

(English translation)

Palermo, 22 January 1998

## To Be a Living Prayer

Dearest everyone,

...

We know that our spirituality, which is both personal and communitarian, leads us to extend our love vertically, as they say today, towards God; and horizontally towards our neighbour. And the holiness that derives from this is the fruit of the balance between these two loves.

But it's easier for some (and the tendency, at times, towards activism proves it) to develop the horizontal dimension of love more than the vertical dimension.

It's true that we usually direct all that we do to Him: we love others, we work, we suffer, we pray, all for Him.

By continually "making ourselves one" with our neighbours we have often reached the point of loving them with our heart as well. Can we be just as certain that we love God not only with our will, but also with our heart?

At the end of our life we won't be able to present ourselves to God together with others, with the community; we'll have to do so alone.

Can we be sure that in that moment all the love built up in our heart during our lifetime will spontaneously go out, as it should, to the One we ought to have loved always, to the one we will encounter and who will judge us?

In other words, will we be able to say something similar, in some measure at least, to what St. Theresa of Avila said when she was close to death? As a logical consequence of her life of love, she said: "My Lord and my Spouse, the hour so longed for has arrived. It's time we see one another, my Beloved and my Lord .... The hour has come in which ... my soul can finally enjoy you as I so deeply desired"<sup>1</sup>

Will there be in our heart something comparable to this longing, to this burning desire?

That encounter will come for us too, and keeping it in mind, we should try even now to improve the depth and intensity of our relationship with God.

...

In fact, we can love as servants and carry out all that the master wants without ever directing a word to him; or we can love as children, with our hearts filled by the Holy Spirit with loving confidence in our Father: that confidence which leads to speaking with him often, to telling him all our concerns, resolutions, and plans; that confidence, that divine desire which makes us eagerly await the moment in which we can devote ourselves exclusively to him, in profound union with him.

It's prayer, true prayer! We must strive for this, to the point of being a living prayer.

The theologian Evdokimov said something beautiful about prayer: "It's not enough to have prayer, we must become and be prayer, built in a form of prayer...."<sup>2</sup>

Built in a form of prayer, being prayer, as Jesus wants. He said: "Pray at all times" (cf. Lk. 21:36).

I believe that in the hearts of many of us there is a real treasure of supernatural love which can transform our life into authentic prayer, which can build us in prayer. We must only take hold of it and use it in the right moments.

1. Efrén De La Madre De Dios - Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y vida de Santa Teresa*, Madrid 1968, p. 760-761.

2. P. Evdokimov, *Aforismi e citazioni cristiane*, Dizionario Piemme, 1994, p. 153.

During this period then, let's commit ourselves to speak often with God, even in the midst of activity. Let's try to improve precisely in this.

Saying "for you" before every action already transforms it into prayer.

But that's not enough. Let's begin to have a constant dialogue with him, whenever possible. Only in this way can expressions of love for God, similar to those of the saints, spring to our lips at the end of our life.

We should practically recycle the great love we have for our neighbours in love for God.

Chiara Lubich