

Meditation 39
Vigil of the Ascension
of Our Lord Jesus Christ
On what we are to ask of God in prayer

Brother Joseph Le Bars

Title

In the title of this meditation the pronoun "on" ("one") is used. This pronoun is normally used when what is said has general application. In the text that follows, one would expect to see used either "one", "men" or even possibly "we". In the present meditation, however, the pronoun "one" is found once in the title and once in point 3. The pronoun "we" is used twice in the first sentence of the first point, and "you" is used 26 times in the whole meditation.

The use of "one" in the title is not suitable and probably indicates that the title was not chosen by the writer of the meditation. He would probably have chosen something like "What we should ask God" as a title, a formulation that appears in the first sentence of point 1 [in the French text].

1st point

*"Jesus Christ shows us
in today's Gospel,
and in the rest of the same chapter,
where he prays to his Father
for his Apostles,
what should be the object of our prayers".*

"Shows us": As often is the case, the Founder shows that the lesson to be drawn from the Gospel applies to everybody.

"in today's Gospel": This phrase occurs quite frequently at the beginning of meditations.

On the other hand, this is the only instance where we meet the expression: "and in the rest of the same chapter". De La Salle makes it clear he is not limiting himself to the day's Gospel which, in any case, does not accompany the meditation since the day is not a Sunday.

"what should be the object of our prayers": the use of "our" is not restrictive, and it is natural to include a mention of those who will hear or read the meditation. What was said earlier about the title is relevant here.

*"He does not ask for worldly things or temporal blessings,
because he did not come on this earth
to procure this kind of benefit to man".*

This is an important statement and echoes what the Founder says in various ways in many other meditations.

*"But acknowledging that
it was the Eternal Father who had given him his disciples,
that they therefore belonged to him, (1)
and were destined
to preach the Gospel (2)
and to labour for the salvation of souls..."*

The importance of the acknowledgment of the dependence of Jesus on his Father: this dependence was often referred to by Jesus in the Gospel, and the Founder recalls its significance for himself and for his Brothers.

*"He asks the Father only for
what may contribute towards this end for which they were called"*

The Founder has said this already in MD 22.1.2: "Hence, as Our Lord's chief object in coming on earth was the accomplishment of his Father's will...you ought to have the same end as he had in view in all your actions".

This passage recalls Jesus' constant concern - his "food" - to do the will of his Father. It recalls also his prayer in the Garden of Olives: "Thy will be done, not mine".

And the will of the Father for him was "to preach the Gospel and convert souls, which was the primary object of his coming" (MD 6.2.1).

*"Hence
Our Lord requests chiefly three things,
of which the first is to be freed from sin,
expressed in this manner:
«That thou shouldst keep them clear of what is
evil»". (3)*

De La Salle uses direct speech here. This is unusual for him and this is the only instance of this in this meditation.

Why does he often use reported speech? Perhaps it is because this leaves him more freedom of style and frees him from having to refer to a given translation, enabling him to trust his memory.

*"This is also the first thing which you should ask of God
and continue asking for until you obtain it".*

"Until you obtain it": This is an expression which occurs quite frequently in this form or in a similar one. The Founder is convinced that we can do nothing without God's grace. This means that we have to obtain this grace, and that means asking for it. He was well aware of this from his own experience. His biographers speak of nights spent in prayer in order to obtain such or such a grace.

*"You should have such a horror
for sin
as to refrain even from
what St Paul says
«has a look of evil about it». (4)
But as you cannot secure this advantage
by your own means, you need to implore
God constantly for it".*

This is another way of saying "until you obtain it".

*"You should pray, then,
that there may be nothing in you displeasing in God's
sight,
since you have to instil his holy love
in the hearts of those whom you instruct".*

The Founder's insistence is quite striking: "ask", "implore", "pray", "until you obtain it", "constantly", "insistently" (missing in English text).

*"Do you do so?
Does this form the object
of your prayers?"*

The point ends with these two questions, the first regarding the manner of praying, the second regarding the object of prayer.

2nd point

"The second petition that Christ makes for his Apostles is that the Eternal Father should «keep them holy through the truth». (5)

This means that

he should sanctify them not only with an exterior holiness of the type which he exacted under the Old Law".

What importance should we attach to this reference to the Old Testament: "which he exacted under the Old Law"? There seems to be an allusion here to the words addressed to the Samaritan woman: "true worshippers adore God in spirit and truth".

Perhaps this is also an allusion to "men are satisfied with marks of outward deference..." (MD 47.3.1).

"but that he should purify their hearts and sanctify them by grace and by the communication of the Divine Holiness

which is in Jesus Christ, which they ought to share in order to be able to pass it on to others".

"Jesus adds that

it is for this reason he dedicates himself for their sakes by the death he was to suffer on the cross". (6)

"Since you are supposed to bring about

the sanctification of your pupils, you ought yourself to possess holiness in an uncommon degree, for you have to communicate it to others as much by your good example as by the words of salvation which you address them each day"

The sentence "you have to communicate it to others" is a powerful one. What importance does De La Salle attach to the verb "communicate"?

"You will be greatly aided in acquiring the perfection of your state which God expects of you, by serious application to mental prayer, love of community exercises, and great fidelity in carrying them out.

This should be the subject of your daily prayer, and you should have it so much at heart that you should never cease asking for it till you have been heard".

Once again we find the expression "till you have been heard". The expression "you should have it so much at heart" provides the motive. Our heart should be filled with such a desire and such a need of sanctity and perfection that we never cease praying, that is, praying for the sanctification of those who are entrusted to our care.

3rd point

"The third petition that Jesus makes to the Eternal Father

for his Apostles in the prayer recorded in the Gospel of today is that they should be closely united among themselves. This union should be so close and firm as to resemble that which exists between the three Divine Persons, (7) not exactly, however, for these are united in essence"

We see here the precision of a theologian, "not exactly, however". In several places, the Founder speaks of the knowledge of the Trinity. At the end of MD 37.2, he quotes from St Augustine: "By the three loaves that you should ask for, says the same Father, you are to understand the knowledge of the three Divine Persons". The Founder gives no commentary on this, nor on the same mystery in MD 46 for the feast of the Holy Trinity. Perhaps he thinks he has spoken enough about the Trinity in the Duties (DA 102.0.6; 0.7 and 0.8.

"but by participation. And this union of heart and mind which Jesus desires to see among his Apostles is to produce the same effect as the essential union

between the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, that is to say, they are all to share the same sentiments, to have the same will, the same affections, the same rules and the same practices. (8)

"This is what St Paul recommends to the faithful in his Epistles, and this likewise is what was remarked in the Apostles and the first disciples of Our Lord, as St Luke records in the Acts, saying: «there was one heart and soul in all the company of believers». (9)

"Since you are privileged to be called by God to live a community life, there is nothing you should pray for with greater insistence than union of heart and mind with your Brothers. Only by means of such harmony will you be able to maintain that peace which constitutes the whole happiness of your life.

Ask therefore the Lord of all hearts to make yours one with those of your Brothers, in that of Jesus".

This is a beautiful suggestion for our prayer which suggests that De La Salle was aware of the apparitions of Jesus to Sister Margaret Mary Alacoque, who was a contemporary of his (1647-1690), and who spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. •

(1) Jn 17,6. (2) Cf. Jn 17,18; Mt 28,19. (3) Jn 17,15. (4) 1Ts 5,22. (5) Jn 17,17. (6) Jn 17,19. (7) Jn 17,22-23. (8) Flp 2,2. (9) Hch 4,32.