

LIFE WITH GOD

PRAYER.
MEDITATION.
CHURCH GOING.
SERVICE.

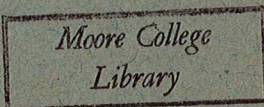
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LIFE WITH GOD.

PRAYER.

"Beginning from Me."

SOME Christians in China have taken as their watchword "Lord, revive Thy Church, beginning from me." The words have a lesson for us all. The Church in our land is not as full of power as God means it to be, and as it must be if it is to win our country for Him. We do, indeed, need to pray that God will revive and renew the Church. And we must add, "beginning from me." Reviving the Church can only mean reviving the men and women who are its members, and nobody can properly ask God to revive the other members unless he is himself ready to be revived.

We must remember also that we need to do more than pray. We must place ourselves where God can reach us, and we must do as He bids us—just as a sick man desiring the help of a doctor must put himself in his hands and carry out his instructions. If, and only if, we do that, can God revive us; if we do our part, He will not fail to do His. Let us think, first, about Prayer. God tells us to pray, and when we do so we are putting ourselves where He can help us.

"Talking to God."

To pray well we must have a right idea of God, and of prayer. When our Lord's apostles asked Him to teach them to pray, and He answered "When ye pray, say, 'Our Father, Which art in heaven . . .'" He was not only giving them, and us, a prayer to use, He was showing us how we are to regard prayer and God. To pray is to talk to God, and we are to think of Him as our Father in Heaven, Who loves each one of us as no earthly father has ever loved, and Who, at the same time, is great, wonderful and holy, the Maker and Ruler of all. To pray is, according to our Lord, to talk to our Father in Heaven. That is the idea of prayer that we get as we think of our Lord's own prayers. A child, looking at a picture of Him praying in Gethsemane, said, "Who is He talking to?"

That is the idea we get from the Lord's Prayer. It "is little else than a series of remarks made by a child to its father" (Bede Jarrett). That is the idea we get from the prayers of the saints."

Nothing will help us to pray better so much as to remember our Lord's words, and try to make our praying real talking to our Father in Heaven. To do that will help us in many ways. It will show us what we ought to talk about in our prayers. We shall see that as well as PETITION, there must be PRAISE, THANKSGIVING, INTERCESSION, and CONFESSION. It will make us sure that God hears us, for no father would fail to do so. It will help us to see

why He does not always give us that for which we ask. He loves us too much to give us things not good for us. We shall see that we ought to pray, and to try to pray well, and we shall be sure that God will help us to pray, and will be content so long as we do our best. The first thing, then, is always to think of God and of prayer in the way that our Lord has taught us.

"In our own words."

A good book of prayers will be a great help to us. Very few of us can manage without one, and if we haven't one, it will be well to ask some wise friend to recommend one that will be helpful.

But we must never forget that praying is talking to God. Saying prayers out of a book **can** be real talking to God. Our Lord's cry of anguish on the Cross was a real prayer to the Father, although the words came from the book of Psalms. We all know that the Collects can be prayed, and not merely said. We must be careful when we use a book that the prayers come from our hearts. They **can**, but as we know, they can fail to do so—and it is only prayers that come from our hearts that are real talking to God.

We ought sometimes to pray without a book. William Law compares such books to crutches, to be used when one is lame, but laid aside when one is not. We all need a book sometimes, but none of us ought to need one at all times. Miss Dent tells of a little girl of eight who, after saying her prayers at her mother's knee, in-

sisted on going away alone to pray. We cannot do better than imitate her, by using our book, and then laying it aside and talking to God in our own words. The prayers that we make will not be such fine prayers as those that others make for us, but that does not matter, for it is to the wishes in our hearts, and not to the words on our lips, that our Father in heaven pays attention.

"Without words."

When we say that Prayer is talking to God, we do not mean that it is using many words, or necessarily any words. There are other and better ways of talking. Words are sometimes poor things for expressing our thoughts and feelings. To clasp a friend's hand is often an easier and better way of expressing our sympathy than saying anything. Mary said a great deal, on the first Easter morning, though all she said **in words** was "Master." So did St. Thomas, when he said "My Lord and my God." Many of the saints spent long hours in prayer, saying only a few words, or none at all.

It is good for us to try to talk to God in words, but we need not be distressed when the words will not come. "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or **unexpressed**." God can hear our desires.

"Without ceasing."

To pray well we must persevere. We learn to do things by doing them. Practice makes perfect. We have only to think of walking,

swimming, cooking, playing the piano, and many other things, to see that it is so, and that there is no other way.

It is, of course, doing things in the right way that makes us perfect. Going on doing them in the wrong way makes us, not perfect, but "perfectly dreadful." That is why, at the beginning, we get someone to show us the right way of doing the particular thing that we want to do well. Having got the right idea of Prayer as talking to God, we must just go on praying, and the more we pray, so long as we pray in the right way, the better will our praying become.

We must have our regular times for praying. Things that are left to be done some time often end by not being done. We may be very busy, but if we arrange our various duties, and don't simply "muddle along," we shall find that there is time for them all. If it sometimes happens that something must be let go, it must never be our prayers. Nobody is really so busy that it is impossible to give some time each day to prayer. "Where there's a will, there's a way." We manage to do the things that we want to do, and we shall want to pray if we remember what praying is.

There will, of course, be times when we do not "feel like it." There are times when we do not feel like getting up in the morning, going shopping, doing the cooking, or visiting a sick friend, but we know that these are duties, and we just get on with them, paying as little attention as we can to our feelings. Quite often the

feeling goes very quickly when once we have started. "Appetite comes with eating," says a French proverb.

There will be times, too, when we feel as though praying is no good. God seems to pay no attention to us, and everything remains as it would be if we did not pray.

It is **facts** and not **feelings** that matter, and our feeling does not alter the fact that God does pay attention. We know that He does because He is our Father, and because our Lord tells us that He does. We must cling to that—and go on praying.

MEDITATION.

Conversation with God.

WE have thought about Prayer, thinking of it quite simply as "talking to God." It is quite certain that we are not living with God as we ought unless we talk to Him. But what we need is not only talking to Him, but conversation with Him, and conversation is not simply talking but listening also. People sometimes forget this in their intercourse with others, and it is to be feared that many of us forget it, in our life with God. We do all the talking and give Him little chance of speaking to us, although it must be even more important that we should listen than that we should speak to Him. A mother would be distressed if her chil-

dren did not listen to her—almost as distressed as if they never spoke to her. She loves to listen to her children, and she wants them to love to listen to her. It must be so with God.

Ways of Listening

There are three ways in which we speak and listen to one another. Sometimes we just talk and listen, but this is not always possible and we have either to send and receive a message or write and read a letter. It is in ways like these that God speaks to His children, and that they listen to Him.

Sometimes He speaks as He did to the child Samuel in the Temple, to Moses at the Burning Bush and to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. We do not know, and need not want to know, whether they heard Him with their outward ears, but He certainly spoke directly to them and they heard Him. There is no doubt that He speaks to some people in that way now.

Sometimes He speaks as He did through His messengers, the Prophets. They began what they had to say with the words, "Thus saith the Lord," and those who heard them knew, or should have known, that they were listening to God. He spoke in that way through the Apostles, and He speaks in that way now through the Ministers of His Church. We should remember this as we listen to sermons, and should try to hear what God is saying to us through them.

He speaks also through the Holy Scriptures which are His Letters to His children. The

Bible is not simply a record of what He said long ago to other people; it is, for those who use it rightly, the means by which He speaks now to them. We must, if our life with God is to be what it should be, listen to Him by using the Holy Scriptures.

Meditation.

The best way of using the Holy Scriptures so as to listen to God is Meditation. It is often regarded as very difficult and complicated, and for this reason many people do not attempt it. There are, of course, complicated ways of meditating, although they are not as complicated as the description of them makes us suppose, but we are not bound to adopt them, and there are ways of meditating that are simple enough for anyone.

Let us see what Meditation is.

It is listening to God by thinking about the Holy Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with a view to producing in ourselves the right response. If we consider that carefully, we shall have a clear idea of Meditation. We have already seen that God speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. To meditate is to read some portion of them just as we read a letter from a friend. Thinking of meditation in that way we shall see that everybody meditates. The difference between one who is trying to live with God and one who is not is not that one meditates while the other does not, but that the one meditates on the Holy Scriptures while the other meditates only on other things. Nobody

needs to learn to meditate, but many of us need to learn to meditate on the Holy Scriptures.

In doing so we must, of course, ask the help of the Holy Spirit. It was He who guided those who wrote them. But for His help they would not be letters from God, and it is only by His help that they can be that to those who read them. Without His help we can no more extract the truth from them than those who wrote them could have put the truth into them.

We must remember that our thinking is meant to lead us on to talking to God and to a change in our life and conduct. If it has made us see more clearly how good God is to us we must go on to thank Him and to promise Him that we will try to thank Him not only with our lips but in our lives. If it has shown us some sin, we must go on to tell Him that we are sorry and that we will do our best to amend our lives.

There is no point in thinking about the Holy Scriptures—in listening to God—if we stop there. Our listening must be followed by talking and doing.

A Way of Meditating

There are many different methods of meditation, and no one of them is suitable for everybody. Someone has said that they are like ready-made clothes—they do not always fit. Sometimes, of course, they do fit, and very often they need only a little alteration to make them do so. In learning to meditate the best plan is to start with some method, and to make such alterations in it as we find to be necessary.

Here is method that some may find useful:

(1) **Read** a portion of Holy Scripture. This should be done, if possible, the night before.

(2) **Recollect** the Presence of God; to Whom you are about to listen and to speak.

(3) **Request** the help of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to help you to hear what God has to say to you through the portion of Holy Scripture.

(4) **Remember** what you have read.

(5) **Realise** it. If you can do so, make a picture in your mind of the scene described in your portion of Holy Scripture, but do not worry if you are not very good at doing this. It is a help to those who can do it, but it is not essential.

(6) **Reason** it out. Consider what it teaches you. Try to understand it, and to see clearly what God wishes you to learn from it, and to do about it.

(7) **Respond** to it. If your thinking makes you thankful, thank God — if it makes you ashamed of your past conduct, tell God that you are sorry — and so on.

(8) **Resolve** to do what God has shown you that He wants you to do—and to do it without delay.

(9) **Request** His help, without which you are sure to fail, but with which you can succeed.

CHURCH-GOING.

WE have seen that our life with God is not, and cannot be, what it ought to be, unless we pray and meditate. Praying is talking to God, and meditating is listening to Him, and unless we have conversation with God it cannot be

said that we live with Him as His children should live.

We will now consider Church-going. We shall see that the same is true of that.

Visiting God.

There are many people nowadays who never go to Church. This is, of course, no new thing. At many times in the history of our own country it has distressed thoughtful people. In 1572 a question was asked about it in Parliament. Even in the first days of the Church there were some who were in the habit of forsaking the assembling together (see Hebrews 10, 25). It was the same in the Jewish Church. We are told of King Jotham that although he was by no means a bad man, he never went into the Temple (see 2 Chron. 27, 1, 2).

Why do people neglect Church-going? Many reasons are given, and many excuses made, for staying away, but the real reason in many cases is that it is not regarded as a **duty** or as essential to the living of the Christian life. It is looked upon as something about which we can please ourselves. It is not in any way **wrong** not to go to Church, and one can be quite a good Christian without going to Church. But nobody who realises what Church-going is can hold that view of it.

The Church is the House of God, and going to Church is **Visiting God**. We do not go to Church simply to meet and join with others in doing certain things, such as hearing about God. If it was no more than that it would be worth doing,

but it is more than that. We go to Church to meet God.

No mother would be happy if her grown-up children often passed her house but never entered it. It would show that there was something wrong. Our life as God's children is not, and can never be, what it should be if we often pass but never enter His House. Many who were once regular in their attendance and have become slack about it, know and would confess that it is so.

What We Do in Church.

We shall see the necessity of Church-going if we consider what we do when we join in a Service.

The Exhortation at the beginning of Morning and Evening Prayer ("Dearly beloved brethren . . .") reminds us that we assemble and meet together to do five things—

- (1) Render thanks for the great benefits that we have received from God.
- (2) Set forth His most worthy praise.
- (3) Hear His most holy Word.
- (4) Ask those things that are necessary for our bodies and our souls.
- (5) Confess our sins.

Nobody can say that there is no need to do these things, and nobody who considers it can help seeing that the House of God is the most fitting place in which to do them, and that we help one another by doing them there together.

We go to Church also to receive, in the Holy Communion, the Sacred Food of Our Lord's Body

and Blood. We have only to consider His words—"Except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood ye have no life in you," and "This is My Body, This is My Blood" to see how necessary it is that we should go to Church for this purpose.

Why We Ought to go to Church.

Thinking over this we shall see the answer to the question, so often asked, "Why should I go to Church?" Here is the answer put in a slightly different way—"I ought to go to Church because the Church is what it is, and I am what I am."

The Church is the House of God—and I am the child of God.

The Church is the meeting-place of God's family—and I am a member of the Family.

The Church is our School—and I am in need of instruction.

The Church is the place where the Sacred Food is given—and I need to be fed.

The Church is our Hospital—and I need medicine for my soul.

To neglect Church-going is to fail in our duty to God, to others, and to our own self.

Church-Going.

Let us do all we can to encourage others to be regular in their attendance at the services of the Church—and especially by setting them a good example. It is not easy and sometimes it is unpleasant to act differently from others. Many of us—and especially mothers—have duties to perform which make it difficult. But remember—

ing the importance of it we shall determine to do our best—and where there's a will there's a way.

SERVICE.

WE have considered certain things which must have their proper place in our life if it is to be what God means it to be. We will now think about service. One result of our praying, meditating and Church-going should be that we are more diligent in serving God. Unless it is so there is something wrong with them.

Vocation.

The first fact that we must impress upon ourselves is that we **all** are called to serve God. Our common use of the word vocation tends to obscure this fact. When we say that a man has a vocation we nearly always mean that God has called him to the Ministry. This makes it appear that only a few men and women have a vocation. Actually **all** have. In one of the Good Friday Collects we ask God that "**every** member of the Church in his vocation may truly and godly serve" Him. We do not need, therefore, to ask whether we have a vocation, but only what the vocation is. It is quite certain that God has called us to serve Him; we have only to find out the particular way in which we are to do so. We must ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Ways of Serving.

Some of God's children are called to serve Him in a special way. St. Peter was called from his fishing because God meant him to be a fisher of

men. It was not that it is impossible to serve God as a fisherman, but only that it was in another way that he was to serve. All through the ages it has been the same, and it is so now. When we hear of the shortage of workers in the Mission Field we must ask what is the explanation. It must be that some who are called to serve in that way are not doing so, for it cannot be that God is not calling a sufficient number. We must ask whether God is calling us. Mothers should tell their children that it may be that God is calling them to serve in that, or some other, special way. Many are not called to serve in that way—but they are called to serve. If St. Peter had not been called to serve by giving up his fishing he would have been called to serve by going on with it. Most of us are called to serve God by doing ordinary work. Most women are called to serve God by being good wives and mothers. A woman who does not marry and devotes her life to caring for orphans is serving God, and so is the woman who marries and devotes her life to her own children. It is quite right to regard the first, but quite wrong not to regard the second, as a "Church-worker." The second kind of work, no less than the first, can be done to the glory of God.

Obedience.

Obedience is the one thing that matters. It does not matter in the least whether what we do is "great" or "small" in our eyes, or in the eyes of others. The only really "great" thing for us is the thing that God gives us to do. It may be, or it may seem to us, that our task is

very unimportant in comparison with that of other people—as St. Peter might have regarded fishing as compared with catching men—but it is far better to do the task allotted as well as we can than to neglect it and attempt something that seems more important. Our Lord came to do the will of the Father, and He did it as readily when it was helping St. Joseph in the carpenter's shop as when it was working miracles or dying on the Cross. Mothers know that nothing pleases them more in their children than loving obedience, and it is in the same loving obedience that God delights.

And, of course, our small tasks are not actually as unimportant as we are apt to regard them. It was said of a certain Play that it owed its success very largely to the fine acting of those who played the **minor** parts. The same could be said of many Plays—and also of the great Drama of life. We, who, for the most part, have only minor parts to play must bear it in mind. Mothers have a great work to do. The Spanish proverb that “an ounce of mother is worth a ton of priest” may be a somewhat exaggerated statement, but it contains a great deal of truth.

Conclusion.

We all are called to serve God, and the Means of Grace that God has provided are to give us strength to do so. We must be diligent in our use of them in order that we may be able to serve Him in the way that He has appointed. Then our life will be life with God and the happiness that brings here will last eternally.

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