

7.

An Homily or Sermon Concerning Prayer

1. There is nothing in all man's life, well beloved in our Saviour Christ, so needful to be spoken of and daily to be called upon, as hearty, zealous and devout prayer; the necessity whereof is so great that without it nothing may be well obtained at God's hand. For as the apostle James saith: 'Every good and perfect gift cometh from above and proceedeth from the Father of lights,'¹ who is also said to be 'rich and liberal towards all them that call upon him,'² not because he either will not or cannot give without asking, but because he hath appointed prayer as an ordinary means between him and us.

There is no doubt but he always 'knoweth what we have need of,'³ and is always most ready to give abundance of those things that we lack. Yet to the intent we might acknowledge him to be the giver of all good things, and behave ourselves thankfully towards him in that behalf, loving, fearing and worshipping him sincerely and truly as we ought to do, he hath profitably and wisely ordained that in time of necessity we should humble ourselves in his sight, pour out the secrets of our heart before him and crave help at his hands, with continual, earnest and devout prayer. By the mouth of his holy prophet David he saith on this wise: 'Call upon me in the days of thy trouble and I will deliver thee.'⁴ Likewise in the gospel, by the mouth of his well-beloved Son Christ, he saith: 'Ask and it shall be given you, knock and it shall be opened, for whosoever asketh receiveth, whosoever seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'⁵ Saint Paul also, most agreeably consenting hereunto, 'willeth men to pray everywhere and to continue therein with thanksgiving.'⁶ Neither doth the blessed apostle Saint James in this point anything dissent, but earnestly exhorting all men to diligent prayer, saith: 'If any man lack wisdom let him ask it of God, which giveth liberally to all men and reproacheth no man.'⁷ Also in

1. James 1:17.

2. Rom. 10:12.

3. Matt. 6:8.

4. Psa. 50:15.

5. Matt. 7:7-8.

6. 1 Tim. 2:8; Phil. 4:6; Col. 4:2.

7. James 1:5.

another place: 'Pray for one another,' saith he, 'that ye may be healed, for the righteous man's prayer availeth much if it be fervent.'¹ What other thing are we taught by these and such other places but only this, that Almighty God, notwithstanding his heavenly wisdom and foreknowledge, will be prayed unto, that he will be called upon, that he will have us no less willing on our part to ask than he on his part is willing to give?

Therefore most fond and foolish is the opinion and reason of those men which therefore think all prayer to be superfluous and vain, because God 'searcheth the heart and reins,'² and knoweth the meaning of the Spirit before we ask.³ For if this fleshly and carnal reason were sufficient to disannul prayer, then why did our Saviour Christ so often cry to his disciples: 'Watch and pray'?⁴ Why did he prescribe them a form of prayer, saying: 'When ye pray, pray after this sort: "Our Father, which art in heaven, etc."'?"⁵ Why did he pray so often and so earnestly himself before his passion?⁶ Finally, why did the apostles, immediately after his ascension, gather themselves together into one several place and there continue a long time in prayer?⁷ Either they must condemn Christ and his apostles of extreme folly or else they must needs grant that prayer is a thing most necessary for all men at all times and in all places.

Sure it is that there is nothing more expedient or needful for mankind in all the world than prayer. 'Pray always,' saith Saint Paul, 'with all manner of prayer and supplication and watch thereto with all diligence.'⁸ Also in another place he willeth us to pray continually without any intermission or ceasing, meaning thereby that we ought never to slack nor faint in prayer, but to continue therein to our lives' end.⁹ A number of other such places might here be alleged of like effect, I mean, to declare the great necessity and use of prayer, but what need many proofs in a plain matter, seeing there is no man so ignorant but he knoweth, no man so blind but he seeth, that prayer is a thing most needful in all estates and degrees of men? For only by the help hereof we attain to those heavenly and everlasting treasures which God our heavenly Father hath reserved and laid up for us his children in his dear and well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, with this covenant and promise most assuredly confirmed and sealed unto us, that if we ask we shall receive.¹⁰

1. James 5:16.

2. Psa. 7:9.

3. Rom. 8:27; Matt. 6:8.

4. Matt. 26:41; Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36.

5. Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2.

6. Luke 22:41-44.

7. Acts 1:13-14.

8. Eph. 6:18.

9. 1 Thess. 5:17.

10. John 16:23-27.

Now the great necessity of prayer being sufficiently known, that our minds and hearts may be the more provoked and stirred thereunto, let us briefly consider what wonderful strength and power it hath to bring strange and mighty things to pass. We read in the book of Exodus that Joshua, fighting against the Amalekites, did conquer and overcome them not so much by virtue of his own strength as by the earnest and continual prayer of Moses, who as long as he held up his hands to God, so long did Israel prevail, but when he fainted and let his hands down, then did Amalek and his people prevail, insomuch that Aaron and Hur, being in the mount with him, were fain to stay up his hands until the going down of the sun, otherwise had the people of God that day been utterly discomfited and put to flight.¹ Also we read in another place of Joshua himself, how he at the besieging of Gibeon, making his humble petition to Almighty God, caused the sun and the moon to stay their course and to stand still in the midst of heaven for the space of a whole day, until such time the people were sufficiently avenged upon their enemies.² And was not Jehoshaphat's prayer of great force and strength when God at his request caused his enemies to fall out among themselves and wilfully to destroy one another?³ Who can marvel enough at the effect and virtue of Elijah's prayer? 'He being a man subject to affections as we are, prayed to the Lord that it might not rain and there fell no rain upon the earth for the space of three years and six months. Again he prayed that it might rain and there fell great plenty, so that the earth brought forth her increase most abundantly.'⁴ It were too long to tell of Judith,⁵ Esther,⁶ Susannah⁷ and of divers other godly men and women, how greatly they prevailed in all their doings by giving their minds earnestly and devoutly to prayer. Let it be sufficient at this time to conclude with the sayings of Augustine and Chrysostom, whereof the one calleth prayer 'the key of heaven'⁸; the other plainly affirmeth that 'there is nothing in all the world more strong than a man that giveth himself to fervent prayer.'⁹

Now then, dearly beloved, seeing prayer is so needful a thing and of so great strength before God, let us, according as we are taught by the example of Christ and his apostles, be earnest and diligent in calling on the name of the Lord. Let us never faint, never slack, never give over; but let us daily and hourly, early and late, in season and out of season, be occupied in godly

1. Ex. 17:10-13.

2. Js. 10: 12-13.

3. 2 Chr. 20:1-24.

4. James 5:17-18; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:42-45; Luke 4:25.

5. Judg. 9, 12:8; 13:4-9.

6. Esther 4:16, 14 (apocryphal).

7. Susanna 1:42-44.

8. Augustine, *Sermones*, 47 (*De tempore*, 226).

9. Chrysostom, *Hom. in Matt.*, 57(58).

meditations and prayers. What if we obtain not our petition at the first? Yet let us not be discouraged, but let us continually cry and call upon God; he will surely hear us at length, if for no other cause, yet for very importunity's sake. Remember the parable of the unrighteous judge and the poor widow, how she by her importunate means caused him to do justice against her adversary, although otherwise he feared neither God nor man. 'Shall not God much more avenge his elect,' saith our Saviour Christ, 'which cry unto him day and night?'¹ Thus he taught his disciples and in them all other true Christian men, to pray always and never to faint or shrink. Remember also the example of the woman of Canaan, how she was rejected of Christ and called dog, as one most unworthy of any benefit at his hands, yet she gave not over but followed him still, crying and calling upon him to be good and merciful unto her daughter, and at length, by very importunity, she obtained her request.² O let us learn by these examples to be earnest and fervent in prayer, assuring ourselves that whatsoever we ask of God the Father in the name of his Son Christ and according to his will, he will undoubtedly grant it.³ He is truth itself and as truly as he hath promised it, so truly he will perform it. God, for his great mercy's sake, so work in our hearts by his Holy Spirit that we may always make our humble prayers unto him as we ought to do, and always obtain the thing which we ask, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

2. In the first part of this sermon ye heard the great necessity and also the great force of devout and earnest prayer declared and proved unto you, both by divers weighty testimonies and also by sundry good examples of Holy Scripture. Now shall you learn whom you ought to call upon and to whom ye ought always to direct your prayers.

We are evidently taught in God's holy testament, that Almighty God is the only fountain and wellspring of all goodness, and that whatsoever we have in this world, we receive it only at his hands. To this effect serveth the place of Saint James: 'Every good and perfect gift,' saith he, 'cometh from above and proceedeth from the Father of lights.'⁴ To this effect also serveth the testimony of Paul in divers places of his epistles, witnessing that the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of knowledge and revelation, yea every good and heavenly gift, as faith, hope, charity, grace and peace cometh only and solely of God.⁵ In consideration whereof he bursteth out into a sudden passion and saith: 'O man, what thing hast thou which thou hast not received?'⁶

1. Luke 18:1-7.

2. Matt. 15:22-28.

3. John 16:23; 1 John 5:14-15.

4. James 1:17.

5. Rom. 1:7; 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:8; Eph. 1:17; 2:8; 1 Thess. 3:12.

6. 1 Cor. 4:7.

Therefore, whensoever we need or lack anything pertaining either to the body or the soul, it behoveth us to run only unto God, who is the only giver of all good things. Our Saviour Christ in the gospel, teaching his disciples how they should pray, sendeth them to the Father in his name, saying: 'Verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it unto you.'¹ And in another place: 'When ye pray, pray after this sort, Our Father which art in heaven, etc.'² And doth not God himself, by the mouth of his prophet David, will and command us to call upon him?³ The apostle wisheth grace and peace to all them that call on the name of the Lord and of his Son Jesus Christ;⁴ as also doth the prophet Joel, saying: 'And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'⁵

Thus then it is plain by the infallible Word of truth and life that in all our necessities we must flee unto God, direct our prayers unto him, call upon his holy name, desire help at his hands and at no other's. Whereof if ye will yet have a further reason, mark that which followeth. There are certain conditions most requisite to be found in every such a one that must be called upon, which if they be not found in him unto whom we pray, then doth our prayer avail us nothing, but is altogether in vain. This first is this, that he to whom we make our prayers be able to help us. The second is that he will help us. The third is that he be such a one as may hear our prayers. The fourth is that he understand better than we ourselves what we lack and how far we have need of help. If these things be to be found in any other saving only God, then may we lawfully call upon some other besides God. But what man is so gross but he well understandeth that these things are only proper to him which is omnipotent and knoweth all things, even the very secrets of the heart, that is to say, only and to God alone?⁶ Whereof it followeth that we must call neither upon angel nor yet upon saint, but only and solely upon God. As Saint Paul doth write: 'How shall men call upon him in whom they have not believed?'⁷ So that invocation or prayer may not be made without faith in him on whom we call, but that we must first believe in him before we can make our prayers unto him, whereupon we must only and solely pray unto God. For to say that we should believe either in angel or saint or in any other living creature were most horrible blasphemy against God and his holy Word, neither ought this fancy enter into the heart of any Christian man,

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1. John 16:23.
 2. Matt. 6:9; Luke 11:2.
 3. Psa. 50:15.
 4. 1 Cor. 1:2-3.
 5. Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21.
 6. 1 John 3:20; Psa. 44:21.
 7. Rom. 10:14.

because we are expressly taught in the Word of the Lord only to repose our faith in the blessed Trinity, in whose only name we are also baptized according to the express commandment of our Saviour Jesus Christ in the last of Matthew.¹

But that the truth hereof may the better appear, even to them that be most simple and unlearned, let us consider what prayer is. Saint Augustine calleth it 'a lifting up of the mind to God, that is to say, an humble and lowly pouring out of the heart to God.'² Isidore saith that 'it is an affection of the heart and not a labour of the lips.'³ So that by these places true prayer doth consist not so much in the outward sound and voice of words as in the inward groaning and crying of the heart to God. Now then, is there any angel, any virgin, any patriarch or prophet among the dead that can understand or know the meaning of the heart? The Scripture saith: 'It is God that searcheth the heart and reins,' and that 'he only knoweth the hearts of the children of men.'⁴ As for the saints, they have so little knowledge of the secrets of the heart that many of the ancient fathers greatly doubt whether they know anything at all that is commonly done on earth. And albeit some think they do, yet Saint Augustine, a doctor of great authority and also antiquity, hath this opinion of them, that they know no more what we do on earth than we know what they do in heaven. For proof whereof he allegeth Isaiah the prophet, where it is said: 'Abraham is ignorant of us and Israel knoweth us not.'⁵ His mind therefore is this, not that we should put any religion in worshipping them or praying unto them, but that we should honour them by following their virtuous and godly life.⁶ For as he witnesseth in another place, the martyrs and holy men in times past were wont after their death to be remembered and named of the priest at divine service, but never to be invocated or called upon. And why so? Because the priest, saith he, 'is God's priest and not theirs,'⁷ whereby he is bound to call upon God and not upon them.

Thus you see that the authority both of Scripture and also of Augustine doth not permit that we should pray unto them. O that all men would studiously read and search the Scriptures!⁸ Then should they not be drowned in ignorance but should easily perceive the truth, as well of this point of doctrine as of all the rest. For there doth the Holy Ghost plainly teach us that Christ is our only mediator and intercessor with God, and

1. Matt. 28:19.

2. Anonymous, *De spiritu et anima*, 50. Traditionally attributed to Augustine.

3. Isidore of Seville, *Sententiae*, 3.7.

4. Psa. 7:9; Rev. 2:23; John 17:10; 2 Chr. 6:30.

5. Isa. 63:16, quoted in Augustine, *De cura pro mortuis gerenda*, 16.

6. Augustine, *De vera religione*, 108.

7. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 22.10.

8. John 5:39.

that we must seek and run to no other. 'If any man sinneth,' saith Saint John, 'we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.'¹ Saint Paul also saith: 'There is one God and one mediator between God and man, even the man Jesus Christ.'² Whereunto agreeth the testimony of our Saviour himself, witnessing that no man cometh to the Father but only by him, who is the way, the truth, the life, yea and the only door whereby we must enter into the kingdom of heaven, because God is pleased in no other but in him.³ For which cause also he crieth and calleth unto us that we should come unto him, saying: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and be heavy laden, and I shall refresh you.'⁴ Would Christ have us so necessarily come unto him? And shall we most unthankfully leave him and run unto other? This is even that which God so greatly complaineth of by his prophet Jeremiah, saying: 'My people have committed two great offences; they have forsaken me, the fountain of the waters of life and have digged to themselves broken pits that can hold no water.'⁵ Is not that man, think you, unwise that will run for water to a little brook when he may as well go to the head spring? Even so may his wisdom be justly suspected that will flee unto saints in time of necessity, when he may boldly and without fear declare his grief and direct his prayer unto the Lord himself.

If God were strange or dangerous to be talked withal, then might we justly draw back and seek to some other. But 'the Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him in 'faith and 'truth;⁶ and 'the prayer of the humble and meek hath always pleased him.'⁷ What if we be sinners? Shall we not therefore pray unto God? Or shall we despair to obtain anything at his hands? Why did Christ then teach us to ask forgiveness of our sins, saying: 'And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us?'⁸ Shall we think that the saints are more merciful in hearing sinners than God? David saith that 'the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness.'⁹ Saint Paul saith that 'he is rich in mercy towards all them that call upon him.'¹⁰ And he himself by the mouth of his prophet Isaiah saith: 'For a little while I have forsaken thee, but with great compassion will I gather thee; for a moment in mine anger I have hid my face from thee, but with everlasting mercy have I had compassion upon

1. 1 John 2:1-2.

2. 1 Tim. 2:5.

3. John 14:6, 10:9; Matt. 17:5.

4. Matt. 11:28.

5. Jer. 2:13.

6. Psa. 145:18.

7. Judg. 9:16.

8. Matt. 6:12.

9. Psa. 103:8.

10. Eph. 2:4; Rom. 10:12.

thee.¹ Therefore the sins of any man ought not to withhold him from praying unto the Lord his God, but if he be truly penitent and steadfast in faith, let him assure himself that the Lord will be merciful unto him and hear his prayers.

O but I dare not (will some man say) trouble God at all times with my prayers; we see that in kings' houses and courts of princes men cannot be admitted unless they first use the help and mean of some special nobleman, to come unto the speech of the king and to obtain the thing that they would have. To this reason doth Saint Ambrose answer very well, writing upon the first chapter to the Romans. 'Therefore,' saith he, 'we use to go unto the king by officers and noblemen, because the king is a mortal man and knoweth not to whom he may commit the government of the commonwealth. But to have God our friend, from whom nothing is hid, we need not any helper that should further us with his good word, but only a devout and godly mind.'² And if it be so, that we need one to intreat for us, why may we not content ourselves with that 'one mediator, which is at the right hand of God' the Father, and there 'liveth for ever to make intercession for us?'³ As the blood of Christ did redeem us on the cross and cleanse us from our sins, even so it is now able to save all them that come unto God by it. For Christ, sitting in heaven, hath an everlasting priesthood, and always prayeth to his Father for them that be penitent, obtaining by virtue of his wounds, which are evermore in the sight of God, not only perfect remission of our sins, but also all other necessities that we lack in this world, so that his only mediation is sufficient in heaven and needeth no other's to help him.⁴

Why then do we pray one for another in this life? Some man perchance will here demand. Forsooth, we are willed so to do by the express commandment both of Christ and his disciples, to declare therein as well the faith that we have in Christ towards God, as also the mutual charity that we bear one towards another, in that we pity our brother's case and make our humble petition to God for him.⁵ But that we should pray unto saints neither have we any commandment in all the Scripture nor yet example which we may safely follow. So that being done without authority of God's Word, it lacketh the ground of faith and therefore cannot be acceptable before God.⁶ For whatsoever is not of faith is sin,⁷ and the apostle saith that 'faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.'⁸

1. Isa. 54:7-8.

2. Hilary the Deacon, *Comm. in Rom.*, 1.22. Traditionally ascribed to Ambrose.

3. 1 Tim. 2:5; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25.

4. Heb. 7:24; 9:12, 24; 10:12.

5. Matt. 5:44; 6:9-13; James 5:16; Col. 3:3; 1 Tim. 2:1-2.

6. Heb. 11:6.

7. Rom. 14:23.

8. Rom. 10:17.

Yet thou wilt object further that the saints in heaven do pray for us and that their prayer proceedeth of an earnest charity that they have towards their brethren on earth. Whereto it may be answered first, that no man knoweth whether they do pray for us or no. And if any will go about to prove it by the nature of charity, concluding that because they did pray for men on earth therefore they do much more the same now in heaven, then may it be said by the same reason that as oft as we do weep on earth they do also weep in heaven, because while they lived in this world it is most certain and sure they did so. As for that place which is written in the Apocalypse, namely, that the angel did offer up the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar, it is properly meant and ought properly to be understood of those saints that are yet living on earth, and not of them that are dead;¹ otherwise what need were it that the angel should offer up their prayers, being now in heaven before the face of almighty God? But admit the saints do pray for us, yet we do not know how, whether specially for them which call upon them or else generally for all men, wishing well to every man alike. If they pray specially for them which call upon them, then it is like they hear our prayers and also know our heart's desire. Which thing to be false, it is already proved, both by the Scriptures and also by the authority of Augustine.

Let us not therefore put our trust or confidence in the saints or martyrs that be dead. Let us not call upon them nor desire help at their hands; but let us always lift up our hearts to God in the name of his dear Son Christ, for whose sake as God hath promised to hear our prayers, so he will truly perform it. Invocation is a thing proper unto God, which if we attribute unto the saints, it soundeth to their reproach, neither can they well bear it at our hands. When Paul had healed a certain lame man which was impotent in his feet at Lystra, the people would have done sacrifice unto him and Barnabas, who renting their clothes, refused it and exhorted them to worship the true God.² Likewise in the Revelation, when Saint John fell before the angel's feet to worship him, the angel would not permit him to do it but commanded him that he should worship God.³ Which examples declare unto us that the saints and angels in heaven will not have us do any honour unto them that is due and proper unto God. He only is our Father, he only is omnipotent, he only knoweth and understandeth all things, he only can help us at all times and in all places, 'he suffereth the sun to shine upon the good and the bad; he feedeth the young ravens that cry unto him; he saveth both man and beast; he will not that any one hair of our head shall perish,'⁴ but is always ready to help and preserve all them that put their trust in him, according as he hath promised, saying: 'before they call I will answer, and whilst they speak, I will

1. Re. 8:3-4.

2. Acts 14:8-18.

3. Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9.

4. Matt. 5:45; Psa. 147:9; 36:6; Luke 12:7; 21:18.

hear.¹ Let us not therefore anything mistrust his goodness, let us not fear to come before the throne of his mercy, let us not seek the aid and help of saints, but let us come boldly ourselves,² nothing doubting but God for Christ's sake, in whom he is well pleased,³ will hear us without a spokesman and accomplish our desire in all such things as shall be agreeable to his most holy will. So saith Chrysostom, an ancient doctor of the church,⁴ and so must we steadfastly believe, not because he saith it but much more because it is the doctrine of our Saviour Christ himself, who hath promised that if we pray to the Father in his name we shall certainly be heard, both to the relief of our necessities and also to the salvation of our souls,⁵ which he hath purchased unto us, not with gold or silver, but with his precious blood, shed once for all upon the cross.⁶

To him therefore with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be all honour, praise and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

3. Ye were taught in the other part of this sermon unto whom ye ought to direct your prayers in time of need and necessity, that is to wit, not unto angels or saints, but unto the eternal and everliving God, who because he is merciful, is always ready to hear us when we call upon him in true and perfect faith, and because he is omnipotent he can easily perform and bring to pass the thing that we request to have at his hands. To doubt of his power it were a plain point of infidelity and clean against the doctrine of the Holy Ghost, which teacheth that he is all in all. And as touching his goodwill in this behalf we have express testimonies in the Scripture how that he will help us, and also deliver us if we call upon him in time of trouble.⁷ So that in both these respects we ought rather to call upon him than upon any other. Neither ought any man therefore to doubt to come boldly unto God, because he is a sinner. For the Lord, as the prophet David saith, 'is gracious and merciful;' yea, 'his mercy and goodness endureth for ever.'⁸ He that sent his own Son into the world to save sinners,⁹ will he not also hear sinners, if with a true penitent heart and a steadfast faith they pray unto him? Yes, 'if we acknowledge our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,'¹⁰ as we are plainly taught by the examples of David,¹¹ Peter,¹²

1. Isa. 65:24.

2. Heb. 4:16, 10:19-23.

3. Matt. 17:5.

4. John Chrysostom, *Hom. de prof. evang.* (*Opera*, 3, 309A).

5. John 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-7.

6. 1 Peter 1:18-19.

7. Psa. l. 15.

8. Psa. 103:8; 107:1.

9. 1 Tim. 1:16; John 3:17.

10. 1 John 1:9.

11. 2 Sam. 12:13.

12. John 21:15-19.

Mary Magdalene,¹ the publican,² and divers other. And whereas we must needs use the help of some mediator and intercessor, let us content ourselves with him that is the true and only mediator of the New Testament, namely the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.³ For as Saint John saith: 'If any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for our sins.'⁴ And Saint Paul in his first epistle to Timothy saith: 'There is one God and one Mediator between God and man, even the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all men, to be a testimony in due time.'⁵

Now, after this doctrine established, you shall be instructed for what kind of things and what kind of persons ye ought to make your prayers unto God. It greatly behoveth all men when they pray, to consider well and diligently with themselves what they ask and require at God's hands, lest if they desire the thing which they ought not, their petitions be made void and of none effect. There came on a time unto Agesilaus the king a certain importunate suitor, who requested him in a matter earnestly, saying: 'Sir, and it please your grace, you did once promise me.' 'Truth,' quoth the king, 'if it be just that thou requirest, then I promised thee; otherwise I did only speak it and not promise it.' The man would not so be answered at the king's hand, but still urging him more and more, said: 'It cometh a king to perform the least word he hath spoken, ye, a if he should only beck with his head.' 'No more,' saith the king, 'than it behoveth one that cometh to a king to speak and ask those things which are rightful and honest.' Thus the king cast off this unreasonable and importunate suitor.⁶ Now if so great consideration be to be had when we kneel before an earthly king, how much more ought to be had when we kneel before the heavenly king, who is only delighted with justice and equity, neither will admit any vain, foolish or unjust petition! Therefore it shall be good and profitable throughly to consider and determine with ourselves what things we may lawfully ask of God without fear of repulse, and also what kind of persons we are bound to commend unto God in our daily prayers.

Two things are chiefly to be respected in every good and godly man's prayer, his own necessity and the glory of Almighty God. Necessity belongeth either outwardly to the body, or else inwardly to the soul. Which part of man, because it is much more precious and excellent than the other, therefore we ought first of all to crave such things as properly belong to the salvation thereof; as the gift of repentance, the gift of faith, the gift of charity and good

1. Mark 16:7, 9.

2. Luke 18:14.

3. Heb. 12:24.

4. 1 John 2:1-2.

5. 1 Tim. 2:5-6.

6. Plutarch, *Apophthegmata Laconica, Agesilai Magni*, 4., p. 208 C.

works, remission and forgiveness of sins, patience in adversity, lowliness in prosperity and such other like fruits of the Spirit, as 'hope, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness and temperance,'¹ which things God requireth of all them that profess themselves to be his children, saying unto them on this wise: 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'² And in another place he also saith: 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and then all other things shall be given unto you.'³ Wherein he putteth us in mind that our chief and greatest care ought to be for those things which pertain to the health and safeguard of the soul, because we have here, as the apostle saith, 'no continuing city, but do seek after another in the world to come.'⁴

Now when we have sufficiently prayed for things belonging to the soul, then may we lawfully and with safe conscience, pray also for our bodily necessities, as meat, drink, clothing, health of body, deliverance out of prison, good luck in our daily affairs and so forth, according as we shall have need. Whereof what better example can we desire to have than Christ himself, who taught his disciples and all other Christian men first to pray for heavenly things, and afterward for earthly things, as is to be seen in that prayer which he left unto his church, commonly called the Lord's prayer?⁵ In the first⁶ book of Kings and third chapter it is written that 'God appeared by night in a dream unto Solomon the king, saying, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt and I will give thee.' Solomon made his humble prayer and asked a wise and prudent heart that might judge and understand what were good and what were ill, what were godly and what were ungodly, what were righteous and what were unrighteous in the sight of the Lord. 'It pleased God wondrously that he had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast requested this word and hast not desired many days and long years upon the earth, neither abundance of riches and goods, nor yet the life of thine enemies which hate thee, but hast desired wisdom to sit in judgment; behold, I have done unto thee according to thy words, I have given thee a wise heart, full of knowledge and understanding, so that there was never none like thee beforetime, neither shall be in time to come. Moreover I have besides this given thee that which thou hast not required, namely, worldly wealth and riches, princely honour and glory, so that thou shalt therein also pass all kings that ever were.'⁷ Note in this example how Solomon, being put to his choice to ask of God whatsoever

1. Gal. 5:22-3; Rom. 15:13.

2. Matt. 5:16.

3. Matt. 6:33.

4. Heb. 13:14.

5. Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4.

6. The original text reads 'third' here, in keeping with the traditional Greek and Latin title of the book.

7. 1 Kings 3:5-13.

he would, requested not vain and transitory things, but the high and heavenly treasures of wisdom, and that in so doing he obtaineth, as it were in recompense, both riches and honour. Wherein is given us to understand that in our daily prayers we should chiefly and principally ask those things which concern the kingdom of God and the salvation of our own souls, nothing doubting but all other things shall, according to the promise of Christ, be given unto us.

But here we must take heed that we forget not that other end whereof mention was made before, namely, the glory of God. Which unless we mind and set before our eyes in making our prayers, we may not look to be heard or to receive anything of the Lord. In the twentieth chapter of Matthew 'the mother of the two sons of Zebedee came unto Jesus, worshipping him and saying: "Grant that my two sons may sit in thy kingdom, the one at thy right hand and the other at thy left hand."¹ In this petition she did not respect the glory of God but plainly declared the ambition and vainglory of her own mind, for which cause she was also most worthily repelled and rebuked at the Lord's hand. In like manner we read in the Acts of one Simon Magus, a sorcerer, how that 'he, perceiving that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, offered them money, saying: "Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost."² In making this request he sought not the honour and glory of God but his own private gain and lucre, thinking to get great store of money by this feat, and therefore it was justly said unto him: 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou thinkest that the gift of God may be obtained with money.' By these and such other examples we are taught whensoever we make our prayers unto God, chiefly to respect the honour and glory of his name. Whereof we have this general precept in the apostle Paul: 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, look that you do it to the glory of God.'³ Which thing we shall best of all do if we follow the example of our Saviour Christ, who, praying that the bitter cup of death might pass from him, would not therein have his own will fulfilled, but referred the whole matter to the good will and pleasure of his Father.⁴

And hitherto concerning those things that we may lawfully and boldly ask of God.

Now it followeth that we declare what kind of persons we are bound in conscience to pray for. Saint Paul, writing to Timothy, exhorteth him to make prayers and supplications for all men, exempting none, of what degree or state soever they be. In which place he maketh mention by name of kings and rulers which are in authority, putting us thereby to knowledge how greatly it concerneth the profit of the commonwealth to pray diligently for the higher

1. Matt. 20:20-23.

2. Acts 8:18-20.

3. 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17.

4. Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.

powers.¹ Neither is it without good cause that he doth so often in all his epistles crave the prayers of God's people for himself.² For in so doing he declareth to the world how expedient and needful it is daily to call upon God for the ministers of his holy Word and sacraments, that they may have the door of utterance opened unto them, that they may truly understand the Scriptures, that they may effectually preach the same unto the people and bring forth the true fruits thereof to the example of all other. After this sort did the congregation continually pray for Peter at Jerusalem and for Paul among the Gentiles, to the great increase and furtherance of Christ's gospel.³ And if we, following their good example herein, will study to do the like, doubtless it cannot be expressed how greatly we shall both help ourselves and also please God.

To discourse and run through all degrees of persons it were too long; therefore ye shall briefly take this one conclusion for all. Whomsoever we are bound by express commandment to love, for those also we are bound in conscience to pray, but we are bound by express commandment to love all men as ourselves; therefore we are also bound to pray for all men even as well as if it were for ourselves, notwithstanding we know them to be our extreme and deadly enemies, for so doth our Saviour Christ plainly teach us in his holy gospel, saying: 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven.'⁴ And as he taught his disciples, so did he practise himself in his lifetime, praying for his enemies upon the cross and desiring his Father to forgive them, because they knew not what they did,⁵ as did also that holy and blessed martyr Stephen when he was cruelly stoned to death of the stubborn and stiffnecked Jews, to the example of all them that will truly and unfeignedly follow their Lord and master Christ in this miserable and mortal life.⁶

Now to entreat of that question, whether we ought to pray for them that are departed out of this world, or no. Wherein if we cleave only unto the Word of God, then must we needs grant that we have no commandment so to do. For the Scripture doth acknowledge but two places after this life, the one proper to the elect and blessed of God, the other to the reprobate and damned souls, as may be well gathered by the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.⁷ Which place Saint Augustine exounding saith on this wise: 'That which Abraham speaketh unto the rich man in Luke's gospel, namely, that the just cannot go into those places where the wicked are tormented, what other things doth it

1. 1 Tim. 2:1-2.

2. Col. 4:3-4; Rom. 15:30-32; 2 Thess. 3:1-2; Eph. 6:19-20.

3. Acts 12:5; 2 Cor. 1:11; Phil. 1:19; Philemon 1:22.

4. Matt. 5:44-45.

5. Luke 23:34.

6. Acts 7:60.

7. Luke 16:19-26.

signify but only this, that the just, by reason of God's judgment, which may not be revoked, can show no deed of mercy in helping them which after this life are cast into prison until they pay the uttermost farthing?¹ These words, as they confound the opinion of helping the dead by prayer, so they do clean confute and take away the vain error of purgatory which is grounded upon this saying of the gospel: 'Thou shalt not depart hence until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.'² Now doth Saint Augustine say that those men which are cast into prison after this life on that condition may in no wise be holpen, though we would help them never so much. And why? Because the sentence of God is unchangeable and cannot be revoked again. Therefore let us not deceive ourselves, thinking that either we may help other, or other may help us by their good and charitable prayers in time to come. For as the preacher saith: 'When the tree falleth, whether it be toward the south or toward the north, in what place soever the tree falleth, there it lieth,³ meaning thereby that every mortal man dieth either in the state of salvation or damnation, according as the words of the Evangelist John do also plainly import, saying: 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life, but he that believeth not on the Son shall never see life, but the wrath of God abideth upon him.'⁴ Where is then the third place which they call purgatory? Or where shall our prayers help and profit the dead? Saint Augustine doth only acknowledge two places after this life, heaven and hell. As for the third place, he doth plainly deny that there is any such to be found in all Scripture.⁵ Chrysostom likewise is of this mind, that unless we wash away our sins in this present world, we shall find no comfort afterward.⁶ And Saint Cyprian saith that after death 'repentance and sorrow of pain shall be without fruit; weeping also shall be in vain and prayer shall be to no purpose.' Therefore he counselleth all men to make provision for themselves while they may, because 'when they are once departed out of this life, there is no place for repentance, nor yet for satisfaction.'⁷ Let these and other such places be sufficient to take away the gross error of purgatory out of our heads, neither let us dream any more that the souls of the dead are anything at all holpen by our prayers, but as the Scripture teacheth us, let us think that the soul of man, passing out of the body, goeth straightways either to heaven or else to hell, whereof the one needeth no prayer and the other is without redemption.

The only purgatory wherein we must trust to be saved is the death and blood of Christ, which if we apprehend with a true and steadfast faith, it

1. Augustine, *Quaestiones evangelicae*, 2.38.3.

2. Matt. 5:26.

3. Eccl. 11:3.

4. John 3:36.

5. Anonymous, *Hypognost.*, 5.5. Traditionally attributed to Augustine.

6. John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Genesim*, 5.

7. Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, 23-24.

purgeth and cleanseth us from all our sins, even as well as if he were now hanging upon the cross. 'The blood of Christ,' saith Saint John, 'hath cleansed us from all sin.'¹ 'The blood of Christ,' saith Saint Paul, 'hath purged our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.'² Also in another place he saith: 'We be sanctified' and made holy 'by the offering up of the body of Jesus Christ,' done 'once for all.'³ Yea he addeth more, saying: 'With the one oblation' of his blessed body and precious blood 'he hath made perfect for ever and ever all them that are sanctified.'⁴ This then is that purgatory wherein all Christian men must put their whole trust and confidence, nothing doubting but if they truly repent them of their sins and die in perfect faith, that then they shall forthwith pass from death to life. If this kind of purgation will not serve them, let them never hope to be released by other men's prayers, though they should continue therein unto the world's end. He that cannot be saved by faith in Christ's blood, how shall he look to be delivered by man's intercessions? Hath God more respect to man on earth that he hath to Christ in heaven? 'If any man sin,' saith Saint John, 'we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.'⁵ But we must take heed that we call upon this advocate while we have space given us in this life, lest when we are once dead, there be no hope of salvation left unto us. For as every man sleepeth with his own cause, so every man shall rise again with his own cause.⁶ And look, in what state he dieth, in the same state shall he be also judged, whether it be to salvation or damnation.⁷

Let us not therefore dream either of purgatory or of prayer for the souls of them that be dead, but let us earnestly and diligently pray for them which are expressly commanded in Holy Scripture, namely for kings and rulers, for ministers of God's holy Word and sacraments, for the saints of this world, otherwise called the faithful, to be short, for all men living, be they never so great enemies to God and his people, as Jews, Turks, pagans, infidels, heretics, etc. then shall we truly fulfil the commandment of God in that behalf and plainly declare ourselves to be the true 'children of our heavenly Father, which suffereth the sun to shine upon the good and the bad and the rain to fall upon the just and the unjust.'⁸ For which and all other benefits most abundantly bestowed upon mankind from the beginning let us give him hearty thanks as we are most bound, and praise his name for ever and ever. Amen.

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1. 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5.
 2. Heb. 9:14.
 3. Heb. 10:10 (Vulgate).
 4. Heb. 10:14.
 5. 1 John 2:1-2.
 6. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannem*, XLIX, 9.
 7. Augustine, *Ep. ad Hesychium*, 199.2.
 8. Matt. v. 45.