

Christ the King Abbey

(Traditional Benedictines)

Cullman, Alabama

www.ChristTheKingAbbey.org

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

Saint Pius V Chapel

Birmingham, Alabama

9:30 AM

Every Sunday except
first Sunday of each month

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 23, 2009 – Green

Mass of Sunday G1; Cr; Preface of Holy Trinity

Weekly Bulletin #1109

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

THE POWER OF PRAYER

By

RICHARD GRÄF, CS.Sp. Part 7

1957

(ii) *Without Mental Prayer no Vocal Prayer*

Mental prayer is not to be understood as in opposition to vocal prayer. If this latter is to be prayer at all the heart must have its part in it and be somehow associated with it. Otherwise it does not deserve the name of prayer. "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; and in vain do they worship Me" (Mark 7, 6).

Prayer can be viewed from many diverse standpoints and be catalogued accordingly; so that we have quite a series of prayer forms. Vocal prayer occupies a conspicuous place among them, a place so large and extended that frequently little or no room is left for other types. Actually vocal prayer, especially when recited in common, is the most difficult kind of prayer. At mental prayer one can detach oneself from the outer world, can close, as it were, all doors and gateways, recollect oneself and penetrate to that inner chamber of the heart where the Blessed Trinity has taken up Its abode. "We will come to him and will make our abode with him" (John 14, 23). If in such solitude of the heart a person cannot pray or dwell in God's presence without distraction, how is he likely to do so when every entrance and approach is thrown open and he has to attend to the medley of many voices, to the musical pitch and rhythm involved in community vocal prayer? In such vocal prayer our imaginations have plenty of inducements to wander. Before attempting, then, the more difficult lesson, one should learn the easier one. He who does not master mental prayer will never learn vocal prayer well. It is only when this latter is penetrated by something more intimate that it gathers vigour and depth.

To pray well vocally is not such a simple thing. Not many possess the requisite power of concentration it demands, and so the majority of people find it impossible to pray vocally for any length without distraction. No effort or will-power ensures attention. In fact the more energetically we try the sooner our efforts flag. If we are honest with ourselves we have to confess our inability to recite five *Our Fathers* successively without distraction; often it will not be even three; and there will be days when, we are ashamed to confess, we cannot say one *Our Father* without being distracted.

Gailer von Kaysersberg when out riding on one occasion fell in with a peasant who walked along beside the horseman. They engaged in conversation and, among other topics, came to speak of religion. Gailer complained that he was on many occasions so distracted in prayer that he could scarcely say one *Our Father* properly. "That would be easy," said the peasant, "if there is nothing more to it." "If there is nothing more to it," replied Gailer, "you will get the horse I am riding if you can recite one *Our Father* without distraction". The peasant readily agreed; he had nothing to lose, and there was the chance of winning a horse. He started to pray but suddenly stopped to ask the Gailer what was to become of the saddle! In this way he forfeited both saddle and horse. Why are we generally so distracted, despite our will to the contrary?

St. Thomas Aquinas was once asked by his sister what she must do to become a saint? You must *will* it, was his answer, "And what next?" she said. Again she received the reply, you must will it. Once again she put him the question, "What else have I to do to become a saint?" For the third time she got the same reply, you must will it. If then so much store is set on our wills; if the will is the great power which leads to holiness, why is it so powerless against distractions? We are aware that God dwells within us, God who is the highest, the most attractive and lovable Being that can be conceived; we definitely wish to be with Him in our thoughts, at least during prayer; why is it that despite all our avowals we fail to concentrate on Him for the space even of an *Our Father*?

We have scarcely placed ourselves in God's presence when our thoughts are elsewhere. As soon as we notice it we collect ourselves and with an effort of the will direct our thoughts once more on God. We have barely done the 'about turn' when we are off again elsewhere. Why are our thoughts not where we would have them to be? And why do they wander whither we would not have them to stray? The fact of the matter is that *love*, and not the will, represents the greatest power within us. Our will indeed can develop massive strength to set it in motion; it can overcome countless obstacles when there is question of our own bent. But how weak it becomes when it has to run counter to it! It fails almost totally in a sustained struggle against the inclination of the heart, against love of self.

As long only as the will is in active motion do our thoughts obey it. If it relaxes a little then straight away they roam to the natural leaning of the heart: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12, 34). Where our hearts are our thoughts are. "Man lives where he loves and not where he seems to live." As long as God is not the chief object of our love and our concern we