

88. PRAYER

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1. PRAYER IN THE DAYS OF DE LA SALLE

1.1. Liturgical prayer

In the predominantly Christian atmosphere of French society in the days of De La Salle, prayer occupied a significant position.

Liturgical prayer, first of all, was characterised by a clear gap between clergy and faithful, and between those who knew Latin and those who did not (the *ignorantins*), despite all the efforts that had been made to explain liturgical words and gestures, and to make congregations take an active part through singing, processions, etc.

Numerous French dioceses of the day had their own rites, with their own liturgical texts which were added to those of Pius V's missal or substituted them. Latin was used throughout.

1.2. Private prayer

"Little Offices" were becoming available for use by lay people and women religious. These prayer

books included certain parts of the divine office, in particular the psalms, and showed a decided fondness for private devotions (eg. to the Divine Child, our Lady and St Joseph).

Mental prayer was held in high esteem, and its practice spread to such an extent that among certain people there was a noticeable turning away from private vocal prayer. Contemporary written evidence of this esteem is abundant, either in the form of "methods of mental prayer" or collections of subjects for meditation.

Private devotional practices, for individual or group use, became very common. This can be seen from the prolific production of pious works containing prayers for the sick, the dying, the souls in purgatory, for various needs, for times of trial, doubt, suffering and mourning. In spite of papal warnings, new litanies were put into circulation, some of which have survived to this day.

After Jesus' "holy relatives", the saints most frequently invoked are those who cure people, and those whose feasts are a feature of rural life. In more educated society, and especially in the writings of Pierre de Bérulle and the French school of spirituality, christocentricity had led to a strong devotion to Our Lady as well as to the mysteries of Jesus Christ — his childhood, his Passion, the Eucharist and the Sacred Heart.

1.3. Teaching about prayer

The leading spiritual authorities not only recommended their followers to pray at regular times, but also urged them to perform all their actions in a spirit of adoration and in union with the interior dispositions of the Incarnate Word. They recommended them

to imitate Christ interiorly, and to have one and the same mind, heart and will as he.

The catechisms of the time all speak of prayer. They examine its traditional characteristics by means of a commentary on the *Our Father*, or on the basis of a more theoretical plan :

- The need and benefits of prayer
- Whom to pray to
- Whom to pray for
- When and how to pray.

Certain manuals, but not all, go further and suggest a real interiorisation of the faith. They urge the reader to learn prayer flowing from an intense spiritual inspiration. As we shall see, this what De La Salle proposed.

2. PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF DE LA SALLE

De La Salle's love for prayer dated from his childhood. As a canon, he took part assiduously in the public prayer of the Church. As the time of his ordination came closer so his life of prayer developed. His life was a continuous conversation with God. Up to the very end of his life, he made every effort, like the other Brothers, to be present at community exercises, especially at vocal prayer (MAR 2 = CL 6,19; CL 8,238 and 278; LA 4,7).

What did prayer mean for him ? If we are to believe his first biographers, it was "a delight" for him, and one of his "normal weapons" (MAR 117 = CL 6,123), the only one he was happy to use on his enemies. Prayer was a "sure refuge" for him when he needed the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, his "recourse" in order to obtain special graces, and the source from which he drew "the necessary greatness of soul to accomplish the work to which God called him" (CL 8,280f; cf. MAR 59,117 = CL 6,73 & 123). He considered time he had not been able to devote to his ordinary exercises as a loss. This was the case when he was ill for a long time, but he made sure he made up properly for these "losses" (MAR 243 = CL 6,219).

"The servant of God loved prayer so much that anywhere was suitable for it, even the streets of Paris" (CL 8,283). In the same way, he found any time suitable for prayer, during the day and often during the

night, in all the circumstances of his life, but especially before taking important decisions (MAR 19, 38, 47, 74,106, 232; CL 8,119, 280, 290, 365). In the *Rules I have imposed upon myself* (CL 10,115 = EP 3,0,6), he promises to pray whenever a Brother asks for his advice or confesses something serious. Elsewhere in his "personal programme", he says he will pray before leaving the house (1), before travelling (11), when passing in front of a church (17), at the beginning of each action (18), when entering the house or his room (19). We can note in this text that De La Salle makes a personal commitment to practise the same points he recommends to all Christians in his catechism (CL 20,488f = DA 405,5).

De La Salle prayed for a very broad spectrum of persons and institutions : for Christians in general, his parents and friends (LI 120,4), his penitents, the sinners he tried to convert, his disciples, his Institute, his activities and the Church. Regarding his Brothers, not only did he pray for them and with them, but when his young community was going through a difficult period, he would establish a prayer rota for the Brothers lasting all day (MAR 95 & 117 = CL 6,105 & 123; CL 8,134, 223, 283, 346, 349; LC 97,1-3).

He prayed "with his mouth and his heart", as vocal and mental prayer were described at the time. He promised to recite the *Our Father* each day "with the

Daily prayers of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (extracts)

MORNING PRAYER

Let us adore God and pay him our respects

I recognise, O my God, that I am unworthy to appear before you and to pay you my respects, having so often abused your goodness and your grace. With great humility I beg your forgiveness for this abuse and for the great number of sins I have committed up to the present moment. I am resolved, with the help of your holy grace, to love nothing but you and in you, and to love you with my whole heart.

I unite myself with my Saviour Jesus to offer you in him and through him all the adoration which is your due. In union with him, I thank you for all the graces and for all the benefits which it has pleased you to give me: for giving me life, for letting me live till now, for making me a Christian, for withdrawing me from the world and delivering me from my sins, for letting me survive this night and giving me this day to serve you.

I offer you all my thoughts, words and actions of this day, so that they may be all consecrated to you and may obtain for me your holy love which is all I wish.

I offer you the new life you have just given me by awaking me from sleep. I beg you that it may be for me a life of grace and that I can say from now on that it is no longer I who live but that it is Jesus Christ who lives in me.

Do not allow, O my God, that there remain in me anything which is opposed to your holy will. Destroy in me all my inclinations and annihilate in me all my natural sentiments which would like to take possession of my heart, so that it acts only through your divine Spirit.

For the sake of your love, I promise to do all the violence to myself that is necessary in order to die to myself and to live only for you. I renounce my own mind and all the pleasure I could have through the use of my senses. I abandon myself entirely to you to suffer today as much as you will wish.

Give me, O my Saviour Jesus, the perfection that you say you want of us, in your holy Gospel, as well as the union you asked your eternal Father for us before you died.

PRAYER BEFORE DINNER

Let us ask God

for the grace to take our meal in a holy manner

I adore, O my God, the goodness which made you institute meals in order to restore our strength and preserve our lives. -

I adore the holy intentions you had in their institution, which were that we might re-establish in ourselves what had been destroyed by work, and give ourselves to your service with renewed strength.

I adore the holy dispositions Jesus Christ your Son had during the meals he took while on earth, in order to teach us to sanctify our own.

In order that I may unite myself to his holy dispositions and correspond to your holy intentions, fill me so intimately with your holy presence that I may approach the table only with the greatest respect and in order to satisfy only my needs [...].

Fill me with your Holy Spirit in order to preserve me from any avidity I might have for this food, and that I may renounce all the sensual feelings that might be aroused in me during the meal. While my body takes its food, O my God, make my mind find its satisfaction in you, and my heart take pleasure in tasting the sweetness of your love.

There is general agreement that these ancient prayers used daily by the Brothers — a fact attested in writing as early as 1738 (AMG) — were composed by St John Baptist de La Salle. Their content links them to the spiritual trends of the 17th century.

EVENING PRAYERS

*Let us renew our attention
to the holy presence of God*

May our prayers rise up to you, O my God, and may your mercy come down upon us.

Come within us, Holy Spirit, and sanctify us. Fill our hearts with your holy grace and kindle in us the fire of your divine love. And as you have united a great number of different nations in the same faith, strengthen us also in the faith and union you have given us and which we cannot preserve without you.

Let us adore God and pay him our respects

May the most holy and indivisible Trinity be blessed now and for ever and ever.

I adore you, Jesus Christ my Saviour, and I thank you for having saved all mankind by your sufferings and death on the cross. You who suffered so much for the love of us, have mercy on us.

I adore you, O my God, with the most profound respect, and I love you with all my heart as the one who gave me my being, who redeemed me and who has given me all kinds of graces, and because you are infinitely good in yourself and infinitely lovable. I adore and I love your infinite perfections, and I ask you for the grace to make me participate in them. I am yours, O my God, because you have made me what I am. Make me also all yours so that, having nothing else in view but to love you, I may never do anything that is capable, not only of separating me eternally from you, but of depriving me of your holy love for even a moment.

I accept willingly all the sufferings and pains you wish me to suffer in this life, because such is your pleasure and because they will earn for me eternal happiness. And as I wish to try to please you by my entire conduct, O my God, make me love all that you love and hate all that displeases you.

You want me to love you, dear Jesus. Since in order to deserve you love we must lead a life similar to the one you led here on earth, give me the grace to enter into the practices of your holy life and to imitate you in your sufferings so that I may be always inseparably united to you.

Let us thank God for his graces and his benefits

I thank you, O my God, through Jesus Christ our Saviour, for all the graces and all the benefits it has pleased you to give me: for giving me life and preserving it till now, for making me a Christian, for withdrawing me from the world and delivering me from my sins, and for all the special graces you have had the goodness to give me today [...].

Let us ask God forgiveness for our sins

O My God, I most humbly beg your pardon for all the sins I have committed against your divine majesty. My heart is filled with sorrow, and the cause of its sorrow is the consideration of your goodness, the horror you have for my faults, the punishment they deserve and the state in which I am of not being able to do adequate penance.

O my God, how could I have been so wretched as to fall into sin again so many times, after always having promised to change my life. I am very confused to appear before you after so many falls and infidelities. If I were not convinced of the greatness of your mercy, I would be justified, in my present state, not to have any hope of forgiveness. I come before you, therefore, attracted by your goodness and all covered with the precious blood of my saviour Jesus, begging you to recognise me in his livery, and to preserve me in your holy grace. I assure you, notwithstanding all my bad inclinations and the disordered affections of my heart, that I wish to belong totally to you and never offend you [...].

*Let us abandon ourselves entirely to God,
and offer him the sleep that we are going to have*

O my God, I offer myself entirely to you: do with me whatever you wish. My life is in your hands. If you wish to take it from me, I give it to you. If you leave it to me, I am happy to keep it. I abandon myself entirely to your holy will.

I offer you, O my God, the sleep I am about to take in honour of your eternal repose and of the repose my saviour Jesus took while he was on earth. [...] I accept this repose as the image of your peace, the restoration from my weakness, the end of my sinning, the preview of my death and the image of the repose we enjoy in heaven.

greatest possible devotion, attention and faith" (CL 10,116 = EP 3,0,20) and not to go to bed till he had finished reciting the rosary which he said as he walked along the street. He had made for himself "a small collection of short prayers and elevations of the heart to God called ejaculations, all taken from the psalms and passages of Holy Scripture, all most tender and affectionate, so as to say to God only what he himself had taught us to say to him" (CL 8,292; cf. *id.*, 103, 283, 290).

Teaching others to pray was one of De La Salle's great concerns as Founder. As soon as he began to help with the organisation of the schools and the training of the teachers, he persuaded them to decide to

follow "daily exercises" together at fixed times, in which prayer occupied a central place. In 1681, which was such an important year, he concentrated on familiarising them with these exercises. The novices, who joined him subsequently, grew up "in the shadow of his prayers" and grew spiritually by learning mental prayer. The slightly older Brothers were guided in their *ongoing formation* by their Founder who would not accept, except as a temporary measure, any lifestyle that did not leave sufficient time for mental and vocal prayer (MAR 27, 30, 163 = CL 6,41, 45, 159; CL 8,367). Finally, he wanted his Brothers to pass on to their pupils what they practised themselves, in order to inspire them with a love of prayer and to teach them how to pray (MD 60,3; MR 202,2).

3. PRAYER IN THE WRITINGS OF DE LA SALLE

3.1. The texts

In addition to leaving us his own example, De La Salle bequeathed to us numerous texts on prayer in his writings. These occur in the *Duties of a Christian* (CL 20,403-494 = DA 400; CL 21,243-304 = DB 4; CL 23,457f = PA 0,29); throughout his *Meditations*, and in particular in MD 36-39 and MD 62; in the *Collection*, regarding vocal prayer (CL 15,195-200 = R 16,4) and mental prayer (CL 15,8 = R 7).

His book on the *Exercises of piety which are performed during the day in the Christian Schools* contains the vocal prayers which divided up the day of the pupils from the time they arrived at school till the time they left. Several passages in the *Conduct of the Christian Schools* indicate the way to pray during a school day.

In *Instructions and Prayers* we are given model prayers. These are very much based on experience and suggest sentiments and attitudes a Christian might wish to express in his conversation with the Lord. Moreover, as De La Salle himself says (CL 17,174 = I 3), these texts have a pedagogical purpose: under the form of prayer, they teach dogma, morals and spirituality.

For the Brothers, the Founder wrote the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* (EM). Primarily intended for the introduction of novices to mental prayer, it offered also the more experienced Brothers more advanced levels of prayer (see 3,9 below).

3.2. Why pray ?

"One should not normally have any business more pressing than praying to God" (CL 20,485 = DA 405,4,4).

God is "the Father of lights". From him "comes every perfect gift" (MF 95,1 quoting Jm 1,17). Without him there is no help for our life, no relief. God is "more disposed to give us what we want than we are inclined to ask him" (CL 20,432 = DA 402,1,18; cf. MD 36,1; 38,1). But we must pray to him, that is, ask him for his grace.

Created by God and for himself alone, and blessed daily by his kindness, human beings have an obligation to **pay him homage**: they must constantly show him their gratitude. As adopted children of God, members of Jesus Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit, it is their duty to offer their body and soul to God each day in prayer (CL 20,411f = DA 401,2).

In order to respond to God's plan and be saved, they must know the right path to follow, and practise the virtues that will help them follow it. They must persevere in doing good, grow in piety, fill themselves with God and his Spirit. Weakened by sin, they need the help of grace to be pleasing to God and to be able to love him. They will obtain this grace by prayer (MD 36,1-2; MF 80,2; 95,1; 107,1; 129,1; 161,1; 174,3; CL 18,52 = E 13,8; CL 20,198 = DA 300,10; CL 20,411 = DA 401,2,1f; CL 20,442 = DA 403).

The teacher who has care of souls must realise that he is incapable of producing any good by himself where salvation is concerned (MR 195,1). No undertaking, no work regarding salvation or the glory of God can ever bear fruit unless it is **blessed by God** and "directed by his Holy Spirit" (MF 107,1). "For God alone can impart that true wisdom, which is the Christian spirit" (MF 157,2).

If a Brother wishes to obtain **the graces necessary to fulfil his duties** well (MF 80,2; 95,1; cf. MF 108,1; MR 198,1), acquit himself well of his ministry (MR 196,1), have sufficient enlightenment to form Jesus Christ in his disciples (MF 80,2), help them to acquire piety (MF 157,2), make his ministry bear fruit (MF 159,2 & 161,2), he must have recourse to prayer: "You will not produce much fruit in them unless you have the spirit of prayer to give unction to your words, rendering them efficacious, and penetrating to the innermost recesses of the soul" (MF 159,2; cf. MF 129,2 & 148,2).

These are some of "the marvellous effects produced by prayer" mentioned by De La Salle (MF 157,2), but there are also others. Prayer disposes a soul to **receive the Holy Spirit** and his wisdom (MD 42,3; MF 119,2). As in the days of Moses, it calms "the anger of a God displeased with mankind" (CL 20,422 = DA 401,3,13). It enables us to converse familiarly with God (CL 17,275 = I 6,27) and to participate in the activity of the angels (CL 20,417f = DA 401,3,2). It delivers us from temporal and spiritual dangers (CL 20,421 = DA 401,3,10). It is a divine medicine which removes all malice from the heart (MD 36,2), and keeps temptation at bay (MF 174,3; CL 20,440 = DA 402,2,13; MD 36,3). In fact, through prayer, "God becomes our strength against the devil" (MF 174,3), and disposes us to fight against the world (MF 182,2) by renouncing its pleasures, and gives us an aversion for all earthly things (CL 20,422f = DA 401,3,14).

Prayer draws us **away from sin** (MF 56,3; CL 20,416 = DA 401,2,10). For the sinner it is "a prompt and easy remedy to obtain the grace of penance and pardon" (MD 36,2). "It is necessary to have frequent recourse to prayer" (CL 17,79 = I 1,8,14) to obtain or regain grace (MD 68,3; MF 174,3; MF 191,2; MF 122,6; MD 56,3).

Prayer makes Jesus Christ live in the hearts of his faithful in order to transform them (CL 20,419 = DA 401,3,5; CL 22,156 = DC 42,6,6). It alone makes it possible to assimilate the maxims of Jesus Christ (MF 78,2). It makes it easier to practise virtue (MD 36,1; CL 20,414f = DA 401,2,8). It obtains perseverance in good (LC 101,5) and in the religious state (MF 174,3), even in the midst of persecutions (MD 78,3).

The Christian, therefore, is invited to imitate the prayer of Jesus Christ, who asked his Father to sanctify in the truth those who would believe in him (MD 39,2). As the believer makes his way towards God, prayer is useful to him as a source of consolation in his sufferings. It disposes him to bear his sufferings (MF 192,3), strengthens and supports him (CL 20,422 = DA 401,3,14; LI 122,6). Nothing can take away the joy that comes from prayer (MD 34,2; cf. MD 18,1).

In a word, "prayer is the light of our soul" (CL 20,413 = DA 401,2,5). It is as necessary "as light is necessary in the world, as life in the body to preserve it, as medicine for a sick person to cure him" (CL 20,416 = DA 401,2,11).

That is why the Founder recommends his disciples to be assiduous in prayer (MF 95,1). All Christians must consider it necessary for salvation: "I believe that it is necessary to have frequent recourse to prayer and that we cannot be saved without praying to God with attention and piety" we read in the Creed written by De La Salle for the pupils (CL 17,79 = I 1,8,15; cf. the article on *Instruction* in the present volume). We cannot abstain from prayer except for some urgent necessity (CL 25,157 = FD 26), when it is linked to the function we exercise (CL 25,158 = FD 40).

No one is exempted from the need to pray, neither the rich, nor those who earn their livelihood by manual work and have to ask for their daily bread. The just, no less than anybody else, have to say to God: "Forgive us our sins" (CL 20,447f = DA 403,1,10-13).

There is no valid reason that can excuse us from prayer, which is a means "all the easier to employ as it is ever at our disposal, and we may use it whenever we so desire" (MD 36,1).

3.3. Pray to whom ?

Strictly speaking, we should pray to the **Father** who is the source of all that is good. He alone is good, he alone is our reward, he alone can preserve our life and give us his Spirit, his grace and his forgiveness (CL 20,457-459 = DA 404,1,1f).

Jesus Christ. Lasallian prayer, like all Christian prayer, is addressed to the Father through the intercession of Jesus Christ by virtue of his redemptive action and infinite grace. By the offering of his life and his death he became our mediator: "Our confidence in prayer cannot have good effects unless it is founded on the merits of Jesus Christ [...] for it is only through him [...] that we have access to the Father" (CL 20,432 = DA 402,1,20).

Because he is the only Son of God, our mediator and intercessor with the Father, and because through him we have access to this same Father, we can hope that our prayer will be heard (MD 62,2; CL 20,459f = DA 404,1,6).

The Holy Spirit. His presence is a necessary condition for prayer (CL 20,424 = DA 402,1,2). De La Salle speaks frequently of his presence in us so that he can pray in us and for us (MD 62,2; CL 17,248 = I 6,2,2).

The ability to pray is a **gift of the Spirit**: "As we do not know what we should ask of God [...] it is necessary for the Spirit of God [...] to tell us what we need and to make us properly disposed to obtain it from God by our prayers" (CL 20,196 = DA 300,0,7; cf. CL 20,424 = DA 402,1,2).

For the Founder of the Christian Schools, the invocation of the Holy Spirit is a part of the teacher's and pupil's prayer, as well as of the teacher's prayer for his pupils. The teacher asks the Spirit to make known to him all the gifts God has given him (the teacher) so that he can pass them on to his pupils (MF 189,1). At the beginning of the lesson, the pupils ask the Holy Spirit to help them to pray well (CL 18,7 = E 2,3; CL 18,26 = E 8,3). On the first day of the school year, teachers and pupils attend the Mass of the Holy Spirit together (CL 24,203 = CE 17,3,10).

The saints to whom we can and must pray. Their intercession is always pleasing to God, but if they obtain graces for us, it is only through the merits of

Jesus Christ, in which they share since they are his members (CL 20,460f = DA 404,2; MF 183).

Mary is the first of all the saints to whom we can address our prayers. There are two reasons for this: 1. "Because she is the most perfect of all creatures [...] her influence is great with God" (CL 20,464 = DA 404,3). 2. Because "she has very great love for the salvation of mankind, she is always ready to give us her help". It is to her in particular that we should recommend "the salvation of our soul". We should also ask her to obtain for us "the grace of God in this life and his glory in the next" (CL 20,467 = DA 404,3,5). We must pray to her every day (CL 22,212 = DC 43,6,3).

In the Christian Schools, the first and short prayer the pupil says at the beginning of the lesson is addressed to Our Lady (CL 24,3 = CE 1,1,9). Each day also prayers are said to St Joseph (CL 22,277 = DC 44,18,9) and in a general way to the pupils' patron saints and to those of their parishes (CL 18,12 = E 2,16).

The **angels** and particularly the guardian angels. Teachers and pupils owe them respect, devotion and confident and grateful prayers (CL 18,12 = E 2,15; CL 18,35 = E 9,10; MF 172,3). Among the angels, we should invoke St Michael in particular (MF 125 & 169), "the leader of all the angels who remained faithful to God" (MF 169,1) and who "gave glory to God with the other good angels, and cried out: 'You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive all glory'" (MF 169,2).

3.4 Pray for whom?

Lasallian prayer is catholic, that is, universal. It is important to pray **for everybody** without distinction (CL 20,452 = DA 403,2,2), for oneself (CL 17,83 = I 1,7,41), for both the just and for "those whose virtue wavers" (CL 20,453f = DA 403,2,5).

We must pray **for the souls in purgatory** because they cannot pray for themselves (MF 185,3; CL 22,218 = DC 44,2,4). We must recommend to God our deceased teachers, pupils and others who have been recommended to our prayers (CL 18,18 = E 4). We have a special obligation to pray for the souls of our parents, friends and benefactors; for those who are in

purgatory through our fault; for the most forgotten souls or for those who suffer most (CL 22,218f = DC 44,2,4).

For the living. Our intentions must include especially Christians who are in communion with the Catholic Church. We have an obligation to pray for all the needs of our holy mother the Church (CL 17,31 = I 1,6,34; CL 24,79 = CE 7,3,5), asking God "to support and extend the Church" (CL 20,454 = DA 403,2,7). In the same way, we must pray for the leaders of the Church: the Pope, the local bishop, parish priests, priests and other ministers of the Word of God (CL 17,31 = I 1,6,34). We must pray also for those who exercise temporal power (CL 20,454 = DA 403,2,7).

The importance of prayer for the Church must not make us forget those who are separated from it: schismatics, heretics, Jews or pagans (CL 20,453 = DA 403,4,2). The Christian should not exclude from his prayers those who persecute and calumniate him (MD 5,2; CL 20,455f = DA 403,2,9).

There should be a special place in our prayers for our friends, parents, benefactors and teachers who are still alive, for all those who continue to help us or who have worked for our salvation (CL 20,455 = DA 403,2,8).

The teacher prays constantly **for his pupils** (CL 15,139 = R 14,6,7; MF 186,3; MF 187,2). But "especially for the conversion of those who have evil inclinations" (MF 186,3; cf. MD 56,3; MF 122,3). The Christian teacher is concerned for the salvation of his pupils, in imitation of Christ, "who seeks the lost sheep" (MR 196,1 quoting Lk 15,4). "You must devote yourself much to prayer in order to succeed in your ministry, constantly presenting to Jesus Christ the needs of your pupils" (MR 196,1).

De La Salle invites the Brothers to pray **for one another** (LA 20,19; 22,12; 25,14; 26,12; 31,24; MD 39,3), for deceased Brothers (LA 18,3), for "the needs of the community" (CL 15,139 = R 14,6,7) and for current business matters (LA 21,18). They should pray also "to make the Institute grow and bear fruit" (MR 207,3).

We should not pray for the saints who, having achieved eternal happiness, "can no longer have hopes

or desires" (CL 20,457 = DA 403,2,12), nor for the devils and the damned, "for whom it is impossible to do penance" (CL 20,456 = DA 403,2,11).

3.5. What should we ask for ?

In the prayers composed by De La Salle, there are innumerable requests addressed to God. The most noble one must surely be: **that the Holy Spirit inspire us** to procure the glory of God, our salvation and that of others. This is what Jesus taught his disciples, as the Founder recalls in his commentary on the Our Father (CL 20,442f = DA 403,1,1).

The glory of God. That his name be considered holy by all mankind. That we should want his Kingdom to come, and want his grace and eternal life. That his kingdom come even here below. That his will be done and that his loving plan be accomplished in each of us (LA 16,11; 45,7; MD 3,3). That we should think, speak and act according to his will (CL 20,409 = DA 401,1,8) and that we should be saved by fulfilling the commandments and making our flesh subject to the spirit.

Our salvation. To the question "Does God always answer our prayers?", De La Salle answers "Yes", on certain conditions, in particular, providing "we ask him what is necessary for our salvation" (CL 21,260 = DB 4,3,20).

It is quite legitimate to ask God for physical nourishment and health (LC 97,3); for the spiritual bread of grace, of the Eucharist and of the Word (CL 20,447 = DA 403,1,12; CL 20,451 = DA 403,1,20); for what is good (MD 4,3); for physical well-being and the goods of the present life; for the good of the soul and for eternal life (CL 17,37 = I 1,6,46; CL 20,406 = DA 401,1,2; CL 20,451 = DA 403,2,1; MD 3,3; MD 62,2); for perfection and holiness (LC 97,3; MD 3,3; MD 39,2); the removal of evil (MD 39,1); for the forgiveness of sin and the remission of punishment due (CL 17,182f = I 3,8).

The salvation of others. Lasallian prayer is apostolic. It asks "God for the light and grace necessary to secure success in all that we undertake for him" (MF 107,1). It also presents to God the needs of the young people entrusted to the care of the teacher (MD 62,2).

3.6. When should we pray ?

De La Salle has much to say about this in his writings. We should pray without ceasing since, according to St Augustine, the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ must be one of constant prayer (MD 5,2; 42,3; CL 20, 435 & 437f = DA 402,2,3 & 402,2,8).

In practice, this means praying at various times spaced out throughout the day and, if possible, planned beforehand. In this way, Christians can follow the recommendation of the Lord to pray always (CL 20,437 = DA 402,2,7). It is enough not to let a day pass without devoting some fixed time to prayer (CL 20,438 = DA 402,2,8).

In order to make all his actions a prayer, a Christian must "offer them to God" by uniting himself "with the intentions and dispositions which [...] Jesus Christ had, and by doing them always for the love of God" (CL 20,488 = DA 405,5,2).

De La Salle insists in particular on certain moments of the day. At times he is referring to the school day, at other times, to the daily Christian life of a lay person :

The beginning of the day. On waking up, show piety by kneeling by the side of the bed and praying (CL 17,105 = I 2,1,6; CL 18,30 = E 9,1,1; CL 20,114 = DA 203,0,20; CL 20,436 = DA 402,2,4; CL 20,484 = DA 405,4; CL 20,490 = DA 405,5,4).

The end of the day. It is "our duty to thank God every evening for all the graces he has given us during the day". This is the first purpose of evening prayer. The second is "to ask his forgiveness for all the sins" committed during the day (CL 20,486 = DA 405,4,3). We can never dispense ourselves from saying evening prayer (CL 17,221 = I 4,1,5; CL 18,30 = E 9,1,2; CL 19,53 = RB 201,1,144; CL 20,14 = DA 101,4,4; CL 20,436 = DA 402,2,4; CL 20,484f = DA 405,4). To omit saying morning or evening prayer would be to neglect one's salvation, show disrespect for God's majesty and live like a pagan who has no knowledge of God (CL 20,484 = DA 405,4).

Before and after meals. In the Lasallian school, lunch and the afternoon snack are taken in the classroom. The teachers must make the pupils understand that "if they are told to eat in school, it is in order that they can learn how to eat properly [...] and to pray before and after" (CL 24,8 = CE 2,1,7; cf. CL 18,32 =

E 9,3,3; CL 19,83f = RB 204,1,219; CL 20,437 = DA 402,2,6; CL 20,491 = DA 405,5,7f).

At school. The readers of the *Duties of a Christian* are invited to say a prayer whenever they enter or leave a place, whether it is their own home or the place where they work. In the same way, the pupils are told to say a prayer when they enter the school and at the beginning and end of lessons. If a pupil breaks a school rule, after receiving the statutory punishment, he must say a short prayer kneeling down (CL 20,490 = DA 405,5,5; CL 24,5 = CE 1,1,9; CL 24,82 = CE 7,4,4; CL 24,111f = CE 10,2; CL 24,176 = CE 15,9,10).

In church. When a Christian enters a temple consecrated to God, whether by himself or for an act of public worship, he does so essentially in order to pray. He takes holy water (CL 22,30f = DC 20,3), attends Holy Mass (CL 20,152 = DA 212,0,2; CL 18,31 = E 9,2,2), joins in processions, pilgrimages and jubilee celebrations (CL 22,11 = DC 10,4; CL 22,20 = DC 10,6; CL 22,113 = DC 30,13).

Everywhere. There are many other circumstances in which De La Salle invites us to pray: entering or leaving a place (CL 20,489f = DA 405,5,3), when a person visits us or we visit a person, and before going on a journey (CL 20,491f = DA 405,5,9). Engaged or young married couples are invited to pray as a preparation for their new family life (CL 20,396 = DA 310,4,6f).

For Christians, Sunday is much more a day consecrated to prayer than a day of rest (CL 20,121 = DA 205,0,6). Other occasions in the liturgical year are similar (CL 22,67f = DC 30,1,3; CL 22,72 = DC 30,3,1; CL 22,90 = DC 30,7,4; CL 22,97 = DC 30,10,2; CL 22,109 = DC 30,12,1; CL 22,141 = DC 42,2,7; CL 22,182 = DC 42,11,12; CL 22,216 = DC 44,2,1).

When tempted. When a Christian is tempted to do evil he must pray (MF 172,3; CL 20,97 = DA 201,2,8; CL 20,428 = DA 402,1,11; CL 22,79f = DC 30,4,8f). De La Salle's exhortation is addressed to Brothers tempted to give up their vocation, or overwhelmed by the difficulties of community life (MF 125,2; LI 66,2; MD 36,1; MF 122,2; MR 196,1; LC 38,32). However, all Christians are invited to pray in times of moral trial (CL 20,428 = DA 402,1,10f; MF 172,3), when they are sick spiritually (MD 71,1) or physically (CL 20,493 = DA 405,5,13).

A person who offends God is invited by De La Salle not to be discouraged, but to become converted by having recourse to prayer (CL 20,302 = DA 307,3,19; CL 20,493 = DA 405,5,13).

3.7. Interior dispositions for prayer

Faith. The basic disposition is “the faith and trust with which we have recourse to prayer”, because “God’s compassion for your misery is greater than your desire to be freed of it” (MD 38,2 & 1).

Love. “It is only to the extent that one loves God that one thinks of him” (LC 92,5). This maxim taken from a letter written to a Brother for his spiritual direction gives us an insight into the style of Lasallian prayer. It throws light on the definition in the *Duties*, which reads: “The word prayer signifies a request one makes to God with humility and insistence” (CL 20,411 = DA 401,1,12).

Forgiveness. In a letter to a religious, De La Salle repeats what he says in his commentary on the *Our Father*, that is, that God could never listen favourably to a person who refused forgiveness, because “aversion for one’s neighbour and resentment because of insults prevent our prayers from reaching God” (LI 119,1; cf. CL 20,448 = DA 403,1,13).

Humility. Far from despising humble hearts, the Lord always accepts the prayers of the humble (CL 14,49 = EM 5,153; MD 38,3; CL 20,429 = DA 402,1,13). He comes down to those who cannot raise themselves up to him (CL 20,429f = DA 402,1,15).

Insistence or perseverance. If we ask God for “sanctity and perfection”, says De La Salle, we should continue asking till we obtain them (MD 39,2). Regarding the way to be insistent, we must imitate the Gospel parable and pray “to the extent of being importunate” (MD 37,2 quoting Lk 11,9). Why should we persevere? Because often God hears our prayer only after much insistence on our part; because perseverance is a sign of our confidence; and because the difficulty we have in obtaining some gift from God makes us appreciate it more (CL 21,259f = DB 4,3,8).

Fervour. We must pray with a great desire to obtain what we ask for. God wants this and gives us his graces in proportion to our desire, when “spiritual favours and anything to do with the salvation of our soul are involved” (CL 20,428 = DA 402,1,9).

Simplicity of heart (LI 126,11) and true **interior devotion** (CL 20, preface = DA 0,0,13). According to De La Salle, the external forms of prayer (physical and verbal) are good and necessary, but never sufficient. To these forms must be added the interior dispositions without which they would be worthless.

Without devotion, understood in this way, “it is difficult for prayer to be wholly pleasing to God”. However, it is not necessary “for this devotion to be felt or to be manifested exteriorly” (CL 20,427 = DA 402,1,8).

Prayer is not very efficacious unless it is accompanied by **mortification**. De La Salle tells each Brother: “Often remind yourself that you must be a man of prayer, for you have to intercede not only for yourself but also for those for whom you are responsible, and for the good of their souls. But in order to make your prayers fully efficacious, join thereto some mortification” (MF 187,2; cf. MF 95,2).

In his letters, the Founder warns the Brothers about dissipation which is an attitude incompatible with prayer (LA 51,10; LA 57,1; LI 90,4).

In more general terms, he teaches that **listening to God** is a condition for prayer. We have an example of this in MD 62 where he comments on a passage from St Luke’s Gospel: “My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves” (Lk 19,46). He says: “As soon as you lose the spirit of prayer and a love for this holy exercise, God will [...] consider you rather as one unworthy of your employment, which is really his own work” (MD 62,1). “Do you sometimes reflect on the great happiness you enjoy in having the Holy Ghost dwelling in you, as in a temple, and while abiding therein offering up prayers for you? Abandon yourself entirely to the influence of this Holy Spirit that he may ask of the Eternal Father all the graces that you need” (MD 62,2).

When prayer becomes profound to this extent, it transcends all the normal distinctions between praise and petition, as Our Lord says: “Your Father knows what you need” (Mt 6,8). It becomes an interior attitude of one’s whole being, the soul breathing. What De La Salle says about spiritual deafness is apposite: “We learn to speak to God only by listening to his voice, for the art of conversing with him can be taught only by God himself. He has his own language, and

he talks solely to his friends and confidants" (MD 64,2).

3.8. The social context of prayer

In his catechisms and works of piety, De La Salle teaches how to pray in the family or school context and, of course, when taking part in the liturgies of the Church. For the Brothers and novices, he includes a "method of mental prayer" as a way of teaching them true meditation.

3.8.1. IN THE FAMILY OR SCHOOL CONTEXT

"Vocal prayer is good to the extent that it is accompanied by prayer of the heart. [...] Vocal prayers can be said in public or in private" (CL 20,471f = DA 405,1,8).

First of all, it is important to dispose oneself interiorly for prayer by external attitudes indicating a wish to pray. Taking holy water (CL 22,32f = DC 20,3), "kneeling down, stretching out the arms, lowering the eyes, being recollected interiorly and exteriorly" (CL 24,6 = CE 1,2,8) are means he recommends as being excellent.

An effort has to be made to remove distractions, prayer often being a struggle (CL 20,426 = DA 402,1,6). He makes a distinction between voluntary or culpable distractions and those that are involuntary, which impose an effort on the believer and can become a source of merit (CL 20,425 = DA 402,1,4f).

The prescribed vocal prayers, with which De La Salle deals at some length, are the traditional formulas of the Church: the sign of the cross, the creed, the *I Confess* and especially the *Our Father*, "model for all other prayers" (CL 20,444 = DA 403,1,4).

These prayers were known by heart by everybody. For those who learned to read, there were other forms of prayer possible, as Blain recalls: "When we begin by teaching children to read French, they at least know how to read it well by the time they leave school. Since they read it well, they can instruct themselves in Christian doctrine; they can learn it from printed catechisms; they can sanctify Sundays and feasts by reading good books and by well-composed prayers in French" (CL 7,375; cf. article *Reading in French* by J.L. Schneider in the present volume).

3.8.2. AT DAILY MASS

Much of what De La Salle had to say on this topic can be found in his *Instructions and Prayers for Holy Mass, Confession and Communion*. This work was first published in 1698 and, if we are to believe the Royal Censor, consisted of three separate texts, one on the Mass, one on confession and one on communion.

96 pages are devoted to the Mass. These are divided more or less equally between teachings about the Mass and prayers. In this latter section, De La Salle offers two series of prayers to be recited during Mass: 1. "Prayers during Holy Mass, taken from the ordinary of the Mass". 2. "Other prayers during Holy Mass which are related to all the actions and prayers of the priest during Mass".

Under this last heading, De La Salle suggests prayers which are at the same time personal, reflecting some of his favourite themes, and ecclesial, nourished by liturgical sources.

Some of these prayers are addressed to Jesus Christ. For example, before Mass: "My Saviour Jesus, I shall attend Holy Mass to give you honour and to thank you for all your goodness and especially for dying for me" (CL 17,71 = I 1,8,1). Before the consecration: "O my Saviour Jesus who, by the words of the priest, are going to change the bread into your body and the wine into your blood, change me also completely by your grace, destroy my passions, make me give up my inclinations and ensure I have no other desire but to love you and to carry out your orders" (CL 17,84 = I 1,8,28).

Other prayers, and these are more numerous, are addressed to God the Father. For example, before the *Introit*: "I am confident, O my God, that you have given me back my life by forgiving me my sins. It is with this in mind that I approach your holy altar" (CL 17,74 = I 1,8,5). At the *Offertory*: "Accept, O my God, the offering that I make to you, together with the priest, of the bread which will be changed into the sacred body of Jesus Christ. [...] Accept also the offering I make to you of my body and of my senses" (CL 17,79 = I 1,8,17).

The *Offertory* ends with a prayer addressed to "the most Holy Trinity". There are frequent prayers ad-

dressed to the Father requesting the gift of the Holy Spirit either for the Church as a whole or for oneself (CL 19,83 = I 1,8,25f; CL 19,58 = I 1,7,38). Only one prayer is taken verbatim from the liturgy, the *Our Father*, and this is hardly surprising. As lay people rarely went to communion, De La Salle includes for them a prayer "for spiritual communion when one does not receive communion physically".

These texts met a definite pastoral need. On Sundays and feastdays, Mass was sung, but on the other days it was read, almost completely in a low voice, by a celebrant with his back to the congregation. The result was that many of the faithful recited the rosary. De La Salle put forward an alternative, not only nearer to the spirit of the liturgy, but also in the language the people spoke and couched in simple terms.

We have the comments of the comte de Vauréal, who lived in Paris, near the school in rue St Placide. He expresses his admiration at seeing the Brothers' pupils going to daily Mass, "each one with a small prayer book in his hand, and no one saying a word". It was for schoolchildren like these that the *Instructions and Prayers* was written (quoted by G. RIGAUT in *Histoire générale de l'Institut...*, vol. II, p. 224).

3.9. Mental prayer in order to "unite oneself interiorly" with God.

When the schoolmasters in Rheims began to live a community life, their daily prayers included a time for mental prayer.

We read in the *Memoir on the Habit* (1689) that applicants to the community are taught "mental prayer and other exercises of piety" (CL 11,349 = MH 0,0,7). More details are given in the manuscript entitled *Practice of the Daily Regulations*, which Maurice A. Hermans considered to be "a faithful description of the first practices introduced into the small Rheims community, probably in 1682" (CL 25,4). The text opens with the following words: "One rises always at half past four. [...] At five o'clock, the bell is rung for mental prayer. [...] One then goes to the oratory for prayer. Vocal prayers are said first, followed by the reading of the subject for mental prayer. Mental prayer is then made until six o'clock" (CL 25,95).

Canon De La Salle could not suggest to his followers to pray silently for more than half an hour each

morning without first teaching them how to relate to God in this new way. The method he suggested they adopt was included in the *Collection* printed in 1711, in the chapter entitled "Method of Mental prayer" (CL 18,8 = R 7). Mental prayer according to this method goes through 3 stages and consists of 21 successive acts: stage 1 (recollection) 9 acts; stage 2 (application to the subject of mental prayer) 9 acts; stage 3 (final thanksgiving) 3 acts.

De La Salle explained this method in greater detail in his *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer*, in which he also tried to give a more personalised formation to the novices and the Brothers. In 1989, a work was published by Miguel Campos and Michel Sauvage (CL 50) on this whole subject. Space forbids anything more than a brief reference to some of their observations :

1. The insistence on beginning mental prayer by "putting oneself into the presence of God" (CL 14,4 = EM 1,9), and on remaining aware of it for as long as possible.
2. The eminently affective character of Lasallian mental prayer. In fact the first two stages, which are symmetrical, have themselves a three-stage structure, which we can outline as follows : 1. Approaching God (faith, adoration, gratitude). 2. Seeing oneself in the light of God (humility, confusion, contrition, applying the mystery to oneself). 3. Uniting oneself to God (resolving to live in Christ, in the sight of God, according to the spirit of the mystery, virtue or maxim which has been the subject of mental prayer), and asking God for the grace to do so.
3. The link between mental prayer and asceticism, seen in numerous texts. For example: "The more a soul attaches itself to God, the more it detaches itself from occupation with creatures and, consequently, from the attachment and affection it had for them" (CL 14,5 = EM 1,11). For De La Salle there is a close and necessary link between mental prayer and the ascetic life, whereas the method is only a help, which should be given only relative importance.
4. The *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* includes an invitation to go beyond the stage of using methods, and encourages the use of interior liberty and leaving oneself open to the movement of the Spirit of God. See the article *Simple Attention* by Joseph F. SCHMIDT in *Lasallian Themes 2*.

4. THE INTEREST OF DE LA SALLE'S TEACHING ON PRAYER FOR OUR DAYS

4.1. Prayer nourished by Scripture

Scripture is one of the essential points of reference in Lasallian prayer. Basing himself mainly on the New Testament, the Founder affirms the liberating power of prayer, its medicinal properties for healing the soul, and its power to obtain God's forgiveness and to strengthen a person in adversity (CL 20,417f = DA 401,3).

De La Salle finds inspiration in many scriptural texts for his teaching about what we should ask for in prayer, for whom we should pray, when we should pray, the texts of prayer we can use, the conditions which make prayer efficacious and the external attitudes which should accompany prayer (MD 39; CL 20,405f = DA 401,1,1).

In the models of prayer that he proposes, De La Salle uses the example of the spiritual attitudes of the great exponents of prayer in the Bible: Jacob, Moses, the Spouse in the Canticle, John the Baptist, the Gospel centurion, Peter, Martha and Mary... (CL 17,214; 259; 260; 271; 273 = I 3,37,4; 6,14,1; 6,15,1; 6,24,1; 6,25,1).

Wishing the faithful to see God's salvation as something occurring here and now, De La Salle recalls the stories of the Sacred Books so that, as they pray, the graces and the prodigies of Bible days may recur in their lives (CL 17,262; 279 = I 6,16,2; 6,30,2).

Prayer based on the Scriptures was an integral part of Lasallian school life from the very beginning. Every day, the children praised God with the words of psalm 116; they asked for forgiveness by reciting psalm 50, and expressed their trust in God's mercy by saying psalm 129 (CL 18,5; 14; 15 = E 1,7; 3,3; 3,5,1).

4.2. Ministerial prayer for educators

Lasallian prayer is real life prayer: it is situational, that is, rooted in the life of the ministry and in the work of the teacher. In the Brother's prayer, work in school is the topic of his dialogue with God.

He admires the goodness of God who gives man the means of achieving knowledge of the true good, and who chooses him to proclaim Jesus Christ and to make him known (MR 197,1; MF 87,2). He adores

the paternal providence of the Father who enables him to have the right dispositions to fulfil his ministry well (MF 131,1). He contemplates Christ the Good Shepherd in order to imitate him in his own work of salvation (MR 196,1). Like De La Salle, he consults the Lord to know in concrete terms what his vocation is (MF 99,2). In the presence of God, he examines his fidelity to the commitments of his ministry, so that by evaluating what he has done, he can improve his educational work (MR 205; 204,1). In the presence of God also, he resolves to improve what he has neglected in his work and to purify his intentions in his teaching of the truths of salvation (MR 206,1; MF 108,2).

He thanks God for calling him to a holy and sanctifying state and employment, for making use of him to bring the benefits of education to poor children, for making him participate in the ministry of the Apostles and Pastors of the Church, and for rewarding him even in this life for this saving work (MF 99,1; 113,1; MR 194,1; 199,3; 207,2 & 3).

He consecrates himself to him to procure his glory, associating himself with his Brothers to conduct schools for the service of the poor (CL 2,42 = EP 2), and so contribute to the accomplishment of God's plan of salvation (MR 197,1). With this aim in view, he frequently surrenders himself to the Spirit of God (MD 62,2; MR 195,2; 204,1 & 2) and prays to him for himself and for his pupils (MR 195,3; 196,1; 197,3; 199,1; 204,2; MD 37,3; 56,3; MF 122,1 & 2; 157,2; 172,3; 187,2).

In the *Duties of a Christian*, the treatise on prayer ends as follows: "The principal effect that these prayers should produce in us" — the acts of faith, hope, praise, humility, resignation, etc — "is to make us practise the maxims of the Holy Gospel" (CL 20,494 = DA 405,5,15). For De La Salle, our lives indicate what our prayer is like, demonstrate if we really pray. In other words, prayer must permeate the life of a person, and life must bear witness to the holiness of the person who prays. The faith, hope and love we speak about in prayer must be demonstrated concretely in our lives.

And so, the contemplation of the wounds of Jesus Christ and the feelings that we have as a result of this

contemplation must produce in us the total renunciation of sin (MD 28,2). We adore Providence by falling in with its plans (MF 131,1). "Admire the good-

ness of God [...] in procuring for man the knowledge of the true good [...] and offer yourself to him to help the children entrusted to you to acquire it" (MR 197,1).

Complementary themes

Celebrating
Consecration
Devotion to St Joseph

Exercises
Love - Charity
Marian devotion

Piety
Simple attention
(contemplation)

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