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An Important Lesson in the School of Prayer

With most praying people, the fundamental if not the exhaustive conception of prayer is asking somewhat of God. This is indeed a part, but surely it is not the whole, of prayer; and it may be doubtful whether more than a beginning is made unless and until there be a disclosure of God to the soul. We read of our blessed Lord Himself that at times He withdrew from all human companionships, for the purpose of secret communion with the Father; as when He went out "into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God" (Lk. 6:12). These midnight, all-night interviews, mark the great crises of His life on earth; and it cannot be supposed that He spent all these hours in continuous supplication. Was it not rather like Gideon, on the plains of Jezreel, to spread out his whole being like fleece, to drink in the heavenly dew in the Father's Presence and in the strength of this celestial nectar confront new trials and temptations?

Thus meditative prayer, like reflective reading of the Word of God, becomes a perpetual means and medium of communion with God. He who converses with a friend, habitually, has no room for doubt as to that friend's existence and presence; and God meant that this simple method of converse with Himself should be a demonstration that He is, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6). It is a demonstration so convincing as to dispel all doubts, being itself the sufficient proof of His reality and verity as the ever present, living, helping God.

The humblest believer, however unlettered or unlearned, may attain in this school of prayer to practical certainty in divine things; he needs not read volumes of Apologetics, or Evidences of Christianity. He needs but to cultivate the sense of the Presence of God, and the proofs, though he cannot always formulate them for others, become convincing and overwhelming to himself. Indeed we most often find such assurance of faith in the humbler, simpler sort of disciples; and, because it is found in the ignorant and unlearned rather than the princes of this world, or the great scholars of the church, there is a proneness to associate such faith with credulity and even with superstition. The more intelligent and intellectual too often lean to their own understanding, and turn to human logic and philosophy for confirmation of their faith. He who learns to have no other means of strengthening his assurance save converse with God, is compelled to learn in God's school, where logic and philosophy are never perverted to the purposes of fallacy and sophistry. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1). The darts of satanic doubt can pierce him, only as they first pass through the divine "wings" which are his covering and shelter.

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet; and, when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father, Who is in secret; and thy Father, Who seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly" (Mt. 6:6).

Here, then, is the initial lesson of our Lord upon prayer. And, as in any other first lesson, a master teacher naturally lays down fundamental laws or first principles, we find here laid the cornerstone of all true prayer. This

primary lesson is so easy to see that it is hard to mistake, namely: Prayer is at bottom the meeting of a human suppliant, alone with God, for supplication and communion at the mercy-seat, and revelation of the Existence, Presence and character of God.

Certain it is that the closet is not an oratory so much as an observatory, from which to get new views of God. There is a quest higher than mere request. There is a search after knowledge of God and communication from Him. In this secret place, devout souls learn what is meant by communion and communion is mutual. There is not only prayer offered, but blessing received. The praying soul speaks to God, and hears God speak. He who enters the closet gets as well as gives, and finds the most precious part of this communion, not in any requests imparted Godward, but in returns imparted manward, the reception from God of divine impressions and communications. The reward, promised, comes while yet he speaks and waits before the Lord: believing he receives, and receiving enjoys. Such reward cannot be kept secret. It makes the heart to overflow and even the face to shine.