

Little Office of Our Lady. This prayer life must of course find its practical expression through work for Our Lords the Sick.

Discerning Particular Vocations Within the Order

It is also essential that during initial formation all Members should be made aware of the possibilities of deepening their commitment in the future by asking to make the Promise of Obedience, or, if unmarried, by a consideration of embracing the life of a consecrated religious in vows as a Knight of Justice. So whilst prayerful discernment should have played its part in bringing someone into the Order, it should also feature in a Member's continuing prayer life, as all should be considering within their circumstances if God is calling them to a deeper commitment within it.

The Promise of Obedience

“By virtue of the Promise, members of the Second Class oblige themselves to strive for the perfection of Christian life in

*conformity with the obligation of their state, in the spirit of the Order*²⁵. It should be obvious that only those committed to a regular and serious life of prayer and work within the Order would aspire to such a commitment. Prayerful discernment will have brought the Knight or Dame to the stage of asking to be admitted to the year of preparation, and this continues in the *Code's* insistence that aspirants must start and end their year of preparation and formation with spiritual exercises of at least five complete days in which they are required to meditate deeply on the commitment they believe they wish to make.

In a discernment process, we can become aware of the voices of God, ourselves, and the world and the devil. By turning away from and ruling out the voices of the world and the devil, greater clarity is gained. One is ready to make the free choice of a deepened vocation when our own voice echoes that of the Lord's. It may be difficult to distinguish these voices without the help of appropriate counsel, and the *Code* specifies that during the formation year the aspirant must have a spiritual director, usually in the

²⁵ *Constitutional Charter*, Article 9, Paragraph 2.

person of a Chaplain of the Order, under whom they must carry out the practices of piety and of the apostolate, according to the spirit of the Order.

The Vocation of the Professed

The most binding degree of membership in the Order is that of the Professed, the Knights of Justice. Indeed it is their existence that makes the Order a “religious order”. The Grand Master has made it very clear that we must have more candidates for Justice: “*I am resolutely determined to see an increase of properly motivated, properly instructed, enthusiastic men as Knights of Justice*”⁶. Fra’ Matthew instructed that in every Priory, Sub-Priory and Association there must be a Chaplain specifically responsible for vocations to the Professed.

Such a vocation represents a serious commitment for the individual to the life of the Order and must again be the result of prayerful discernment. Everything that has been said thus far about this must necessarily apply to discerning a vocation to Justice. However, given the relatively small numbers

⁶ From the opening speech of HMEH Fra’ Matthew Festing at the 2009 Venice Strategy Meeting.

of men who are currently amongst the Professed, the discernment process takes on a dual aspect. It is obviously the responsibility of the candidate to discern whether he has such a vocation in conjunction with his spiritual director or confessor. However, it is also the responsibility of the Order as a whole to encourage such a discernment process, and two vital parts of this will be prayer and formative education.

Vocations to Justice should be a focus of the prayer life of every Priory and Association, and frequent Masses for Vocations should have this as a specific intention. We should ask the Saints and Blessed of the Order on their feast days to intercede on our behalf. It has already been suggested that Candlemas Day, February 2nd, should be a “Vocations Day” within the Order, and perhaps the Novena to Blessed Gerard should also be directed towards this intention. We must be convinced in our prayer that the “*Lord of the harvest*” does not cease to ask some to place their entire existence freely at his service within the Order, so as to work with Him more closely in the mission of salvation.

As already stated, the possibility of a vocation to Justice must be part of the initial formation for enter-

ing the Order. It should certainly not be left to Members to “discover” later (or not) that professed religious are at the heart of the Order’s life. It is the experience of at least one Grand Priory that such an approach bears fruit in terms of such vocations. It is worth remembering that a Knight only has to have been a Member of the Order for one year before he can apply to become an aspirant to Justice⁷. There are at present some potential candidates for Justice who are not yet Members of the Order, but who have already engaged in a discernment process. As in any religious order, the periods of Aspirancy and Novitiate are periods when the candidate and his Superior can discern whether the vocation is real. At the heart of the preparatory periods will be prayer and the regular guidance of a Spiritual Father and Novice Master, usually a Chaplain with suitable experience, assisted by a Professed Knight. The Aspirancy ends and the Novitiate begins, preceded by an 8 day retreat. This should certainly be a time for prayerful discernment, and could well include the second “week” of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius, which concerns discernment of a “state of life”.

⁷ See Article 9 of the *Code*.

Who can embrace the consecrated life of a Professed relying on his own human powers? The response of a Knight who is aware that it is God who takes the initiative in his vocation can never be that of the servant in the Gospel who hid his talent in the ground, but is rather that of our Patron St John the Baptist who, coming from a priestly family dedicated to service in the Temple, left that to go into the desert to prepare the way of the Lord. It is prayer which brings a Knight to this vocation and prayer which sustains it. As Pope Benedict reminds us, it was Jesus from the Cross who entrusted us to Mary, His Blessed Mother, as Her sons and daughters. As he says, *“I want to entrust to her all those who are aware of God’s call to set out on the road of the consecrated life”*⁸. Let us indeed prayerfully entrust all vocations to our Order and particularly to those of the specific vocation of Justice to the intercession and motherly care of Our Lady of Philermo.

Fra’ Duncan Gallie

Member of Sovereign Council
Director of Vocations to Justice

⁸ Message of the Holy Father for the 46th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, 3rd May 2009

PRAYER AND HOSPITALER ACTIVITY

(translated from French)

His Passion imminent, Jesus Christ, surrounded by those He loved, said to them: *“I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (Jn 13: 34-35). In the same way, Our Lord Jesus Christ always gives Himself to us as an example (*exemplum dabo vobis* (Jn 13:15): *“I have given you a model of humility. I have become a servant so that you will learn how to serve all men with a meek and humble heart”*. This message must be our guideline, an extraordinary message about that mercy which Jesus practised in His life among us, announcing the Kingdom and Love of God and curing the sick.

Many writings and testimonies refer to this link between prayer and action: the duty of love, mercy and compassion towards others is the keystone of the teaching received from the Apostles, Saints and Fathers and Doctors of the Church. And to nourish charity, prayer is a grace that God gives us to enter into contact with Him, for Him to accompany us in

our life and support us in His charitable work. To achieve it, we are not required to choose between prayer and action, but to merge these two requirements so that prayer helps us to act with strength and courage in our desire to be charitable. St Benedict, father of the Benedictines, told his monks to “*pray and work*” and St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, recommended that the members of his community be “*contemplative in action*”. St Therese of Lisieux said that “*every action of our daily life should be rooted in God and in the present*”. Albeit a contemplative, the saint linked her life of prayer to Charity: “*When I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more I am united to him, the more also do I love my sisters*”. Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta, to support her sisters assisting the sick and the poor who “*do us the honour of allowing us to serve them*”, wanted the prayer I cite here to give them the grace to face the miseries of the human race and to serve Jesus “*under the disguise of the poorest of the poor*”:

“My God, I love you with all my heart and more than any other thing, because You are infinitely good and I love my neighbour as myself for love of You. I love you, O Father, Infinite Love, because You loved me first. May Your Spirit

increase Charity in me and make me love everyone like He who loved them to the end by giving His life on the Cross, Your Son Jesus Christ Our Lord”.

It is the personal relationship with Christ, the continuity of prayer and action, that is the very source of Christian life; it continually invites the disciples of Christ to extend their hands to the poor and sick: because it is in the name of Jesus that the Christian goes to them, intent on listening, accepting and sharing. Again recently, the Holy Father Benedict XVI, receiving a delegation of the Circolo Romano, said: *“We are aware that the authenticity of our fidelity to the Gospel is tested on the basis of our attention and concrete solicitude towards our neighbour, especially the weakest and the marginalized. Thus the Spirit of Charity – that can express itself in numerous ways – becomes a privileged form of evangelization in the light of Jesus’ teaching who regarded as done to Him whatever was done to the least and most forgotten of our brethren”.* In the same way, His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, in his message to Muslims for the end of Ramadan of this year, stresses that *“The attention, the compassion and the help that we, brothers and sisters in humanity, can offer to those who*

are poor, helping them to establish their place in the fabric of society, is a living proof of the Love of the Almighty, because it is man as such whom He calls us to love and help, without distinction of affiliation”¹.

It is prayer, received as a Grace of God, that creates the bond between those who accompany the sick and the sick themselves, who can come together in their obligation and trial by placing themselves under the gaze of He who is Mercy and Love. For the helpers, prayer is an interior moment addressed to God, that prompts them to live with Him and gives support in their decision to act; for the sick, it is the confidence that enables them to receive the love of God that alone can “*light the fire of healing*” and that helps them to sustain the prayer of the healthy, as the prayer recited in our hospital of St Jean d’Acre in 1200 testifies. Charity means selflessness, altruism and compassion. Actions carried out in His name that come from the heart are the expression of a true love for others. “*He who does not have the wings of supreme love cannot make his loving fly to heaven*”: this is what Ramon Llull said in his fine book *Tree of the*

¹ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *Message for the End of Ramadan*, September 11, 2009, 3.

Philosophy of Love. Thus Charity, in the noblest sense of the word, is the Love of God for His children: the supreme, immense Love of the Father who sends His Son to earth, and then of Jesus Christ who dies of Love to save us.

It is this new commandment that the Order of St John of Jerusalem, then of Rhodes, then of Malta, called the Sovereign Order of Malta, expressed with *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*. Hence the members of the Order must pledge to perform its charitable works as spelt out in Article 2, paragraph 2, of the *Constitutional Charter*: “True to the divine precepts and to the admonitions of our Lord Jesus Christ, guided by the teachings of the Church, the Order affirms and propagates the Christian virtues of charity and brotherhood. The Order carries out its charitable works for the sick, the needy and refugees without distinction of religion, race, origin and age. The Order fulfils its institutional tasks especially by carrying out hospitaller works, including social and health assistance, as well as aiding victims of exceptional disasters and of war, attending also to their spiritual well-being and the strengthening of their faith in God”. The Supreme Pontiffs have often pointed out how the Knights of St John of Jerusalem were able, during the course of history, to adapt to new sit-

uations and to respond to the Church's needs in every epoch. His Holiness Pius XII also recalled that the Order has often been a precursor and that the knights had to be "*good Samaritans by vocation, hospitallers by purpose, charitable by collective tradition and by personal devotion*".

At their investiture, the new members of the Order received in the French Association promise, with the aid of God and the protection of St. John the Baptist, to aim at Christian perfection, in conformity with the duties of their status, according to the Order's spirit and traditions. They also pledge to dedicate their actions, as far as possible, to the service of the Association and to its hospitaller, charitable and social works. Because of this pledge, they have to observe loyally and faithfully the Order's laws and to conform, always and everywhere, to these rules and especially to the terms of Article 9, paragraph 3 of the *Constitutional Charter*: "*The members of the Order are to conduct their lives in an exemplary manner in conformity with the teachings and precepts of the Church and to devote themselves to the charitable activities of the Order, according to the provisions of the Code*"; and to Article 116 of the *Code*: "*In accordance with the Constitution, members*

of the Third Class shall conduct themselves so as to give Christian example in their private and public lives, thus putting into effect the tradition of the Order. It is incumbent on them to collaborate effectively in its hospitaller and social work". This commitment, common to all members, is thus twofold and corresponds to the Order's fundamental charisma of *tuitio fidei* and *obsequium pauperum*, to achieve the ultimate aim of the sanctification of the Order's members in God's work. More explicitly, the *Spiritual Recommendations for the Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta* state that the Members of the Third Class have to be "responsible for the honour due to the Order to which they belong, and to bear witness to the ideals of the Order, thereby living the spirit of faith and practising charity and helping the poor and the needy"². Following the example of their Professed confreres, they pledge "to serve the sick and the poor of Jesus Christ and to dedicate themselves to the service of the Church and of the Holy See according to the spirit of the Order" (Article 6C Code); and following that of the Members in Obedience who "oblige themselves by a special promise, which binds in conscience, to a life leading to

² "Spiritual Recommendations for the Members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta", Rome 1993, p. 7.

Christian perfection in the spirit of the Order and in the sphere of its works” (Article 94, paragraph 1 *Code*), they will be able to live intensely the call they have received.

Responding to the call of the Constitution “*Lumen gentium*”, addressed to all the laity, to order temporal affairs according to the Christian conscience, all the Order’s members have a particular responsibility for building the Kingdom of God guided by the light of the Gospel and the Order’s charisma which means “*loving God with their whole heart and their whole soul, with all their mind and all their strength so they might love each other as Christ loves them*”. During the Investiture ceremony, after having pronounced his pledge, the new member receives from me, as President of the French Association, the Order’s cross blessed by a Chaplain, with the request to: “*bear this cross, white as a sign of purity and symbol of the eight beatitudes; and every time you bend over a sick person, it is as if Christ Himself bends over suffering humanity*”. The latest Council, by praising the more concrete virtues and recalling the place of the lay faithful in the Church, echoes the Order’s spirit and traditions of “*behaving like authentic Christian gentlemen*”³. The Council also specifies

³ *Ibid.* p. 10.

that, when acting with the inspiration of divine charity, the faithful will essentially express in their life “*the spirit of the Beatitudes*”, something that has a special meaning for those who bear the eight-pointed cross.

During his visit to the Order’s hospital in Rome on 2 December 2007, Pope Benedict XVII addressed both its members and the hospital staff with these words: “*In every sick person, whoever he or she may be, may you be able to recognize and serve Christ himself; make them perceive with your acts and words the signs of his merciful love. To carry out this ‘mission’ well, endeavour, as St Paul instructs us in the Second Reading, to ‘put on the armour of light’ (Rm 13: 12), which consists in the Word of God, the gifts of the Spirit, the grace of the Sacraments, the theological and cardinal virtues; fight evil and abandon sin that darkens our life. At the beginning of a new liturgical year, let us renew our good resolutions of evangelical life. It is full time now for you to wake from sleep’ (Rm 13: 11), the Apostle urges; it is time to convert, to throw off the lethargy of sin, to prepare ourselves confidently to welcome ‘the Lord who comes’⁴. By recalling*

⁴ “*Homily of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI during the Eucharist Celebration at the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, 1st Sunday of Advent, 2 December 2007*”, in: SOVEREIGN MILITARY HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST. JOHN OF JERUSALEM, OF RHODES AND OF MALTA, *Human virtues – Christian Virtues, Events, Young People*, «Journals of Spirituality n. 8», Rome 2008, pp. 123-124.

the Pauline expression of “putting on the armour of light”, the Holy Father is stressing that only by doing so will we, as members of the Order, be able to accomplish this mission of mercy. St Paul’s is a theme dear to the Order: it is the shield of Faith, the helmet of Salvation and the armour of God. Thus equipped, in the service of the Faith and in assisting others, the Order’s members will be able to achieve their sanctification. I would add that, if the Order’s Members did not possess a profound spiritual life, our works would only achieve an exterior effectiveness, certainly useful but not matching their true aim, which is that of “*translating into facts the adherence to Christ through the testimony of Love*”: and which is summarized in the two commandments which the two latest Pontiffs have given us: “*the creativity of Charity*”, to which John Paul II has called us, is only possible if we put on, at Benedict XVI’s invitation “*the armour of light*”.

It is this commitment of prayer and action that we are asked to experience concretely and which has to be tested in our individual pathways. In 1997, on the occasion of the World Youth Day, I attended as a member of a First Aid team the Closing Mass celebrated by the Pope. Immediately after the anamnesis,

our team was asked to help a young pilgrim. Kneeling beside her, I found I was reciting the “Our Father” while I helped her and, raising my eyes to the doctor who was also assisting, I realized that she was praying as well. Our eyes met and we experienced an instance of true communion of Faith and Charity.

Although this document is mainly addressed to the Members of the Order it also naturally concerns all the Volunteers working in the hospitaller, charitable and social structures under the aegis of our Cross. The Volunteers must pledge to respect the instructions given to them, to consider the people around them and to testify with their behaviour, endurance and general attitude that they are aware of bearing the values of a Catholic institution. The Volunteers and the Members of the Order, volunteers among volunteers, thus pledge to give the best of themselves and to place themselves at the service of the poor and sick. The Knight’s prayer, that every Volunteer can make his or her own, recalls the meaning of this pledge: *“to help me to remain faithful to the Order’s traditions, practising the Roman Apostolic Catholic religion, defending it against impiety and exercising charity to my neighbour, and first of all to the poor and the sick”*.

May Our Lady of Philermos, St John the Baptist and the Blessed Gerard intercede with Our Lord Jesus Christ so that he can continue to look benevolently on our charitable works and heed our prayers, supporting our Members' commitment and enlightening the Grand Master in the leadership of our religious, sovereign and centuries-old Order.

Dominique de la Rochefoucauld de Montbel
President of the French Association

A PROPOSAL OF PRAYER FOR THE YOUNG

(translated from Italian)

“A brother asked Father Poemen: ‘Tell me a word’. He said: ‘When the copper is on the fire, neither a fly nor a reptile can touch it. But when it’s cold, they come and sit on it. It is the same for the monk: As long as he’s engaged in spiritual works, the foe finds no way to subdue him’”¹

Praying is an experience; as such, it cannot be transmitted to others: it can only be lived and told through analogies, similes and descriptions, which are however always inadequate. The best way to learn to pray is to follow a master who’s able to trigger (within each of his disciples) the desire and firmness required to develop a life interwoven with prayer. In this way, the Christians can follow the first disciples’ path, when they asked Jesus: “*Lord, teach us to pray*”². Jesus, perfect God and perfect man, is the greatest prayer master. Since praying is an experience and a “practice”, it brings best fruit when it is learnt already at a young age. We know that after a certain age it becomes more difficult to learn to ride a bicycle or to

¹ AA. VV., *Vita e detti dei padri del deserto*, a c. di L. MORTARI. Rome, fogli 1999 (3^a ed.), p. 400.

² Lk 11:2.

swim, while it is much easier for children. In the same way, it will be easier and more natural for a person to continue on a path of prayer that began in early years, instead of starting one anew (even if it is never too late to start). In the following pages we will briefly deal with the situation of young people and with the significance of Christian prayer for them. Thereafter, we will submit some proposals for a prayer practice that carries both the aspect of youth and that of the Order of Malta.

Young People and Prayer in the Holy Scriptures

In the majority of ancient civilizations, including the Israelite, the elderly enjoyed authority and prestige, while youngsters were usually held in little esteem. Always submitted to the harsh control of their fathers, they were subject to an almost exclusively repressive education, where corporal punishment was the rule³. In the Old Testament, however, we

³ Cfr. Prv 23:13: “*Withhold not chastisement from a boy; if you beat him with the rod, he will not die. Beat him with the rod, and you will save him from the nether world*”.

often notice God's marked preference for young people; they are frequently entrusted with a prophetic message or with a major role within the People of God. There are numerous examples for this: the remarkable things that happened to Joseph in Egypt⁴, the calling of the prophet Samuel⁵, which takes place when he spoke with God in the Temple; the royal anointing of David⁶, who has preferred to his older brothers; the courageous intervention of young Daniel saving chaste Susannah (who had been unjustly accused by two elderly judges trying to get hold of her) from sure death⁷. In the Holy Scriptures, any genuine relationship with God is marked by prayer. In the New Testament, the keen attention of our Lord Jesus towards young people is wholly evident. The episode of the young rich man is paradigmatic in this aspect: It clearly shows the Master's concern for the young, who are called to make difficult choices regarding their future and are often held back in their development by the burden of family wealth.

⁴ Gn 37:2 ff.

⁵ 1Sm 3:1 ff.

⁶ 1Sm 16:11 ff.

⁷ Dn 13:1 ff.

Christian civilization very soon acknowledged this new attitude towards youth: In Benedictine tradition, for instance, the abbot also has to listen to the younger monks before taking his decision, “*because the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best*”⁸.

Youth as Potential to Be Moulded by Prayer

All too often in our days youth is regarded as a value in itself. Beauty and physical strength, spontaneity and enthusiasm are restlessly craved for and shown off even by those, who are no longer young but nevertheless define youth as perfect happiness. This error of perspective must be corrected, and youth must be viewed as an age of potential still unexpressed, that waits to be brought to light, refined and supported by a real, important Christian education. Being young is not an asset in itself; it may be an advantage, if youth is considered as the demanding and complicated period of human and spiritual growth, and prayer is essential during this education period. Young people appreciate a close connection between moral and spiritual life: the fascination of

⁸ R. GUARDINI, *Lettere sulla autoformazione*, Brescia 1958, p. 65.

the master, of the spiritual father, lies in the consistency between his prayers, his teachings and his actions. Authentic prayer has its first echo in morals, and it pushes to be honest, with oneself and with others, as a well-known Scout prayer: “*Teach me to work briskly and to behave loyally when You only see me, as if the whole world could see me*”.

Acquiring a Method

“*Praying is something spontaneous and non-spontaneous at the same time. The soul is naturally capable of praying, just like the breast breathes and the hearts beats, but it refuses to do so. We have to learn to pray, even if this does not appear evident at the beginning*”⁹. These words of the famous theologian Romano Guardini underline an important truth: praying is often tough. Spiritual authors have sometimes described praying as hard work or as a struggle, a battle. In spiritual life there are, in fact, moments of grace marked by high inner joy as well as easy and enthusiastic orientation of the human soul towards God; more often than not, however, when it

⁹ R. GUARDINI, *Lettere sulla autoformazione*, Brescia 1958, p. 65.

come to prayer we are absent-minded, lazy, annoyed. It is always necessary to prepare oneself to reception and encounter, in the same way as one would do before a date with an important, beloved person.

St John of Damascene provided a very precise definition of prayer as “*the elevation of the soul to God or the requesting of good things from God*”¹⁰. This explains the theoretic side, but not the eminently practical one: how should one pray? Spontaneity – in prayer just as in normal life – rarely produces significant results. We must prepare ourselves for prayer, following the path traced out by others in former centuries. We must find a *method*. In the first place, we have to remember that *sacred* matters require a certain degree of *separation*, and we therefore have to stand before the Lord after freeing ourselves from the noise and anxiety of the world; at the beginning, fifteen minutes a day will be enough. There are certainly also brief prayers and practices, like the “*Jesus Prayer*”¹¹, which allow to turn one’s thoughts to God even while

¹⁰ ST JOHN DAMASCENE, *De fide orthodoxa*, 3, 24. See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2559.

¹¹ See ANONIMO, *Racconti di un pellegrino russo*, a c. di A. Pentkovskij. Roma 2000.

performing some manual work or travelling. Nevertheless, it is indispensable to devote some time to prayer every day, a time that's dedicated to adoration: "*One of the reasons why community or personal prayer often appears to be sterile or conventional is that actual adoration, which takes place in a heart that lives in true communion with God, is missing*"¹². Adoration, just like prayer, has its roots in humility: When we recognize that we are weak and depend on God, we're capable of developing a correct approach to the life of grace. While pride is the greatest sin of all, a constant, earnest awareness of our condition as created beings guarantees fruitful prayer. There are many possibilities offered by Christian tradition to sanctify time with prayer: participation in the Eucharist is the most obvious, by there is also the Eucharistic Adoration, the Rosary, the *Angelus* prayer. However, there is no doubt that the special prayer, which thanks to its intrinsic structure gives any day its rhythm, is the Liturgy of the Hours. "*The public and common prayer of the People of God, [...] is rightly considered as one of the primary tasks of the Church*"¹³. The Liturgy of the Hours

¹² A. BLOOM, *Living prayer*, Darton 1965, p. 5.

¹³ *Principi e norme per la Liturgia delle Ore*, 1.

allows us to pray together with all baptized persons: priests, religious and laity, using the Word of God and in particular the Psalms, these wonderful epitomes of poetry and prayer that Jesus himself addressed to his Father during his life on earth, even when he hung on the Cross¹⁴. If sometimes we don't find words to speak with God, let's rely on the unsurpassed words of the Psalter! Laity, too, should use the Breviary, even if they are not obliged to pray it every day. When the Psalms are recited over various weeks, months and years, they get rooted in one's memory and thus become available in times of joy and of sadness: recollection turns into prayer.

The Order's Prayers: Proposals

During the Order's activities and pilgrimages we get the opportunity to pray together with people who suffer in the body and mind: This teaches us to remember the Lord's presence also in times of pain and trial, and to develop feelings of genuine *compassion*, which means sharing our fellow's suffering. In

¹⁴ Cf. Mt 24:46: "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*"

this way, we learn to make ourselves responsible not only for the material, contingent needs of our brothers and sisters, but first of all for their spiritual needs that may be less evident, but are all the more urgent and critical. Every young member of the Order has the privilege of being a part of an almost millennium-old praying community. Even when we pray in solitude, we are certain that we may count on the spiritual support of our confreres, both the living and the deceased. The particular devotions of our Order (to the Holy Cross of the Lord or to the Blessed Virgin) must always be employed and practised, since they are specific to our charisma. It would also be useful and instructive to increase knowledge – at all levels, through suitable material – about the lives of the Saints and Blessed of the Order. How many youths found their vocation in the past reading the “*Vita*” of a Saint and enthusiastically following his life history! (This was the case, just to mention two examples, of Ignatius of Loyola and Daniele Comboni.)

As far as the youth groups are concerned, it would be desirable that the spiritual assistants work out a “prayer itinerary for the Order of Malta”, tak-

ing into account the age of the youngsters and their cultural and catechetical level. Just as it is necessary to gradually approach the Order's activities, it is also necessary to make a way into its spirituality in a step-by-step process. For instance: The young people will be progressively coached as to the significance of their membership in a hospitaller order and asked to meditate on Christ's sufferings; the Order's military, chivalry and nobiliary tradition will provide the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of terms like "honour", "obedience" and "sacrifice"; finally, the Order's sovereignty will lead them to conceive authority as a service in favour of the only real king: Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, since in Him any particularism is abolished.

Conclusion

We often run the risk of underestimating the power of prayer. Absorbed by our manifold activities, we neglect the invisible (which, however, does not have to be ineffective). In order to rediscover the benefits of a shared spiritual intention, it would be advisable and important to propose a monthly com-

mon prayer intention for the entire Order and bring it to the attention of all members through the official Internet site or other media.

When we look at the eight points of our Order's special cross, we always have to recall and contemplate the eight Beatitudes of the Gospel that show us a perfect, redeemed man. The Sermon on the Mount shows us Man as he is supposed to be, i.e. transformed by prayer and love: "*The saint's soul thus becomes just like a well-governed city. In the soul of the just, we find the Father and with Him also the Son, like the Gospel tells us: We will come to him and make our dwelling with him (Jn 14:23)*"¹⁵.

Michelangelo Ranuzzi de' Bianchi
Knight of Honour and Devotion

¹⁵ ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, 25.

REFLECTING ON THE *PATER NOSTER*

(translated from Italian)

Jesus himself initiated his people in prayer by teaching them the “Our Father”. John the Baptist also initiated his disciples in prayer: one of Jesus’ disciples asked him “*Lord, teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples*”. Jesus said to them, “*When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name ...*” (Lk. 11:1 ff.).

The evangelist Matthew placed this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus gathered his disciples around him and *began to teach them, saying: “Blessed are the poor in spirit,”* (Mt. 5:1-2). In this discourse, Jesus speaks of prayer, warning people about the ways in which the pagans and certain Hebrews pray, then adds: “*This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven those who are in debt to us; and do not put us to the test, but deliver us from the Evil One*” (Mt. 6: 9-12).

What is the use therefore of commenting on a prayer taught us by the divine Master himself? The studies on the *Pater* by the Fathers of the Church, exegetes, theologians and others, have answered this

objection. I recall in particular the treatise on the “*Lord’s Prayer*” by St Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, and the *Comments on the Our Father* by Origen, who lived about the III Century¹. In this Journal devoted to prayer I thought it necessary to devote some words to what Jesus has taught us.

The *Pater* is the most universal of prayers. In it the Order of Malta’s members can find inspiration and nourishment for the spirit and commitments of their Order. St. Cyprian writes: “*There is nothing at all that is not to be found in these our prayers and petitions, as it were a compendium of heavenly doctrine*”.

Our Father in Heaven

The Gospels show us that Jesus was in a continuous union with his Father and wanted us to participate in this relationship. We see this especially in his Last Supper discourse as recorded by John (chapters 13-17). Jesus’ magisterium is the revelation of his Father’s love: thus the prayer he teaches makes us turn to the Father as children and invoke Him as a

¹ ST CYPRIAN, *Liber de Oratione Dominica*, PL 4; ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, PG 11.

Father. This is not an individualistic prayer, as if one were praying only for oneself. The initial invocation and the petitions are all expressed in the plural: ‘*Our Father, give us today ‘our’ daily bread; forgive us ‘our’ debts. “Our prayer”, St Cyprian says, “is public and common... we pray not for one but for the whole people”.*

Placed in the heart of the Mass, recited by all the faithful, it is truly a community prayer. “*The Lord’s Prayer,*” writes Rudolf Schnackenburg, “*is, so to speak, the continuation in the Church of the great prayer that Jesus hands up to the Father*”².

Recited by the Members of the Order of Malta, the prayer taught by Jesus, while it makes them part of the Church’s choral invocation also makes them feel a particular solidarity with their brothers and sisters united by the Order’s ideal.

Hallowed Be Your Name

Have we ever seriously thought what this invocation means? It certainly does not seem egoistic and can appear as an act of generosity towards God, a

² R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Le parole di Commiato di Gesù*, Brescia 1994.

noble desire in his regard. But it is in the first place a pledge of the praise that we take, in which we also want to involve other people. We recite in the Psalms: “*Magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together*” (Ps 34:4). St Augustine, talking about the Psalms, writes: “*God praised himself so that man might give him fitting praise; because God condescended to praise himself man found the way in which to bless God*”. We are thus invited to enjoy the praise of God by reciting or singing the Psalms of the Hours. St Augustine says in the “Confessions”: “*How I wept when I heard your hymns and canticles to your honour, being deeply moved by the sweet singing of your Church*”.

Indubitably the prayer “*hallowed be*” cannot add anything to the sanctity of God. Why then do we use these words? “*Because we seek from the Lord that His name be hallowed in us*” (St Cyprian). The invocation thus places us within the itinerary of our sanctification. We invoke fidelity to the sanctification we have received in Baptism: we need divine help for a daily sanctification. We never forget that the sanctification of its Members is the Order of Malta’s fundamental purpose as indicated in its *Constitutional Charter*³.

³ Artiche 2, paragraph 1

A reference to the *name of Jesus* is not out of place. St Bernardine of Siena carried it in his heart and spread its devotion by means of the classic monogram with initials that he wanted placed in homes and public places. We can see it resplendent over the portal of the Palazzo della Signoria in Florence.

Your Kingdom Come

In the Thirties and Forties, the “Aspirants” or young people enrolled in the Azione Cattolica Italiana, greeted each other by saying: “*May Christ reign*”; with the reply: “*Always!*” Asking for the kingdom of God to come means invoking the advent of the reign of Christ. The Preface of the Solemnity of Christ the King admirably expresses this intimate relationship: God has consecrated Jesus Christ, His only Son as the eternal priest and universal king, so that on the altar of the cross He would redeem mankind and present to You, his almighty Father, a universal “kingdom”: “*a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace*”.

By invoking the advent of the kingdom we consider ourselves part of it: “*he who prays for the coming of the kingdom of God*,” Origen writes, “*prays with good reason so that the Kingdom of God may rise and bear fruit and be perfected within Him*”⁴. Redeemed by the blood of Christ, we aspire to reign with the Resurrected One. The Good Thief on the cross asked: “*Remember me when you come into your kingdom*”.

“*Your kingdom come*” has a missionary breath and opens one’s vision to the kingdom of God to be achieved in the life and institutions on this earth aiming at truth, justice, love and peace. Experience shows we are still far from achieving this and that we must intensify not only our prayers but also our deeds. A well known jurist wrote: “*In the act of hoping for the advent on earth of the kingdom of God, man pledges, within the limits and up to the limit of his freedom, to achieve it*”⁵.

The members of the Order of Malta contribute to the advent of the kingdom if they carry out, in industrious fidelity, their Order’s charisma, in the confident expectation that one day the king will give them the invitation: “*Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take*

⁴ ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, 15.

⁵ F. CARNELUTTI, *Interpretazioni del Padre Nostro*, Venezia 2001.

as your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you... For I was hungry and you gave me food... a stranger and you made me welcome... sick and you visited me ...” (Mt 25:34).

Your Will Be Done, on Earth as in Heaven

Pledges of behaviour in earthly affairs and theological profundities are interwoven in this invocation: you perceive them through prayer.

It is clear that “*your will be done*” does not mean: Do, O Lord, as you will, but rather, I will do what you want! St Cyprian interprets God’s will in the life of Christians: “*The will of God is what Christ both did and taught. Humility in conversation, steadfastness in faith, modesty in words, justice in deeds, mercy in works, discipline in morals... the will of God means holding fast to his love and being inseparable from it, standing bravely and fearlessly by His cross when His name and honour are challenged... showing in death the patience for which we are crowned ...*”.

The Master who taught us the “Our Father” lived in continuous and complete fulfilment of his Father’s will: it was food for him: “*My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work*” (Jn 4:34). “*Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and*

mother” (Mk 3:35).

In his Last Supper discourse, Jesus fully reveals his Father’s will: “*the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love*” (Jn 15: 9-10). Thus the will of God is love.

Romano Guardini comments: “*the chain of love is to reach still further. Not only from the Father to the Son, from Christ to his disciples, from the disciple to all who hear God’s word, but from one believer to another. Each is to be to the other as Christ is to him who does his Father’s will. This will is to create spiritual consanguinity: all are to be brothers and sisters in faith. Jesus will be ‘the firstborn among many brethren’ (Rm 8:29)*”⁶.

These lofty thoughts illuminate and comfort our daily routine, with events that are often monotonous, on occasion difficult and painful and sometimes very demanding: a terrain where we can discern the divine will, that we would be incapable of carrying out if we were not moved and supported by the love of God. We are helped by Mary who pronounced the *fiat* of

⁶ R. GUARDINI, *Il Signore. Riflessioni sulla persona e sulla vita di Gesù Cristo*, Milano, Chap. VI.

the Annunciation and who stood erect at the foot of the Cross.

For the Order's Members "*in obedience*" this invocation of the *Pater* broadens the horizons of their "Promise". Let us remember, finally, the prayer of the 21st Sunday of the Liturgical Year B: "*Lord, make us strong and generous in your love, so that we can comply with your will in all things*".

Give Us Today Our Daily Bread

The Jews in the desert received manna, bread from heaven. They gathered in the morning what they needed for the rest of the day.

"*Give us today our daily bread,*" writes St Cyprian. "*This can be understood both spiritually and literally, because either understanding is a God-given help to salvation*".

This twofold meaning should certainly be borne in mind. But it is the material meaning that immediately presents itself to the mind of those who pray. The invocation contains many expectations and prospects. The farmer who relies on the fruits of the earth for his bread, thinks and hopes that the course of the seasons will be favourable and he prays for

this. In these difficult times many are worried about the jobs they might lose or not manage to find. The inhabitants of many regions of the world hope for their daily food to survive! “*Daily bread*” also means medicines for regaining health or simply to stay alive.

In his Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (n. 27) Pope Benedict XVI writes: “*Life in many poor countries is still extremely insecure as a consequence of food shortages, and the situation could become worse: hunger still reaps enormous numbers of victims among those who, like Lazarus, are not permitted to take their place at the rich man’s table, contrary to the hopes expressed by Paul VI. Feed the hungry is an ethical imperative for the universal Church*”.

As Christians, the many requests for daily bread invites us to feel compassion for all and especially for those in need. What a chord this strikes in those who have chosen to serve the poor and take care of the sick!

Origen mainly talks about the spiritual meaning. He refers to the request “*give us this bread always*” (Jn 6:34) made by those who, having followed Jesus on the other shore of the lake, had been attracted by the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus said to them: “*I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and*

whoever believes in me will never thirst” (Jn 6:35).

In the same sense, St Cyprian of Carthage writes: “*And so we petition that our bread, that is Christ, be given us daily, so that we, who abide and live in Christ, may not withdraw from His divine life*”.

Forgive Us Our Debts, as We Forgive Our Debtors

Forgive us our debts. Two truths are contained in this request: one that we are sinners and the other that God forgives.

Jesus warns us that we are sinners and that we have to pray daily for our sins. And who can say he is without sin? Let us thus take King David’s confession: “*Iniquitatem meam ego conosco et peccatum meum contra me est semper. I know my iniquity and my sins are always before me*”. Acknowledging that you are a sinner and invoking God’s pardon means imitating the tax collector who “*stood off at a distance and ... beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner’*”. The tax collector went home justified (Lk 18:10 ff).

Alongside the awareness of sin there is the truth of God’s forgiveness. But what does the forgiveness of God mean? The believer becomes aware that,

before God, before His truth, he is no longer a sinner and thus the guilt is removed from the moral conscience of the person forgiven.

Romano Guardini has a profound reflection on this divine intervention: “*God is Himself the good, but in inconceivable freedom... Such freedom renders Him more powerful than sin. The name of this freedom is love... God can proclaim: the sin no longer exists... The justice he (man) now possesses comes from God, it is the gift of love... here is Christ’s message. He lived and went to his death so that all this could come about*”⁷.

As we forgive our debtors. The second part of the invocation contains a condition for the first to be fulfilled: forgiving offences. Jesus often illustrated this need. At the end of the *Pater*: “*If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions*” (Mt 6:14). Remember the severe condemnation of the servant who had been forgiven a large debt and who was punishing another servant for a much smaller amount (cf. Mt 18: 32-35). And again, God does not accept the sacrifice of someone who is

⁷ R. GUARDINI, *op. cit.*, chap. IX.

angry with another, but tells him to leave the altar and go first to be reconciled with his brother (cf. Mt 5:23-24). Origen also observes that: *"We are debtors, therefore, not only because we are obliged to give but also to say a kind word"*.

The need for mutual forgiveness, also for the members of the Order of Malta, offers good material for reflection and for examining one's conscience. We must ask if, in situations of discord, there has been reconciliation or if there is still a regrettable distance between people and groups. The words of the "Our Father" are a pressing invitation to love each other. St. Paul is very clear on this: *"Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another"* (Rm 13:8).

Do Not Put Us to Test

The word of God introduces us to this vital theme. We read in the Book of Job: *"Is not man's life on earth a drudgery?"*. We are reassured by St Paul: *"God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it"* (1Cor 10:13). *"We know that all things work for good for those who love God"* (Rm 8:28).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 596) explains this invocation: *“We ask God our Father not to leave us alone and in the power of temptation. We ask the Holy Spirit to help us know how to discern, on the one hand, between a trial that makes us grow in goodness and a temptation that leads to sin and death and, on the other hand, between being tempted and consenting to temptation”*.

In the tragic moment of Gethsemane, Jesus’ colloquy with his Father is a heartfelt and enlightening prayer: *“He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will’”* (Mt 26:39). Jesus had asked the three apostles to accompany him and watch with him. Finding them asleep, he admonishes them: *“Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Mt 26: 41).

But Deliver Us From the Evil

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, at this point of its illustration of the Lord’s Prayer (n. 597), gives Evil a capital letter and indicates it in the person of *“Satan who opposes God and is ‘the deceiver of the whole world’ ”*. Even without a capital letter, evil is a reality

that exists in the world not without the influence of the Evil One.

“The clear and full awareness that, despite the advent of Jesus, evil, or the ‘evil one’ is still in the world and menacingly at work...he is as strong as ever...Thus every Christian must be attentive for himself, for the community he lives in and for all human society. But this should not cause you anxiety or throw you into despair. Jesus said that his disciples will have the same complete joy that He has”⁸. Origen, with imaginative language similar to that of Paul, speaks of the Christian’s effective defence against evil: “(they are set on fire), but not so they who with the shield of faith quench all the flaming darts aimed at them by the Evil One, (Eph 6:16) since they have within themselves rivers of water springing up into life eternal (Jn 4:14)”⁹.

The Holy Father, with St Paul, exhorts the members of the Order of Malta to “*put on the armour of light*”.

Vigilance and defence do not mean retreat. God has entrusted Christians with tasks to perform in the world. In the prayer to the Father for his disciples in his Last Supper discourse, Jesus said: “*I do not ask that*

⁸ R. SCHNACKENBURG, *op. cit.*

⁹ ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, 13.

you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one” (Jn 17:15).

The Apostle John, as he admonishes “*Do not love the world or the things of the world*” warmly encourages the young: “*I write to you, young men, because you are strong and the word of God remains in you, and you have conquered the evil one*” (1Jn 2:14).

The Virgin Mary watches over all of us: “*Sub tuum praesidium confugimus, Sancta Dei Genitrix*”: *Beneath your protection we take refuge, O Holy Mother of God.*

Origen states that our entire life is an unceasing “Our Father”: “*Let us, therefore, not think that it is words we are taught to say in any appointed season of prayer... let our whole life of prayer without ceasing speak the words ‘Our Father in the Heavens’ having our citizenship in no wise on earth but in every way in heaven?*”¹⁰.

H.E. Mgr. Angelo Acerbi
Archbishop tit. of Zella
Prelate of the Order of Malta

¹⁰ ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, 5.

IN MEMORIAM

Cardinal Pio Laghi, Patron of the Order of Malta, died on 11 January 2009. Born in Castiglione (Forlì) on 21 May 1922, he was ordained to the priesthood in 1946. He served in the Holy See's Diplomatic Corps in Nicaragua, in the United States, in India and in the Secretariat of State. Promoted Apostolic Delegate of Palestine in 1969, he received his episcopal consecration. He was subsequently Apostolic Nuncio to Argentina and to the United States. In 1990 he was appointed Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education. Created Cardinal the following year, he was Prefect of the same Congregation up to 1999. Since 1993 he had been Patron of the Order of Malta.

The late Cardinal was an assiduous contributor to the Journals of Spirituality. We thus thought it appropriate to recall him in this edition, the first to be published after his death, by offering a short profile that covers just a few aspects of his char-

acter and work.

Those who knew Cardinal Laghi well were able to appreciate his uncommon human qualities. He was a compassionate man and a loyal friend; he was thoroughly honest, lucid, forthright and strong-willed. He did not hesitate to speak frankly, always willing to give advice with acuity and conviction.

The same all-embracing qualities are to be found in his priestly personality, in a life of piety and pastoral diligence in the different areas of his work and responsibilities. Less well known were his activities in St Peter's Oratory in Rome, of which he was chairman. He often went there; he loved contact with the young and those who practised sport. He was sporting himself and played tennis up to a ripe old age. His strength of character and priestly spirit also came to the fore in the health problems he suffered during his last years and in his exemplary preparation for death.

His natural talents, preparation and experience accompanied him in the diplomatic service

in which he spent a great part of his life, sometimes in difficult situations such as his years in the Nunciature in Argentina under a military dictatorship.

In Palestine, among other things, he promoted the building of the Catholic University in Bethlehem. In the United States he moved from Apostolic Delegate to Diplomatic Representative since diplomatic relations had been established in 1984. When war with Iraq was imminent, Pope John Paul II chose him as envoy to the US President for a peace initiative.

In his service in India he had become close to Mother Teresa of Calcutta with whom he continued to keep in contact. In Rome, Mother Teresa told him about her desire for a hospital in her home country. The Cardinal worked indefatigably for this to come about, supporting the initiative undertaken and completed in Tirana, Albania, by the Sons of the Immaculate Conception.

He followed with particular distinction and

affection the life and works of the Order of Malta in the 16 years of the high office entrusted to him by Pope John Paul II. He presided over the main liturgical celebrations and participated in the pilgrimages, always ready to offer advice on the most important issues. To the end he hoped to be able to participate in the Order's International Seminar in Venice in January 2009. When he felt that he was too sick to do so, he instead sent His Highness the Grand Master a message for that important meeting. He died four days before the Seminar opened.

During his encounter with the Order's delegation, the Holy Father, who had blessed the body after the funeral service in St Peter's Basilica, told me that *he had been a great cardinal*. He was also a great friend of the Order and of the author of this memoir.

A.A.

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