

45. *Seed sown among thorns*

I wholeheartedly encourage your desire to learn to pray and to seek counsel in the works of the great spiritual writers. But I think I discern a certain fever, a certain excess in your eagerness. You seem to be acting as if prayer were one of man's conquests, when it is above all a grace received from Christ.

He came into our midst in order to teach us to pray. He didn't come merely to give us a formula for prayer, even the supreme formula, the Lord's Prayer. He came to teach us his own prayer which, before being articulated, is first of all the heart of his being: praise, filial love and intercession. How can I say "teach"? He came to communicate his prayer to us, and infuse it into us. He never ceases accomplishing an invisible mission among us. This consists in implanting into our hearts his prayer, the only prayer that can really gain a hearing before the Father.

Every soul in the state of grace has *the potentiality for prayer*. It suffices for this potency to pass into *the act of prayer*, for the prayer of Christ, within it and through it, to rise up toward the Father.

But the prayer of Christ, that baptism communicates to us, is a seed sown within us. It is like the mustard seed of the parable, that can become the largest of shrubs, although it is the smallest seed of all. Do not object that this parable is not concerned with the prayer of Christ within the soul, but refers to the Kingdom of God in the world. You know very well that the Kingdom of God is Christ's presence. It is Christ's dominion over that portion of mankind which gives itself to him, and thus is also his dominion over your soul. Now, anyone who speaks of the presence of Christ is speaking of the prayer of Christ, because for Christ, to live is to pray.

If Christ's prayer is within us, a seed sown amidst thorns, our initiation into prayer will consist essentially in becoming aware of this prayer and encouraging its development.

At the same time, let us be modest. It is not the earth that produces the seed, nor is it the gardener's activity that produces flowers and fruits. At the very most, the earth and the gardener provide the conditions and the elements required for the germination and growth of the plant. The Christian does not produce the only prayer that is pleasing to the Father, that is, the prayer of the Son. This prayer is a gift of God. And yet, it withers if we do not bring to it the eagerness and cooperation of our whole being. Likewise, it withers if we do not have recourse to the sacraments that nourish it.

Christ's prayer is choked by brambles if, during mental prayer, we do not prune away the thoughts, feelings, and teeming desires that weigh us down.

But if we do what we are supposed to, then we do not need to try so hard, or be so worried. *"This is how it is with the reign of God. A man scatters seed on the ground. He goes to bed and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without his knowing how it happens"* (Mk 4:26-27). Let us have confidence. Let us have faith in the prayer of Christ within us, the faith of the farmer who believes in the seed he has sown. Let us also have the patience of the farmer who knows how to wait until summer to harvest his crop.