

Prayer, the soul of every apostolate

Dear pilgrim friends, we have come a long way today! Our feet know this well... Jesus himself walked a lot during his life. He has experienced fatigue and thirst. One day, while he was sitting tired, at the edge of a well, he said to the Samaritan woman: " *Give me something to drink !* This thirst that we all know allowed Jesus to reveal to us a deeper thirst, the one that dwells in the

The heart of every man: the thirst for living water. It was precisely of this thirst that Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman: "*If you knew Him who asks you for a drink, you would have asked him, and **he would have given you living water.***"

A hundred years ago, God gave the Church of France a man who knew this thirst, this living water and its source: Dom Chautard. Through his little book, *The Soul of Every Apostolate*, he guided millions of souls to the living water. Dom Chautard analyzes the words of Jesus, saddened: "*The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few: **pray...***"³ What does Jesus propose to make the mission effective? Plans? Strategies? No. He simply says, " **Pray!** Not primarily human resources, but prayer, the source of living water.

Today, following Dom Chautard, we are going to meditate on the three essential steps to enter into the interior life and become missionaries of living water:

1. To discover what white water is;
2. Draw living water;
3. Transmit it to others.



Christ in the Garden of Olives, with the Sleeping Apostles, Bernard van Orley (1488 - 1541)

1. Jn 4:7.
2. Jn 4:10.
3. Lk 10:2.

But before beginning this meditation, let us invoke the Holy Spirit, the source of all inner light.

What is living water?

For Dom Chautard, the source of living water is God: "*You alone,*" he says, "*adorable Trinity, are perfect eternal life.* In their eternal relationships of knowledge and love, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in infinite intimacy and it is this life that they want to share with us. This is why Jesus invites us to draw from him the divine life, the life for which we were created: "*If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink*"⁴! "Let us go to Jesus and drink!"

If the source is God himself, then the living water that flows from it is his own life. Jesus told us: "*I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it abundantly.*"⁵ This divine life is transmitted to us through baptism and the other sacraments. It transforms us in depth. It makes us children of God and **sanctifies us**: this is **sanctifying grace**. This living water also comes to strengthen our strength and help us to act according to God in concrete situations: it is **the grace of today**. In short, the living water of which Jesus speaks to us is the grace of God: sanctifying to transform us interiorly, current to help us in action.

In the mission, Jesus is like our spiritual battery: without him, we are flat; with him, we radiate. He said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and in whom I abide bears much fruit, **for without me you can do nothing**.*" This is the sentence that Dom Chautard wrote at the beginning of his book, *The Soul of Every Apostolate*: "*Without me you can do **nothing**!* Nothing!"

This living water is offered to us... But how can it be received in practice? Let us invoke the Holy Spirit to ask him.

4. Jn 7:37.

5. Jn 10:10.

6. Jn 15:5.

How to draw living water?

Remember, fellow pilgrims, how Jesus transformed the world. He had promised His apostles that He would send the Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit descended on them in the form of tongues of fire, **transforming them into inner men**. And their preaching bore fruit. Before receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they were without strength, without inner fire. They were transformed and, according to their word, 5,000 Jews asked for baptism: **3,000 on the day of Pentecost and 2,000 a few days later!** That is a quarter of our pilgrimage. **5,000 converted by two sermons!** What power! What fecundity! And yet, those who preached did not seek any effect. They were fishermen from Galilee, not professional orators. **This was the first miracle of the interior life...**

This is the lesson of Pentecost: we will bear fruit only if we have a solid interior life, if the Lord dwells in us through prayer. In the Gospels, we see how important it is to **live with Jesus** and to be one of his friends. He draws us to him. He teaches us to put ourselves at his school. Only when we have formed Jesus Christ within us will we be able to easily transmit it. Saint Paul was profoundly convinced of this. He repeated to himself: *"For me to live is Christ."*

But to live with Jesus, we must spend time in his presence as the apostles and other disciples did. This is prayer: to stand in the presence of the Master who calls us.

Here is how Dom Chautard entered into prayer:

*"The hour of prayer has arrived. I want to tear myself away from the earth and throw myself into the presence of this God whose activity, all of love, envelops and penetrates me. **I am then in contact with a lively, adorable and amiable** interlocutor. Immediately, I love it deeply. It is necessary. Annihilation, contrition, protest of dependence, humble and trusting prayer that this interview with my God may be blessed. »*

To succeed in prayer, one must first of all consider God **as a present and living person**, and not as a distant and passive being. God is not an abstraction. The God before whom I stand is

infinitely personal. He looks at me. He loves me. He loves me as I am, with my miseries and my sins. "*I am the good shepherd, and I know my sheep, and my sheep know me*"⁸»

Prayer is an exchange of glances between lovers. But be careful: like any relationship, prayer is often a struggle. You have to fight to remain faithful. Like our walk to Chartres, the interior life requires perseverance. Men and women called to transmit divine life must draw from the source of prayer.

Without a relationship with Jesus, without an interior availability to grace, we fall into what Dom Chautard calls " *the heresy of works* ", which is also called **activism** : it is when human action takes the place of God's action, when we imagine that the success of our apostolate depends solely on our work and not on divine grace: then we exhaust ourselves, we disperse, we take pride in our successes as if they came from us, we become discouraged by our failures, we no longer take the time for prayer, we reduce everything to our own efficiency, we look at the mission as a purely human work. Danger! For in this way, disconnected from the source of all spiritual fruitfulness, one is no longer the docile instrument of God. No, not everything depends on us and our works! As Donoso Cortès wrote so well⁹, " *those who pray do more for the world than those who fight. And if the world is going from bad to worse, it is because there are more battles than prayers* ." It is no coincidence that Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus is the patroness of the missions, she who never left the Carmel. She entered it " *to save souls and above all to pray for the priests* ," she said; she offered her sacrifices for the missionaries. This is the importance of contemplatives in the Church: they are in direct connection with the First Cause of all conversion, and for this they have a formidable efficacy.

After having watered us with his grace, Jesus sends us on a mission. A final question then arises: how to become bearers of living water in a thirsty world? Let us invoke the Holy Spirit so that he may make us understand this.

8. Jn 10:14.

9. Juan Donoso Cortés, *Theology of History and the Crisis of Civilization*, Cerf, 2013. Introduction, p. 83. Donoso Cortès was a Spanish Catholic counterrevolutionary thinker of the nineteenth century.

How do you transmit living water?

Pilgrim friend, it doesn't matter who you are or what path you take to heaven: if you want to transmit God's life to others, you must first receive it yourself and live it to the fullest. Remember the luminous words of St. Bernard: " ***Be reservoirs, and not canals! The canal allows water to pass through without retaining a drop. The reservoir fills up, then, without emptying, pours an overflow that is always renewed into the fields it irrigates.*** To understand how to become these reservoirs, let us turn to those who lived this mission with intensity: the saints.

St. Dominic, for example, spent his nights in prayer. He wanted to contemplate his God for a long time and then pass on the fruit of his contemplation to others. This became the motto of his order: " *Contemplata aliis tradere* – To transmit to others what one has contemplated." He also wanted to obtain the salvation of all through his tears: " *My God, my God, what will become of the souls of poor sinners?* Thanks to his prayer, the Order of Friars Preachers changed the face of Europe.

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus, for her part, discovered the extraordinary power of prayer on the occasion of the condemnation to death of the criminal Pranzini. She had masses celebrated for him and recited novenas, desiring with all her missionary heart to save the soul of the hardened sinner. And against all hope, she obtained from him a gesture of repentance: he was her " *first child* ", she would say. She then groped for this vocation that transformed her life, and wrote: " *In the heart of the Church, my mother, I will be love. And then I'll be everything.* »

Fellow pilgrims, perhaps we are discouraged by the lack of results of our missionary action. **Saint Bernadette**, on the other hand, did not let herself be stopped by the incredulity with which her testimony was received:

"***I am not in charge of making you believe it, I am in charge of telling you,***" she repeated. Even if he does not appear to have obtained any conversion, a saint can accomplish an immense work. **Saint Charles de Foucauld** baptized almost no one on African soil and had no disciples during his lifetime. However, his invisible work has borne immense fruit to the present day. He illustrated the words of St. John of the Cross: "***A single act of pure love is more useful to the Church than all other works put together.*** »

In a word: it is by having **God within us** that we participate best in the work of salvation, in the missionary work. For this reason, **Eucharistic devotion is at the heart of the soul of every apostolate**: it is from the sacred host that the missionary impulse springs, and it is to it that all souls must be led. *"To evangelize the world, we need apostles who are experts in the celebration, adoration and contemplation of the Eucharist,"* confirmed John Paul II.¹⁰

The Virgin Mary, Queen of the Missions

In our missionary prayer, let us not forget **the crucial role of the Virgin Mary**. Saint Dominic understood this well, he who developed the practice of the rosary as a missionary instrument par excellence at the beginning of the thirteenth century. By her *Fiat*, by her perfect docility, Mary is

Christ's "partner" in the work of salvation, she is the queen of missionaries and of mission, as Pius XII reminds us: *"To souls who desire to live more sincerely and more completely the doctrine of Jesus, to those who are burning to make it known to others, the Virgin Mary obtains the grace of the apostolate, she puts on their lips the words that convince without offend, it animates them with an ingenious zeal and a humble, patient, and devoted affection, without which the apostle is in danger of soon growing weary"*¹¹. Why is it so effective? Because more than any other, **it carries God within it**, as on the day of the Visitation, **and reminds us that the secret of any mission is to carry God within oneself**. Not our ideas, not our plans, but **the living presence of the Lord working in us**. Very often, people have drawn closer to the Church and to Christ because they have first come closer to Mary, through the rosary, through the miraculous medal, through the sweetness of Marian prayer. Let us therefore ask that devotion to Mary grow in us, and let us entrust the people we meet to their Heavenly Mother.

Dear pilgrim friends, if we want our world to become Christian again, let us first of all be men and women of prayer. We will then be friends of God, reservoirs of living water, contemplative missionaries!

10. Message for World Mission Day 2004.

11. Pius XII, radio message for the National Marian Congress of Belgium, 5 September 1954.

Quotes

The spiritual life constitutes the very heart of the Christian apostolate, and this is all the more urgent because the orientation of the modern world, and its ever more avid appeal to the prodigious resources of technology, seem to be diametrically opposed to the serious practice of prayer and union with God.

Pius XII, April 3, 1956

Christ is crowded with apostles who speak of Him. Oh, how He would like apostles who live by Him!

Father A. Peyriguere

Later on, the soul will produce fruit just to the extent that the inner man has been formed in it... If this interior life is nil, there may be zeal, good intentions, and a lot of work, but the fruits will be nil. It is a source that would like to give holiness to others, but cannot because it does not have it; we give only what we have, and it is in solitude, in this life alone with God alone, in this profound recollection of the soul that forgets all creation in order to live alone in union with God, that God gives himself entirely to the one who also gives himself entirely to Him.

Saint Charles de Foucauld, *Letter to Father Jerome*, May 19, 1898 (OS, p. 765)

To remain together was the condition set by Jesus for accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit; the necessary condition for harmony between them was prolonged prayer. A great lesson for any Christian community is presented here. It is sometimes thought that missionary effectiveness depends essentially on careful programming, followed by intelligent implementation through concrete commitment. The Lord certainly asks for our collaboration, but before any response on our part, his initiative is necessary: the true protagonist of the Church is her Spirit. The roots of our being and our action are to be found in the wise and far-sighted silence of God.

Benedict XVI, Homily of 4 June 2006

The active life must proceed from the contemplative life, translate it and continue it outwardly, detaching itself from it as little as possible.

Dom Chautard

It is not possible to engage in the direct apostolate if one is not a soul of prayer. Let us be aware that we are one with Christ, as He was aware that He is one with His Father; our activity is truly apostolic only to the extent that we allow Him to work in us and through us with His power, His desire and His love.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta, *The Joy of Gift*, trans. Paul Granville, preface by Malcolm Muggeridge, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, coll. "Livre de vie", 1979, p. 70

Before the apostolate of word and deed, there is the apostolate of prayer and suffering, without which the external apostolate would be nothing, exactly nothing. Words and actions come only in the last place, after what I will call the apostolate of silence in love, which was the greatest apostolate of Jesus and Mary in Nazareth for thirty years. Jesus preached in silence just because he was the Word of God incarnate. You too preach by what you are: children of God, confirmed in the Holy Spirit and deified by the Eucharist. He preached by his example, you also preach by your example, if you are Christians that you should be.

Father of Elbée, *Believing in Love*

The missionaries will exert themselves in vain to bring the pagans to the Catholic religion, to shed their sweat and even their blood; it will be in vain for them to call upon all their knowledge, their skill, all human means; unless the grace of God touches the hearts of the infidels to soften them and draw them to Him, the heralds of the Gospel will obtain nothing, all their efforts will end in nothingness. But the faculty of prayer being the share of all, it is naturally in the power of all to give the Missions this help and, in a way, this nourishment.

Pius XI, *Encyclical Rerum Ecclesiae*



Bibliography

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