

TALK ON PRAYER – LEGION OF MARY VISIT TO CARFIN – 25 JULY 2017
FEAST OF ST JAMES, THE APOSTLE, BROTHER OF JOHN, VENERATED AT COMPOSTELLA, SPAIN

Today is the Feast of St James, the Apostle. Present at many miracles of Jesus, martyred by Herod, about 42 AD, son of Zebedee.

Compared with St John or St Paul, St James wrote very little, but experienced much of the 'Christ Event'. Should we read much into this? Maybe he wasn't very literate, perhaps he concentrated on passing on the oral tradition. Does this mean he was less close to Jesus, or less prayerful....of course not. Do we have any recorded prayers of St James? I don't know that we have but that doesn't mean he wasn't a man of prayer. Prayer, as you know, takes many forms. There is rote prayer (The Rosary), formal prayer (Benediction), liturgical prayer (Mass), prayers or intercession, prayers of thanksgiving but very importantly, there is also praying in and from the heart. Because this form of prayer is deeply intimate and personal, only God and the person knows if it is active and real. I don't think it would be wrong to believe that St James, along with the other Apostles, were guided in this by Jesus. Because Jesus, when he prayed, spoke directly to the Father. It was not stylized or formal or outward gestures, it was praying very much in the heart, a genuine conversation with God.

As human beings, we have been made, not only for communication but for communion, a sharing in one another through love.

Fr George Maloney, a deeply spiritual Jesuit priest, put it like this. "It is in human love relations that we discover the loving beauty of God. This beauty we call transcendent because it can never be captured, possessed, held within us in a static complacency. We yearn to be set on fire by the ever-new levels of union with God that we can, by God's condescending love and mercy, attain. As we experience a sense of identity in the union of love through an expanded state of consciousness, we always want more of the same awareness. We cannot live without it".

To get to the first step of praying in the heart, we must get rid of self-centredness and with utter faith, put ourselves entirely in God's hands and like St James, be utterly fearless about the thought of death and judgement.

The Desert Fathers, like Macarius and John Climacus, strongly gripped by the love of God, believed that Jesus encourages all Christians to pray continually. In other words, to see our whole lives as a spiritual experience.

As it says in 1Thess 5:17-18, "Be happy at all times, pray continually and for all things, give thanks to God, because this is what God expects you to do in Christ Jesus". (St Paul)

'Prayer' then is a state of being. Always seeking to do God's will. The question we may ask, is this possible for me to do?

Yes, by God's grace, all things are possible. Faith and conversion is a continual surrender to God. Always seeking purity of heart and consciously beating off all that is ungodly, that wishes to separate us from his love. We cannot do this on our own, nor does God expect us to do it alone. He gives us the Holy Spirit, Our Lady, the Archangel Michael and all the saints, to defend us in our battles.

So, to be prayerful in the heart at all times means directing all of our actions towards the pleasure of God. Think of the Morning Offering, recite it. In other words, always be conscious of God, never let His presence leave you. Feel yourself repeating in your heart 'Abba Father' or 'God help me to love you' or 'Jesus', His holy name. On the bus, in the shop, walking along the street. St Basil said that the ordinary Christian can't always be reciting prayers but we can have an alert consciousness of God's ever-abiding presence and an active desire to bring ourselves into harmony with God's holy will. St Basil said "I set the Lord always in my sight. For he is at my right hand, that I may not be distracted".

For us today, we live in a form of urban desert, not like the Desert Fathers but in the 'urban desert'. There needs to be an opportunity for us to transcend beyond all the noise, pollution, chaos, crime, immorality, pornography and the corruption of modern life to remain close to God's will, to purify ourselves, to die to selfishness and thereby attain a state of inner harmony and peace, tranquility and resting in God, as centre.

Where does the heart of Mary fit into the call to pray in the heart? The Eastern Churches, the origin of the Desert Fathers too, have always had a great devotion to Mary. They call her 'Theotokos' which means 'Birth Giver to God', connecting with an attitude of call to prayer of the heart. Mary is for us, the perfect model of what a Christian should be, wholly integrated, totally surrendered in faith, obedience and love to the wishes of God.

Mary's whole life was a life lived in her heart for Jesus's sake, the Word made Flesh. As she lived only to let that Word come forth into new life, she gives Jesus to others. This means she continually is glorifying God in the prayers of the heart. Therefore, a total life of integrated Christianity. In Mary's heart is a will, a desire to be always a loving servant of God. She offers everything us, as epitomized by the song of the Magnificat, "My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour".

Mary is the perfect role model for the Legion of Mary. She prays from the heart. She has purity of heart. Everything is offered up for God and all her work and actions is done in faith and love. There is never a moment when God is absent from her consciousness.

All this love of Mary unites us with God. May it fill us also with a similar, unselfish love for the entire world, at all times until we depart from the world.

St Luke refers to the heart of Mary. At Bethlehem, she reflects on the words of the shepherds, "she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart". Her life with Jesus, at Nazareth, is summarized in similar words. "His mother stored up all these things in her heart".

She pondered every happening of her Son in the light of the Holy Spirit. May we, as lovers of Mary, do the same, follow her example and see our whole lives as a prayer in the heart.

Amen

Commented [SP1]: