



**C.Ss.R**

**PIRITUALITY**

ONE BODY (Eph 4, 4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4, 4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ΕΙΝ ΓΕΙΒ (Εφν 4,4)

## **ONE BOODY: PRAYER AND THE PERPETUAL HELP ICON**

### **An Apostle of constant Prayer.**

In his book “Visits to the Blessed Sacrament” St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori says in the first reflection, “Jesus, the source of all good”: “Holy God! People ask, ‘Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, what should one do or not do in your presence’. But I say: What good should one not do? One loves, one praises, one thanks, and one asks for favors. What does a poor person do in the presence of a rich person? What does a sick person do when with a doctor? What does a thirsty person do when he or she finds a spring of crystalline water? Finally, what does a starving person do before a splendid banquet?”

He lists different ways of speaking with God: prayer of love, prayer of praise, prayer of thanks. All of these are a result of two presuppositions: that there is a powerful and merciful God, and that human beings are limited and have needs. However, God condescends to initiate a friendship between the Creator and the creature. St. Theresa of Jesus says: “It seems to me that prayer deals with nothing other than friendship, many times finding ourselves alone with the one that we know loves us” (Vida Chap. 8, #5).



Before anything else prayer is a gift from the God of mercy who treats us as friends without us having done anything to merit this treatment. He is totally open to our every need, he is willing to lose his precious time to attend to our wants, and, is even open to our whims, our complaints and the pouring out of our difficulties.

Prayer is not limited only to speaking with God, it is also silence, in order to hear God. However, our hearts are full of material obstacles that get in the way of listening. In order that the voice of God may reach us clearly we have to clear our house of worries and selfish feelings. The authenticity of our prayer can be destroyed by ambitions and personal desires and then we are neither speaking with nor listening to God, we are speaking with and listening to ourselves. We are like the royal lord who was accused before a court of considering himself God. When he was asked what his reasons for such a

consideration were, he answered: “Because when I pray to God and try to hear his answer the voice that I hear is my own”. Is not that similar to what happens to us if we go before God without being totally open to accept his will?

As long as we do not enter into our hearts to listen to God there in our prayer, and we limit ourselves to presenting him with a list of petitions and needs, we will not be prepared to listen to

our brothers and sisters. We will not pass from contemplating his or her superficial physical reality to a reflection on what lies behind that facade, in his or her heart, where the feelings reside.

### **Your Word is light for my path**

It is time to read Luke 18, 9-14: A necessary attitude for prayer is humility of heart: ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ Time must be dedicated to silence, reflection and communication.



We start our reflection with the two protagonists of the parable:

- The Pharisee had many dark recesses in his relationship with God. He speaks and does not give God any opportunity to answer. He also tries to be the voice of God, that voice which cannot penetrate his heart because his ears are blocked by his self-sufficiency and pride. His own voice is all that is heard.

- The publican begins by recognizing his need. God’s gaze is able to enter his heart and illuminate the dark corners of his person. His sincerity is what opens his ears to the voice of God. He does not multiply words in order to present himself as a sinner. He has what is necessary: “A humble and contrite heart God will not despise” (Psalm 51, 19).

Have you stopped up your ears with the self-sufficiency of the Pharisee? Open them with the humility of the publican.

### **Before the Icon**

Spend time contemplating the icon and ask yourself: What message does the icon communicate to me?

It should be sufficient to situate yourself before the icon of the Virgin of Perpetual Help, contemplate her eyes and let yourself be drawn in by her gaze. It is a gaze which inspires confidence enough for one to feel free to pour out one’s feelings, whether they be of joy or of distress. In that gaze is an invitation to ask for help and protection. Before this icon the same thing happens to one as happened to the lepers when they passed near Jesus. Even though they were prohibited from drawing near to healthy persons, the figure of Jesus drew them to himself like a spring of fresh water attracts a thirsty person. They knew that he did not reject them, that he gazed on them with confidence, and that he dared to touch them and heal them.

Something similar happens before the icon. A freedom is felt which allows one to make a sincere prayer. She is the Mother of God, she has Jesus in her arms: “If you wish you can...” Do you need a healing, relief from your burdens? Confide in her affection for you, she herself expresses it through her loving gaze. Simply, without a need for words, you can open your heart to her. The aid that she offers to anyone who approaches her is offered with so much clarity that even those who are not believers have recourse to her imploring protection. It is an icon which overflows with humanity and consoles any man or woman.

The Icon projects the image of God. It is a mirror that best reflects the maternal face. The feminine traits of God, present in the Old Testament, appear in the sensitivity and tenderness of the Icon. In the prophet Hosea, God



speaks thus: “I lifted the yoke from their neck, and bent down to feed them” (11.4). Isaiah says: “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (66.13). We see this in the gesture of Mary holding the hands of his son, frightened by the instruments of the passion presented to him by the angels. Mary says to the orphans, the lonely and the abandoned. “Come, that I may hold you in my arms, as I hold my Son ”

If your heart is moved by beauty and you have held on to the appreciation for art which resides in the human soul, when you gaze upon the eyes of the icon you will experience the supernatural beauty that flows from them. Light seems to flash from them. If your gaze is enlivened by your faith you will be able to experience the words of the Angel Gabriel at the moment of the Annunciation: “The Lord is with you”, almost as if they were being pronounced at that very moment. In Mary you are seeing God, she radiates the kindness of the Heavenly Father.

### **Drinking from our well**

The charism of the Congregation is the wellspring from which we Redemptorists drink the water of prayer. Founded in order to bring gospel nourishment to those in need of the Word of God and following the example of Jesus Christ, who would go apart to pray, to talk with God, we look to prayer for our own sustenance and as the bread which we share.

Since the beginning of the Congregation the Redemptorists dedicate part of their lives to the contemplation of the mysteries of Salvation. These men, whose lifestyle has always been marked by generosity and sacrifice in serving the needy, sought strength and generosity from their relationship with Our Lord, in the silence of their houses, converting their rooms into oratories. Study has marked the preparation for their preaching, which has been done in dialogue with Jesus Christ, teacher and intimate friend.

Prayer is absolutely necessary for believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there are different ways and traditions to exercise prayer. Among the Redemptorists the most common mode has been: meditation, the Eucharist and the love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, the Stations of the Cross, the rosary and other devotions to Our Blessed Mother. These devotions come down to us from our founder who practiced them with fervor, highlighted them, preached them. He wrote books which helped make these devotions easier and he recommended them as a means of strengthening one’s friendship with God.

St. Alphonsus considered that, of all the books which he had written, the one that was most useful to help the faithful attain salvation was “The Great Means of Prayer”. He said: “If I could I would have as many copies printed as there are Christians in the world, and I would put a copy into the hands of each one.”

## The Constitutions today

Prayer is indispensable for both common and personal life. Constitution 26 says: “Let the members ever take to themselves the exhortation of Christ the Redeemer: “they ought always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18: 1). It cites Acts 1, 14 and 2, 42 which offer as models of prayer the apostles themselves who devoted themselves to the breaking of bread and to prayer and persevered in prayer united by the same Spirit with Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

This emphasis on prayer in the Constitutions is taken up by every Redemptorist from the time of the novitiate. In theory nobody questions the necessity for prayer. The problem arises, and sometimes strongly, when it comes to putting the theory into practice.

The biggest problem seems to be the multiple activities that are taken on by the community as well as the individual confrere. Sometimes only a part of the members of the community are present for the community prayer. On the one hand, the community has not been able to adjust and adapt to the various schedules of its members in order that all may be present for prayer. On the other hand, some individuals make appointments knowing that they coincide with scheduled community prayer times.



Community prayer and personal prayer support each other, or rather, they mutually nourish each other. Community prayer, without a previous lived and personal direct contact with God, is limited to a recitation of the Divine Office, without any inner experience of God. It becomes an imposed prayer, a routine obligation, and sometimes a bothersome one. If this is one's experience then any excuse is used to be absent from community prayer; it is easy to find excuses and justify absence.

Community prayer exercised by members who are not in contact with God reminds one of a wagon load of empty clay pots; as the wagon bounces along they make a lot of noise but it is the noise of emptiness.

Prayer together is the vital nourishment of a community. A community which does without community prayer is, in effect, cutting off the source of oxygen necessary for their life together, their fidelity to a preferential option for the poor and needy, and their ability to understand, pardon, and love each other. The mutual support which at times requires sacrifice can only be found with the help of community prayer.

The way we practice community prayer has evolved positively. The mode of praying together is enriched by the sharing of experiences of Gospel living among ourselves as confreres and even in contacts with other congregations. These diverse practices of prayer in common has gradually taken the place of the more traditional ones, they inject new life into the prayer and help not only to better our prayer together but also our personal prayer. It is also helpful in celebrating and living prayer experiences with the laity that we serve.

## Conclusion

In conclusion let us end this reflection with a prayer before the icon of the Virgin of Perpetual Help.

With our eyes fixed on your image,  
we ask you, good Mother, to teach us how to speak with God;  
just as you did when you spoke with your Son.  
First remove us from the prison of our selfishness,  
of our self-centered interests and prejudices.  
We get lost in doing and planning.  
Sometimes we forget our Redemptorist identity,  
because we do not make time for silence,  
nor for quiet and peace-filled conversation with God.  
We are aware that God makes use of our desires,  
and that, despite our doubts and shadows,  
helps us to be faithful to our vocation and serve the poor  
whom you support with your Perpetual Help.  
It is God who had gathered us into community.  
Jesus Christ counts on us  
to carry on the evangelical mission.  
In the child that you embrace  
you show us the faces of starving children,  
of girls who have been raped, and those who are forced into labor  
and deprived of their rights.  
Help us to free them from this slavery,  
heal them and bring them close to Jesus.  
He is our teacher and guide.  
We promise to follow your advice:  
“Do what he tells you”.



ONE BODY is a monthly text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information:

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