

ACCEPTING THE GIFT OF GOD

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John Baptist de La Salle has left us a method of mental prayer.

The method does not consist primarily in going through the acts, but **in accepting the gift of God, the gift of his presence, of his word, of the life of the Spirit.**

The Method of Mental Prayer, with all its details, can and ought to be simply a guide, a succession of signposts, but its essence does not lie there. **What it does essentially is to invite us to meet the One who has gone before us to Galilee and who waits for us there so as to lead us into the very heart of our ministry.**

At the end of each section, in which the various acts have been explained in detail, De La Salle encourages us to interiorise them so as to be able to do without them and to be open to the Spirit. This will enable us to live our own life in unity with God and ourselves. This unity is forever threatened and has to be constantly renewed.

A simple interior view of lively and respectful faith

"which leads the mind and heart to adopt an attitude of silent adoration, of love, admiration, gratitude and thanksgiving, of self-abasement, as well as a heartfelt desire to unite oneself to Jesus Christ and to share in his spirit and graces" (EM 8,210).

The prayer of the heart

One can pray to God from the heart in a number of different ways, but particularly in five ways:

"One can do so by silence, remaining simply in the presence of God in an attitude of respect and adoration, without saying anything, without asking God for anything" (DA 405,1,11).

"This consists simply in remaining in the presence of God in an attitude of respect and adoration, revealing our problems to him, without asking him to free us from them. This is how beggars often behave: they restrict themselves to showing their sores and their

poverty to passers-by, without asking for anything, believing that they can move them to compassion in this way" (DB 4,4,3).

"One can also pray with one's thoughts without using words" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in doing one's duty to God, revealing one's needs to him, by means of the thoughts in one's mind, without using any words" (DB 4,4,4).

"One can pray also by affection, asking God for something with the affection one has in one's heart" (DA 405 1,12).

"This consists in telling God, more by the feelings in one's heart than by the thoughts in one's mind, of the love one has for him, and of the desire one has to obtain the grace one is asking him for" (DB 4,4,4).

"One prays by actions when one performs good ones with the aim of doing one's duty to God, or to obtain some grace from him" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in doing good actions for the love of God, with the intention of doing one's duty, or in order to obtain some grace from him" (DB 4,4,5).

"But one of the best ways of praying to God from the heart is to pray by suffering. This is done by bearing the sufferings that God sends us patiently and in his honour, or in order to obtain some spiritual or temporal benefit" (DA 405,1,12).

"This consists in bearing with Christian patience all the sufferings and afflictions it pleases God to send us in this life, with the intention of doing one's duty to him, or to obtain some grace" (DB 4,4,5).

All this comes from the *Duties of a Christian*, a catechism composed by De La Salle for the Christian Schools and, in particular, for the pupils.

To pray as a Lasallian

From behind all the details of De La Salle's Method of Mental Prayer there emerge five essential and still relevant points.

Christ's human nature is the only way through which Christians can encounter and know the God of Salvation.

This prayer is centred wholly on Jesus Christ, his life, his actions, his behaviour, his virtues and his words. One of the most rewarding aspects of De La Salle's way of praying is that it is **completely Christological**.

This means that it enters into the mystery of Jesus Christ, as he is today, in order to know the Father. Only the Holy Spirit can enable us to achieve this. That is why we can say that **Lasallian prayer is Trinitarian and therefore deeply theological**.

"In your state you need the plenitude of God's Holy Spirit, since you should live therein and be conducted solely by the spirit and the light of faith. Only the Holy Spirit can give you these dispositions" (MD 32,2,2).

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to grasp the mystery of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, and to live it in everyday life. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to choose the right actions and attitudes in response to God's signs. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us understand the Father's Plan of Salvation and to write this History of Salvation in our lives and in the hearts of children.

It is a prayer formed by the Word of God, because it is this Word which reveals Jesus Christ, and because these words of God are the words of Christian prayer.

This is shown by the many explanations and examples given by De La Salle in his Method.

Of course, we no longer read and understand the Scriptures in the way in which he did. We do so in the light of all the biblical studies which were not available in De La Salle's day.

What is important, is that De La Salle, using whatever means were available to him, should have chosen to make use of the Word of God. It is up to us to do likewise, using whatever means are available to us at the present time.

Seeing everyday life, people and situations with the eyes of faith is fundamental. Lasallian prayer begins with an act of awareness that where we are going, God has already preceded us and is present there.

The two most important parts of Lasallian mental prayer begin with an act of faith. In the chapter of the Rule on the spirit of the Institute, De La Salle stresses the connection between the spirit of faith and the Word of God. The connection is almost physical.

Our humanity today is where our salvation takes place. It offers the only way there is of going to God.

Our prayer is always that of someone who is immersed in the age in which he lives.

Each day, we must take the time to recognise where God has passed through our lives, and discern the calls of the Spirit in the fabric of life around us.

We must take the time to give thanks for manifestations of life, and for the victories of the forces of life over the forces of darkness.

We must take the time to pray for the people with whom life has involved us, and whose needs we see or feel.

We must take the time to evangelise life, to refocus our attention on our goal, the Kingdom of God; to find renewed life through the Spirit, the Spirit of the Beatitudes through which we communicate with the poor Christ who is humble and gentle of heart, the servant of justice and the bringer of mercy.