



"you must be thirsty for your brothers's wellbeing"

CATECHESIS FOR PADRE PIO'S PRAYER GROUPS

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PRAYER IN THE FAMILY

From the First Letter of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy (2,1-8)

First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our Saviour, whose will is for everyone to be saved and to come to know the Truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all. This was the testimony at the proper time. For this I was appointed preacher and apostle (I am speaking the truth, I am not lying), teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. It is my wish, then, that in every place men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.

From a letter of Padre Pio to the Ventrella sisters

My dearest daughters,

May Jesus fill your hearts with his divine love, and transform you totally in him! My dearest daughters, one letter is enough for all of you, because you have but one heart and one single expectation before Jesus, that is, to perfect yourselves in the ways of God. How healthy it is to be so united to each other! How good and joyful it is for all brothers and sisters to live in the same manner, with one aspiration. Thus sang the true prophet, and this is how it truly is, my good daughters. The union of souls is like the precious ointment which was spread on the supreme priest Aaron, as the true psalmist says once again elsewhere, in which there was so much perfumed liquor that everyone I breathed one single odour and sweetness.

But I don't want to dwell on this matter. What God has united by blood and sentiment is inseparable, as long as this God reigns with you, and he will reign there in eternity. Take heart, therefore, dearest daughters, be sweet and lovable to all, humble and courageous, pure and sincere in everything. What better desire can I have for you today, from this prison in which I find myself, for your sanctification and mine?

Be like little bees, bringing nothing into their lives but honey and wax. May your home be full of sweetness, peace, agreement, humility, and piety as regards conversation. And given that your different states could necessitate my writing to you individually, despite your common goal, I will do so when necessary.

CATECHESIS

The mission obviously begins at home. There is a point in common between the vocation to be Prayer Groups and that of bearing witness to the Gospel in the family: the emotional bond. In prayer we call God the Father, Jesus Brother, the Virgin, Mother, that is, we use precisely those terms that are part of the familiar language. Somehow a lived family life leads us to understand prayer better and vice versa.

It is clear that our mission should begin at home. There is a point in common between the vocation of being part of Prayer Groups and that of bearing witness to the Gospel in the family: the emotional bond. In prayer we call God the Father, Jesus Brother, the Virgin, Mother, that is, we use precisely those terms that are part of the familiar language. Somehow family life leads us to understand prayer better and vice versa.

A question: missionaries in the family, how and why?

A small altar in our home

The family is already defined as a "domestic church" in the conciliar constitution of Vatican II *Lumen gentium*, but it will be above all St. John Paul II who took up and deepened this concept in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. The pontiff, in fact, argues that the family, called in itself to live the communion of its members under the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes a place where we concretely come to know what the Church is: a single body linked to Christ the head. In this way, despite the difficulties encountered in living family communion, each member of the family not only has the duty to live charity first of all towards those who live with them, but also has the responsibility to manifest with his own life belonging to Christ.

While this applies to everyone, it is particularly true for those who want to live the spirituality of Padre Pio. One of his first spiritual daughters, Nina Campanile, remembers how much importance he attached to the apostolate in his family: "In the spiritual direction the Father did not limit himself to listening to what were only practices of piety or spiritual things, but entered into all actions of our day, throughout the life of our family to be carried out according to Christian, moral and civil laws. Each of us had to be like a family lighthouse; in this way the whole family ended up addressing the Father and following his guidelines ».

The testimony of Nina Campanile challenges us as members of the Prayer Groups because - according to the teaching of the Church and in particular of Padre Pio - we are called to live proclamation, prayer and witness at home. The consideration that our family members do not always share these things with us, indeed - at times - they may not even share the same faith, cannot exempt us from this ecclesial presence, indeed it commits us personally as a temple of God and abode of the Spirit Holy.

We could say that our charism constitutes us as living chapels in our homes, aware that the love that binds us to our loved ones becomes *caritas*, that is charity, love, that inner fire that binds us to God and to our brothers precisely through prayer.

Missionaries in the family

Although, therefore, it would be ideal to have many families praying together, let us first of all concentrate on prayer "in the family", that is, on what makes us people of prayer among our relatives and friends. Obviously we are not referring to certain ostentations that can sometimes be counterproductive or to a censor and moralistic attitude that can lead to a rejection of the message in the Gospel. Praying "in the family" means letting the Holy Spirit pass through us and He - not our Pharisaic attitudes - speak of God through our body.

To do this it is necessary to have a firm point, which is essential: «Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (Jn 14: 23-24). Jesus does not live in us because we have put on a team shirt or the uniform of a brotherhood. So that He may live in us it is necessary, says Saint Ambrose that "your spirit may enjoy the riches of simplicity, the treasures of peace, the sweetness of grace ». To achieve this goal, he continues, "... open your heart, go to meet the sun of the eternal light" which enlightens every man "(Jn 1: 9). True light shines on everyone. But if one has closed the windows, he will deprive himself of the eternal light. So, if you close the door of your mind, you close Christ out too. Indeed He could enter by Himself, nevertheless He does not want to intrude, he does not want to force those who do not want to open.

In fact, prayer puts us in communion with God, a communion that must be real, we must host him in our life, which - therefore - is one, according to the Spirit. Of course, the Lord hears our prayers, regardless of the degree of holiness or purity of heart. Many fathers of the Church, however, insist that distance from sin and a true path of conversion create the ideal conditions for our communion with God through prayer.

Being in the family like those who host him in their lives, being "chapels" undoubtedly means becoming the place through which grace is communicated to our family. But to do this it is necessary to be a place entirely dedicated to God, a place not to be desecrated through sin, but also where there can be no resentments, however small ones these may be, nor too much indulgence towards ourselves: we need to spread our soul before him to host him in the best way.

Padre Pio always recommended having this high tension towards holiness, which he compared to the "*orange trees of the Riviera near Genoa, which are laden with fruit, flowers and leaves combined, almost all year round. This is because your desire must always bear fruit whenever the opportunity arises throughout the day, but nonetheless it must never cease to desire the objects, and opportunity to go beyond this. The flowers are frequent recognition of your weakness, and this recognition preserves both good works and good desires*".
(Letter of Padre Pio)

Missionaries for the family

In our constant endeavour to be holy by keeping the Spirit strong and firm in us, we are called to pray for the family, because we are a small domestic Church. In *Familiaris consortio* we read: "*The Church prays for the Christian family and educates it to live in generous coherence with the gift and priestly task received from Christ the High Priest*" (n. 59).

Each member of the Prayer Groups is that part of the Church that lives within the walls of his family and is therefore called to pray for this family and to educate it to live the gift of grace received in marriage. Prayer for the family is born spontaneously to us, especially as a prayer of intercession, because we are in contact with the human and spiritual events of the people who are close to us and with whom we have emotional ties.

Jesus' invitation comes back to our minds and hearts : "Pray without getting tired", especially when our intercessory prayer does not achieve its goals. Here the educational role of prayer becomes very important, and this leads us to a greater faith: we must meet God, not his miracles. Intercessory prayer is important, because it is the synthesis of our humility (we turn to God as poor people who need help), but also of our faith in his providence. While we are praying, however, we must always repeat to ourselves the words of St. Paul: "You have approached myriads of angels" ..

When we feel discouraged and it seems that there is nothing more to be done, it is precisely then that our faith must first of all make us see that God is next to us anyway. In this way our prayer for the family becomes a great witness and is the basis of family prayer.

Missionaries with the family

We have arrived, as we can see, at the core of the problem: we all realize that the prayer made by the whole family, together, is something important and truly necessary. We cannot, however, hide that things are not that simple. Personally, I come from a family where the rosary was said every evening. Although like all young boys I was often distracted and sometimes unwilling to pray- I believe that my vocation stemmed from all those rosaries. However, one thing was clear to me: despite my unwillingness, I knew that our family prayer was not the result of an obligation but of my parents and my paternal grandmother's way of life.

In the *Familiaris consortio* we read: "A fundamental and irreplaceable element of education to prayer is the living witness of parents. Through their own concrete daily lifestyle, they carry out their own form of priesthood : by the mere habit of praying together with their children, father and mother reach deep into their hearts, leaving traces that subsequent life events will not be able to erase. Let's listen to the appeal that Paul VI addressed to parents: "Mothers, do you teach your children the prayers of Christians? Do you support your priests in your children's preparation for the sacraments of the first age: confession, communion, confirmation? Do you make them aware that, if they are sick, they can think of Christ suffering? Do you endeavour to teach them how to invoke for the help of Our Lady and the saints? Do you pray the Rosary in your family? And you, dad, do you know how to pray with your children, with the whole household, at least sometimes? Your witness, in the righteousness of thought and action, supported by some common prayer, it is worth a life lesson, it is worth an act of worship of extraordinary merit; thus bringing peace to the home: "Pax huic domui!" Remember: this is the way you build the Church! ».

Missionary men and women

Praying in the family is not easy, sometimes it is difficult even just praying before meals. However, there is a discreet and very fruitful path: that of personal contact. Precisely the so-called elderly (or old if we link this word to the wisdom of those with white hair) can be the bearers of advice, creating true bonds and encouraging reconciliation. The family is a truly important field for the mission, but one fundamental thing is necessary: we must take a step back from God. It is He who converts and changes hearts, we must learn to open the way for him. Our essential weapons are humility, concealment, goodness of heart. A believer who makes room for God knows how to lose himself, especially within the walls of his home.

PRAYER TO SAINT PIO BY JOHN PAUL II

Humble and beloved Padre Pio,
teach us, we pray,
humility of heart,
so that we may be counted
among the little ones of the Gospel,
to whom the Father promised to reveal
the mysteries of His Kingdom.
Help us to pray without ceasing,
certain that God knows what we need
even before we ask Him.
Obtain for us the eyes of faith
that will be able to recognize the face of Jesus
in the poor and the suffering.
Sustain us in the hour of the combat and trial and,
if we fall, make us experience the joy of
the sacrament of forgiveness.
Grant us your tender devotion to Mary,
mother of Jesus and our own Mother.
Accompany us on our earthly pilgrimage
towards the blessed Homeland,
where we hope to arrive
in order to contemplate the Glory of
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit forever.
Amen