

MI MONTHLY FORMATION (3)

In Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

MARCH 2006 PRAYER INTENTION:

**That, faced with the difficulties of everyday life,
we learn from you how to appreciate the certainty
that nothing is impossible with God.**

Dear Friends,

As we have said, during this year we want to keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus by fostering the same interior attitudes that characterized the entire life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially: her interior life; her obedience of faith to God's will; her ardent, heroic charity; and her capacity of suffering out of love. This month, we want to focus our attention upon another aspect of **interior life**, precisely upon **PRAYER AS OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE AND REVELATION**.

DEFINITION

Looking for a definition of prayer we may find something like this: Prayer is

- *An act of human communication with the sacred or holy—God, the gods, the transcendent realm, or supernatural powers, found in all religions in all times...*
- *A silent or spoken petition made to God or a god. Its characteristic postures (bowing the head, kneeling, prostration) and position of the hands (raised, outstretched, clasped) signify an attitude of submission and devotion.*

Those who, like me, are old enough to have learned their basic faith from the Baltimore Catechism may define prayer as *a lifting of the mind and heart to God*. This definition tells us that God is far beyond our ordinary experience; that prayer entails effort on our part, and involves both our mind and heart, i.e., our understanding, feelings and will.

PRAYER AS A RELATIONSHIP

We should never forget that prayer is an act of communication or better a relationship between God and man, which depends almost entirely on his grace, since he is God. In fact,

“There is an infinite chasm between God and man; man, no matter how hard he tries, cannot come to God – cannot leap across infinity. He cannot even take the first step in coming to God. God must come to man. He alone can leap the infinite gulf between Creator and creature; this is what he did in the Incarnation of Jesus and what he does in the life of every pray-er who truly encounters him.”¹

Therefore, true prayer is always an opening to God and a response to his love and revelation; it is an *action and reaction*, as St. Maximilian Kolbe liked to say.

“In the entire universe, we meet an action and an equal reaction to that action, but contrary, a coming and a going, a distancing and a nearing, a division and a union. But the division is

¹ Thomas Green, SJ, *Opening to God*, Ave Maria Press, p. 28-29. For the importance of prayer as human's response to God's initiative, see p. 32-33.

always in sight of the union, which is creative. This is nothing else but the image of the most holy Trinity in creatures' activities" (SK 1318).

"Life in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity is constituted by the flux and reflux of love" (SK 1310).

As Fr. J.F. de Louvencourt remarks, "this double movement, the Trinity's own, becomes the archetype of all others. Therefore it is universally present. It can be found in the world of faith as well as in the world of the visible."² In fact, St. Maximilian explains that

"The same as in the natural and supernatural world everything comes from the Father through the Son and the Spirit to the creatures, in the same way all creatures ascend to the Father through the Spirit and the Son" (SK 1224).

"God creates the universe, and this action in a certain way is a separation. In virtue of the natural law received from God, the creatures perfect themselves, become similar to God, return to Him; as for reasoning creatures, they consciously love Him, unite evermore with Him through love and return to Him" (SK 1318).

Moreover, Fr. Kolbe stresses that in this movement between God and creation the Immaculata is intimately united with her Son and the Holy Spirit:

"All action comes from God through Jesus and the Immaculata to reach the souls, while the reaction comes from the souls and through the Immaculata and Jesus reaches the Father" (SK 1286).

"Grace reaches the creatures by following one path: from the Father through the Son (Christ), through the Holy Spirit (the Immaculata). The reaction proceeds in the opposite way: from the creature, through the Immaculata (the Holy Spirit) and Christ (the Word), to the Father" (SK 1291).

Perceptively Fr. Louvencourt notes,

"What is true about love and grace is also true about prayer with its two descending and ascending phases. . . . Prayer always is constituted by a call by God and an answer from us. God invites us by giving us his grace; this is the action; and we turn towards him, always with the help of grace; this is the reaction. This reaction is not only an answer given to God, but an ascending towards him, or even an elevation according to the terms used by St. Maximilian: *'The divine perfection that shines from the ineffable life of the Most Holy Trinity spreads throughout the universe in numerous reflections like the echo. In the same way, the heart, leaving the creatures, elevates itself to knowing and loving God Himself in the Most Holy Trinity'* (SK 469)."³

IMITATING MARY, THE VIRGIN IN PRAYER

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (MC) Paul VI says that

"Mary is also the Virgin in prayer. She appears as such in the visit to the mother of the precursor, when she pours out her soul in expressions glorifying God, and expressions of humility, faith and hope. This prayer is the Magnificat (cf. Lk. 1:46-55), Mary's prayer par excellence, the song of the messianic times in which there mingles the joy of the ancient and the new Israel. As St. Irenaeus seems to suggest, it is in Mary's canticle that there was heard once more the rejoicing of Abraham who foresaw the Messiah (cf. Jn. 8:56) and there rang out in prophetic anticipation the voice of the Church: "In her exultation Mary prophetically declared in the name of the Church: 'My soul proclaims the glory of the Lord. . . .'" And in

² Fr. Jean-Francois de Luovencourt, OCSO, *St. Maximilian Kolbe Friend and Doctor of Prayer*, chapter three.

³ *Ibid.*

fact Mary's hymn has spread far and wide and has become the prayer of the whole Church in all ages. At Cana, Mary appears once more as the Virgin in prayer: when she tactfully told her Son of a temporal need, she also obtained an effect of grace, namely, that Jesus, in working the first of His 'signs,' confirmed His disciples' faith in Him (cf. Jn. 2:1-12). Likewise, the last description of Mary's life presents her as praying. The apostles "joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14). We have here the prayerful presence of Mary in the early Church and in the Church throughout all ages, for, having been assumed into heaven, she has not abandoned her mission of intercession and salvation. The title Virgin in prayer also fits the Church, which day by day presents to the Father the needs of her children, 'praises the Lord unceasingly and intercedes for the salvation of the world.'" (MC 18)

In her hymn of praise to God, the *Magnificat*, we find an echo of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament. This canticle reflects the interior world of the Blessed Virgin. She speaks of God's holiness and greatness, and proclaims his mercy and faithfulness toward his people. The Holy Spirit, who speaks at all times through the prophets, filled Mary and gave her a prophetic vision and understanding of God's salvific plan.

John Paul II in his first Encyclical wrote that

"The mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth when she pronounced her 'fiat.' From then on, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of both a virgin and a mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love... The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him..." "The Holy Spirit inspired her to remain in the Upper Room, after our Lord's Ascension, recollected in prayer and expectation, together with the Apostles, until the day of Pentecost, when the Church was to be born in visible form, coming forth from darkness. Later, all the generations of disciples, of those who confess and love Christ, like the Apostle John, spiritually took this Mother to their own homes (cf. Jn 19: 27), and she was thus included in the history of salvation and in the Church's mission from the very beginning, that is from the moment of the Annunciation. Accordingly, we who form today's generation of disciples of Christ all wish to unite ourselves with her in a special way."⁴

Consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we all the more wish to unite ourselves with her, with her intercessory prayer, with her maternal concern for the needs of our brothers and sisters who run out of joy, of peace and of love. Let us make our prayer more and more like hers; let us go with her into the Upper Room to support the Apostles of today and tomorrow with our prayer, kindness, respect and commitment; let us invite all to consecrate themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary so that all can come closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and find there salvation and happiness. In this way, as St. Maximilian dreamed, "through the Immaculata we will attain the ultimate purpose of the MI, that is, the greatest possible glory of God."

Rossella Bignami
Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata
FKMinCAL@Aol.com

⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979, n. 22.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER DEEPENING THE THEME

Church's Teaching

From the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

27. The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.

Prayer as God's gift (2559)

"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God." But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or "out of the depths" of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; *humility* is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that "we do not know how to pray as we ought," are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. "Man is a beggar before God."

Prayer as covenant (2562-2564)

* Where does prayer come from? Whether prayer is expressed in words or gestures, it is the whole man who prays. But in naming the source of prayer, Scripture speaks sometimes of the soul or the spirit, but most often of the heart (more than a thousand times). According to Scripture, it is the *heart* that prays. If our heart is far from God, the words of prayer are in vain.

* The heart is the dwelling-place where I am, where I live; according to the Semitic or Biblical expression, the heart is the place "to which I withdraw." The heart is our hidden center, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others; only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation: it is the place of covenant.

* Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man.

Prayer as communion (2565)

In the New Covenant, prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit. The grace of the Kingdom is "the union of the entire holy and royal Trinity . . . with the whole human spirit." Thus, the life of prayer is the habit of being in the presence of the thrice-holy God and in communion with him. This communion of life is always possible because, through Baptism, we have already been united with Christ. Prayer is Christian insofar as it is communion with Christ and extends throughout the Church, which is his Body. Its dimensions are those of Christ's love.

The Prayer of the Virgin Mary (2617-2619)

* Mary's prayer is revealed to us at the dawning of the fullness of time. Before the incarnation of the Son of God, and before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness: at the Annunciation, for Christ's conception; at Pentecost, for the formation of the Church, his Body. In the faith of his humble handmaid, the Gift of God found the acceptance he had awaited from the beginning of time. She whom the Almighty made "full of grace" responds by offering her whole being: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word." "*Fiat*": this is Christian prayer: to be wholly God's, because he is wholly ours.

* The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith. At Cana, the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; this is the sign of another feast—that of the wedding of the Lamb where he gives his body and blood at the request of the Church, his Bride. It is at the hour of the New Covenant, at the foot of the cross, that Mary is heard as the Woman, the new Eve, the true "Mother of all the living."

* That is why the Canticle of Mary, the *Magnificat* (Latin) or *Megalynei* (Byzantine) is the song both of the Mother of God and of the Church; the song of the Daughter of Zion and of the new People of God; the song of thanksgiving for the fullness of graces poured out in the economy of salvation and the song of the "poor" whose hope is met by the fulfillment of the promises made to our ancestors, "to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

Prayer

“You are great, O Lord, and greatly to be praised: great is your power and your wisdom is without measure. And man, so small a part of your creation, wants to praise you: this man, though clothed with mortality and bearing the evidence of sin and the proof that you withstand the proud. Despite everything, man, though but a small a part of your creation, wants to praise you. You yourself encourage him to delight in your praise, for you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

St Augustine, Confessions, 1

From John Paul II

“The Church’s love of preference for the poor is wonderfully inscribed in Mary’s **Magnificat**. The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who ‘has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, ...filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, ...scattered the proud-hearted...and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him.’ (Lk 1: 52-53). Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the ‘poor of Yahweh,’ who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in him (cf. Pss. 25; 31; 35; 55). Mary truly proclaims the coming of the ‘Messiah of the poor’ (cf. Is. 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary’s heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the **Magnificat**, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that the truth about God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love of preference for the poor and humble, that love which, celebrated in the **Magnificat**, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus.”

Encyclical Redemptoris Mater, n. 37

MI Youth-Beat

From Benedict XVI

“Dear Young People,

In our hearts we have the same urgent question that prompted the Magi from the East to set out on their journey, even if it is differently expressed: "On whom can I rely? To whom shall I entrust myself? Where is the One who can offer me the response capable of satisfying my heart's deepest desires?". The fact that we ask questions like these means that we realize our journey is not over until we meet the One who has the power to establish that universal Kingdom of justice and peace to which all people aspire, but which they are unable to build by themselves. Asking such questions also means searching for Someone who can neither deceive nor be deceived, and who therefore can offer a certainty so solid that we can live for it and, if need be, even die for it. ...

Dear young people, the happiness you are seeking, the happiness you have a right to enjoy has a name and a face: it is Jesus of Nazareth, hidden in the Eucharist. Only he gives the fullness of life to humanity! With Mary, say your own "yes" to God, for he wishes to give himself to you.

WYD, Cologne 2005, Welcome

The Magnificat “is a canticle that reveals the spirituality of the biblical *"anawim,"* namely, of those faithful who acknowledged themselves "poor" not only because of their detachment from all idolatry of wealth and power, but also because of their profound humility of heart, free from the temptation to pride, open to saving divine grace. The whole Magnificat, which we just heard interpreted by the Choir of the Sistine Chapel, is characterized by this "humility," in Greek *"tapeinosis,"* which indicates a situation of concrete humility and poverty.” ...

“In his wonderful commentary on the Magnificat of St. Ambrose I am always moved by this amazing word: ‘If, according to the flesh, Christ has only one mother, according to faith all souls engender Christ; each one, in fact, receives in himself the Word of God.’ Thus the holy doctor, interpreting the words of the Virgin herself, invites us to offer the Lord a dwelling in our souls and in our lives. Not only must we bear him in our hearts, but we must take him to the world, so that we too might engender Christ for our times. Let us pray to the Lord to help us to praise him with Mary’s spirit and soul and to take Christ again to our world.”

General Audience, February 15, 2006

Consecration in Action

In the previous month as we practiced attentive listening, we received many graces which helped us hear God's voice in our daily life. In continuing to erect the first pillar of our total consecration, interior life, our Lord awaits to grant us the grace to respond to him by lifting our minds and hearts to Him. Here are a few simple daily practices that will help us experience God's presence:

- 40 to 1440: This is the ratio to remember. There are 1440 minutes in the day. Schedule 40 minutes out of our 1440 minutes to pray to our Lord (approximately 2.7% of the day). This time can be either done at once or spread out throughout the day, but you should schedule it into your day at the same time each day. Pick a time of the day when you are most refreshed and alert (cf. Swenson, *"Praying in Time"*).
- During the course of the day, we are bombarded with deadlines, meetings, errands, memos to write, phone calls to make. Be conscious of when the most hectic part of your day begins, and then STOP! Close your eyes. For one minute, offer yourself to Our Lord. Praise Him. Adore Him. Thank Him. Offer yourself to Him. Tell Him that you desire to be in union with Him. Ask Our Lady to take the moment, cleanse it and offer it to Her Son. Ask Our Lady to help you love Him with Her love. Now, open your eyes from your Heavenly retreat and continue to fulfill His Will (cf. Br. Lawrence, *"The practice of the presence of God"*).
- Visit Our Lord truly present in the Blessed Sacrament at your local church during your lunch break or on your way home.
- Visit our Lord from afar. Find a quiet place and turn in the direction of the nearest church. Now lift your heart and mind to Him and make an act of faith stating that you believe that He is present with you at that moment.

By Rik Hernandez

Wisdom for our time

Knowing how to listen to God, as we previously considered, is important. Knowing how to talk and respond to Him is an even greater attribute. Simply stated, we communicate with God through prayer. Prayer, however, is not limited to a formal, ritualistic pattern. After all, we learned as children that prayer is simply the lifting of our minds and hearts to God. A quick, *"I love and thank you, God,"* is a powerful acknowledgement that we understand and appreciate all His blessings. Another popular little prayer which reassures God - and us - that He is the proper priority and focus in our lives is, *"Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place my trust in You."*

Such little "mini-prayers," repeated silently anytime, anywhere throughout the day or night become a prayerful offering of our entire lives to God.

By Margaret Volpe

From the Writings of Fr. Luigi Faccenda, OFMConv. *

Kolbe, a Man of Prayer

Father Kolbe was a man living in constant prayer. A man who lived the most profound interior life, who invoked Mary many, many times a day; who knelt and implored: 'O Immaculate One tell me who you are. What do you want of me. Teach me how I can bring you to all my brothers.'

Kolbe was a man who even in jail and in the concentration camp prayed the rosary; a man who inflamed his fellow prisoners with the most profound divine mysteries; a man always available to hear confessions and take the Blessed Sacrament to those who needed encouragement and comfort.

Father Kolbe was a man who acted like a loving mother for the young aspirants in Niepokalanow; he was both father and mother giving comfort, consoling, offering his own piece of moldy bread to his fellow prisoners at Auschwitz. He was a mother for those condemned to death assisting them to the end and closing their eyes lovingly kissing them on the forehead, with tears flowing on his cheeks.

(Fr. Luigi Faccenda, *The Disciple Took Mary into His Home*, 1996, page 68-9)

* Fr. Faccenda, OFMConv. (1920-2005), is the Founder of the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata

More Resources

Bible: Lk 11:1; Mk 1:35;6:46; 15:34; Lk 5:16;
Mt 7:7-11, 13-14, 21; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13; 16:24
Marian: Lk 1:46-55; Jn 2: 1-11; Acts 1: 14

John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Jan. 2001, nn. 32-33

Benedict XVI, Addresses and Homily to the Youth in Cologne, - WYD and General Audience, Feb. 15 at www.vatican.va

Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2006*, at www.vatican.va/Holy_Father/Benedict_xvi/messages

CCC Part Four (2558-2865)

MI General Statutes nn.6-7, 15

www.consecration.com

Fr. Luigi Faccenda, *One More Gift*, Immaculata Press, p. 68

Dates to Remember

- 1** Ash Wednesday. Fast & Abstinence
- 3** *St. Katharine Drexel*, virgin (USA)
- 5** **First Sunday of Lent.**
- 10** The novena in honor of St. Joseph begins
- 17** *St Patrick*, bishop (USA)
- 20** *St Joseph, husband of the B. V. Mary.* Solemnity.
- 25** **Annunciation of the Lord.** Solemnity. Plenary Indulgence for MIRS

FROM THE WRITINGS OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

The Spirit of Prayer

“In the work that absorbs us we must frequently awaken the spirit with short prayers, so as not to lose the spirit of prayer. A soul without the spirit of prayer may be convinced it is accomplishing a great deal, but it is like a ship that is sailing very swiftly but will wreck on a crag. When the spirit of prayer is flowering in a soul, it can be recognized in the event that obedience directs it elsewhere and the soul is content, but if it senses dissatisfaction, the spirit of prayer may be in jeopardy. We must try to be in the hands of the Immaculate One what a brush is in the hand of an artist.” (July 4, 1937)

In *Maria Was His Middle Name*, p. 126

Discussion corner

- What is my personal definition of “prayer”?
- What is my experience of prayer?
- What helps me the most in my prayer life and what is the greatest hindrance?
- Are you aware of the many different techniques of prayer? Which are your favorites?
- Can prayer enable us to discern God’s will and to follow it?
- Why is prayer a universal experience?

