

# Alter Christus

*"As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation"* (Pope Benedict XVI)

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

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## This Month's Reading: *Blessed Paolo Manna*

Dear Father,

*Apostolic Virtues* is the name of the book from which this month's reading comes. It was written in 1943 by Blessed Paolo Manna, PIME, an outstanding missionary and superior. A man of prayer, zeal and deep faith, he wrote many letters and books to help his missionaries and spent his entire life promoting the missions.

In this bulletin, he will warn us about what he calls "The heresy of action", which means we spend the whole day working but at the end of the day, we neglect our daily meditation and prayers. He says that some missionaries "begin to neglect prayer... With a crazy kind of logic, in order to save more

souls, they cast off the foundations of the interior life to give greater attention to the so-called indispensable demands of the ministry, to intensify and better organize the work of the apostolate. (...) They say calmly: 'Am I not leaving God because of God?' What a huge error: this is really leaving God because of the devil." Is it not also our own experience many times? Because of this, without hesitation, the blessed missionary says: "Let us not delude ourselves: we will not have the virtue to move the heart of God, to move the hearts of people, if we are not men of great prayer."

We should ask God to give us the spirit of prayer with which He

endowed the souls of the great and holy missionaries whose lives are well known to us. It is not by chance that these holy missionaries bore much fruit. Blessed Manna says: "I cannot help but think: if we were more holy, really holy, maybe things would be much better!"

May God help us to follow this writing and to put daily meditation and prayer as a priority in our lives.

God bless you!

Fr. Tomás Ravaoli, IVE

*LCI Director*

## Author: Blessed Paolo Manna

Paolo Manna was born in Avellino Italy in 1872. He entered the Institute of Foreign Missions in 1891. On 19th May 1894, he was ordained as priest.

In 1895 left for the mission of Toungoo in Eastern Burma. He worked there for a total of ten years with two short repatriations until 1907 when his illness forced him to come back to Italy definitively.

From 1909 onwards, through writings and a variety of other activities, he dedicated all his energy for more than forty years to fostering missionary zeal among the clergy and the faithful.

In 1916 founded the Missionary Union of the Clergy on which Pius XII bestowed the title of "Pontifical" in 1956. He became the director of Le Missioni Cattoliche (the Catholic Missions).

From 1909 he published "*Missionary Propaganda*" as well as "*Missionary Italy*" for young people.



He wrote great works of evangelical and missionary passion such as "*Operarii autem pauci*" (the labourers are few), "*Go out of Your Country*", "*The Separated Brethren and Us*", "*Observation on the Modern Method of Evangelization*", and "*Apostolic Virtues*".

He was an ardent and passionate soul for the proclamation of the Kingdom and everywhere he kindled the flame of missionary commitment.

He was the Superior General of PIME from 1924 to 1934. He died in Naples on September 15, 1952, and was declared Blessed by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

# Practice Of Prayer In The Missions

By Blessed Paolo Manna

## 1) Introduction

Mental prayer is indispensable for a missionary to be able to respond to his divine vocation, to be sanctified and to save many souls. I am convinced that, even if we are missionaries by vocation and ordination, we will not be holy missionaries without the practice of prayer.

May this writing be blessed by our Lord, and bear much fruit for the good of my confreres. Everyone should read and take it to heart: what I say are not so much my own words, but the expressions of the feelings of the saints, which I have been careful to collect, because only the saints can address this issue well.

## 2) The Heresy Of Action

I often seriously reflect on that which is called the problem of converting millions of souls, on the state of the missions today, on that which we missionaries are called to give in order to attain the conversion of these souls. I reflect on that which we really do

attain and **I cannot help but think: if we were more holy, really holy, maybe things would be much better!** We have more men, and they are working hard, perhaps harder than ever but what are the results in the missions today, in relation to the energy committed, the money spent and the amount of work and initiatives?

Most certainly there are some results, but are there as many as there should be? Why are we still so very far away from the goal? Why do we always work at the margins of the societies, while the great blocks of non-Christians are not affected? Oh! I think that the world would be so much better, the spread of the faith so much more advanced, if priests were more united to Jesus Christ, if they trusted less in their own work and activity, and allowed the Holy Spirit and His grace to work, by a life of greater prayer. *“Together they devoted themselves to constant prayer.”* (Acts 1:14) Each one of us must experience Pentecost all over again. The anonymous author of *“Oporetet Illum Regnare”*, speaking about priests in the homeland, asked the same questions and came to the identical

conclusion. I will summarize what he says in the chapter entitled “**The Heresy of Action.**”

Why is it (he asks), that so many meetings, conferences, and congresses, so much printed material, so many rich liturgical functions, do not affect the religious life of the faithful in the way one would hope?

Often we are too afraid to put our fingers into the wound, and so we try to explain this by making more plans and agendas, which are too often sterile and inconclusive. The reason for this malady, the deep and true reason, is unique and evident: the center of gravity has been displaced!

Didn't St. Paul say that only Jesus must be at the center of one's life: “*In Him everything continues in being.*” (Col 1:17) This is not just a simple sentence: it is a theological formula which is absolutely precise and undisputable. Since everything was created through the Word, so everything, especially in regard to souls, finds in Him its only source, the ultimate reason for being and doing. Everything necessarily rests upon Him and works through Him. Every violation of this law cannot but frustrate the marvelous order of Providence and lead us to sterility.

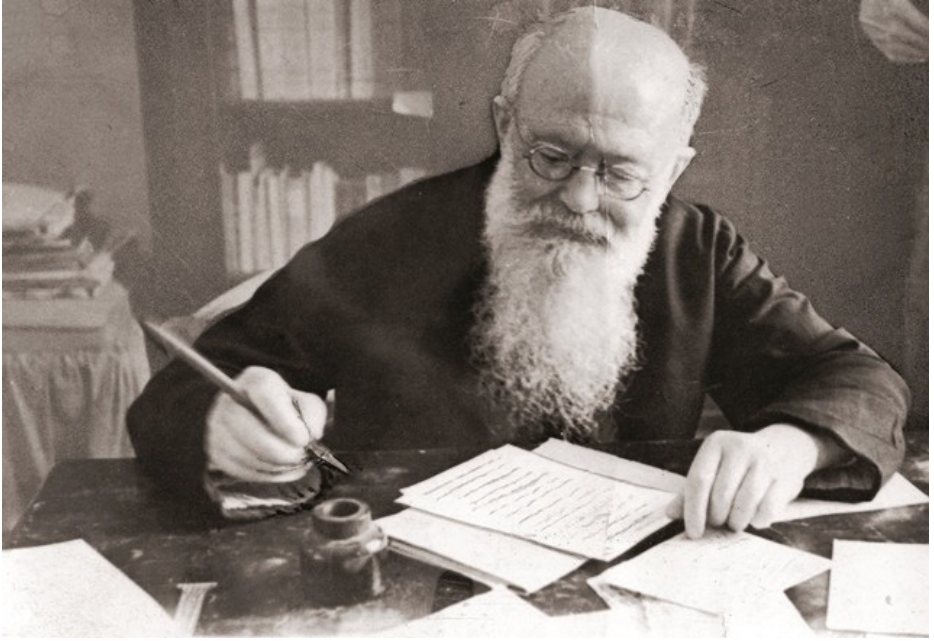
And to think that for some, these arbitrary violations have become almost habitual! They so easily forget Jesus, cast Him aside... and it goes without saying

how much souls suffer because of this. They begin to neglect prayer... With a crazy kind of logic, in order to save more souls, they cast off the foundations of the interior life to give greater attention to the so-called indispensable demands of the ministry, to intensify and better organize the work of the apostolate. “It is purely and simply the life of an animal,” St. Vincent de Paul would say. As a corollary, it is an agitated fever, which often leads to neurosis.

Say to such a priest: you would do well to spend a little time in meditation, and he will answer: Oh, leave me alone; don't talk to me about that! I'm tired, I'm busy. I agree with you, but what do you want from me? I don't have a free minute. There's no time for the essentials.

Then distaste for spiritual things sets in, the habit having less to do with the Lord; and then...? They say calmly: when all is said and done, am I not leaving God because of God? **What a huge error: this is really leaving God because of the devil.** Oh yes, the devil has no fear of certain Catholic works which are based upon clamor, confusion and self-love; he lets us do them, he helps us... and he laughs at us. It is the interior virtues and prayer which bother him the most. But at least, one thinks, there are only a few who believe this nonsense. Only a few? They are legion!

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Jesus said to pray always, without tiring, and instead they never pray, with the feeble excuse that action is a prayer. Instead, it is the practical denial of our neediness; it is the sacrilegious exclusion of grace from human life... The worst thing is that this theory is making inroads among the young priests, and if God does not put a stop to it, who knows where we will end up? It is an undeniable fact that all of us know some of these consecrated persons, who no longer know how to speak the words of Jesus, because their own conversations with Him have become so rare and so cold: they are full of activity and empty of God.

Is the author exaggerating somewhat? Let's hope so! But let's also examine ourselves a little and see if this heresy of action has not already crossed the

sea and arrived in the missions, where it could find fertile soil, because there is so much to do there, even more than in Christian countries. It is not my intention to institute such an examination. Each of us has to do it for himself. Here, on the authority of the true apostles, I limit myself to recalling the bases upon which must rest true zeal for souls, if one wants to perform works which are serious, meritorious and capable of bearing much fruit.

### 3) The Soul Of The Apostolate

**As apostolic missionaries, missionaries by nature, we must be men who are distinct from all others.** We are on earth, but each day we deal with the things of heaven; we are men, but we live and work only for the interests of God;

we operate in time, but it is to eternity and for eternity that our view, all of our efforts and struggles are directed. We must therefore be men who are more celestial than earthly, moving about in a heavenly atmosphere, dealing with the things of heaven, starting from the holy Mass and communion which we receive each morning.

God, souls, heaven, hell -these are things we can't see or touch; yet our lives must be based on them; by vocation and profession, we must be concerned with them for all of our lives! What brings us to see, to feel this supernatural world as we see and feel the material world which surrounds us? Nothing else but faith, kept alive and burning by the assiduous practice of mental prayer. The man of prayer, immersed as he is in supernatural light, has clear vision, so that he can see in earthly things, the things of Heaven: "...as if he were looking at the invisible God." (Heb 11:27)

Mental prayer, then, is one of the bases upon which the zeal of the true missionary rests. The other base is mortification. On these foundations, our Blessed Lord based His apostolate, and it would be folly for us to try to do otherwise: "*No one can lay a foundation other than the one which has been laid.*" (1 Cor 3:11)

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In this regard, the precious work *Monita ad Missionarios* has these incisive words: "In view of the fact that a missionary is only an instrument in the hands of God, he cannot achieve anything by himself unless he is united to God through prayer and unless he applies himself to doing God's will; how can he achieve anything by himself if he does not hear the voice of the One who sends him? How can he carry out God's plans unless he learns of them through prayer? How can he act as a mediator between God and people if he has not learned in prayer how to bring about such reconciliation? How can he nourish his people unless he himself first drinks the pure milk of divine wisdom through contemplation?" (Chapter 2, Article 2)

The assiduous practice of prayer, then, is indispensable for a missionary: without it, as far as being a missionary is concerned, he may be called alive, but he is really dead!

#### **4) The Word Which Converts**

Why is it that so often the word of holy missionaries, simple and unadorned, converts souls, penetrates and sanctifies them? And why is that so many other times the Word of God remains sterile and leaves people just as it has found them? It is because the latter, not having

been drawn from heaven in the fervor of intimate union with God, does not have the grace to penetrate the heart of the hearer, because it has not penetrated the heart of the preacher. **Holy missionaries bear fruit in terms of souls because they give themselves over to prayer,** and their words have the fruitfulness, the virtue of God's Word. Before speaking about God to his people, the good missionary, in his prayer, speaks about his people to God, and then says to the people that which he has heard and drawn from God: "*I only tell the world what I have heard from Him, the truthful one who sent me.*" (Jn 8:26) All of the great missionaries who have saved so many souls have done this.

My dear confreres, we often complain that we are not satisfied with our Christians; we lament the hardness of heart, the indifference of the non-Christians. Shouldn't we blame ourselves for this, for not being close enough to God in prayer. It's no wonder that people don't listen to us, if we don't know how to listen to God, if it bothers us to spend time with him in prayer, if we can't stay one hour in front of the holy tabernacle. "The fruit in the listener," says Fr. Lallemand, "depends ultimately on the virtue of the preacher and his intimacy with God: in a quarter hour of prayer, he can receive more thoughts which are

likely to move hearts than in a year of study."

In our ministry, we too often forget our own natural and innate neediness and insufficiency. Poor missionaries! How uselessly we run around, how vainly we complain, if we are not men of prayer! We can preach to the ears of the body: "We speak to the ears of men," St. Augustine tells us, but "it is God who enlightens the mind, who moves one to act, who builds."

In order for our preaching to move hearts, it must be truly divine, made so by the Holy Spirit, which must fill us; and we receive the Holy Spirit especially during prayer.

St. John of the Cross addressed these words to the preachers of his time, words which could very well be applied to any missionaries of today who love work more than prayer: Let those who, taken up in the

fever of activity, think that they will save the world by their preaching and other external works, reflect a moment and understand... that they would be much more useful to the Church and dear to God... if they would devote half their time to prayer... Without prayer, everything they resolve to do is just so much noise...: they do little more than nothing, often nothing at all, and sometimes even evil. (Spiritual Canticle)

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### 5) The Power To Move Hearts

As saviors of souls, our task is not so much to illuminate the intelligence as to move hearts, to subdue them, to conquer them and submit them to God. One can understand the immense difficulty of this undertaking. On the other hand, if we do not succeed in this, why are we missionaries?

To submit souls to God: what a divine mission! A subject most inspiring for me to reflect upon is this: how difficult it is for God to become the absolute Lord of a person's heart. Everyone of us, without considering the sinners and the non-Christians, can recall his own story in this regard. May we come at last to place this heart of ours completely at the feet of Jesus!

Now, beloved confreres, let us not delude ourselves: we will not have the virtue to move the heart of God, to move the hearts of people, if we are not

men of great prayer. The whole secret is here. It is this which has made the great apostolic men, the great missionaries, fruitful.

Bishop Marinoni, in the beautiful novena to St. Francis Xavier, says: "**Prayer must be the flame of the missionary's heart:** with prayer, he soothes God's anger with humanity; by it, he moves the resistant person to return to God. Prayer was the omnipotent weapon Xavier used to convert so many peoples, so many poor non-Christians."

From mental prayer the missionary attains that fervor of zeal, those generous impulses, that divine anointing, which neither eloquence nor study can give, and which make them such shepherds of souls, leading them to God. It is God who speaks through the mouth of the missionary who prays, as He spoke through the mouth of St. Paul: "*Christ, as it were, appealing through us.*" (2 Cor 5:20) St. Vincent de Paul, St. Philip





Neri, the Curé of Ars, and so many others, without the pretense of great eloquence, but inspired by meditations on the things of heaven, were so powerful in bringing souls to God that they could not be equaled by the greatest orator.

The man of prayer also has the power to move the heart of God: he can ascend to such power that his prayer becomes almost infallible, when it regards the salvation of souls. The examples of this are notable: God wants to punish the wickedness of His people. Moses prays, he implores; the angry Lord does not listen. Moses prays some more; and God then asks Moses not to pray to Him, to let Him be, because He's had His fill of them: *"Let me alone, then, that my wrath might blaze up against them to consume them."* (Ex 32:10) But Moses doesn't stop: either pardon them, he says, or cancel me from your book too. Oh, the omnipotence of prayer, exclaims St. Jerome: God is won over by the prayer of His servant! This is a great example for us missionaries, when we want to obtain the grace of conversion for souls. Many times one prays, but very coldly, and with little faith, and one doesn't attain what is prayed for! And then one says: I have done my duty, and is satisfied with that!

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The missionary who prays is not just a personal servant and humble subject of God. He is a priest, a minister and authorized mediator! He has a mission, the mission to save souls. There is a great difference between the supplication of a humble subject and the discourse which a minister presents to the king: more

than making a request, he discusses, and explains the reasons for his petition in terms of the sovereign's own interests.

Blessed Cafasso says: "Ah, if a priest were to be penetrated by this quality and armed with this faith when he prayed! He would say: Lord, I am your minister; I am the very one to whom you desired to entrust the mission of representing you on earth, of saving souls, of forgiving sins: now I am here in front of you to discuss these very affairs. Now tell me, would God ever send

away empty-handed one who spoke to Him like this about the things that God Himself has assigned to him, and in which God wants him to succeed?"

## **6) There Are Missionaries... And Then There Are Missionaries**

**Oh, what a difference there is among missionaries!** You can tell immediately by his speech, his judgment, his behavior,

who is a man of prayer and who is not. In the former you generally find more deliberation in words and opinions, more charity, more firmness of purpose and above all, more decisiveness and direction toward God in all the actions and circumstances of life. **The difference lies completely in prayer.**

The man of prayer lives and breathes in an atmosphere of faith; he considers and evaluates all earthly things from a supernatural perspective, and he is moved by supernatural motives in all his actions. The missionary, a man of prayer, has a way all his own to view the struggles and efforts of the apostolate, the success or failure of a project, life and death. He sees more with the eyes of the spirit than with those of the body, and he does not allow himself to be dazzled and overly enthused by all that which, even among our own projects, makes too much noise and relies upon the crutch of human industry, calculation, praise and approval.

**The missionary who does not pray and is not familiar with God, is always agitated;** he might work a lot, because he has many natural gifts and an active character, because he loves action; but he relies too much on his own abilities, his own cleverness, his own policies; and too often it happens that through

his activity and work, he sadly verifies the saying: "It shall perish altogether, whatever is not born of God." (Thomas A Kempis)

Yes, he works; and often he works for the salvation of souls and the establishment of Christianity. But, lacking a spirit of faith enlivened by prayer, he treats the ministry and work of the apostolate like an earthly occupation, with only human views and methods: he relies too much upon earthly means and his own abilities. In such a state of soul he doesn't even see the necessity for prayer, and he can end up, like Martha, complaining about and criticizing his confrere, who gives (as is his duty) priority in his daily affairs to prayer and other acts of priestly piety.

And since I have recalled the Gospel story of Martha, I want to make another reflection. Generally, we say that Martha represents the active life and Mary the contemplative life. Jesus responds to the complaint of Martha: "*Martha, Martha, you are anxious and upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion and she shall not be deprived of it.*" (Lk 10:41-42) This one thing required is contemplation, which is also called the better portion. If contemplation is necessary, and the better portion,

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how could the missionary be dispensed from it?

But, someone will say, we have embraced the active life...! I tell you: no! We have embraced the apostolic life, which is the complete and truly perfect life, because it is the life followed on earth by the Son of God. A purely active life does not exist. Mary chose the better portion: we have chosen the whole, which contains, principally and necessarily, the better portion, which is prayer. The missionary is Martha in contemplation, Mary in exterior action. The missionary who wants to do only the part of Martha is reprimanded by our Lord, is not blessed, and accomplishes nothing.

### 7) Money And Miracles

It is said -and because it is said so often we all believe it a little bit- that we do not do more because we lack the means. What we could do with more money...! I would be tempted to say that to the heresy of action we could add the heresy of money. I would like to know when our Lord, or the holy Apostles, or any of the truly apostolic men, ever gave money the importance that some give to it today, going so far as to consider it an indispensable means of the apostolate, almost a sine qua non condition for converting souls!

You can also hear it said sometimes, as a justification, that the Apostles had the gift of miracles, and today you don't see miracles any more. I say instead that the Apostles and all the truly apostolic men

prayed as well: they had and still have today the grace of the Holy Spirit with them, and **the more dedicated they were to prayer, the more abundant was the grace.** It is only this grace which converts souls.

In regard to miracles, then, it is not that their time has passed: what has become rare are men capable of obtaining them. Cottolengo and Don Bosco are men of today and they performed miracles because they prayed and were holy. So it is not that the arm of God has shortened: it is our faith which has decreased. The Gospel retains all of its virtue intact, and only needs someone to take it seriously, as Saint Francis of Assisi and so many others have done.

In this regard St. Ambrose, commenting on the instruction given by our Lord to his missionaries (Mt 10), says: "He established how one must preach the Kingdom of God: without walking stick, without purse, without shoes, without bread, without money; none of these worldly things are needed by the spiritual man; and the more faith one has, the less he needs the support of these things." In another place our Lord says that all the material needs of the apostle and the apostolate will be provided, when first one seeks the Kingdom of God.

**The missionary dedicated to prayer obliges the Holy Spirit to work and so brings about true conversions,** and creates solid Christians. The missionary who doesn't have a love for prayer, who wants only to work, is attached entirely to the support of material means: he

builds churches, he opens schools, and maybe attracts some people to the faith. But what a difference in the attraction, and above all what a difference in the quality of the Christians! The former one sanctifies the material things, which are combined with the virtue, faith and the zeal with which he works and animates his converts; the latter also builds things, but his work is done to be seen, and his Christians are cold; they follow him as long as he has power and the ability to help them: if one day because of sickness or disagreement with his superiors, the missionary must leave that place, the one who replaces him will inherit quite a weak legacy.

### 8) Prayer And Conversions

There is a very intimate relationship between a missionary's spirit of prayer and the quality of the Christians he baptizes. Do our new Christians and the non-Christians who surround us see in us one sent by God, the man of God, the priest, or nothing more than the Westerner, the man who is capable, educated, influential with the authorities, and who dispenses money? Do people come to us because they are attracted by our spirituality, the fruit of a life of prayer, or only in the hope of a wholly earthly and material advantage? What is there that rises up in us and distinguishes us from other Westerners in the eyes of the Buddhist, the Hindu, or the Moslem? Do they see us simply as the ministers of the religion of those who are all

about progress, business and money? That's the way it will be if there is no sign of an interior life because of little or no contact with God in prayer, if they see us only working externally, so different from their own priests who, while non-Christian, tend by nature toward solitude and asceticism.

Oh! The missionary who is truly a man of prayer: only he can appear before the people as a messenger of God, as having a mission which is truly for them. He, like St. John the Baptist, can stand before the crowd and shout: "*Reform your lives! The Reign of God is at hand,*" (Mt 3:2) and like St. Peter he can say: "*You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the Holy Spirit.*" (Acts 2:38) St. John came out from the contemplation of the desert, and St. Peter from that of the Cenacle.

**The missionary, inflamed in prayer by the fire of the Holy Spirit, truly converts souls and makes of them true Christians** who, burning with the same fire, in turn become apostles of the faith within their own circumstances. This is how the faith spread in the beginning. This, and not in any other way, is how the true and spontaneous spread of Christianity can be brought about today: when the missionary, totally a man of God, united for life with Him, communicates life to others, when he is no longer a stranger to the souls of the non-Christians but an apostle, who makes apostles out of each of his converts.

Lacking this spirit of prayer, as I have said and repeated, the missionary might make some conversions, might establish some Christian communities, but they will be communities which are maintained by and dependent upon our help, without the intrinsic virtue of life and expansion. This is an issue of capital importance, which requires the attention of my confreres. Isn't it true that very often our newly baptized are completely lacking in zeal, convinced that the means of converting people to Christianity is in the hands of the mission treasurer? That is how the faith expands when it is carried by human arms: not very far. And how to go much farther? In the arms of God, who alone can go far! But because God lends His arms to us, we must live strictly united with Him: "He who lives in me and I in him will produce abundantly, for apart from me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5)

## 9) Practice Of Prayer In The Missions

### a) Where should we pray?

If we want to pray well, we must choose, as much as possible, a place far away from noise and distraction. "Go to your

room, close your door and pray to your Father in private." (Mt 6:6) St. Jerome gives this advice: "Choose a suitable place, far away from noise, where, as in a port, you might be protected from the storms of worries and distractions; let your study of God's word be so strong that thoughts of the future replace the

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worries of today." And don't think, he says, that by going off by yourself, you are cutting yourself off from your people; quite the contrary: "We don't say this in order to take you away from your people, rather, it is so that in that place of prayer you might meditate and learn how you can better give yourself to them."

Our room, and the church (before the faithful arrive) are good places for reflection and meditation. But it is indispensable that the place be away from disturbances and distractions, if we want to get anything out of it. The Gospel is our teacher. Our Lord always loved to pray in solitary places: "Jesus was praying in seclusion..." (Lk 9:18) "He went off to a lonely place in the desert, where He was absorbed in prayer." (Mk 1:35) Where did He invite his disciples, to teach them the practice of prayer? "Come along to an out-of-the-way place." (Mk 6:31)

I have said that this solitude is indispensable because it is here that the Lord speaks to the soul, it is here that the Holy Spirit operates; in solitude He strengthens, He glorifies his disciples and teaches them His will.

*b) When should we do our meditation?*

The best time is in the morning. The prudent and ordered missionary reserves for himself, for his own soul, the first hours of the day. Our Lord preferred nighttime for prayer; but we find that He also prayed in the early hours of the morning. *“Rising early the next morning, He went off to a lonely place in the desert, where He was absorbed in prayer.”* (Mk 1:35) The prophet David did the same thing, as we read in many of the psalms. For example: *“Before dawn I come and cry out... My eyes greet the night watches in meditation on your promise.”* (Ps 119:147-148) Naturally, this means that we have to get up earlier: this is already a beautiful act of mortification, fidelity and love for the Lord.

When I was in the missions, and I was making the first visit to the villages with Bishop Tomatore, I saw that holy old man rise from his bed at the first cry of the rooster, light a candle, take out the volume of Da Ponte which he always carried with him, and remain in devoted meditation until it was time to begin his ministry. What edification, what a practical lesson the sight of this gave me!

And when there is no time in the morning, nor throughout the day, there is always the night. “Ministers of the Gospel can be so caught up, as the Apostles were, in preaching, that not a portion of the day remains free for them because of the continuous and important work they are engaged in. Well then, however much time the work of the day took away from prayer, let them take that much time away from sleep, so that they can rejoice even more that after a full day’s work they still have something to offer to God at night.” (*Monita ad Missionarios*)

Just as we never neglect our meals just because we can’t take them at the





normal time, so we cannot omit our meditation on those days that we are not able to do it at the usual time. I know, there are many excuses used to justify the neglect of our prayers: the ministry, worries, travel, ill-health, the heat... Well, it's a simple question of being convinced of the necessity of this holy practice, if we want to carry on well, just as we are convinced of the necessity of food for the life of the body. If there is this conviction, the time will be found. So

when one is tired or in ill health, one can do a little meditative reading.

In fact, this is the truth: it is really the missionaries who are busiest, most hardworking and zealous who give a greater amount of time to prayer. The lukewarm, the lazy, those who have time for so many useless things, never find time to collect themselves and to pray. Believe me, it is not a question of time.

*c) How much time should we give to meditation?*

In times less gentle than today, when people ran around less and accomplished more, the missionaries gave a lot of time to prayer. In *Monita ad Missionarios* (1650), I find: Though the whole life of a missionary should be a continuous

**Just as we never neglect our meals just because we can't take them at the normal time, so we cannot omit our meditation on those days that we are not able to do it at the usual time.**

prayer and he should not be distracted from the intimate presence of God at any time, nevertheless, every day he must dedicate a special time to be with God at least two hours. And in a precious manuscript of Bishop Marinoni (October, 1850), which contains a complete outline of the Rule for our missionaries, I find this thought of the holy co-founder on this point and the practice of his confreres: "The life of a man who completely severs all his relations with the world and all that is dear to him must

be, more so than in any other state, a life of the spirit and of faith. The missionary who does not have a strong relationship with God and a lively interest for His glory and the good of souls, not only lacks the attitude necessary for his ministry, but also ends up in a kind of empty and intolerable isolation. His work is not always surrounded by that devoted kindness, that air of fervor and applause which accompanies a priest working among intelligent souls and sensitive hearts. This kind of human comfort can somewhat sustain one's zeal, even if it is not founded on God and on love. But the missionary among non-Christians cannot and must not always hope for this..."

Bishop Marinoni continues with other wonderful premises and then comes to this conclusion: "For all of these

reasons, which must be the material of frequent meditation for missionary students, it is important that they have solid dispositions of pure love and fear of the Lord, of sincere zeal and secure control of their passions! To such purpose—beyond the different exercises of piety—one is to engage in mental prayer for an hour each morning and a half hour after dinner.”

This is what was prescribed in the Institute in regard to prayer when the students were all priests; and they adhered to it rigidly. In fact, I find in the same manuscript, where the daily schedule of the house is given: “After rising, an hour of meditation... this is never to be shortened and never omitted, not even on holidays, though there be a great gathering of penitents in the church.”

Now, to some missionaries, whether in the missions or in the homeland, I ask: would it be too much to spend a whole, continuous hour in meditation every morning? I don't intend to impose a duty or give an order: “*I give*

*my opinion...as one who is trustworthy.*” (1 Cor 7:25) All the spiritual teachers say that mental prayer, in order to be effective, must not be too short in duration: God does not send down His fire when we are in a hurry, or before we have everything ready for the sacrifice. “*Let those who can understand, understand.*” (Mt 19:12) Prayer becomes burdensome and annoying when we rush through it, or when we make it a little more than a period of spiritual reading. But believe me, when it is done well, an hour passes all too quickly! It can happen that after a half hour of meditation has seemed too much, an hour seems almost too little.

It would take too long for me to list the amount of time the missionary saints gave to prayer: it's enough to recall St. Francis Xavier. No struggle, trial or journey could ever keep him from his prayer. He got up during those hours intended for rest in order to dedicate himself to prayer, often spending the whole night at the foot of the cross or before the Blessed Sacrament.



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