

## Prayer – the Necessity of Man’s Dialog with God

1. In order to understand prayer as a means of dialog *par excellence* with God who loves men and is infinite in his existence, life and love, we must capture in a few luminous lines the intimate structure of man that enables him to strive for a permanent dialog with God. Even if, at times, man is not aware of the fact that he has to enter into a dialog with God in order to fulfill himself as a person, his aspiration to connect with his fellow men, his need to relate constantly to realities outside him, indicates that man has by his nature or by his ontological constitution an inner structure, received from creation, which makes him capable of such attitudes.

This intimate structure of man cannot be credibly explained otherwise than by the fact that he is called into existence by a special creative act, which the personal, loving God has realized, and which has the desire to have also in the created plane existences connected to Him, and to whom He shares the power of existence and whom He leads with wisdom and love to the fulfillment of their existential meaning.

The very act of creation in the book of Genesis is illustrative from this point of view. Man was created as a “living being” by the participation of God himself, that is, by his “breath”, through which man became that “living being.” In this way, man is placed in a direct connection both with the creation of God in general, but above all with God, who brought him into existence in particular. Faithful to the word of Holy Scripture, the Fathers of the Church have brought to light this special quality of man, of being in contact with both the created world and with God the Creator. “As dust I am bound to the life below; but being also a divine fragment, I carry inside me the desire of the future life”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, man has a special

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<sup>1</sup> St. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, *Poemata dogmata*, VIII, PG 37, 452. “The divine fragment” represents the direct participation of God in the act of creation, meaning that it is He Himself who animates man with the “breath of his mouth.” Which means

relationship with God, by virtue of the creative act, by which he feels the ontological need to always be in communion with God, to enter into dialog with him, to be grateful To Him and to express his constant love. Only to the extent that man maintains himself in living relationship or in constant dialog with God, does the seal of the divine image which man bears grow ever more in the likeness of God. By instilling the living soul in man, God has placed it on an existential trajectory that man will have to take into account. Ignoring this ontological given of his being entails grave consequences for his spiritual and biological life.

Man is capable of a real, living and loving dialog with God, because it is God who initiated him into such dialog through the act of creation. Therefore, Father Stăniloae rightly said: “Man speaks because he is spoken to by God, because he is put through speech in relation to God. And because he speaks, more precisely he answers, man will never end up telling Him what He is and showing Him his love, and man will never end up understanding and wanting to understand even more and express his joy, gratitude and doxology for what God shows him”<sup>2</sup>.

2. In this context, we must also look at the possibility of concretizing the dialog of man with God through prayer. In the act of prayer, in trust and hope man addresses God as a loving You. Through this dialog, man comes out of his own loneliness, which cannot be overcome only by his relation to the other created things, and not even by interpersonal dialog with his fellow men. For this dialog ultimately remains without solid support, often reducing itself to a superficiality of the relationship with others, unless it is based on the solid foundation of man’s relationship with God.

Man is related to God because he bears in him the immortal image of God. This kinship of man with God acquired through the act of creation pushes him into a permanent dialog with God. This dialog of man with God is expressed, on the one hand, by always thinking of God, but not less, or above all, by the connection with God that takes the form or work of prayer.

3. Prayer can and should be understood as a gift of God, but at the same time as a work or endeavor of man.

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in other words the “image” of God in man or the divine seal that man bears in him.

<sup>2</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, ediția a III-a, București 2003, vol. I, p. 409.

In the prayer directed to God, the believer experiences the fact that in his prayer, made with all his being, the power of God is present sustaining the spiritual fire of prayer. The psalmist David says, “The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth. He will do the will of those who fear him, and he will hear their prayer and save them” (Psalm 144, 18-19). The Apostle Paul also says that in our prayer it is not only us, with our words and thoughts, but also the Spirit of God. “The Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how to pray properly, but the Spirit himself prays for us with unspeakable groans” (Romans 8, 26). In prayer, the whole being of the believer must be expressed, as the Apostle of the Gentiles confesses: “I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind; I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing with the mind” (I Corinthians 14, 15). The Spirit, the mind, the soul, and even the bodily powers must be involved in the act of prayer, as the form *par excellence* of man’s dialog with God. In prayer God pours out the spirit of his love, light and wisdom on those who pray. The same Apostle states in this sense: “I do not cease to thank for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, to the full knowledge of Him” (Ephesians 1, 10-11).

In the Pulpit Prayer at the Divine Liturgy, this reciprocity of the believer who blesses God in prayer is shown, with the blessing that he receives from the Father of Lights: “You who bless those who bless you, Lord, and sanctify those who put their hope in you...” so, in the dialog of prayer, the believer glorifies and blesses God, but through it the believer is blessed by God.

When the psalmist says that God is “near” to those who call Him in prayer, it means, in fact, that he is present in the very soul of the one who prays. “Prayer is a state of mutual interiority between the one who prays and God. The soul of the one who prays is like a plant thirsty for water, that is, for God, but at the same time it is full of divine sap”<sup>3</sup>. The praying man offers his being to God in prayer, and God pours upon him the power of the grace of his love. The Fathers of the Church are unanimous in asserting that the true prayer of the believer is the work of man, on the basis of the gift of prayer offered him by God.

<sup>3</sup> Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru STĂNILOAE, *Trăirea lui Dumnezeu în Ortodoxie*, Editura Dacia, Cluj-Napoca 1993, p. 127.

4. Prayer is the mystery of man's union with God, which is accomplished whenever the believer prays with his whole being. It is a permanent dynamic dialog between the faithful man and God, which removes the former from the limitations of his own existence and projects him into the ever new horizon of communion with God. In this way, prayer is an opportunity to overcome all sorts of spiritual traumas of man, which are seen in his existential limitations, which sometimes frighten him, and sometimes reduce him to the level of the mechanical processes of the surrounding nature.

5. Understood thus, prayer brings a multitude of bright and blessed fruits into the being of the one who truly prays. Starting from the incarnate Word of God as the supreme model of prayer, the Fathers of the Church masterfully summarize the consequences or fruits of prayer in the lives of believers. It is seen as a great treasure of the soul, a spiritual weapon, a peaceful haven, and priceless wealth. "Great weapon is prayer, great ornament is petition; she is safety and haven, treasure and unrobbed wealth"<sup>4</sup>.

A true, almost exhaustive list of the fruits of prayer is presented by a Church Father well trained in the art of prayer. He says: "Prayer is for the beginners like a fire of joy, breaking out from the heart. For the perfect it is a working light with good fragrance. Or again, prayer is the preaching of the Apostles, the work of faith, or rather unmediated faith, the hypostasis of the things hoped for, working love, angelic movement, the power of the immaterial, their deeds and their joy. The Gospel of God, the assurance of the heart, the hope of salvation, the sign of purity, the symbol of holiness, the knowledge of God, the manifestation of baptism, the bath of purity, the arvuna of the Holy Spirit, the joy of Jesus, The joy of the soul, the mercy of God, the sign of reconciliation, the seal of Christ, the ray of the sun of the mind, the star of hearts, the strengthening of Christianity, the manifestation of reconciliation with God, the grace of God, the wisdom of God... Prayer is God working all in all, because one is the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who works all in Christ Jesus"<sup>5</sup>.

6. Therefore, prayer is closely related to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not some practice without a solid foundation in divine revelation.

<sup>4</sup> St. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Omilie la Psalmul 145*, in: PG 55, 526.

<sup>5</sup> St. GREGORY OF SINAI, "Carte foarte folositoare în acrostih", in: Filocalia, vol 7, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune a Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1977, p. 133.

Consequently it is connected with the preaching of the Apostles and the Gospel of Christ. At the same time, prayer is a confirmation of the sacrament of the Holy Baptism and leads continually to an ever fuller knowledge of God. When a faithful man prays from the depths of his being, his soul is filled with light, joy, and the grace of Christ’s love. At the same time, prayer is also a sign of reconciliation and of the pouring out of the wealth of God’s gifts upon the one who prays.

Only those who practice personal prayer, integrated in the Church’s prayer, feel this wealth of gifts that flow to him in prayer. For in his prayer is the spirit of the Church praying in him and with him. A complete detachment of personal prayer from that of the Church is a nonsense that does not fulfill its purpose. Only in this connection of personal prayer with that of the Church does the believer find himself in a permanent and profound dialog with God, and so many spiritual gifts are poured upon him, which strengthen him for his mission in earthly life and prepare him for perfect union with God, with the Theotokos and all his saints in the Kingdom of the most Holy Trinity.

7. Understanding of prayer as a deep necessity of the human being, but also as a powerful dialog of man with God help us see that by constant prayer man reaches a state of dignity, nobility and health. Thus, contemporary man can overcome more easily his own anguish, spiritual and even physical suffering, as well as self-imposed or self-inflicted isolation from others or from the world, because both partners of dialog through prayer are present and active in prayer: God and man. The existential state of man in all his life manifestations depends on the awareness of this opportunity of dialog with God through prayer. Will contemporary man take this opportunity?

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