

Christ the King Abbey

(Traditional Benedictines)

(Formerly St Francis of Assisi Chapel)

www.ChristTheKingAbbey.org

Cullman, Alabama

Every Sunday: 6:00 AM and 10:00 AM

Daily: 6:00 AM

Holy Days of Obligation:

6:00 AM - 8:00 AM - 7:00 PM

Our Lady of Lourdes Chapel

Montgomery, Alabama

10:45 AM

Only on first Sunday

of each month

St Pius V Chapel

Birmingham, Alabama

9:30 AM

Every Sunday except

first Sunday of each month

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 27, 2008 – Green

Mass of Sunday; Gl; Cr; Pref. Trinity;

Weekly Bulletin #1052

*O Lord, uphold us and
our absent brethren.*

THE PRAYER OF FUTILITY

In the following insightful chapter, "The Prayer of Futility," from the book "We Die Standing Up" (1949), Father Hubert van Zeller, OSB, points out that the purpose of prayer is to please God, not to please ourselves.

"The great complaint with most people about their prayer is that they never feel they're getting anywhere. But of course it would be a very bad sign if they did. A lot of the trouble about prayer would disappear if we only realized – *really* realized, and not just supposed that it was so – that we go to pray not because we love prayer but because we love God. Not in order to master distractions or perfect a system or because we have said we would go on with the thing, but simply in order to please God. Once granted that God's view of our prayer is the only one that is at all worth taking into account, it can't much matter what our own view of it is. In fact the less view we have of it – and for view we can substitute the word 'feeling' – the better. This is what St. John of the Cross is talking about when he says that darkness in prayer is better than light. Better in the sense of being not only safer for us but making for a purer prayer in itself. This is a significant claim to make.

"Oh, I know all about that,' you will say, 'but it's no use telling me that God's way of judging prayer is so different from my way of judging it that what are distractions to me are praises to Him. Distractions and praises are not only different things altogether, they are completely opposite things. Your theory doesn't make sense.' Excuse me, it does. In the first place the opposite to a praise is not a distraction but an insult – and ordinary distractions are certainly not that. In the next place we must remember that God's scale of values, His sphere of operation, His terms, even, are quite different from ours. What is light to Him is so luminous that to our materially focusing eyes it appears as darkness. (This is not simply my idea: it is St. John of the Cross' and, before him, Dionysius the Areopagite's.) If we can't even look at the sun without seeing black spots everywhere, it is hardly likely that we shall see very much of what we are looking at when we are trying to train our gaze upon Light Itself.

"God knows the limitations which He has imposed upon man and makes allowances: we think we can see ourselves as God sees us and this causes difficulties. There *is* only one test of our prayer: are we wanting God? Do we want Him so much that we are prepared to go on looking for Him in our prayer in spite of apparently never getting any nearer to Him? Upon the answer to this enquiry depends the whole business of our success or failure in prayer. Success and failure are to be judged in God's terms, not ours.

"The above may be easier to follow if we change the approach. Take the Book of Job. Here we are granted an intimate glimpse into the ways of God, the ways of the devil, the ways of a certain holy man. First of all the devil is briefed, by God's permission, for an attack upon the man Job. Next the attack takes place. Then Satan returns and presents his report. At first sight it looks like a good report, but by the time we have finished the Book of Job we realize that the report can be pulled to pieces and that the attack must have been a complete failure. The same sort of thing is presumably still going on: the devil tempting, God permitting, man resisting as best he can. There is imperfection in the fight put up against temptation, and sometimes it seems to the weary, frightened soul that there is nothing left of its resolve, but the struggle still goes on, and in the topmost pinnacle of the will there is still the refusal to be stamped into evil. Our prayers, always by God's permission because He knows what is best for us, are forever being invaded by dryness and distraction. The devil's reports are constantly coming in before the throne of God. There is the same misrepresentation. But though we may be deceived, God is not deceived. Pick out any day in our prayer life and consider the kind of account which Satan might present at the judgment seat of God. It shouldn't be a record of our resisting effort on a good day when perhaps we have been in form, but simply a frank statement of what has been going on when our prayer has run true to normal – when, in other words, it has been that boring blank, punctuated occasionally by the arrival of not very memorable diversions.

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