

Christ the King Abbey

(Traditional Benedictines)

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

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

May 2, 2010 – White

Mass of Sunday GI; Cr; St Athanasius BCD Preface of Easter

Weekly Bulletin #1146

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Part 29

RICHARD GRÄF, CS.Sp.

FOR RELIGIOUS

A good, ingenuous Sister who had lived thirty years in religion once said at the end of a retreat: “How well I could pray in the world! Prayer was for me then a recreation and my deepest joy. But since I entered I felt my heart had been robbed of its most precious possession; I simply could no longer pray despite my desire to pray well. Now after this retreat I can pray again, pray exactly as I did in the world.” It happened that in the convent to which she belonged mental prayer was explained in terms of a rigid method. Anxious though she was to pray properly and in an intimate manner, she adhered rigidly to the method as explained, believing that otherwise her mental prayer was no prayer at all. The result was that her familiar intercourse with God was spoiled, even made impossible. This good soul was simple and child-like and could make nothing of a rigid system; before her entry into religion she had managed quite well without systematized prayer. “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2, 27). The sabbath is meant to be a day of rest and relaxation instead of being burdened with many rules and prescriptions. Rules and methods are meant to help us in prayer, not to be a burden and restriction; if they impede and weigh us down they no longer serve their purpose and should be relinquished.

In a certain convent an elderly nun hard of hearing used to pray half-aloud to herself in the choir with the result that she could be overheard by a large number of the community. The Mother Superior drew her attention to this: “Sister, you must pray a little less loud, you are disturbing the others in the choir. The Lord can hear you quite well.” The Sister replied: “I feel that if I don't hear myself praying I have not prayed at all.” Cry louder, the louder the prayer the better! (3 Kings 18, 27). Are we so far removed here from the Buddhist prayer-wheel? And what has become of mental prayer, the prayer of quiet and recollection? Without a life of mental prayer there is no proper interior life.

In a large hospital run by Sisters—a fervent community they were, eager for sacrifice and prayer—a thousand *Hail Marys*, that is twenty Rosaries, used to be recited on Sundays by each Sister. Note well, these were extra prayers over and above the many vocal prayers prescribed by rule. In addition there was the hospital work to attend to on Sundays as on week-days. One could not reproach the Sisters' spirit of prayer and sacrifice, but their practice in prayer might merit remark. Twenty Rosaries, along with all the other prayers and exercises, with professional work thrown in, are surely an excessive burden. A programme such as this is spiritual hard labour and contributes precious little to familiarity with God. A thousand *Hail Marys* must be “worked off” at all costs! Such a load of prayers, far from promoting recollection and the interior spirit, makes those burdened with it only more superficial and “nervy.” Instead of finding repose of mind in contact with God they feel as a result utterly exhausted in body and spirit.

Prayer is not to be counted but assessed at its proper worth. What matters is not the number of prayers we say, but their depth. As it is, we mortals are limited in our capacity; when we spread ourselves overmuch it is always with a loss of concentration. “Speak not much, as the heathens; for they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you therefore like to them; for your Father knoweth what is needful for you before you ask him” (Matt. 6, 7). God values the intensity of prayer much more than its outward expression. In sports the best element is lost when they are conducted watch in hand. And prayer ceases to be prayer when one begins to look on it as a feat, and to reckon it up. He lives rightly who knows how to pray aright. Hence in religious houses, as well as in the world, more stress should be laid on a proper training in prayer. What is neglected in early formation in the home can only with difficulty be made good in later life. So in religion too, an adequate training in prayer should be provided from the beginning. Neglect in this matter during postulanship, and especially during noviceship, can scarcely be repaired later. There is no atmosphere more congenial to such training than that of the novitiate: if a religious fails then to learn how to pray properly he will scarcely learn it later when conditions are much less favourable. □