

Prayer in the life of St. Vincent Pallotti

There is a prayer in the Pallottine Tradition, well known in our communities, in which we turn to the Lord and ask him to keep alive in our family the spirit with which St. Vincent was filled, so we strive to love all that he loved and to do what he taught us ...

This prayer, which we recite almost every day, is really a key to interpret and analyze the underlying motivations that bind us to our Founder and which give us a strong sense of belonging to his family.

As his children we want to love what St. Vincent loved.

As his disciples we want to do what he taught us.

It is in his experience of prayer that we discover what Saint Vincent loved even before looking at his apostolic zeal and his enthusiasm in charity towards all. Furthermore, his relationship with the Lord is the place where we come to know who he loved and by whom he feels infinitely loved.

"You, O my God, who mercifully created me and with everlasting love have loved me, and love me, and therefore having mercy on me have drawn me to yourself, guide me, move me according to your infinite mercy in every thought, word, and operation." (cf OCCC 10, p. 134).

"... Being a living image of God, a living image of the Holy Spirit, who is infinite love, incomprehensible immensity of the Father and the Son: therefore since You are a natural constituent part of my Soul which aspires to infinite Love ... I am obliged to live a life of Love in the Infinite Love: therefore I have to regulate all the thoughts of my mind and affections of the heart with Love to aspire to infinite Love ... (cf. OCCC 13, p. 83 - 84).

When indicating a place from which prayer springs, the Scriptures speak sometimes of the soul or of the spirit and more often of the heart ... it is the heart that prays.

The heart is the dwelling place where I am, where I live (according to the Semitic or Biblical expression: where I "descend"). It is our hidden center, beyond the reach of our reason and of others, only the Spirit of God can scrutinize and know it. It is the place of decision which is in the depth of our psychic faculties. It is the place of truth where we choose life or death. It is the meeting place, since we are beings in the image of God we live in relation (to others) (cf. CCC nos. 2562-2563).

With great respect and devotion we dare to enter the innermost sanctuary of the heart of St. Vincent, we do so like children who accede to the place that is most dear, secret, or closely guarded by their parents.

We dare to enter with the fear of one who does not wish to desecrate a holy place and at the same time with the right of children who know that in this shrine the most precious wealth that he left us as a legacy is kept:

"Desiring greatly to love God

I wish to and intend to do so effectively and to have loved

and to love God and give him infinite glory with infinite perfection

infinitely from all eternity, for all eternity, infinitely

but in such a way as if I were at the same time in Heaven and on earth; in Heaven to love God supremely ..." (OCCC 10, p. 69).

When we enter the shrine or sanctuary of the inner life of St. Vincent - especially through his spiritual diary - we come face to face with a mine of desires, intentions, aspirations, professions of faith, in which his choice of God reaches its climax, even to the extent of annihilating the most vital needs of the human person: "My God ... not the intellect, but God, not the will, but God ... not the soul, but God, not sight, but God, not the hearing, but God, not smell, but God, not taste, and speech, but God ... " (OCC 10, p.131).

Looking at his relationship with the Lord in prayer, we understand the motivations, reasons and the way he loved God, but especially we appreciate how he feels loved by God the Father most amiable, loving, tender.

None of us ignores the fact that St. Vincent received a solid education in prayer. We know many episodes of his childhood, especially the way in which his mother led him and accompanied him (we think of the novena to the Holy Spirit). St. Vincent acquired a spirit of prayer from his parents, from the Sacraments, from daily participation in the Eucharist with his father, from spiritual direction, through his desire for assimilation to Christ (flagellation) and through his intense relationship with the Madonna, up to the Mystical Marriage in which it is she who takes the initiative.

Already in his youth he was a man of prayer. We could even say *he was a man who became prayer*.

We cannot penetrate his mystical experience which was a very personal and ineffable encounter with the Mystery, but as children we want to know how he prayed in order to allow ourselves be permeated by his spirit of prayer.

In perfect harmony with the canons of the Christian Tradition, the prayer style of St. Vincent is just as it is described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

"Great is the mystery of the faith!" ... This mystery, then, requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer (cf. CCC n. 2558).

St Vincent lived prayer as a personal relationship; an intense relationship, one that is intimate, profound, uninterrupted, ineffable, a true immersion in God.

His prayer is a prayer of awareness, full of presence and self-consciousness; enriched by all the connotations of the relationship between God and the human person, that are present in Revelation: *"If you only knew the gift of God! " (Jn 4:10). The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for. (cf. CCC 2560).*

In the experience of San Vincent, on every page of his diary, this spiritual truth shines: it is God who desires and wants to communicate to him His great love, His infinite love.

Prayer, as a relationship with the Lord, *so tender, loving, amiable Father* and the most beloved Jesus, *enamored of souls*, is the most precious gift of the communicative Love of God: *'My heart can no longer hold itself back in its desire to communicate with souls'*, this is how St. Vincent writes, borrowing the words of the Heart of Jesus to Saint Margaret M. Alacoque. (cf. OCC 10, p. 85).

His prayer is:

confessio laudis: a proclamation of what God does for him, of how much God loves him: "You, O my God, have loved me, and love me ..." (OCCC 10, p. 134).

confessio vitae: a lucid and sincere declaration of his unworthiness and ingratitude is a constant and recurring attitude, as we are taught by the doctrine of the Church: "*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 (Psalm 130,1)?

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 (Rom 8,26)," are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer." Man is a beggar before God." (cf. CCC 2559).

confessio fidei: a solemn act of unconditional trust that may even seem implausible, going so far as to affirm that the greater is his unworthiness and his misery, so much the greater is *the deluge of graces and mercies that God continues to pour out upon him* "*I believe, O my God, that I would abuse your mercy if I were to think that your infinite mercy does not triumph over my indisposition, and I am treated mercifully by You in your infinite mercy with a great abundance of grace as if I were righteous of heart ...*" (OCCC 10, p. 182).

His prayer is continuous and uninterrupted, "*Pray all the time, asking for what you need, praying in the Spirit on every possible occasion*" (Ephesians 6.18) as the continuous flow of a river of clear water, moment by moment, breath by breath, without respite.

His prayer is an intimate dialogue with the Lord and a deep and personal conversation in which he feels himself to be the subject of an infinite love which is free, unconditional, a love that grows just as much as his unworthiness, or rather his awareness of not being worthy to merit it, grows.

His prayer is an ineffable experience, untranslatable into common terms, often made up of very short words or silence, because words are not enough; it is a silent contemplation, adoration, a mystical experience of personal encounter with Jesus Christ, *who is the more than beloved Bridegroom of the Soul ...*

His prayer is Trinitarian: it is always directed to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His apostolic prayer for vocations, and each one of his prayers of offering, intercession and blessings are shining examples of this.

His prayer is Christ centered, always in union with Jesus, through the merits of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus: "*anything you ask for...in my name*" (Jn 16, 23). Thus St. Vincent turns to the Father: I intend to adore you, love you, thank you and pray to you *with all the affection of the most holy heart of Jesus.*

His prayer is Marian; Mary has a place of honour and has a most important role in the spiritual life of St. Vincent Pallotti. There isn't any invocation of God that is not expressed as *through the merits and the intercession of Mary most Holy, our more than beloved Mother.* His rapport with our Lady culminates when "*the great Mother of Mercy, to triumph with a Miracle of Mercy over the ingratitude and inconceivable unworthiness of the most miserable of all the subjects of the Kingdom of mercy, most mercifully deigns to effect a spiritual espousal and she gives him as a dowry all that she possesses and she makes known to him her own Divine Son, she pledges herself that everything may be totally transformed in the Holy Spirit*". (cf. OCCC 10, p. 195).

His prayer is Universal: always for all and in union with all the Angels and Saints, with all creatures.

His prayer is transformative, a full immersion in God, in His love and in His mercy:

- * *immersed in the blood of Jesus I confess your infinite magnificence, and my immense misery ...* (OOCC 10, p. 29).
- * *immersed in your infinite mercy...* (OOCC 10, p. 204)
- * *to arrive at and to be fully immersed in, and as it were transformed in your Divine Love and in your infinite Charity, and in all of You...* (OOCC 13, p. 53)
- * *everything entirely immersed in God, and thus immersed in purity in essence...* (OOCC 13, p. 431)
- * *for ever immersed in the sweetest torrent of your true joy...* (OOCC 13, p. 568)

And the list could go on, up to infinity ...

The experience of the relationship with God in prayer delights the heart of St. Vincent and it renders him capable of receiving the Infinite Love, the Infinite Mercy, and the Holiness itself of God.

As well as being a man who became prayer, St. Vincent is a great master of Prayer.

As his disciples we want to do as he has taught us: “ Do as he tells you (Jn 2,4) ”.

How did St. Vincent teach us to pray? With words and above all with example as we have seen. His teaching, which is contained in the Rule, in ‘God the Infinite Love’, in his letters, in the texts of the various ‘Months of May’ – where he has Mary speak – trains us to develop in ourselves a profound attitude of prayer and of contemplation of the Love of God for us all.

In his school we learn to cultivate a constant attitude of openness to the presence of God and of availability to the action of His Spirit.

Our interior glance becomes more acute and is able to contemplate the prodigies of grace and of the mercy of God, which take place in us and all around us; optimum conditions are created in which the power of God together with an awareness of our misery, frailty and incapacity, can finally meet and holiness can blossom.

It is not possible to present here the vastness of the teachings of St. Vincent on prayer, we limit ourselves to some elements, aware that we are only drawing on part of his riches.

Let us consider all that he taught us to begin the day, how to live the time of meditation, how to adore and as it were breathe the presence of God.

“Grant O Lord that your worship and the ecclesiastical ceremonies be exercised in the most exact, perfect and holy way”, this was the desire of St. Vincent from the making of the sign of the cross in the morning until the last act of the day. His aspirations always tended towards the most sublime perfection.

As soon as we wake and get up, he invites us to:

- * kiss the most holy Crucifix which we have under the pillow;
- * take the holy water and make the sign of the Cross;
*trusting that we be fortified with the power of the Father,
enlightened with the Wisdom of the Son,
and sanctified with the virtue and charity of the Holy Spirit.*

It seems that he never insists strongly enough in proposing the making of the sign of the cross as he had learnt it from St Francis de Sales and which he calls 'a devout and very effective practice' and which he reformulated in a more extensive and personalized version:

*By myself I can do nothing, with You I can do everything,
for your glory I want to do everything,
to You be endless glory, honor, love, reverence,
to me scorn, shame, sufferings. (cf. OCCC 10, p. 122).*

As an expert Master of Prayer, he suggests to us also the attitudes to be cultivated:

- * sincere distrust of our own strength;
- * with complete trust in God;
- * with purity of intention and animated by pure charity;
- * with a true sense of our own unworthiness;

the motivations:

- * to increase our trust in grace;
- * to spend the day in the fullness and in the perfection of holy works;

the occasions:

- * each time that we hear any call to a community exercise;
- * in temptations of any kind;
- * at the beginning of and throughout the duration of works or activities.

Furthermore he invites us to promote the use of these prayers among the faithful, by word of mouth, or by having them printed.

Even in dressing ourselves and in our walking he exhorts us pray:

- * Psalm 94 with the most lively and effective desire that all the beings who are, and who will be until the end of the world, may know, and may render homage, adoration and perfect obedience to the Most High;
- * Psalm 66 to obtain for ourselves and for all persons the mercy and the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and Eternal Life;
- * Psalm 116 to be recited with a tone of voice of one who is being heard and with the most lively desire that all peoples and all nations may come to praise the Most High;
- * Psalm 50 to begin all the works of the day with a spirit of true humility and penance.

He exhorts us to :

- * *make continuous acts of adoration, love, gratitude, as devotion and trust inspire us ;*
- * *renew and increase faith in the presence of God:*

My God, I am unworthy of this gift of faith and the practice of your divine Presence ... My God, my adorations deserve to be rejected by You, I intend to adore you from all eternity and for all eternity at every infinite moment as You are, One in Essence, Triune in Persons, infinite in Your attributes and I adore You with the Adoration of all Angels and Saints and of their most

holy Queen, Mary, and that of all creatures, I intend to adore you, love you, thank you, and pray with all the affections of the most holy Heart of Jesus.

He recommends adoration of the Blessed Sacrament to us and suggests:

- * *to remain in silence, with humble confidence and great concentration, listening to Jesus speaking to us: "I will not put any limit to my graces for those souls who come looking for them in this my heart."*

He exhorts us to give great importance to daily meditation:

- * *to pray to obtain the enlightenment and the graces to meditate fruitfully;*
- * *to be clear on the purpose of meditation;*
- * *to cultivate inner silence;*
- * *to ask pardon for faults committed in meditation;*
- * *to give thank for the gifts and the enlightenment received;*
- * *to pray for the gift to maintain and increase the fruits of meditation.*

I ask forgiveness of the Lord and of St. Vincent for all the limitations and inadequacies of this sharing.

To conclude let us turn to St. Vincent and pray the final part of the prayer mentioned at the beginning:

"I pray O Father, that Your spirit of humility and charity be in me and in all your children. As Jesus Christ prayed for his disciples, so too You pray in the Holy Trinity for us all, for we may be freed from evil, sanctified in the Truth and confirmed in the Union."

For personal reflection

1. In order to learn how to pray, I must know what kind of relationship I have with the Lord.
2. How has my belonging to the Family of St. Vincent Pallotti influenced, enriched and deepened my relationship with the Lord and the style of my prayer life?
3. For my future life, what attitudes do I want to cultivate for a life of prayer that is more intense and deeper?

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