

Persevere In Prayer With One Mind With Mary

(Acts 1:14)

Of those persons who have left the Church, Cardinal Heenan has said that they did it because they had lost touch with God for some time previously. By this His Eminence meant that they had abandoned prayer. Of course we have to carry this idea a little further and reason that very many of those who are weak in the Faith but have stayed on in the Church, are suffering from the same malady in a lesser degree; they may be praying but praying insufficiently.

Could there be a greater tragedy than that persons thus walk deliberately out of the Ark of Salvation, or linger on in it deriving so little benefit from it?

This presents us with the absolute necessity for having a reasonable amount of prayer in our lives, which is not so easy in the case of people who are leading very busy lives. The answer to this plea of being too busy is that such persons find time for their meals. But prayer is in the

same category as those meals. It is as necessary to the soul as the food is to the body. And so it must find its place. This is the true position.

Our next problem is: How much prayer and of what kind? This is most difficult to answer, for it depends on how busy one is. Some cannot give as much time to prayer as others. Moreover it is to be remembered that an apostolate must also find its place in one's life. By avoiding an apostolate, one could leave time which could be used for prayer. But that would represent a lack of balance. There should be both apostleship and prayer.

How much prayer? You know how the Legion has approached this question. It asks for an apostolate, which takes not less than two hours per week, and attendance at a meeting which takes one and a half hours. Part of that meeting is prayer and the rest may be regarded as a continuance and part of the work. In addition the Legion requires the daily recital of the Catena. No one could regard all that as being enough prayer for a week, but the Legion is here presuming that its members are saying prayers on their own. The Legion does not attempt to order what those prayers are to be. But it does make some recommendations. Firstly, it strongly urges the daily saying of all the legionary prayers inclusive of the Rosary. Surely, as the handbook points out, the active legionary should be saying as much prayer as the Auxiliary?

But that does not completely satisfy the Legion either in the case of the active or the auxiliary member. It goes on to recommend the Praetorian and Adjutorian degrees. These comprise Mass and Holy Communion each day, plus the Legion Prayers, plus the recitation of an Office. Furthermore the Legion goes on to recommend the Short Breviary as the Office to be used. All this would amount to

an hour or more per day. Admittedly this is a good deal. It is far more than could be declared as being necessary to preserve the Faith and the spiritual life of the person, more especially as there is an apostolate along with it.

Now I would venture to say something about the nature of prayer and the sort of prayer which it is possible that God wants from us. This is a bold project because the views of no two people would coincide on it. As the phrase puts it: So many people, so many opinions.

Firstly, prayer is defined as a raising of the mind to God. Anything that thus puts us into touch with God is in a sense prayer, but not everything would establish that touch in equal degree. A prayer ascends in quality in the measure that it contains faith and to the extent that we put our heart into it.

Secondly, prayer must be orthodox, that is it must reflect the doctrine of the Church. It must proceed from a believing soul; the prayer of a half-believer would not do this and would sadly fall short in value. Also the prayer of a Progressive who minimised Our Lady and the saints and angels – and other doctrines too – would be flawed and would only have the value of a flawed article. I repeat that the very heart of prayer is the faith that is in it. A prayer full of heroic faith is an omnipotent prayer.

Is apostleship prayer? In a broad sense it is. It fulfils our Christian obligation. It is a vital service of God; the life without it would be incomplete. It would be wrong to replace it by formal prayer. But at the same time it is not strictly prayer, which is a direct addressing of God, an interview and discussion with him. It is of prayer in that strict and formal sense that I am talking here.

Is spiritual reading prayer? The same answer would apply: It is not strictly prayer. It qualifies from another

aspect. It is good, it is necessary. It can even be turned into formal prayer. For example if – especially before the Blessed Sacrament – we were to read a little and then turn directly to the Lord and talk over that with him; after that going back to the reading and then to the little talk with him. That would certainly be formal prayer, provided that the prevalent note is that of the ‘talking’ and not of spiritual reading.

Is the reading of the scriptures prayer? The same argument would apply, I think. It would be prayer to the extent that we are to mix up with it that direct recourse to God and that colloquy with him. If it is no more than spiritual reading, I would *not* regard it as possessing the directness and intimacy which must be the characteristics of prayer.

For instance the following comes just now to us. A priest asks if the reading of the Bible would satisfy the Praetorian and Adjutorian obligation to recite an Office. In support he states that his authorities have granted priests a dispensation from the Divine Office if they read any part of the Bible for thirty minutes per day. This seems extraordinary. But in any case it is *not an Office* and our unhesitating reply would be to that effect. The Bible would not satisfy the Praetorian and Adjutorian obligation as to an Office.

Again I return to the vital case of faith in our life and in each part of it, especially in our prayer. Suppose we make prayer into an exciting and very pleasant business; that is by providing pictures and entertaining phrases in the books which we use, and by otherwise removing what is tiring, have we not also removed some of the faith from it?

However, what has put it into the heads of those persons that prayer is supposed to be only a recreation and that

anything which is 'hard' is to be eliminated? They must never have read the lives of the saints. Of course prayer has its peaks of great joy, but normally it lives in the valleys. In the main it is a work out of which we derive degrees of satisfaction which vary as much as the weather. Being based on faith which does not afford full light, prayer will often be intensely laborious even though a labour of love. I think it is intended to bear that character of toil and struggle. It would be positively destructive to the life to lose sight of this as a principle and to seek to avoid that laboriousness.

Faith is best proved by seeing nothing proceed from it. If something happened at the end of every prayer, people could not be kept from praying. What I have been calling pure faith is independent of visible results or agreeable feelings or of anything else. Here I proceed to give a startling exemplification of this aspect.

The Carthusians spend eleven hours a day in formal prayer. In addition they have what they call a recreational period in their own little houses. They may spend this as they would wish, that is in further prayer, in reading and meditation, or in some pursuit like woodwork, painting, etc. Or they may write. Obviously there is no visible return from the meditation and reading. I do not know what is done with the woodwork or the paintings. I do know what they do in regard to their writings because I enquired. They put them into the stove when finished.

What! Does this mean that they waste their time burning what had cost them so much trouble! Yes. And their answer is that they did that writing in the Lord. The merit of it is in him. He can use it as he wills. You will see by this what pure faith can mean. If they saw their writings published, and if they wrote for that purpose, that element of pure faith would be diminished.

The foregoing would represent a very drastic exemplification of what an exercise of pure faith can be like. It would appal the light-minded type of person. They would call that performance a waste of time and a meaningless drudgery. But if we think things out, that is what faith will always mean to the worldly mind. Faith is a sort of drudgery. We address ourselves to an invisible Being and he gives no sign of hearing us or answering us. That is where faith enters in. We deal with the unseen and we rely on being answered. We see nothing proceed from our prayer, but we believe firmly that it is being heard and will be answered some time, some way.

Now I come to the Rosary. To the modernistic mind the Rosary is anathema. To them it contains everything that is wrong. It is repetitive – as if the idea in approaching God is that we must amuse him along the lines of human recreation. As if we must be original all the time. As if we must concoct fine thoughts of our own. As if we must not repeat ourselves.

So we introduce items which though very pious are not strictly prayer; that is spiritual reading of some kind. The aim would seem to be the imparting of variety to our interview with God. He must be amused. Prayer is to be made a variety performance. The whole thing is put on human footing as if God only feels what we feel, and as if his values were precisely the same as our human ones. But God has no need of our eloquence or ingenuity or entertainment.

That type of reasoning can leave totally out of account certain higher elements, that is of pure faith, and also what I would call a doctrinal presentation, i.e. the acknowledgment of the Catholic doctrines which might be called the 'detail' of faith. For example, if we do not in

some realistic way make Mary present in our prayer, then a vital ingredient is absent. For she is necessary to that prayer. The council has declared her to be the Mother of the Soul. It has described her as Mediatrix, which means that she plays some sort of vital intermediary role in all our relations with God. Acknowledgment of this must find a place in our prayer. The prayer of a person who formally repudiates that place of Mary can hardly be described as full Catholic prayer, and its efficacy is to be doubted.

These things said, I must return to the Rosary. It certainly contains that acknowledgment of and adverting to Mary, because for the most part it is actually addressed to her. In the next place, it contains that doctrinal presentation which I have referred to as necessary. Its special idea is the viewing of the Christian Mysteries, Redemption from its beginning to its end. Elsewhere I have made the suggestion that this aspect should be widened; that there are some other Mysteries of Redemption worthy to be included in the Rosary's round. I have proposed: the Immaculate Conception, the Birth of Mary, the Marriage of Mary, the Marriage Feast of Cana, the Institution of the Eucharist – all these of course being inserted in their proper place.

The Rosary is not merely an attempt to entertain God with our thoughts. It is pure prayer and petition and some meditation. There is not enough intellectual activity in it to take our minds off God – which is often the result of those more elaborate approaches to him. Somehow the effect of the Rosary is to leave us resting in him. We say our words and we realise he is listening to us and working in us.

If we try to delve deep into the essence of things, it seems to me that the Rosary as much as any other prayer and possibly more than most others – realises the very

core of prayer. We are informal with God. We turn from him to Mary and we talk freely with them. We are not distracting ourselves trying to think out brilliant flashes. We are just praying. I feel that all these up-to-the-minute expedients in regard to prayer are a getting away from those simple ideas and landing us into something which is of a different character to prayer altogether.

I am not denying that those substitutes are good things, but are they prayer? Writing on this subject of the importance of the Rosary, I have not hesitated to describe it as irreplaceable and this from every possible point of view. And therefore let legionaries be more than doubtful when they are presented with propositions of the *aggiornamento* order. Almost invariably these will contain the suggestion that the Rosary be either abolished or else reduced to a single decade. In other words the prayer of the praesidium is to be reduced to a minimum dimension. Of course this suggestion will be covered over with sugar; it will be proposed that when that decade is said, it will be followed by a talk by the Spiritual Director on some aspect of the particular Mystery or other portion of Christian doctrine. But such a talk as that, though no doubt valuable in itself, is definitely not prayer. Moreover it would make the meeting hopelessly top-heavy. Already there is in the meeting a spiritual reading session and the allocutio. To add to those a third talking session would unbalance the meeting. Some persons seem to imagine that the formation of people is no more than a matter of non-stop talking at them.

Finally I come to the question of an Office. The Legion Short Breviary is now being printed. It is possible that a few months will place us in possession of the finished article. Then we must throw ourselves ardently into a

campaign of getting the whole body of the Catholic people, and not legionaries only, into the saying of that Office. Its duration will be about thirty minutes. It can be divided up into bits as desired. It follows the daily round of the Church calendar, the same as the Priest's Breviary but compressed. Infinite care has been taken to make the translation of the Psalms, Hymns and Prayers a work of beauty.

Why should people say an Office? Well, you know the argument in the handbook that the Office is the official service of prayer in the Church, the voice of the Mystical Body in which all our poor voices intermingle with the voice of Our Lord and take on the quality of his prayer. This is the special value of liturgical prayer, placing it on an eminence above our own individual prayers. But there is another vitally important aspect. In itself, and quite apart from that other official value possessed by it, the Office is a supreme form of pure prayer. It puts you facing God, using the words of the Holy Spirit. The Office is made up for the most part of the Psalms and extracts from the Scriptures, interspersed with lovely hymns, including the supreme canticles – the Te Deum, Magnificat, Benedictus, Nunc Dimittis.

Read the Psalms and you will see that some of the verses are set in the mouth of God and some in the mouth of the person addressing God. Therefore it is a case of a dialogue between God and that person. There you have the ideal form of prayer: a conversation with God.

Secondly, as the words are those of the Holy Spirit, we can rest content with them; we have not to distract ourselves by having to work out words of our own. We lie in the arms of God, just as a child would in the arms of a beloved parent, holding our effortless chat with him.

Some may contend that it is a tiresome performance to be going through much the same routine each day, saying the same things. But as an inconsistency, those same persons would be found urging the reading of the scriptures which would also mean a repetition. They are doubly inconsistent inasmuch as the Office is mainly built up from scripture.

Every line of the Psalms affords food for thought and love. There is literary beauty in them, not that this represents an ingredient that can be called vital; nevertheless it is of help. All the emotions and the trials of life are covered. All the time we can readily apply the words to our own personal circumstances. Either we are pleading with God in regard to our necessities or we find that he is replying to us about them. The whole course of the divine history is reviewed. The names of all the special persons and place recur. As we proceed, we encounter the items of prophecy concerning the Redeemer and the woman who is to be his co-operator.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, I suggest than an Office, and in particular the forthcoming Legion Breviary, wonderfully offers you all the ingredients of a perfect prayer. It does another thing; it commits you to half an hour of it daily. This commitment is psychologically important. It tends to ensure you're fulfilling the duty with regularity, fitting it into your daily schedule and not permitting it to be elbowed out by all sorts of secondary things. It establishes its own place in the life. I have known many persons who have adopted the Short Breviary which we have hitherto been using, and I do not know of any who have dropped it. Those whom I know to be saying it seem to delight in it. Looking at them, I would say that they are drawing great spiritual benefits from the practice.

I add the special item of information that our own Short Breviary will represent a very great improvement upon that one which we have been using. And it will not occupy any greater length of time to say.

I sum up: Prayer is not an accessory or an aside in the Legion but its very soul. Practically all of the propositions for an 'up-dating' of the Legion seem to miss this point. They propose the cutting down in one way or another of the place of prayer, and particularly of Marian prayer, in the meetings. That would not represent a mere adjustment but a going off at a tangent which would result eventually in something different to the Legion.

The Legion is a distinctive and delicately balanced mechanism. A disturbing of this balance could turn it into something else; for instance into a mere 'activism', or a 'humanism', or a 'classroom', none of which it is supposed to be.

In particular, anything which modifies the Legion's characteristic attitude towards prayer and towards Mary would be destructive.

The Legion is a prayerful consideration with Jesus and Mary of the 'Father's business,' and the going forth in union with that Holy Pair to complete that business.

We must not let the Legion be perverted.