

58. *Fourth Letter to Jean Pierre*

Have I succeeded in making you realize that thanksgiving, the soul of mental prayer, is something very different from a superficial sentiment? It is the surging up of our innermost self which, having come forth from God, returns to God. It is the ebb and flow of love. God's love is poured out on his child, and a filial love leaps back toward the Father. One and the same love comes forth from God and returns to him, a paternal love at the start, and a filial love when it returns.

This exchange of love between God and man reflects—and is part of—a much loftier reality: the love between the Father and the Son within the Trinity. From all eternity, the Father, in a surge of divine generosity, has communicated the fullness of his being, without reservation or intermittence, to his beloved Son. From all eternity, the Son has received the Father's gift, and offered himself to him in a joyous leap of thanksgiving. This love that gives and this love that renders thanks are, as it were, "two powerful waves that impetuously rush toward one another, meet, meld into one, and leap up together from their bed in an immense geyser" (Richard of Saint-Victor).

The Son of God has come into our midst to celebrate his eternal thanksgiving within a human nature. In the heart of the man Jesus, the unimaginable Trinitarian mystery is being lived. The Son surrenders himself totally to the Father who is giving himself to him. "*Father, I thank you...*" (Jn 11:41, etc.). This little prayer, which rises so often from Jesus' lips, is very revealing of his innermost life, of his eternal religion, incarnated in his humanity.

The thanksgiving of Jesus was manifested in all its plenitude and power at the Passion and the Resurrection. Triumphant over suffering and death, it carried him up in a conquering flight to the right hand of the Father.

Even so, Christ has never stopped celebrating here on earth the great liturgy of thanksgiving. Day after day, hour after hour, from the rising to the setting sun, the Mass has perpetuated over the centuries the act by which Jesus offered himself in thanksgiving to the Father, in his own name and in the name of the human race.

But Christ's love aspires to still greater things. To give thanks for and among all men is not enough for him. He wants millions of hearts and millions of voices. He takes possession of these hearts through Eucharistic Communion. He implants in them his own eternal thanksgiving to germinate and develop, so that it may be celebrated not only in church, but may also be lived in all times and places by all who open their hearts and souls to it.

As for mental prayer, it is that privileged hour when all occupations come to a halt, and the Christian devotes himself unreservedly to Christ's own thanksgiving.