

12. The fable of the violin and the violinist

The audition is over. There is loud applause as the the curtain falls. It redoubles in enthusiasm. The violin comes to the front of the stage, bows, and pointing to the timid violinist standing in the wings, addresses the public: "I hope that your applause is for the gentleman as much as for me. I owe it to the truth to acknowledge that, without his collaboration, I would not have done so well."

There are many Christians who make me think of this violin! Are you perhaps one of them? For them, holiness—toward which they are striving with great good will—is the work of man with God's collaboration. Their ways of acting are revealing on this point. For instance, their prayer consists in asking God for his help, and pleading their cause with him by means of all the good arguments they can muster, so as to make him decide to intervene in their favor. Such a frame of mind is no doubt touching, but it rests on an infantile conception of the relationship between God and man. It distorts Christian life, and impedes the soul's journey toward perfection. As a matter of fact, sanctification is not man's work with the help of God, but God's work with the help of man. And that is something very different.

When we understand this, everything is transformed, and our mental prayer first of all. Our prayer no longer focuses on getting God to decide to act, or getting him to take an interest in his child. We have finally grasped that God is always acting, as our Lord has said: "*My Father and I are always at work*" (cf. Jn 5:17). Mental prayer consists essentially in surrendering ourselves to this divine action.

Of course, it is possible to find a way of remaining in a state of surrender from morning until night, but often our activities loosen the bonds that join us to God. They thus tend to pull us out of the range of his action. It is through mental prayer that we come back to it, and surrender our whole being, with all of its faculties, to his control. And once back to our tasks, we remain within the orbit of God's action. Led by the Spirit of God, we then act as sons of God. In the words of St. Paul, "*All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*" (Rm 8:14).

In this perspective, your prayers will not be the petitions of a child trying to force the Lord's hand, teasing to make him change his mind. Rather, they will be a conversion (the word comes from the Latin *convertere*: to turn towards), a turning around of your being to become humble, receptive, and pervious to the Lord's sanctifying action. It is not a question of getting God to be converted to us, but indeed of our being converted to him.