

## **Concerning the Prayer of Faith (II)**

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In a previous article, I considered the importance of the luminous awareness of the presence of God during meditation. Our attention to that presence makes us go out of ourselves to become united to God and to seek God's plan, works, and interests. Now, I will use a brief semantic digression to introduce my reflections for today.

### **Problems with Vocabulary and Translation**

Regarding meditation, prayer, mental prayer, etc., it is very true that all the teachings of Father Chaminade lead us to a much more "intuitive" and affective prayer (in its etymological meaning: *intuitu = attentive gaze*). Today there is a new interest arising in the tradition of *lectio divina*. Generally, prayerful reading of the Word of God is a very relevant and accepted translation of this practice, which began in medieval monasteries. Following this suggestion, I would say the prayer of faith, in Father Chaminade's style, is a prayerful contemplation of the mysteries of God. My reflections will focus on this theme.

### **The Magnificat as a Prayer of Faith**

Let us suppose that someone dedicates some time to a philosophical reflection, in light of reason alone, to attain some knowledge of God. Even though this journey would be difficult and costly, he or she would be able to reach some conclusions. This mental effort could be called a study, but it is not strictly a time of prayer. Although something can be deduced about God with the light of reason only, we cannot contemplate the Creator.

Faith is absolutely essential to contemplate God, the God of Jesus Christ. Throughout the Bible, God has progressively revealed to us many aspects. The magnificent content of this manifestation of God is summarized in the Creed, which unfolds the mysteries of God to us. In its light, we are able to look, admire, and contemplate God. Father Chaminade declares that Christians can look at God unceasingly and untiringly in that light. The contemplation of God and God's attributes is a method of prayer. According to Father Chaminade, when we recite the Creed and declare God as our creator, God is the one who sustains us and immediately asks whether we savor these truths. (How could we not love the creator of our being, the one who sustains our existence this very moment?) Then we delve into feelings of thanksgiving, praise, and supplication. We have entered into authentic prayer, because we have reached a loving contemplation.

We have some moments of true prayer that perhaps occur inadvertently in our lives. Let us imagine the following situation: You have climbed a steep mountain. It is a bright Sunday morning and you have climbed the highest peak. You breathe with delight and relief. An incredible landscape unfolds before your eyes. You contemplate this ecstatically, and your believer's heart is moved. Then you let yourself be carried away by your feelings of admiration: how great is God! How wonderful must be God's beauty! A pale reflection of the Creator has brought you into a true prayer. Your heart has been completely filled by the excellence and majesty of God.

We could consider a whole array of other examples. But I want to stop briefly at a mystery that Father Chaminade loved with deep affection and tenderness. God has a plan of salvation, which was communicated to us in God's Word. Our Blessed Founder writes, "I come to the mystery of the Son of God made man!" Following his indications, we can admire all the aspects of this mystery: the self-abasement of God; His great love for us; a God who is conceived in the womb of a virgin by divine intervention; a virgin who conceives a son while remaining a virgin; a God hidden in the fragile covering of a small body. . . . This contemplation makes us admire, praise, love; on the one hand it fills us with joy; but on the other, it fills us with humble repentance. How little attentive we are to this mystery in the routine of daily life! How far we are from Mary who is incarnating, deeply rooting Jesus among us! And from this arises our petitions to the God who saves us and to Mary who calls us.

### **From Faith of Belief to Faith of Love**

Our Marianist spirituality repeats the same journey we are studying through different approaches. It makes us distinguish a mental dimension from an affective dimension in the definition of faith.

The intellectual dimension consists in a firm conviction about the truths we believe. We can bring up the example of the dialog between Jesus and Martha, before the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus (Jn 11:20-27). Jesus questions Martha with insistence, "Do you believe this?" That is, "Are you sure?" Do you have a solid and strong conviction? This intellectual dimension is essential but incomplete. It is not enough.

Father Chaminade is emphatic: "We must remember faith belongs more to the heart than to the mind."<sup>1</sup> You should not only be convinced about the mystery, but also you should love the mystery. I often offer the following example: I believe God is my heavenly Father, as Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> In his writing *Meditation on Faith and the Presence of God*, note 1. In this article I follow, almost literally at times, passages from *Meditation Method on Creed* and also *Meditation no. 10, from the Retreat of 1818*.

Christ said. I am convinced of this. But above all, I like having God as my Father; I enjoy it because faith not only illumines our minds, but it also especially warms our hearts and moves our wills. Thus, we are led to fervent feelings and to good resolutions.

Whenever I have presented these considerations in an atmosphere of silence and prayer, I have noticed very deep responses. I remember a lady . . . a mother . . . who commented: “I had never experienced this step from faith of the mind to faith of the heart. As I sat in the chapel for awhile, I felt how much I enjoy having God as my Father and how far I am from living it.”

### **Healing the Heart**

The human eye must be healthy in order to receive light and to see. Our eyes may be affected by a disease; glaucoma, for example, can attack the optic nerve and result in progressive loss of vision, even blindness. In Father Chaminade’s thought, the heart is the eye of faith. In order to enjoy a vision of faith, we must have a clean and healthy heart. And precisely, nothing has a more purifying effect on the heart than the meditation of faith. The more we contemplate the mysteries of God, the more we will empty our heart of all that is not God.

Therefore, we must frequently practice this loving contemplation of the mysteries of our faith, to gradually clean our hearts and to render them free. If the light of faith penetrates our souls, the Word of God comes to dwell in them and to transform our whole lives. We will only think like Christ. Jesus Christ has flooded our minds with his light. Animated by faith, our clean and healthy hearts will only feel as Jesus Christ feels. In this manner we become transformed into new people.

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