

Seventh Stage in Contemplative Prayer  
LISTENING & INTERCEDING  
Teaching for Oct.26<sup>th</sup> Prayer session

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Introduction

In the sixth stage of contemplative prayer we pray for the infilling of the Holy Spirit so that He may lead our life in the path of the children of God. Once we enthrone the Holy Spirit at the centre of our life, giving him full freedom to lead our life, He joyfully begins leading our life. The two things He does in this respect are, first, giving directions about the will of God and second, giving divine assistance to accomplish that will. Our response to these two functions of the Holy Spirit are listening to him and praying for his help respectively. Therefore, the seventh stage of the Contemplative Prayer consists of listening prayer and intercessory prayer.

**A Listening Prayer**

Catechism of the Catholic Church describes another most important aspect of Contemplative prayer thus: "Contemplative prayer is *hearing* the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving commitment of a child. It participates in the "Yes" of the Son become servant and the Fiat of God's lowly handmaid. Contemplative prayer is silence, the "symbol of the world to come" or "silent love." Words in this kind of prayer are not speeches; they are like kindling that feeds the fire of love. In this silence, unbearable to the "outer" man, the Father speaks to us his incarnate Word, who suffered, died, and rose; in this silence the Spirit of adoption enables us to share in the prayer of Jesus" (CC2716, 17). This teaching can be better understood when we realize the fact that prayer is more an act of God than an act of man. Prayer is not so much of our speaking as of God's speaking. Therefore, listening aspect of prayer is of paramount importance.

An Example of Jesus' prayer

The very first prayer of Jesus reported in the gospels is his prayer at his baptism: "*After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* (Lk. 3:21-22). It is important to analyze the format of this prayer to understand the essence of Contemplative prayer. It is to be noted that here there is no mention at all of "what" Jesus prayed, but what he heard alone is highlighted. It simply means that hearing what God says to us in prayer is far more important than what we say in prayer.

When once Peter and his companions found Jesus in prayer in the wilderness after a long search for him, they told him that every one had been searching for him. Of course it was an appeal to meet the people waiting for Him. But his response was very strange and unexpected: Simon and those who were with him pursued him and on finding him said, "*Everyone is looking for you."* He told them, "*Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."* So he went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee" (Mk.1: 36-39). It indicates that during the long hours' prayer of that particular morning

the Father had insisted on his preaching in certain nearby cities that day. Yes, during that early Morning Prayer what Jesus heard from his Father was not about ministering to the people who were waiting there, but to preach in those particular nearby cities. That was why he didn't heed to the Apostle's request to meet the people who had been searching for him for long hours. It is not because of his lack of concern for the people who came in search of him but because of his greater zeal to accomplish what his Father had told him that morning. And he said plainly that what he preached were exactly what he had heard from his Father. "*When you lift up the Son of Man you will know that I am who Am; then you will know that I do nothing on my own authority, but I say only what the Father has instructed me to say*" (Jn. 8:28—Good News Version). This explains why Jesus spent long hours daily and sometimes even the whole night in prayer. He had been primarily hearing from the Father, than asking of Him something.

Another important prayer of Jesus was the one he did in the previous night of choosing the 12 Apostles from among his 72 disciples. "*In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named apostles: Simon, whom he named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James...*" (Lk. 6: 12—13). Here, from what Jesus did immediately after that unusual prayer that lasted a whole night it is very evident that Jesus had been listening to his Father as to regarding who all are to be chosen to be the Apostles. That prayer was spent on nothing but hearing from his Father.

Not only in these particular occasions but this was what Jesus had always been doing in his prayer. His prayer was always receiving directions from his Father. This is most evident in his prayer at Gethsemane: "*After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done."* (And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him. He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.), (Lk. 22:41-44). The gospel underlines that an angel came from heaven to strengthen Jesus! Of course, the angel came and strengthened Jesus in his agony. But, usually the angel's coming from heaven is an indication of bringing some specific message from God. Yes, the purpose of angels' coming that night was also to pass a message to Jesus, conforming God's will with regard to Jesus' suffering and death. In short, his prayer at Gethsemane was one of listening in order to discern what is God's will and also asking God's help to accomplish that will.

This listening to his Father in prayer was Jesus' supreme act of obedience to the Father and his servant-hood before the Father. It was the expression of his total surrender to the Father as well as his profound intimacy with the Father. That is why Catechism says thus: "Contemplative prayer is *hearing* the Word of God. Far from being passive, such attentiveness is the obedience of faith, the unconditional acceptance of a servant, and the loving commitment of a child. It participates in the "Yes" of the Son become servant and the Fiat of God's lowly handmaid"(CCC 2716).

### An Example of Mary's prayer

The Catechism in the above mentioned paragraph refers to the Bl. Virgin Mary's "FIAT" in describing contemplative prayer as listening to God. It says that the listening prayer in Contemplation is a participation in the *FIAT* of Mary! There is no doubt that Mary's whole life was a continuous prayer. But the account the gospel gives about her prayer was "hearing" through the angel Gabriel the message from God about the birth of the Messiah and pondering over in her heart what she had heard!

### Listening prayer- the expression of deep relationship with God

The more we grow in our friendship with God in prayer, the more we desire to hear God tell things than telling Him things. The episode of Martha and Mary episode brings out this point clearly. Mary's priority was to sit at the feet of Jesus to hear him. What Martha did was also a good and necessary service to Jesus. Jesus did not underestimate her service at all. But he said, "*There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her*". (Lk. 10:42) Jesus was really teaching the importance of listening part in prayer.

Just as a spouse is very eager to know the deepest desires of his/her partner when they grow deeply in their love, with a sincere determination to do anything for his/her partner and with a readiness to sacrifice any of his/her personal convenience for that of the other, so also at this point of prayer, when we are totally immersed in the ocean of Divine love, we thirst to know our Divine lover's deepest desires with a complete willingness and earnestness to do what ever God wants us to. As the evangelist John perceived the innermost desires of Jesus by leaning on the Master's chest, at the Last Supper, at this 7<sup>th</sup> stage, we most lovingly and attentively listen to what God has to tell us.

In fact, this part of the prayer is that which makes prayer most elevating and joyful experience. As we grow in our intimacy with the Lord through our commitment to daily contemplative prayer, God will enjoy revealing his deepest secrets to us. This is the greatest expression of his love for us. He has promised this through prophet Hosea: "*So I will allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart*" (Hosea 2:16). As we reach this stage, we simply don't feel to ask him for anything but simply enjoy hearing him. This is what Jesus mentioned in his last discourse: "*On that day you will not ask me about anything*" (Jn. 16:22-23).

This sharing from the part of God is his new covenant with us. It is a fulfillment of the actualization of the prophecy made through Jeremiah: "*Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell to you things great beyond reach of your knowledge*" (Jer.33: 3-4). Along with this sharing of his will he also helps us to fulfill his desires. Thus, every day becomes blessed by knowing and doing his will. This is very important because Jesus said: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ...*(Mt. 7:21).

When the Scripture says: "*I will put my Spirit within you so that you will obey my laws and do whatever I command*" (Ezek. 36: 27), it means that the purpose of giving the Holy Spirit to us is to listen to the Spirit to know the will of God. The Holy Spirit also

empowers us to accomplish the Divine will. Hence the close connection between the sixth stage—praying for the in-filling with the Holy Spirit and the seventh stage—listening to God.

In the face of the fact that our natural thinking and ways are far, far different from God's ways and thinking( cfr. Is.55:8), and that what seems right to us may even lead to our perdition( cfr. Proverb. 14:12), this listening prayer becomes all the more important and vital. The Apostle's experience should be an eye-opener to all of us: *"They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the Holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them, so they crossed through Mysia and came down to Troas(Acts. 16:6-8).* Note that preaching the gospel in Asia and Bithynia was not a bad thing in itself. And the Apostles with all their sincerity presumed that preaching the Gospel in Asia would be certainly the will of God. But that was not God's plan for them at that time. In the same way that many things that we want to do now may be good in themselves. But that may not be what God wants us to do at this particular time. If we presume that they are God's will without making an effort to discern God's will properly God may tell also what he told his chosen people: *"In speaking to your fathers on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I gave them no command concerning holocaust or sacrifice. This rather is what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk in all the ways that I command you, so that you may prosper. But they obeyed not, nor did they pay heed. They walked in the hardness of their evil hearts and turned their backs, not their faces, to me ( Jer7:22-24).* In that case, God may tell us also what he said to the Pharisees and Scribes: "Jesus said to them in reply, *"You are misled because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God"( Mt. 22:29).*

Moreover, our goal is to reach the perfection of the Heavenly Father and not merely to keep away from sin. Unless we listen to God frequently how can we know all His ways and desires? Listening prayer is actually the fulfilling of the condition for the actualization of the entreaty in the Lord's prayer " Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven". Needless to say that it is only God's will that matters in Heaven. The whole heavenly court is there to do God's will. For that very reason they are "all ear". Hence, the prayer " Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven" constantly reminds us to be "all ear" to God's words as Jesus and Mary were.

Therefore, listening to God in prayer is highly important. It is only through a purposeful listening to God that we can know his specific will and desires. Otherwise our lives will prove futile in spite of the many good things that we do of our own will. The word "obedient" comes from the Latin word *audire, which means "listening"*. The Scripture says that Jesus was always the obedient Son of the Father. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be Yahweh's "servant". All these mean that he was always listening to the Father. Hence the book of Hebrews says: *"For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, 'As is written of me in the scroll, Behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"( Heb. 10: 5-7).* But in

order to do God's will, first he needed to know that will. That was why Jesus spent hours and hours in prayer every day, especially in the morning to discern God's perfect will for the day. It was that specific will that he accomplished every day. Hence he could meaningfully say before his last breath: "*When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit"* ( Jn. 19:30).

One thing is to be understood here clearly. In the beginning we may find difficult it to discern clearly. That is partly because of our lack of experience or lack of sincere and persistent seeking. But if we persevere in seeking His will, God will certainly reveal His will to every one, because He knows that it is very necessary for our salvation. And it is confirmed in his promise "*Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell to you things great beyond reach of your knowledge"* ( Jer. 33:3).

### Some suggestions for better listening

To make this possible, what we need to do is to wait on the Lord to speak to us. Set apart some time every day for this active listening to Jesus, at least ten minutes. Ten minutes each day for listening to God can bring about radical change in your life. As we make this listening prayer at the end of daily Contemplative prayer time, our prayer becomes a real guideline for all our actions of the day.

Listening with the Scripture is one of the common ways of listening. Here, this listening with the Scripture should be along with listening to the Church. It means, the understanding of the Scripture should always be in conformity with what the Catholic Church teaches us. It should not be mere subjective interpretation.

The charismatic gifts such as gift of knowledge, gift of wisdom and gift of prophecy are very helpful means to listen to God. But much care and prudence are to be used to discern properly.

The inspirations we receive during the listening prayer are to be reflected upon again and again to make sure that they really come from God.

### Caution!

Indolence in listening prayer will cause the whole prayer fruitless. The transformation of life, which is the ultimate goal of Contemplative Prayer will not be realized in the absence of listening prayer. Moreover, ignoring listening prayer is a great irreverence to God because in the usual prayer we give more importance to us than to God by concentrating on asking favors. Suppose we get a rare chance to speak to a great person. What we prefer naturally is to hear from that person than telling our stories to him precisely because his words are far, far valuable than ours. In the same way, as we acknowledge the greatness of God we naturally love to hear him more than to be heard. Hence, avoiding listening prayer in our prayer life is a grave mistake and a great loss.

## B INTERCESSION

The entreaties in The Lord's Prayer: 'Give us this day our daily bread', 'Lead us not into temptation', 'Deliver us from the Evil One' –all these refer to intercession. These are the three important topics for which Jesus has commanded us to intercede for our fellowmen.

Here, it is to be noted that in the Lord's prayer there is not even a mention of praying for personal needs at all. All the prayers of petition are in plural that means they are not for me alone but for me and for all others together. It may seem contrary to our human nature. We are more prone to pray primarily for our personal needs. But, we shall not forget that Lord's Prayer is only for a Christian and a Christian is not supposed to live as human nature dictates but as an adopted child of God. Paul makes this point quite clear: "*So then, my friends, we have an obligation, but it is not to live as our human nature wants us to. For if you live according your human nature, you are going to die; but if by the Spirit you put to death your sinful actions, you will live. And we should not be like cringing, fearful slaves, but we should behave like God's very own children, adopted into the bosom of his family, and calling to him "Father, Father"*"(Rom.8:12-15). Here what Paul means is that a Christian is an adopted child of God by virtue of his birth from the Holy Spirit. He is no more an isolated person but a member of Christ's body. Therefore, every member of Christ's body has an organic relationship with him.

So, once the Holy Spirit has taken over the task of guiding life, through our prayer for the in-filling with the Holy Spirit, automatically we begin a new relationship with all other people. We really begin to act in the spirit of adoption, which we received through our baptism. That means, we bind ourselves with one and all in the world, especially to all our brethren, in an entirely new way. Here we really become concerned about them and their needs just as we are concerned about the needs of our brothers and sisters who became our own by physical birth. Only in this sense, that we can grasp the profound meaning of the commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself". By now, by the virtue of our spiritual adoption we begin to pray for all people with as much interest as we pray for our own needs because we have come to identify their difficulties and sufferings as our own. That was why Paul said: "*And apart from these things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches. When some one is weak, then I feel weak too; when some one is led into sin, I am filled with distress*" ( II Cor. 11: 28-29).

From this it is clear that intercession is becoming of a Christian. It is the obligation of every Christian because it is the greatest act of fraternal charity. Hence, avoiding intercession is a grave sin of omission. That is why the prophet Samuel said so: "*As for me, far be it from me to sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you and to teach you the good and right way*"( I Sam. 12:23). Moreover, Jesus has commanded his disciples to pray: "...give **us** this day **our** daily bread, for give **us our** trespasses, lead **us** not into temptation, deliver **us** from evil.

## Great Intercessors in the Scripture

### **Abraham**

God's revelation to Abraham about the punishment for the people of Sodom and Gomaorah led him to intercede for the people:

*“Then the LORD said: “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me. I mean to find out ... Then Abraham drew nearer to him and said: “Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city; would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty, so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice? The LORD replied, “If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake. Abraham spoke up again: “See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes! What if there are five less than fifty innocent people? Will you destroy the whole city because of those five?” “I will not destroy it,” he answered, “if I find forty-five there.” But Abraham persisted, saying, “What if only forty are found there?” He replied, “I will forebear doing it for the sake of the forty.” Then he said, “Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on. What if only thirty are found there?” He replied, “I will forebear doing it if I can find but thirty there Still he went on, “Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?” “I will not destroy it,” he answered, “for the sake of the twenty.” But he still persisted: “Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time. What if there are at least ten there?” “For the sake of those ten,” he replied, “I will not destroy it.” ( Gen. 18: 20-32).*

### **Moses**

The most striking picture of Moses is his prostrating before God on Sinai for 40 days together in fasting and prayer for God's mercy on his people. It is true that he was so furious against them for their sins of idolatry and impurity. The Scripture reveals how angry he was against them: “Moses then turned and came down the mountain with the two tablets of the commandments in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, front and back; tablets that were made by God, having inscriptions on them that were engraved by God himself... As he drew near the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing. With that, Moses' wrath flared up, so that he threw the tablets down and broke them on the base of the mountain. Taking the calf they had made, he fused it in the fire and then ground it down to powder, which he scattered on the water and made the Israelites drink.

But that is not the end of the story. The Scripture continues: “Moses asked Aaron, “What did this people ever do to you that you should lead them into so grave a sin? ... When Moses saw that the people had been committing adultery... he stood at the camp entrance and shouted, ‘all of you who are on the Lord's side come over here and join me’. And all the Levites came. He told them, ‘ Jehovah the God of Israel says, Get your swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other and kill even your brothers, friends and neighbors. So they did and about 3000 men died that day... The next

day Moses said to the people: 'You have committed a grave sin. I will go up to the LORD, then; perhaps I may be able to make atonement for your sin.' So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Ah, this people has indeed committed a grave sin in making a god of gold for themselves! If you would only forgive their sin! If you will not, then strike me out of the book that you have written." The LORD answered, "Him only who has sinned against me will I strike out of my book. Now, go and lead the people whither I have told you. My angel will go before you" (Ex. 32:15-16, 18-21, 25-28, 30-33).

Here, what we see is the tremendous love of Moses for the people in spite of his uncompromising disagreement with their sinful life. And that deep love for them prompted him to intercede for them even at the risk of his own salvation.

### **Daniel**

Daniel's understanding of the Scriptural prophecy of approaching disaster of Israelites led him to intercession:

*"I, Daniel, tried to understand in the Scriptures the counting of the years of which the LORD spoke to the prophet Jeremiah: that for the ruins of Jerusalem seventy years must be fulfilled. I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. I prayed to the LORD, my God, and confessed, "Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, you who keep your merciful covenant toward those who love you and observe your commandments! We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws.*

*O Lord, in keeping with all your just deeds, let your anger and your wrath be turned away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain. On account of our sins and the crimes of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become the reproach of all our neighbors. Hear, therefore, O God, the prayer and petition of your servant; and for your own sake, O Lord, let your face shine upon your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, O my God, and listen; open your eyes and see our ruins and the city which bears your name. When we present our petition before you, we rely not on our just deeds, but on your great mercy. O Lord, hear! O Lord, pardon! O Lord, be attentive and act without delay, for your own sake, O my God, because this city and your people bear your name!" I was still occupied with my prayer, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, presenting my petition to the LORD, my God, on behalf of his holy mountain.( Daniel 9: 2-20).*

Look at God's response to this prayer of intercession! God was so pleased with Daniel's intercession that an angel was specially sent to him to inform him that it pleased God so much that he became God's beloved: *"I was still occupied with this prayer, when Gabriel, the one whom I had seen before in vision, came to me in rapid flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me in these words: "Daniel, I have now come to give you understanding. When you began your petition, an answer was given which I have come to announce, because you are beloved"(Daniel. 9:21-23).*

### **Ezekiel's message.**

Through Ezekiel God reveals the strength of intercession in saving from God's wrath those who live in sin!

*“Then he cried loud for me to hear: Come, you scourges of the city! With that I saw six men coming from the direction of the upper gate, which faces the north, each with a destroying weapon in his hand. In their midst was a man dressed in linen, with a writer's case at his waist. They entered and stood beside the bronze altar. Then he called to the man dressed in linen with the writer's case at his waist, saying to him: Pass through the city (through Jerusalem) and mark an X on the foreheads of those who moan and groan over all the abominations that are practiced within it. To the others I heard him say: Pass through the city after him and strike! Do not look on them with pity nor show any mercy! Old men, youths and maidens, women and children--wipe them out! But do not touch any marked with the X; begin at my sanctuary. So they began with the men (the elders) who were in front of the temple” (Ezek. 9: 1-6).*

### **Paul's zeal for intercession**

Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy: *“First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior, who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as ransom for all” ( I Tim. 2: 1-6).*

It is very interesting to note here that Paul while asserting Jesus alone is the mediator between God and man insists that we are duty bound to intercede for others. And he says that it is good and pleasing to God, our savior. Here Paul also indicates that our intercession is helpful in bringing people to accept salvation and come to the knowledge of truth. Paul himself humbly requested people's intercession for the success of his gospel work:

*“Finally, brothers, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may speed forward and be glorified, as it did among you, and that we may be delivered from perverse and wicked people, for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one” ( II Thess. 3:1-3).*

*“Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; at the same time, pray for us, too, that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak of the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I must speak”(Col. 4:2-5).*

*“With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones and also for me, that speech may be given me to open my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador in chains, so that I may have the courage to speak as I must” (Eph. 6: 18\_20).*

### **Paul's intercession for the Churches**

*“ I remember you constantly, always asking in my prayers” (Rom. 1:9)*

*“I, too, hearing of your faith in the Lord Jesus and of your love <sup>10</sup> for all the holy ones, do not cease giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation resulting in knowledge of him” (Eph. 1: 15-16)*

*“I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now” (Philp. 1:3-5)*

*“We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the holy ones because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. Of this you have already heard through the word of truth, the gospel, that has come to you...Therefore, from the day we heard this, we do not cease praying for you” (Col. 1:3-6, 9).*

*“We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope <sup>2</sup> of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father” (I Thess. 1:2).*

For Paul, intercession was a powerful means of evangelization. So he presented some of the topics of his teaching in the form of prayer. As for example:

*“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” ( Eph. 3:14-19).*

*“Therefore, from the day we heard this, we do not cease praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light” ( Col.1:9-12).*

### **Intercession—Early Church’s power.**

When the Apostles were threatened with imprisonment and death for preaching the gospel, the only thing the Church did was that they intercede for them:

*“So they called them back and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus...After threatening them further, they released them... After their release they went back to their own people and reported what the chief priests and elders had told them. And when they heard it, they raised their voices to God with one accord and said, "Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them... And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with*

*all boldness, as you stretch forth (your) hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus. As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness”(Acts. 4: 18, 21-25, 29-31).*

When the first Pope St. Peter was put in jail, the Scripture says that the Church got immersed in fervent intercession. The result was incredibly amazing:

*“About that time King Herod laid hands upon some members of the church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Peter thus was being kept in prison, but prayer by the church was fervently being made to God on his behalf. On the very night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter, secured by double chains, was sleeping between two soldiers, while outside the door guards kept watch on the prison. Suddenly the angel of the Lord stood by him and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and awakened him, saying, "Get up quickly." The chains fell from his wrists. The angel said to him, "Put on your belt and your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, Put on your cloak and follow me. So he followed him out, not realizing that what was happening through the angel was real; he thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first guard, then the second, and came to the iron gate leading out to the city, which opened for them by itself. They emerged and made their way down an alley, and suddenly the angel left him. Then Peter recovered his senses and said, "Now I know for certain that (the) Lord sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people had been expecting. When he realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who is called Mark, where there were many people gathered in prayer. He motioned to them with his hand to be quiet and explained (to them) how the Lord had led him out of the prison. “ (Act. 12: 1-3a, 4-13, 17).*

### **Intercession is Evangelization**

After telling the disciples of the vast scope of gospel preaching, what Jesus told them to do first was to intercede before the Father, the owner of the vineyard. Sending them out for preaching comes only after that: *“At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest. Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness”(Mt. 9: 36—10:1).*

### **Jesus evangelizes forever through Intercession**

The Scripture says that though Jesus finished preaching the gospel with his death, he continues evangelizing by intercession. It is surprising to note that Jesus devoted only three years to the preaching of the gospel. And only at the age of thirty he began the preaching. He could have started it earlier. Why didn't he do that? But the book of Hebrews provides an explanation: with regard to this: *“He is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them”*

(Hebr. 7:25). It means that through his intercession he continues to save people all the time.

### **Intercession—main tool of evangelization for the saints**

#### St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.

Little flower never preached a sermon. She didn't go out of the four walls of her convent. Most of the time she was in the kitchen or the laundry. And she was continually bedridden from illness. But the Catholic Church elevated her to be the patron of evangelists throughout the Universal Church. Through this the Church has been teaching that through humble intercession with mortification, and suffering, great conversion will happen.

#### St. John Maria Vianny

Fr. John Vianny was a most illiterate cleric, for whom even ordination to priesthood was denied on account of his ignorance of Moral theology. So he was appointed in a completely neglected parish in a remote village, thinking that nothing worse can happen there due to his incompetence because all the parishioners were incorrigible ones. But he started praying for his people incessantly for long hours for the conversion of his parishioners. He performed severe mortification too. Before long all his people returned to faith. People from surrounding parishes and even from far away places began to flock to him. Finally the French government was forced to build new rail track to Ars, where Fr. John Vianny carried his pastoral work.

#### St. Padre Pio

Padre pio was a man of prayer. His life's mission was saving souls through prayer. His whole life was an apostolate of prayer. Countless is the number of those whom he brought to God by his constant intercession. He prayed not only for the living, but also for the souls in purgatory. He used to say that more souls in purgatory went to him seeking his intercession than the living. Because they know better the power of intercession than the living do.

#### The Blessed Virgin Mary's Fatima message

Pray, pray, pray! Pray for the conversion of sinners. Then there will be peace in the world. Do Penance, pray the Rosary—these were the means the Mother of God requested suggested for saving the millions who are dire need of our intercessory prayer.

### **Intercession with the Saints and Souls in purgatory**

The doctrine of the "Communion of the Saints" teaches us that our intercession is with all the saints in heaven, with the holy souls in purgatory and the countless men and women on earth who intercede before God. "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers" (CCC 962—Paul VI, *CPG* § 30).

CCC says: “ Since Abraham, intercession - asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks "not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm”.

Therefore, asking the intercession of the saints, especially of Bl. Virgin Mary is a very powerful means for our intercession.

“Mary is the perfect *Orans* (pray-er), a figure of the Church. When we pray to her, we are adhering with her to the plan of the Father, who sends his Son to save all men. Like the beloved disciple we welcome Jesus' mother into our homes, for she has become the mother of all the living. We can pray with and to her. The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary and united with it in hope” (CCC 2679).

“Because of Mary's singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray in communion with the Virgin Mary, to magnify with her the great things the Lord has done for her, and to entrust supplications and praises to her”(CCC 2682).

It is to be remembered always that the Most Holy Rosary is the most efficacious intercessory prayer. Of course the Holy Mass is the pre-eminent one.

About the efficacious intercession of the Saints in heaven the Church teaches: “*The intercession of the saints.* "Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness.... [T]hey do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus.... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.”( CCC 956).

Praying for the Souls in purgatory has two fold effect. It helps them and it helps us: “In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them. Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective”.

Offering Mass for the dead is a great act of charity and a great means of intercession and saving souls. Other prayers for the dead, especially Rosary are also very helpful.