

**"ADMIRE THIS GOODNESS
OF GOD"
(MR 197,1,2)**

CIL Staff – Rome

In the final analysis, according to John Baptist de La Salle, this is what mental prayer consists in.

The basic attitude: faith

According to John Baptist de La Salle, the most important attitude of the heart is faith.

– **Faith is the recognition by a person of the holiness of God's name.** God is love and this love is forever urging him on.

– **Faith is the conversion of the person** who becomes aware again of his poverty and of his sins. He gives up considering himself as the centre of his own attention, in order to find his rest in God. It is at that point that he can turn to the Father and have the confidence to plead with him.

– **Faith is when a person follows Jesus Christ**, the way of life and the fulfilment of the Covenant, and finds meaning and confidence again in him.

The Brother who prays, praises and beseeches God in Jesus Christ. He speaks to God who is at work through his Holy Spirit, and who associates the Brother in the furthering of his plan. He is present at the heart of his activities and in his prayer.

His prayer is that of a poor person who recognises his wrongs and his sins, and who hopes and pleads. He is a poor person, called to work for God. He comes before him bearing his responsibility for those to whom he has been sent, because it is God who has entrusted them to him.

His prayer is that of a minister of Jesus Christ and of his Church. He represents Christ for young people. He presents their needs to God.

"It is your duty to go up to God every day by mental prayer to learn from him all that you must teach your children, and then come down to them by accommodating yourself to their level in order to teach them what God has communicated to you for them - as much in your mental prayer as in the holy scriptures which furnish you with the truths of religion and the practical maxims of the holy gospel" (MR 198,1,2).

For them, with Christ and with them, he stands before the throne of the Almighty.

For John Baptist de La Salle, the first part of mental prayer, making oneself ready, gives unity to the person, centring him on God and his Word, which are constantly present in the heart of a person and at the centre of life itself. It is not a question therefore of withdrawing into oneself or escaping from reality. On the contrary, it consists in allowing oneself to be led by the Word of God to the very depths of one's soul, where the dialogue between the I and the You takes place. A person who prays enters forever into the mysterious relationship of the Father and of the Son, united by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A person reaches God only by passing through the human nature of Christ.

The three stages of Lasallian mental prayer come from Jesus Christ, unite one to him, and lead one in him and with him.

– **Returning to the source of Christian Revelation:** by making mental prayer we unite ourselves intimately with Jesus Christ Our Lord.

– **Recognising that this mystery of Jesus Christ is being accomplished now in our lives** for the salvation of mankind. It is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ who lives in me.

– **Celebrating this mystery which has been accomplished in Christ and which continues to be accomplished in our everyday lives.** Contemplating in the mystery of Jesus Christ how great God's love is for us.

The *Explanation of the Method of Mental Prayer* invites us to contemplate the person of Jesus Christ:

In what he **IS**: the mysteries and his Mystery.

JESUS - LIFE

In what he **DOES**: his actions, his virtues.

JESUS - WAY

In what he **SAYS**: his words, his maxims.

JESUS - TRUTH

Just as there are several Gospels to reveal the same Mystery of Salvation, so there are different ways of approaching the person of Jesus Christ.

The mysteries of Our Lord

John Baptist de La Salle gives the name of "mysteries" to the principal actions performed by the Son of God made man for our salvation - his Incarnation,

his Nativity, his Circumcision, his Death and his Passion (EM 7,177). We are asked to see the Gospel first of all through a deep understanding of the life of the Lord.

The fundamental mystery of Jesus Christ is that he is the Son of God made man for our salvation.

To make mental prayer on a mystery of Jesus Christ is to study his humanity. According to John Baptist de La Salle, in mental prayer, we must constantly return, in one way or another, to the events of the human life of Jesus.

This way of looking at the life of Jesus leads us back to the realism of the Incarnation. We have to realise that it is only by faith that we can go beyond appearances and look upon events with a constantly renewed understanding.

The mystery is contemplated in mental prayer and is proclaimed by the ministry

The spirit of the mystery, to which De La Salle frequently refers, is at the same time the effect it has on our present life, and the intention Jesus Christ had when he accomplished it (EM 7,179 and 180). We enter into the mystery more by taking part in it, than by imitating Jesus accomplishing it.

The contemplation of the Mystery of Christ by the Brother involves not only the assiduous reading of the Gospel, but also the attention given to what goes on in life around him, and in taking seriously what God tells him by word and signs in the events of his life.

Turning to the mystery of Christ is not a form of escapism: it is rather a way of being present and sensitive at the very heart of the lives of people, young people and of one's own.

In mental prayer, it is the total mystery of Christ which is celebrated. It is a celebration in Christ and of Christ. It is a celebration of his earthly life, of his presence in the here and now, and in the life of the Brothers and in that of young people.

Making mental prayer in order to change one's life

The very process involved in Lasallian mental prayer leads the person praying to examine directly the way in which he lives in the light of the demands made on him by the mystery of Jesus Christ. De La Salle is

opposed to any form of mental prayer that is divorced from life.

There are two major ideas in his teaching:

The role attributed to the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian. Being faithful to the Spirit implies at the same time obligation and freedom; concrete duties and the gift of the unexpected; deepening of self awareness and openness to the needs of the Church, the world and young people; personal growth and disinterestedness for the sake of the mission; the acceptance of a gift and the use of one's talents...

The importance given to events, new situations, to God's action in history, and to the fact that this period of history, however special it may be, is still part of Salvation History.

What is important is not to live according to intangible principles that are fixed for all times; or to seek to keep resolutions and then feel guilty when we fail to do so. If we behave like this, it shows that we want to arrive at sanctity by the strength of our own will; that we want to dictate to God how he should behave towards us; and that we are concerned about how closely we resemble the model we have created for ourselves.

If God acts through reality, priority has to be given to life around ourselves, to discernment, to beginning over again, to seeing situations in the light of the gospel, and not to theories imposed from the outside. It means listening and accepting the Word which springs from the very heart of present reality.

This calls for a **deeply spiritual attitude** which makes us **recognise God when he comes, and live out the response that he elicits.**

We have to be creative in our daily lives; we have to reveal the meaning of what our eyes and our hearts see; we have to abandon ourselves to the Spirit, and offer ourselves to God, for his service, for young people and for those to whom we have been sent.

We accomplish God's will in the concrete circumstances of our lives. We procure his glory also, because, in this way, we make him loved, praised, adored and served.