

XLII.

The Prayer of the Regenerated.

"Likewise the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which can not be uttered." —*Rom. viii. 26.*

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Next in order comes the question: What is the work of the Holy Spirit in the *prayer of the regenerated*?

Here we distinguish (1) the prayer of the saint, and (2) that of the Holy Spirit for him.

The last we consider first, because, through the Apostle Paul, we receive clearest revelation concerning it: "Likewise the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that can not be uttered" (*Rom. viii. 26*). For the better understanding of this passage, observe:

In the *first* place, that the apostle refers to the prayer or groan arising not from the regenerated person himself, but from another in his behalf. It is not a prayer, but an intercession from the Holy Spirit for him."¹³

In the *second* place, it is necessary to distinguish between the intercession of the Holy Spirit and of Jesus Christ the Righteous.

Christ intercedes for us in *heaven*, and the Holy Spirit on *earth*. Christ our Holy Head, being *absent* from us, intercedes *outside* of us; the Holy Spirit our Comforter intercedes *in our own heart* which He has chosen as His temple.

There is a difference, not only of place, but also in the *nature* of this twofold intercession. The glorified Christ intercedes in heaven for His elect and redeemed, *to obtain for them the fruit of His sacrifice*: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

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13 Expositors of an earlier period judged with Calvin that the intercession of the Holy Spirit signified a working upon us, by virtue of which *we ourselves groaned in ourselves*. But this view is incorrect; for [verse 23](#) states what Calvin supposed to be stated in [verse 26](#). In the former, the apostle speaks of groanings that proceed from us, wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. [Verse 26](#) can not be a mere repetition; for the word "likewise" introduces a new thing, altho it is similar to the preceding. Moreover, the word here applied to the Holy Spirit is the same as the one used in [verse 34](#), "*entunchánein*," which signifies the intercession of the Holy Spirit. And again, the word "*sunantilambánesthai*," which is translated "to help," requires that the person rendering assistance be not only in us, but also works *with us* and *for us*. [Verse 27](#) leads to the same conclusion, first, because it speaks of the mind of the *Spirit*, and not of man's mind; secondly, because the intercession is said to be according to God, "*katà Theón*," not "*eis Theón*," *i.e.*, according to the will of God, and this can be said of the Holy Spirit alone. We do not, however, deny that, in one respect, this groaning makes instrumental use of the vocal organs, as in the matter of the "*glóssais lalein*," the speaking with tongues. We maintain only that the unutterable groaning does not imply the use of those organs; rather the opposite.

Righteous" (1 John ii. i). But the object of the Holy Spirit's petitions is the laying bare of all the deep and hidden *needs* of the saints before the eye of the Triune God.

In Christ there is a union of God and man, since, being in the form of God, He took upon Himself the human nature. Hence His prayer is that of the Son of God, but in union with the nature of man. He prays as the Head of the new race, as King of His people, as the one that seals the covenant of the New Testament in His blood. In like manner, there is to some extent a union between God and man, when the Holy Spirit prays for the saints. For, by His indwelling in the hearts of the saints, He has established a lasting and most intimate union, and by virtue of that union putting Himself in their place, He prays for them and in their stead.

In each instance there is intercession, but in each in a *different manner*. In his priestly capacity, as head of the family, the father prays for his family not because the members could not offer similar prayer, but on account of his calling as their head to represent them before God. All pray, but he as their head prays for them all. And thus, as the Head of the Body, it is the calling of Christ to pray for the Body. Tho their prayer were perfect, His prayer would still be needed. All the members must pray, but He must pray for them all. Entirely different, however, is the prayer of the mother for her dying child. Being only five or six years old, the little one can scarcely pray for himself. He has not the slightest conception of what is happening to him, nor of his own needs. Then his mother kneels by his side and prays for him, "helping his infirmities, for he knoweth not what to pray for as he ought." If he were twenty years older, there would be no need of it; he himself could understand his condition and pray for himself. And this applies to the intercession of the Holy Ghost. If the saint were what he ought to be, and could pray as he ought, there would be no need of this intercession. But, being imperfect and beset by weaknesses, not knowing what to pray for, the Holy Spirit helpeth his infirmities, and prays for him.

Christ intercedes for the body because He is the Head; even tho the prayers of the members were perfect and mature, He would still intercede with the Father in their behalf. But the Holy Spirit prays because the prayers of the saints are *imperfect, immature, and insufficient*. His prayer is, *complementary* and necessary, inasmuch as the saint can not yet pray as he ought; hence *decreasing* as the saint learns to pray more and more correctly.

The intercession of the Holy Spirit is according to the saint's *condition*, which is described in the seventh chapter of Romans. Surely, the Lord God might have been pleased to regenerate the sinner in such a way as to deliver him at once and completely from sin, and from all the after-effects of his old nature; but He has ordained it otherwise. Regeneration does not effect such a sudden change. It does indeed change his *state* before God at once and completely, but it does not place him at once in a *condition* of perfect holiness. On the contrary, after regeneration it remains, on the one hand, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Rom. vii. 22; but also, on the other, "I see another law in my members,

warring against the law of my mind.” (Rom. vii. 23) Hence the cry: “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. vii. 24)

And the intercession of the Holy Spirit fully meets this condition. If in regeneration we became perfectly holy, without any infirmity, with perfect knowledge what we should pray for, there would be no need of this intercession. But, this not being so, the Holy Spirit comes to help our infirmities, *in us to pray for us, as tho it were our own prayer.*

This *last point* must be emphasized. The Holy Spirit prays for men called *saints*; and it must be maintained that every regenerated person is a saint, his infirmities notwithstanding; a saint, not for what he is in himself, but because of the word of Christ: “*Thou art Mine.*” And these two conditions, (1) of being a saint, and (2) still unholy in himself, can not remain unreconciled. Wherefore the Sacred Scripture teaches that, altho we lie in the midst of death, yet in Christ we are holy; hence we have a holiness, yet not *in us*, but *outside* of us in Christ Jesus. “Our Life is hid with Christ in God.” And the same applies to our *prayers*. *We are saints not only in name, but in deed.* And therefore the prayers that ascend to the mercy-seat from our hearts *must be holy prayers*. It is the sweet incense of the prayers of the saints. But being unable of ourselves to kindle the incense, the Holy Spirit helps our infirmities, and from our hearts prays to God in our behalf. We are not conscious of it; He prays for and in us with groans that can not be uttered; which does not mean that He makes *us* utter groans for which we can not account, but that He groans in us with affections and emotions which may comfort us, but which have nothing in common with the sighing of our respiratory organs. This is clear from [verse 27](#), where St. Paul declares, that He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.

Apart from the intercession of the Holy Spirit in our behalf there is also a work of His Person *in our own prayers*.

The proportion between these two operations is different according to our different conditions. The child, regenerated in the cradle and deceased before conversion was possible, could not pray for himself; the Holy Spirit prayed therefore for and in him with groans that can not be uttered. But if the child had lived and was converted at a later age, it would first have been the prayer of the Holy Spirit alone; and after his conversion his own prayers would have been added. And, even after his conversion, he may become indifferent and fall into a temporary apostasy, so that his own prayer fails altogether; yet the prayer of the Holy Spirit in him never fails.

Finally, according to the measure of his spiritual growth, his progress in prayer will be either slow or rapid. The Holy Spirit prays in us as long and in as much as we can not pray for ourselves; but at the same time He teaches *us* to pray, that gradually His prayer may become superfluous. This includes that when temptations threaten us of which we are ignorant,

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or we are in the midst of assaults and conflicts which we fail to understand, the Holy Spirit immediately renews His prayer, and cries unto God in our behalf.

But this should not be understood as tho the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray, that He may withdraw Himself altogether from our prayers. On the contrary, every prayer of the saint must be *in communion with the Holy Spirit*. In order to be more earnest in prayer we must sustain a more intimate communion. The more we pray alone and of ourselves, the more our prayer degenerates into a *sinful* prayer, and ceases to be the prayer of a *child of God*. Wherefore St. Jude admonishes us to pray *in the Spirit*.

There is only this difference: when the Holy Spirit prays for us, He prays *independently of us*, altho in our own heart; but when we have learned to pray, altho the Holy Spirit continues to be the real Petitioner, yet He prays *with us* and *through us*, and cries unto God from our lips. As a mother first prays *for* her child without his knowledge, and then teaches him to pray that by and by she may pray *with him*, so also is the work of the Holy Spirit. He begins with praying for us; then He teaches us to pray; and when we have made some progress in the school of prayer, then He begins to pray with us not only *in us*, but *through us*. This is the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry "Abba, Father"; but in such a way that at the same moment He testifies with our spirits that we are the children of God.

For this reason the Lord said to the woman of Samaria: "The hour cometh and now is when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth." (John iv. 23) The addition "in truth" had reference to the symbolic service of ceremonies in Israel. The land of Canaan was the type of heaven, Jerusalem of the inner sanctuary, and Zion was the throne of God; the bloody sacrifices of ram and heifer signified the remission of sin; the altar of incense was symbol of the prayers of the saints. All this was truly typical, but it was not the truth itself. Jerusalem was not the sanctuary of the Lord Jehovah, and Zion was not the mercy-seat. The truth of all this was and is in the heaven of heavens, and thus truth and grace came by Jesus Christ, even as its symbol and shadow had come by the law of Moses. After the coming of Christ, the prayers of the saints were to be separated from Jerusalem; wherefore Jesus said to the woman: "Jerusalem and Gerizim are out of the question; they belong to the dispensation of shadows; and that dispensation ceased with My coming into the world. Henceforth there will be no more worship in shadows; but a worship of the Father in actuality and in truth." And this gives us the true interpretation of the addition: "in Spirit." So long as the people depended upon the service of shadows, they looked upon *external* things as supports of their prayers. But, since it was to be a worship in *truth*, it needed the *inward* support which the *Comforter*, the Holy Spirit, offered them.

The saint is a saint because he received the Holy Spirit, who took up His abode with him and inwardly married Himself to the soul. Every vital utterance proceeding from him, apart from the Holy Spirit in him, is foreign to his sonship and is sin. Only in so far as he

is moved and operated upon by the indwelling Spirit are his thoughts, words, and deeds the utterances of the child of God in him.

And if this is true of the whole domain of his life, how much more of his *life of prayer*? After his conversion he often prays of himself apart from the Holy Spirit; but that is the prayer, not of God's child, but of the old sinner. But when the communion of the Holy Spirit is active in his heart, and works in him both the impulse and the animation of his prayer, then it is truly the prayer of the child of God, because wrought in him by the Holy Spirit.

Wherefore Zacharias combines the Spirit of grace and of supplication. It is the same Spirit who, entering our hearts, unlocks unto us the grace of God, enriches us with that grace, teaches us to realize that grace, and at the same time causes our *thirst* for that grace to utter itself *in prayer*. Prayer is the cry for grace, and can not be uttered until the Holy Spirit presents to the spiritual eye the riches of grace which are in Christ Jesus. And, on the other hand, the Holy Spirit can not cause these riches of grace to scintillate before the eye of the soul without creating in us thirst and longing desire for this grace; thus compelling us to pray.

Or, to put it more comprehensively, the prayer of the saint requires three things:

First, an insight into the riches of eternal redemption.

Second, vivid impressions of his spiritual deadness and distress.

Lastly, the earnest desire for lively fellowship with the unsearchable treasures of divine grace.

And how can the holy presence of the Lord Jehovah be revealed to him in peace but by the Holy Spirit, entering into his heart? And how can he have a *vivid* realization of his spiritual distress except the Holy Spirit reveal it to him? And how shall he be so bold, out of that distress, to cry unto God in the fellowship of love except the Holy Spirit create boldness and confidence in his soul?



XLIII.

Prayer for and with Each Other.

“Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.”—*James v. 16*.

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Let our last article touch once more the key of love wherein the article preceding that of prayer was set. To speak of the Spirit’s work in our prayers, omitting *the intercession of the saints*, betrays a lack of understanding concerning the Spirit of all grace.

Prayer for others is quite different from prayer for ourselves. The latter is indeed lawful; God even commands us “in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to make our requests known unto God.” Yet it may contain refined egoism even tho it be followed by thanksgiving; hence to prayer is added *intercession*, that in prayer the breath of love may quench gently, yet effectually, remaining egoism, and lead us to the still holier prayer for the heavenly King and His Kingdom.

Christ prays for us, but the Bride must also pray for her heavenly Bridegroom. David’s prayer for Solomon points beyond Solomon to the Messiah: “Give the King Thy judgments, O God” (*Psalms lxxii. 1*). In the Twentieth and Sixty-first Psalms the same thought is expressed. However, this is not a prayer for His Person (for as such He is glorified already), but for the coming of His Kingdom, for the extending of His Name to the ends of the earth, for the gathering in of the souls of His elect.

In the Lord’s Prayer, this most holy petition stands even in the foreground; for when we pray, “Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done,” (*Luke xi. 2*) we are inspired, not by love for self or for others, but by love for Him who is in heaven. It is true, we realize that the fulfilling of that prayer is most desirable for others and ourselves; still it is the *love for God* that stands here in the foreground. It is the summary of *prayer* eminently fitting the summary of the *law*: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” (*Matt. xxii. 37*) This is the first and great *commandment*. Then, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (*Matt. xxii. 39*) And so in our prayer: first, for the cause of God, this is the first and great *petition*; then, prayer for the neighbor as for ourselves. Our *prayer* is the test of our relation to the first and great *commandment*.

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And what is the work of the Holy Spirit in the prayer of intercession?

It is necessary here, for a clear understanding, to distinguish between a *twofold intercession*: (1) there is a prayer for the things that pertain to the body of Christ; and (2) another for the things that do not belong to that body, according to our impression and conception of the matter.

Prayer for kings, and for all that are in authority, does not concern the things that pertain to the body of Christ; neither does the prayer for our enemies, nor that for the place of our habitation, for country, army, and navy, for a bountiful harvest, for deliverance from pesti-