

## YOU SEEK ME AT DAWN

CIL Staff - Rome

**"In the depths of the soul, in the most intimate part of the soul".** (EM 1,3)

We distance ourselves from the external and everyday world in order to penetrate to the very heart of our lives.

**"They will be exact in making mental prayer every day".** RC 4,1.

The beginning of the *Explanation of Mental Prayer* makes a clear distinction between the times for prayer and the times for ordinary occupations.

The Rule shows clearly, and our own spiritual experience corroborates this, that, in order to persevere in having this meeting with God, we need certain pre-arranged periods of time. We know well enough that relying on pure spontaneity in this matter leads fairly quickly to neglect.

On the other hand, we must bear in mind that prayer, more than anything else in our lives, is a gift of God. It is a gift that cannot be bound by our regulations. The Holy Spirit cannot be restricted by our arrangements, however venerable and regular they may be.

In which case, we have to say that regularity too is a gift of God. It is achieved only by means of asceticism. We have to ask God for the strength to practise this asceticism. Our own good will is not sufficient. There is always the danger that we will become so proud of our prayer that we will think that it comes from us.

The kind of asceticism that is asked of us today is to be faithful to a fixed time, shared with others, during which we can experience daily in our mental prayer the extraordinary encounter of our life with the Living One.

This is, of course, a challenge to our lifestyle and, in practice, to the hierarchy of our values and commitments. This too is something confirmed by our own experience. It forces us to re-examine constantly our daily arrangements, so that we can have this encounter with the Lord day after day.

**"I heard your voice in the depths of my heart"** (I3,8,1).

For John Baptist de La Salle, the place where prayer takes place is in the depths of the soul, the depths of the heart, or in the depths of oneself, where one experiences the full depth of one's existence, and which is the very source from which our "I" springs. It is the place where we meet ourselves, where we alone can be, where only God's Holy Spirit can join us.

That is, this is where we experience his burning love, the fire and the breath of Life springing from the heart of God and burning in God.

It is there that we speak with God. It is there that God speaks to us.

Returning to the depths of one's heart does not mean creating an idealised personality for oneself. It means setting out to discover oneself in spirit and in truth. It means seeking to rediscover the fundamental meaning of one's life, its essential focal point, and to seek this as someone on a journey, sometimes tired, sometimes wounded and wounding, sometimes hurt and lost. It means seeking the truth about oneself, about one's relations with others, about one's commitments and responsibilities, about one's desires and dreams. It means doing this in the full awareness of the life one lives.

**"An interior activity, that is to say, an application of the soul to God".** (EM 1,1).

For John Baptist de La Salle, to return to the depths of one's own being is to meet God. The relation with God constitutes the person. The truth of what I am implies a life-giving relation with God.

**This God is not an idea**

This God who is present in me is someone. He is at work in the world, in young people, in my Brothers. His salvation History, his history of love for mankind, continues today as before. Sacred History has not

come to an end. We have here a Living God who has left traces of himself in my life today.

**The God I speak to in prayer is the same God I meet in my fellow human beings.**

In my prayer I speak to him of these meetings, and these meetings are nourished by my meeting with him.

**We must never forget that the Mystery of the Incarnation is the culmination of Christian Revelation.**

We go to God only through the human nature of Jesus Christ. And the corollary of this is that we go to God only through our own human nature. It is on our earth and in our world that we live and follow the path to God.

With an insistence that is no doubt too peremptory, and with a somewhat worrying disdain for creatures and for God's creation, the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* stresses the fact that God is infinitely superior to all created things. We do not invent the God we adore. This God is not our creation, not the creation of our mind, nor of our heart.

This Wholly Other speaks to us through the lives of young people, cries out with the poor, suffers with those who suffer. He is present in the struggle for justice and freedom.

John Baptist de La Salle's spiritual and evangelical life shows that the God of the *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* is the same God that he meets in the children from the suburbs of Paris and in his struggles to keep his special and fragile community in existence. The God in the Blessed Sacrament is the same God he meets in the children and young people God entrusts to him.

In any case, for De La Salle and his Brothers, God's dwelling is always the same; it is the same Temple, the same Presence: "*since they are the living images of Jesus Christ our Divine Master*" (MF 80,3,2 St Nicholas) "*You should learn to recognise Jesus beneath the rags of the poor children whom you have to teach. Adore him in their person*" (Mf 96,3,2 Epiphany).

Becoming recollected interiorly, therefore, does not consist so much in seeking ideas, creating silence by withdrawing from life, rejecting others as an intrusion. Becoming recollected interiorly means finding oneself, in the depths of one's heart, thirsting for God, impatient to see his face, drawn towards him by a profound longing.

**Praying means, first of all, accepting that one is searching for God and that one is being sought by God.**

Praying means taking time over this search in order to stimulate the longing that God has put in us; to experience it, to try to quench one's thirst for this love; to move forward, to go deeper into the knowledge and love of God; to rejoice in the meeting, to rejoice that one loves and is loved.

**"You will know the sacred Scriptures better by meditating on them than by learning them by heart"** (MF 170,2,2. St Jerome).

We meet God in his Word. This Word does not replace the event, but it enables us to hear it and experience it as a sign of the presence and action of the living God. The meeting with God which I recall in prayer is inserted by the Word of God into the overall History of Salvation, the history of a meeting, the account of a response.

**The Word of God for me today**

It is the place of the meeting which begins over and over again and which is always new. It is the account of an exodus: the Exodus of the People of God, the Exodus of God, in Jesus Christ, to be among mankind. It is the Exodus of my own life too. It is a series of love stories: the love story of my meetings with God, of my refusals, of my new beginnings. I can never cease trying to decipher my vocation, the signs along the way, the traces of God on my path.

**The Word of God gives meaning to my Hope in my everyday life**

By giving my meetings a context, the Word of God gives my life story a context also. By giving it a place in the History of Salvation, it constantly gives birth to new Hope, because this History of Salvation is a history of Liberation. On that Easter morning, the ultimate meaning became clear. All comes to an end in the heart of the Lord of the Universe.

**The Word of God cannot be dissociated from the One who is the Word of the Father for us, Jesus the Christ.**

It cannot be dissociated from his life, from his Mystery, from his example, his virtues, his behaviour and his words. As a result, my life also is in relation with this Person. This does not mean simply that it conforms to principles, ideas, or even to a Rule. It means that I walk side by side with the One who loves me and whom I love; the One who chose and called me; the One who consecrates and sends me.

**"Go over frequently in your mind and endeavour to imprint upon your heart what you have savoured most in what you have read"** (R 14,7,3).

Reading the Bible is not an end in itself, but a means which leads us to mental prayer, to habitual intimacy with God.

In this way, spiritual life becomes a dialogue. The spiritual life which unites a person to God will become more authentic in the degree that the relationship between God and the person becomes more personal.

*"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 to whom he grants the happiness of often speaking with him" (MD 64,2,1).*

I have to make my life and my actions resound with the Word of God by a reassessment of them in the light of the Holy Scriptures. This reassessment could lead to an enlightenment of the mind experienced with the community.

When the radical nature of the Word of God is at work in my life, it is not a human operation: it is a gift of God and the power of his Spirit.

*"The truths that the Holy Spirit teaches those who receive him are the maxims of the Gospel. These he makes us understand and relish, and take as the guiding principle of our life and actions. It is the Holy Spirit alone who can make us understand them and who can lead us efficaciously to practise them, for they are above the human intellect" (MD 44,2,1).*

### **Why do you hide your face? Why do you sleep?**

John Baptist de La Salle experienced the absence and the silence of God in his own life. We need to make a distinction between what he writes on this topic and his own experiences. In fact, one can conclude that it is not so much a trial imposed by God, as something that occurs in our lives, in our human and fraternal relations, in a context of mutual choices and refusals.

### **The quality of our relations with others has repercussions on our relationship with God.**

The absence, the silence and abandonment by God can be understood and accepted only in this human context.

For us, men and women of the last years of the 20th century, there is a new element in all this. God may seem to be absent from our own personal world, but he seems absent above all from the world at large. In the face of the massive forces of destruction and death at work in the world, God remains silent. Everything seems to be overwhelmed by a negation of meaning.

### **One way forward could be to reconsider and reinterpret - but not in the same way as John Baptist de La Salle - the Book of Job, the defeat and exile psalms, and the Passion of Our Lord.**

The solution is to leave the matter in the hands of God, and in the final analysis, to abandon oneself to him and to trust him. And in doing so, we accept our total solidarity with our fellow human beings, as we face the abyss which constantly opens up before us in this never-ending night.

### **Now as before, the only way forward is through the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection.**

This way moves from a death that is feared and refused to a death that is accepted in faith, in order to

be born to a new life, which will not be more beautiful or easy. In this way, however, we will rediscover meaning and coherence because we entrust them once and for all to God.

**One response that is suggested by De La Salle is personal commitment, even at the cost of one's life,** in order to restore meaning, or begin to come close to it, or to draw it closer, where one can.

*"For this had to be the kind of ardent zeal you had for the salvation of those you teach, when you were led to sacrifice yourself and to spend your whole life to give these children a Christian education and to procure for them the life of grace in this world and eternal life in the next" (MR 201,3,2).*

**Another response is his extraordinary confidence that the children of the artisans and the poor can grow and become free:**

In fact, this is the central idea of the *Conduct of Schools*.

"In order to achieve this, they have to be shown how important it is for an artisan to be able to read and write for, even if he is not very intelligent, if he can read and write, he is capable of doing anything" (CE 16,2,21).

There are also so many *Meditations* that say the same thing:

*"St Margaret is a striking example of what you should do with regard to the children whom God has confided to your care. Here you see a queen making it her chief concern to do that which constitutes the essential object of your state. Let it be an honour for you to do the same, and look upon those whom God has entrusted to you as the children of God himself. Take much more care over their education and instruction than if they were the sons of a king" (MF 133,2,2 St Margaret, Queen of Scotland).*

**He has such great confidence in these poor and despised teachers who become Brothers and his Brothers, and whose ministry is that of the Apostles.**

*"It is your privilege to share in the Apostolic mission by giving religious instruction every day to the boys entrusted to you, and by explaining the truths of the Gospel to them" (MF 159,2,2. St Barthelemy).*

### **He believes that the work of God's Salvation**

goes on and is accomplished even in the absolute darkness of the night, even when all that is felt is Absence.

This is a faith that is obstinate in its search for God, in its analysis of the Scriptures, in its listening to the Word of Life.

It is a humble fidelity to the daily meeting, a meeting that has been prepared, that is experienced and loved.