

The Meditations for Rogation Days
Rogation Tuesday
MD 38
(1/2)

Brother Joseph Le Bars

On the love of prayer

1st point

"The more strongly to induce us to pray, Our Lord gives us the most positive assurance that «every gift you ask for in your prayer will be granted»".

This first sentence is quite surprising. It contains two strong terms "strongly" and "positive". The first occurs 33 times in the Lasallian Vocabulary. According to Furetière's dictionary (1701) it means "in a firm and constant manner". The second term occurs only 3 times in its adverbial form. According to the same dictionary, "positively" means "in a sure and effective manner"; something that is "constant, certain and not imaginary"; "Promises which are not simply words, but genuine and positive".

[In the French text] the adverbs "strongly" and "positively" modify the verb "induce" (in French "engager") which the dictionaries of 1701 and 1721 define as "obliging, inducing to do something". Trévoux's dictionary (1771) gives "synonym of oblige, but expressed more delicately. It means to induce a person to do something by means of promises or a pleasant attitude generally, without imposing it as a duty or an obligation". This would seem to be the sense of the verb in the present context, although, it should be noted it is modified by the adverb "strongly".

De La Salle speaks with great assurance. This must be quite intentional, inspired by his deep convictions, further reflected later by his use of the adverbs "effectivement" ("really") and "infailliblement" ("unfailingly", missing in the English text).

"Our Lord gives us the most positive assurance that every gift you ask for in prayer will be granted".

For De La Salle, there is absolutely no doubt. These are the words of Jesus Christ who, as he says later, is "truth itself" (MD 38.2.1). He quotes the words used by

Our Lord: "Every gift you ask for in prayer will be granted".

And he comments: "Prayer has this effect of itself, and we have God's word as our guarantee".

This sentence may appear a little surprising and is, in fact, somewhat puzzling. De La Salle certainly seems to presume that requests will produce an effect. And yet this is the correct interpretation of "Ask and you shall receive", supported as it is by "Seek and you shall find" and "Knock and it shall be opened to you". There is no distinction of persons. No conditions are imposed. De La Salle deduces the efficacy of prayer from God's promise, and he goes on to say: "Hence the more we ask the more we shall receive, for it is God's greatest pleasure to bestow gifts on men".

We find the same idea in the Duties of a Christian (DA 402.1.18): "...God is more disposed to give us what we ask for than we are to pray. Is this not in fact what he says in the Holy Gospel: «Ask and you shall receive»".

St Mark says the same thing (11, 24) in a passage echoing what Matthew reports (21, 22): "Every gift you ask for in your prayer will be granted".

It is interesting to note [in the French text] the use of the word "affection" [translated as "love" in the English text]. It appears in the Duties, in the title to Meditation 38, but not in the body of the meditation. One could not be blamed for thinking that this word is not perhaps altogether appropriate, and that "efficacy" might be better. On the other hand, the use of "induce" at the beginning and "urge" in the reference to St Augustine would seem to call for a response in terms of love, and so the use "affection" would seem to be justified.

This first point is composed almost entirely of quotations from St Augustine (11 out of 18 lines). The translation made or used by De La Salle is fairly close to the one we use here of Sermon 105, dated 1700 (Approval in Paris February 17th 1694, Privilege December 4th 1692).

"St Augustine says that if God were not disposed to grant us what we ask, and if he did not really will to do so, he would not urge us so strongly to petition him. "for if he had no desire to give us, he would not urge us, as he does, to ask him.

"You ought to be ashamed, therefore, at your sluggishness and negligence in prayer, seeing that God has a greater wish to bestow his favours upon you than you have to receive them. His compassion for your miseries is greater than the anxiety you have to be delivered from them. Bestir yourself, then, and believe him who urges you so insistently. Strive to be worthy of his promises, and take pleasure in appealing to him frequently".

"«Who», asks St Augustine, «has ever turned to God with confidence and been left unheard?»"

The Sermon is "on the words in the Gospel of St Luke 11, 5-13: Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night, etc".

Chapter 1, to which the Founder refers to particularly in this point, has the title: "With how many entreaties and with how many different words, Jesus Christ urges us to pray".

"People should blush, therefore, at their negligence and laziness, when they see that Jesus Christ has a greater wish to give, than we have to receive, and that he has a greater desire to deliver us from our miseries than we have to be rid of them.

"Let us awake, then, my brothers! Let us allow ourselves to be touched by the exhortations of Jesus Christ. Let us give him the obedience that he asks of us by his promises".

After seeing De La Salle use [in the French text] "on" ("one") three times in the first sentence of this point, we are not surprised to find "we" used at the beginning of the quotation from St Augustine.

We should note, and this is quite important, that "we" is used throughout the text of St Augustine we are quoting here, while in De La Salle's text, with the exception of the first sentence, "you" is used throughout. The Latin text which corresponds to this section begins with the words: "Erubescat humana pigritia", but then continues with "plus vult ille dare quam nos accipere...". Why did the Founder not keep "we" which he uses in DA 402.1.18: "... God is more disposed to give us what we ask for than we are to pray".

On a first reading, we might be tempted to think that only the first sentence of the passage is from St Augustine and that the rest is an exhortation from De La Salle as a commentary on the sentence. We are given the impression that everything from "You ought to be ashamed" to "in appealing to him frequently" is the usual exhortation with which a point ends. This impression is strengthened by the final sentence: "Who, asks St Augustine..." in which De La Salle has recourse to St Augustine again, as if the two preceding sentences were not from him also. As a matter of fact, that is the way the text is set out in the 1982 edition and in MD 38.1.2, where "You ought to be ashamed..." starts a new paragraph.

The last sentence, attributed in an explicit way to St Augustine, does not seem to occur in the same sermon.

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