

## The Importance of Prayer

Address to clergy, religious and laity at St. Mary's Cathedral,  
Miami-  
September 10, 1987.

Dear Archbishop McCarthy and my other brother Bishops,  
Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
Dear Friends,

1. It is a great joy for me to begin my pastoral visit here in Miami, in this Cathedral of St. Mary's. This Church represents a long history of faith and dedicated Christian life and witness on the part of countless clergy, Religious and laity in this city and in the state of Florida.

In coming among you, I wish to commend you for the Jubilee Year of Reconciliation that you have observed in preparation for my visit, and for the Archdiocesan Synod that you are holding. These events are meant to be of lasting spiritual value for all of you of the Archdiocese, so that your Christian witness in everyday life may be ever more fruitful in the society of which you are a part. I also commend you for meeting the challenges of a rapidly expanding local Church. Over the years, you have welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees, of different languages and cultures, fleeing religious or political oppression. You have struggled along with them and for them to build a united community in Christ. I urge all of you-the clergy, religious and laity of Miami, in communion with your Archbishop and with me-to continue seeking ways to deepen our ecclesial unity in the one Body of Christ.

This unity is expressed in many ways. It is unity in preaching the Gospel, professing the Creed, celebrating the liturgy and participating in the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. It is unity in going forward as a missionary Church to evangelize the world. But our very presence in this house of God reminds us of another source of unity. I am referring to the personal prayer of each and every one of us, whether offered here in a moment of silence or amid the many settings in which our daily life unfolds. "The spiritual life," as the Second Vatican Council reminds us, "is not confined to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is certainly called to pray with others, but he must also enter

into his room to pray to the Father in secret; indeed, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul, he should pray without ceasing" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 12).

### How to Pray

2. People always have a great interest in prayer. Like the Apostles, they want to know how to pray. The response that Jesus gives is one known to all of us: it is the "Our Father," in which he reveals in a few simple words all the essentials of prayer. The focus is not primarily on ourselves, but on the heavenly Father to whom we commit our lives in faith and trust. Our first concern must be his name, his kingdom, his will. Only then do we ask for our daily bread, for forgiveness, and for deliverance from trials yet to come.

The "Our Father" teaches us that our relationship to God is one of dependence. We are his adopted sons and daughters through Christ. All that we are and all that we have comes from him and is destined to return to him. The "Our Father" also presents prayer to us as an expression of our desires. Beset as we are by human weakness, we naturally ask God for many things. Many times we may be tempted to think that he does not hear or answer us. But as St. Augustine wisely reminds us, God already knows what we desire even before we ask. He says that prayer is for our benefit because in praying we "exercise" our desires so that we will grasp what God is preparing to give us. It is an opportunity for us to "widen our hearts" (cf. Letter to Proka, Epistle 30).

In other words, God is always listening to us and answering us—but from the perspective of a love far greater and a knowledge far deeper than our own. When it appears that he is not fulfilling our desires by granting the things we ask, however unselfish and noble they may be, in reality he is purifying those desires of ours for the sake of a higher good that often surpasses our understanding in this life. The challenge is to "widen our hearts" by hallowing his name, by seeking his kingdom, and by accepting his will. Like Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane we may sometimes pray either for ourselves or others, "Father, you have the

power to do all things. Take this cup away!" But also like Christ we must add, "Not my will but your will be done" (cf. Mt 26:39, 42; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42).

The act of praying is also meant to open us up to God and our neighbor, not only in words but also in action. That is why Christian spirituality, following Jesus himself (cf. Mt 6), associates prayer with fasting and almsgiving. A life of self-denial and charity is a sign of conversion to God's way of thinking, to his way of love. By humbling ourselves through penance, we open ourselves to God. By giving in charity, over and above the demands of justice, we open ourselves to our neighbor. St. Peter Chrysologus gives witness to this tradition when he says: "Prayer, fasting, and mercy...give life to one another. What prayer knocks for upon a door, fasting successfully begs and mercy receives. For, fasting is the soul of prayer; and mercy is the life of fasting.... Fasting does not germinate unless watered by mercy" (Sermon 43).

#### Prayers Tremendous Power

3. Dear brothers and sisters: We must never underestimate the power of prayer to further the Church's redemptive mission and to bring good where there is evil. As I mentioned earlier, we must be united in prayer. We pray not just for ourselves and our loved ones, but also for the needs of the universal Church and of all mankind: for the missions and for priestly and religious vocations, for the conversion of sinners and the salvation of all, for the sick and the dying. As members of the Communion of Saints, our prayer also embraces the souls of those in Purgatory who, in the loving mercy of God, can still find after death the purification they need to enter into the happiness of heaven. Prayer also makes us realize that sometimes our own troubles and desires are small compared to the needs and to the sufferings of so many of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. There is the spiritual suffering of those who have lost their way in life because of sin or a lack of faith in God. There is the material suffering of millions of people who lack food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and education; of those who are deprived of the most fundamental human rights; of those

who are exiles or refugees because of war and oppression. I know that Miami is no stranger to this kind of suffering. We must act to alleviate it, but we must also pray not only for those who suffer, but also for those who inflict suffering.

### Greeting to Hispanics

Dear brothers and sisters: as Pastor of the whole Church I have benefited from the prayers of millions of the faithful throughout the world, and today I express my gratitude to you for the prayers you offer for me, and I ask you to continue. Indeed, with St. Paul I say: "Pray for me that God may put his word on my lips, that I may courageously make known the mystery of the Gospel.... Pray that I may have courage to proclaim it as I ought" (Eph 6:19). And at this moment I am praying in a special way for all of you who make up the household of the faith in this Archdiocese. We are called today and always to remain united in prayer-for the glory of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

strength from Christ's Love

Address at meeting with priests from around the U.S.-St. Martha's Church, Miami, September 10.

Dear brother Priests,

1. Coming here today, I wish to open my heart to you and to celebrate with you the priesthood which we all share. I am convinced that there is no better way to start than to direct our thoughts to that Shepherd whom we all know-the Good Shepherd, the one High Priest, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

My heart is full of gratitude and praise as I express my love for the priesthood, the vocation in which we participate not because we are worthy, but because Christ loves us and has entrusted to us this particular ministry of service. And I thank God for you, my brother priests. In the words of St. Paul: "I thank God...whenever I remember you in my prayers-as indeed I do constantly, night and day" (2 Tm 1:3).

I am also grateful to you, my brother priests, for your welcome of fraternal love, expressed personally and through Father McNulty as your representative. I address my words to all of you present here and to all the priests in the United States. To all of you I express my gratitude for your ministry,

for your perseverance, for your faith and love, for the fact that you are striving to live the priesthood, close to the people, in truth-the truth of being ministers of Christ the Good Shepherd.

As priests, we all hold a "'treasure in earthen vessels'" (2 Cor 4 7). Through no merit of our own, and with all our human weaknesses, we have been called to proclaim God's word, to celebrate the sacred mysteries, especially the Eucharist, to care for the People of God, and to continue the Lord's ministry of reconciliation. In this way, we are servants both of the Lord and of his people, being ourselves constantly called to conversion, constantly invited to "walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

I have come to the United States, my brother priests, in order to confirm you in your faith, according to the will of Christ (cf. Lk 22:32). I have come to you because I want all distances to be bridged, so that together we may grow and