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A SERIES ON THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

Sufferings in Prayer

(Part II)

Prayer is one of the glories we can already enjoy in this life, for it is a ladder by which God descends to us and we ascend to Him. However, even in our prayer life we are not exempt from the stresses that correspond to our earthly existence and we have to endure all kinds of disturbances. But God, in His wisdom, makes use of it all.

Yesterday we had begun to speak about the so-called "sufferings in prayer", among which we had mentioned distractions and dryness of feeling. Today we want to continue with some others...

❖ **Aversion to prayer**

When an intense prayer life is cultivated, it is possible that there appears an aversion or a dislike to prayer, to the Word of God, and to religious things in general. Everything seems meaningless! This can have different causes. On the one hand, the Devil is always interested in dissuading us from advancing in the spiritual life and he acts by means of suggestions, wanting to influence our thoughts and feelings. On the other hand, reluctance can also come from our human nature, which rebels against the demands of faith and, in one way or another, says: "I don't want any more".

This situation must be faced with wisdom. We can simply confess our love to God, tell Him that we do not want such feelings, even though we feel them within ourselves. Here we make a clear distinction: If I do not consent with my freedom to negative thoughts and feelings, I am offering them resistance, even with the "tip" of my will. In this case, the aversion is not consented to, so that it cannot unfold its destructive potential either.

It is also possible for aversion to arise in the face of a certain form of prayer, such as, for example, vocal prayer. In this case, it is possible that the Lord allows it so that we seek a more silent prayer, which is capable of touching the soul more deeply.

In any case, we must remain faithful to prayer and not leave it aside. God looks upon the misery of the soul; He dwells in it and will protect it. We can turn to Him in all confidence and say to Him: "Lord, I no longer understand anything, but You know me. I want to be faithful to You! Please take me as I am, with all this reluctance and aversion I feel." Thus, this type of crisis can contribute to spiritual growth.

❖ Mute soul

It can also happen that the soul reaches a state where it no longer seems to be able to say anything, it feels empty and burned out.... Everything that it can say seems to be false, as if it were mere words, without sense or sanity. This state is very painful and can cause great confusion in the soul. But from God's perspective, the situation looks different. Precisely when we are in a subjectively lost state and yet continue to serve God and do not neglect prayer, then we are no longer surrendering something from ourselves, but we are surrendering our very selves. The soul may be silent, but the spirit speaks. The soul can no longer articulate words; it would seem that something in it wants to cry out, but the cry is transformed into groans and sighs... The soul believes that it is not giving anything; but in reality it is giving it whole self and letting God reign.

❖ A silent God

It is also part of the sufferings of prayer that sometimes we seem to receive no answer from God. This can be very painful, especially when we were used to a very lively dialogue with God and used to feeling our prayers being heard and answered. Now, however, one may feel that they pray and though they know that God understands them, they do not perceive His answer. A God who is silent, a God who is taciturn... The soul no longer sensibly experiences God's presence. It depends entirely on faith, but it is precisely in this way that it is strengthened. This process, when we can no longer rely on interior experience but only on faith, is part of the so-called "passive purification," which we will discuss at another time.

For today, let us close the subject of the sufferings in prayer with this conclusion: in all these crises we have spoken about, we must cling to the life of prayer in order to grow

interiorly. Then we will be able to show God our faithfulness and believe that He is there, even if we do not feel it. It is here that our trust in God is required!