

The Four Pillars

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GOOD FOUNDATIONS

In the year 1968 they had to close the largest church in Buenos Aires. Large cracks in the ceiling caused pieces of stone from the vault to fall to the floor, with great danger to the parishioners. They consulted many engineers and architects and each one gave his solution, but the stones kept falling. Finally, they called an engineer who was an expert in sustaining buildings. This man, different from all the others, instead of examining the ceiling, dug giant holes next to the foundations, to see how they were, to view their thickness and depth.

Upon finishing these studies, the engineer called the pastor and said, "Father, you don't have a problem, this has a solution."

"How can you say that?" the pastor asked. "Until now all the work has been futile."

"We can fix the ceiling," said the engineer, "because this church has been built on four strong pillars. You didn't see them because they were underground, but there is as much foundation below as there is building that you see above. Over these four pillars we will strengthen the ceiling." And that's what he did. This church, one of the most beautiful in the city, was saved in this way from the wrecking ball.

Not all churches are made of stone. Saint Paul tells us that we are living temples of God. And even though we are not made of stone, we also need foundations, hidden pillars that sustain the walls and the rest of the building, made of the virtues, the apostolate, the faith, etc.

This booklet wants to help you lay four great foundations for your Christian life.

One of the seven wonders of the ancient world was the famous Colossus of Rhodes, an enormous statue constructed in the entrance of the port that has the same name. This wonder, that was visited by many people, went underground. According to the story, it collapsed because it had foundations of dirt.

In nature, as in the things created by humans, there is a law: the greater the work, the greater needs to be the foundation. In trees, roots; in animals, feet; in inanimate beings, the foundations. The same happens in the works of an engineer, architect, or artist: the greater the height, weight and volume, the greater need to be, proportionally, the foundations, which need to be firm and deep if they want to sustain the building and give it the necessary stability.

As you are already realizing, these four pillars are four moments of prayer. Prayer is the foundation that makes you grow in friendship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Like four great columns, its function is to sustain everything else, to keep us always in the continual and loving presence of God.

In the case of the Church, the word “pillar” is a synonym for “foundation,” but the word pillar can also be used for those poles that transport electric cables and maintain tension. What’s more, “pillar” can be used for the milestones that show the way.

As much as the foundations, the columns of light and the milestones are means to reach a greater goal and through which they acquire meaning. No one lives in the foundations, nor would it make sense to have an electric column without a cable to transport electricity, nor to stop and stand beneath a milepost. In all three cases, the pillars are put there to protect and to reach a greater end without which they lack a reason to exist: they are means for reaching something else. The four pillars are meant to nurture a personal relationship with Christ. They are the means to live in His presence and acquire His same thoughts and feelings.

The four pillars form a part of the teaching of the Church, corroborated through the lives of the saints, keeping in mind that their ultimate origin is in Jesus.

The four pillars are:

The daily reading of Sacred Scripture

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament

Love of the Virgin Mary, our Mother

Beginning and ending the day in the company of Jesus.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR PILLARS

“A Certain Distance”

The pillars that uphold electric cables are separated one from another. This distance is to keep the cables from having such a big curve that they touch the ground. Because of this, in the measure that the cable is close to the pole, it is raised. The force of gravity and the weight of the cable itself make it tend toward the ground, but it is lifted immediately by the presence of the following pillar and so on successively.

The four pillars, to fulfill their purpose, should have an adequate distribution throughout the day. This same distribution will help you maintain the “elevation of looks” necessary. These characteristics are important for the pillars that we want to speak of here: adequate distribution and sufficient tension.

RECHARGE THE BATTERIES

So that the whole day is lived in the presence of God, we need to distribute these moments of prayer in the best way possible, keeping in mind the natural division of each day: morning, midday, afternoon, and night. These are the four most important moments, and with these moments, generally, we change our activities. Therefore, it is important that each of these moments be illuminated by a pillar.

This distribution maintains the tension and the profound desire to be with the Friend, keeping the heart afire. Throughout the day, when we are submerged in things, tasks, and other work, there can be something inside us that strengthens us and renews us. We need to Recharge the batteries.

A BOUNDARY STONE

Some years ago, a group of friends was climbing a high mountain, and at the end of a trail, they couldn't distinguish where the way led. But soon, when they had already counted themselves lost, they saw a giant stone with another smaller stone above, painted with a cross. “It's a boundary stone!” someone said.

The pillar is a boundary stone, a signal along the way, an indicator of the right direction that helps us orient ourselves and helps us not to lose our course.

To fulfill their purpose well, these pillars and boundary stones should be set in a place that is clearly visible and should be big enough to be easily seen. If they are very small or are hidden, they run the risk of being passed by without being seen, and thus not fulfilling their purpose. The pillars orient us, and for this reason the size and the location are important.

The four pillars signal for us the true reason that we have in this life and what will be our final destination. But they also help us now to ask Jesus and the Holy Spirit for criteria for doing, for discerning what it is that He wants from us in any given situation. In this way, our actions are illuminated by the Faith, a Faith that begins to be put in practice in prayer turned into life.

It is also important that they are put in a good place, because it is not the same to have a conversation in the middle of noise and work as it is to speak with a friend alone, in a place that predisposes us so that we can speak from our hearts of the most profound things and listen in serenity. It is true that God is present in all places and that we can always be with Him, that He is within us and never leaves us alone, but it is also true that His presence in the Eucharist is special, and that we, as human beings, are very much affected by the characteristics of the place in which we find ourselves. For this reason it is important that we have these strong moments of prayer in a good place, more than anything to avoid the distractions that, if they are difficult to eliminate completely, at the very least we can use these small means to help us center our attention in the Lord. Your place of prayer, your very own sanctuary.

TO OVERCOME

Look at what the Book of Exodus tells us: the people of Israel were in a war with their neighbors the Amalekites. The battle started in Rephidim. Moses, on top of the mountain, prayed with his arms extended, like on a cross. “When Moses raised his arms, Israel overcame; but if he lowered his arms, Amalek had the advantage. Already the arms of Moses were tired, so that he found a rock and sat on it, and Aaron on one side and Hur on the other, sustained his arms; his arms in this way remained unmoving until the sun went down and Joshua defeated Amalek.” (Ex 17:11-13).

At times we have to get up early, like the Lord, or organize ourselves well to find a good time. We cannot make a case with eternal excuses: “I don’t have time, I don’t know, I don’t get anything out

of it, or He doesn't listen to me." When we are fully convinced of the necessity of something or of Someone, or when we really want something, we make the time for it.

For a Christian, God is always Someone important, that we can't go without, not if we don't want to spoil our life and leave it forever sterile. Without breathing we can't live. Without prayer, we can't be holy.

We will try to express more precisely what each pillar consists of in our interior life.

THE FIRST PILLAR: THE READING OF THE WORD OF GOD

They say that the Bible is the best selling, the most ancient, and the most holy book, but it is also the least lived.

It was St. Jerome who translated the Bible for the first time into Latin, and to do this, he lived in a cave next to the manger in Bethlehem. The saint says that one night he had a dream: he saw himself already dead at the throne of God, and they were ready to begin the judgment. With great force, an angel asked him, "Who are you?" And St. Jerome responded: "I am a Christian." "That's not true," said the angel. "You're a Ciceronian." (Cicero was a pagan writer who St. Jerome admired, and when St. Jerome left Rome, he had left all he owned, except the Bible and three books by Cicero.) This dialogue was repeated three times. St. Jerome realized that his judgment wasn't good, and in the middle of fears and anxieties, he woke up. Immediately, he took the books by Cicero and burnt them.

Perhaps it's not necessary for us to burn all of our books, but we can say with St. Jerome that "not to know the Holy Scripture is not to know Christ."

For this reason, St. Paul, already old, reminded his disciple Timothy: "Remember that from your infancy you have known the sacred scriptures, which are capable of giving you wisdom for salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for refutation, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the one who belongs to God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:15-16).

The Word of God is living and effective, powerful like a two-edged sword. When Jesus speaks, marvelous things happen: the paralytic walks, the sea is calmed, the fig tree dries up, the blind see. Today, too, miracles happen through His Word: Christ makes Himself bread, He forgives our sins, He heals our body and our soul. The Word of God does not return to God without having an effect.

St. Augustine defined the Bible as "a letter from God to us." A letter to be read and to be eaten. The book of Revelation brings us another important story: St. John saw in the hand of God a book

sealed with seven seals, and no one could open it. Only Jesus, who is the Word of the Father, is worthy of opening it. After a series of visions, God invited St. John to eat this book: “It will be bitter in your stomach, but in your mouth it will be sweet like honey.” (Rev 10:9).

So is the Word, sweet because it comforts us, fills us with joy, teaches and sets us afire, but also bitter because it shows us the evidence of our own sin. But for this to happen, we need to “eat it,” ruminate it, know it, meditate it. Not just read it like one reads any other book, rather like THE WORD OF GOD! Only in this way can we incorporate it in our life, live it!

That’s why this is the first pillar: “Not to know the Scripture is not to know Christ.” (St. Jerome).

From there comes the veneration that all Christians have for Sacred Scripture, and you have seen how in the Mass the priest kisses the Scripture. How we should care for it, have it well-covered, in a good place, read it with respect and—why not?—also kiss it at the end of the reading or proclamation!

For this reason, if we want like St. Paul “to boast of knowing Christ, to arrive at the highest knowledge of Jesus, my Lord, for whose love I sacrificed everything,”(Phil 3:8) we should read at least the Gospel, since God, “although He spoke to our Fathers in many ways, finally in these days has spoken to us through His Son.” (Heb 1:1-2) The doctrine of Christ is in the Gospel and in the other sacred books. The peaceful and serene reading of them will make them familiar, and, through the years, will bring us to a deepening of the revealed doctrine, to discover the details that in the first readings we pass over, to see in its clarity the glorious figure of Christ, God and Man. Another step more and we will come to be enamored with the Lord and with love we will understand more. “You don’t understand me? If you love me you should understand me,” someone has written. A personal relationship will be born, converted in prayer and, beginning to be imitators of Christ, like Paul, to clothe ourselves with Him, to feel ourselves members of Him, we will arrive, finally, to exclaim, amazed like the Apostle: “No longer I, but Christ who lives within me.” (Gal 2:20) A result of this fullness of life will be the desire for other souls to be closer to God. Gospel and apostolate is a fundamental binomial in the life of all Christians. Hopefully, such will be your composure and your conversation that all who see you and hear you will be able to say: “In this one I see the life of Jesus Christ!”

The Gospel is our book and of no other can we say this with more ownership. In it, we are told of the intimacy of God. The Church insistently recommends to all the faithful the regular reading of

the Holy Scripture so that they can acquire the highest knowledge, the knowledge of Jesus Christ, because not to know Scripture is not to know Christ.

To begin to read the Word of God, I suggest that you begin with a daily meditation of the Holy Gospel. During the day, take some time (between 10 or 15 minutes) to read, after putting yourself in the presence of the Lord, trying to discover that which today He wants to teach you.

This reading is the first step, that should bring you to what properly we call “meditation.”

THE MEDITATION

What is the meditation? “Mental prayer is nothing else, it seems to me, than an interaction of friendship, being at times interacting with the one who we know loves us” (St. Theresa of Jesus).

This prayer, so important and loved by all the friends of God and all who long to be His friends, consists in a dialogue with Him, starting from a text of the Gospel (sometimes one can use another text).

This way of praying is neither more nor less than an encounter with Jesus through a text of the Gospel. The Meditation is also called “Lectio Divina,” the name given it by monks. It has three moments, each one of which responds to one of these three questions:

--What does the Lord say in this Word?

--What does the Lord say *to me* through this Word?

--What do I reply to the Lord?

Not only talking

They say that crazy people talk to themselves, but I believe that at times without being crazy we talk to ourselves, when we pray without having the least sensation that we are together with “someone who loves us.” For this reason, the first thing to do, if you want to pray seriously and to talk with God, is to put yourself in His presence.

We need to make ourselves aware of what we are going to do and make ourselves aware of Who we are in front of. It is putting ourselves in the right “frequency,” “synthesizing” our heart with the heart of Jesus, quieting our soul and entering prayer with great desire. It is very important to be in the presence of God; many times all the rest of the prayer depends on this presence, and for this reason all the other things that help us enter into an atmosphere of prayer are important. It is the moment to

invoke the Holy Spirit, without which it is impossible to pray, asking for the grace to have a good moment of prayer.

Another good recommendation for praying better is that you read the Gospel that you will meditate on the next morning before you go to bed the night before, so that during the night it is working in your heart. Even more, already you know what you will encounter and it will make the work easier for you.

What does it say?

In the Presence of the Friend, with whom you will have this moment of conversation, read the Gospel of the day, and once you have read it, ask yourself what this Gospel says, trying to be as objective as possible. To achieve this, read the text two or three times, slowly, saying every word, imagining the scene, and trying to see what is the message that Jesus transmits. What does it say to everyone? What teaching or what light for our life do we receive from Jesus in this text?

When you have already seen with clarity the message for everyone, it is time to ask yourself:

What does Jesus say to me?

This is the moment to see what it is that Jesus wants you to revise, change, work on, understand, convert. It is the moment to listen to Him, to observe him, to enter into the scene, to put yourself into the story, to convert yourself into an actor in this Gospel, a participant, to see your life with Jesus and to open yourself to be converted, to be changed. This should be done in dialogue with Jesus, in contemplation and in analysis.

Perhaps at the beginning the more rational and analytic aspect will dominate in us, trying not to distract ourselves, to concentrate, etc. But with spiritual growth, this will be counter-balanced with a more mystical and contemplative attitude where the dialogue with Jesus will be dominant. This is a path to follow all your life.

What do I say?

Having seen what the Lord wants to show you, you arrive at the moment of the petition, the moment to ask Him to give us the grace to achieve what we have seen. It is the moment to remember what Jesus Himself tells us: “Without me, you can do nothing,” (Jn 15:5) the moment to cry out to Him

like the leper, “if you want, you can make me whole.” (Mk 1:40) The question should be, “What do I say to Him?” And not only ask, but give thanks, adore, ask forgiveness . . . you speak.

Is it always necessary to make a proposition after each meditation? It is important to make concrete propositions, ones that are possible and that can be fulfilled today. These are the three characteristics of a realistic and sincere proposition. We should propose for ourselves two or three things, and during a more or less prolonged time, work on these, without distracting ourselves.

If it helps you, I will give you a rule to help make more concrete our fragile propositions. When proposing something for yourself, ask yourself: how, when, and where. “I want to be more of a servant,” you say. Very well, but . . .

How? Helping to clear the table? Helping your friend study? Collaborating in the cleaning of the house or of the apartment where I live?

When? Today? Tomorrow? During the week?

Where? At home? In your high school? In the university or your work?

SPIRITUAL READING

It was the year 1521. Ignatius of Loyola had fallen with a wound in his leg defending the city of Pamplona against the French invasion. During the long hours of recuperation, Ignatius read. His life, before very superficial, was changed through reading the Life in Christ and the lives of the saints. Spiritual reading has made many saints.

This model of the first pillar consists in the running reading of a text of the Sacred Scripture that is not the Gospels, but the Old Testament or the letters of the New Testament. It is to familiarize ourselves with what God has transmitted to us through His Word. And we cannot forget, in addition to the Sacred Scriptures, the reading of some spiritual book. In our interior life an intellectual element enters: ideas. Heart and head, in their total offering to God, need to walk side by side; and so this reading is indispensable as a fount of intellectual enrichment. St. Francis de Sales wrote: “If prayer is the flame of a sanctuary lamp, spiritual reading is the oil on which the flame feeds.” The simple act of dedicating some time each day to spiritual reading represents at the end of the year a wealth nothing can diminish, a wealth of ascetic and mystical formation.

Like the river that always sings the same song but with different water, so in the daily reading of good spiritual books, we will have the same doctrine, but with new forms, with greater profundity

and solidity, with the warmth of life. Spiritual reading is a norm that enriches the mind and moves the heart, and the two, heart and mind, to the service of God.

The lives of saints are very good to read to encourage us and set us on fire for Christ. “If they could do it, why not me!” Ignatius of Loyola asked himself, and later became St. Ignatius of Loyola, from reading the lives of the saints and the life of Christ.

THE SECOND PILLAR: LOVE OF THE EUCHARIST

“I am the Bread of Life, he that comes to me will never hunger.” (Jn 6:35)

“If you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and do not drink His blood . . .” (Jn 6:53)

All of us believe in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, the presence that theology calls: true, real and substantial. Presence because He is there. Jesus is in our Tabernacles day and night. There is Someone, not just something, Someone alive. It is a true presence because so He promised: “I will be with you until the end of the world.” (Mt 28:20) And it is real, with the reality that contains His body, blood, soul and divinity: “there is no truer truth,” as we sing in the Adoro Te Devote, that ancient eucharistic hymn.

Theology adds something more: it is a substantial presence, not an accidental presence. This means that it is not only a memory of Jesus, as when someone is present in the works that they have left, or in a memorial. In the Eucharist the presence of Jesus is substantial. Jesus Himself is present!

But it is not enough to define this truth theologically—you have to believe it. It needs to move from our mind to our heart, becoming more than an idea; it needs to be a time of perception or sentiment of the reality of the faith, touching, like Thomas, with the finger of our faith, a faith made alive, the wounded side open to the resurrected heart of Jesus.

Jesus, after His resurrection, appears to Mary Magdalene. At first she doesn’t realize, she talks with Him and cries, is sad, until Jesus says her name: “Mary.” And only then does she see Jesus, discover Him, a veil falling from her eyes . . . and the world is different, now she doesn’t cry more, but runs, is filled with strength and is capable of shaking the disciples, of bringing them the faith in the resurrection. (cf. Jn 20:11-18)

In another occasion, the Apostles are fishing after Easter and Jesus appears to them on the shore. They were sad, but suddenly, one of them recognizes Him: “It is the Lord!” he shouts, and Peter throws himself headfirst into the water (cf. Jn 21:1-14). Something similar happens in our life, a voice inside us shouts: “It is the Lord!” From this day, our perception of the Eucharist is different, because

we have a living sense of the presence of Jesus. And a Christian who senses this, who truly believes from the heart in the presence of Jesus, is a Christian who already is outside of all crises. Not that he doesn't have any crises; rather, he has already overcome them because there is something better, or better said, Someone in his life that helps him. Even if the boat is sinking, He is present, He is in control.

The Eucharist is the sun of our life that illuminates everything. One day, a missionary discovered that the aborigines, every day before going to work, stayed in front of the Tabernacle, adoring for a moment the Eucharist in the mission chapel. "What are you doing on your knees?" The missionary asked them. "Warming ourselves in the sun," they said.

The Eucharist is the continual presence of Jesus among us "until the end of the world." One man complained to Jesus that he was alone in his life, and Jesus responded, "You are alone? What does my presence here mean to you?"

It is not true that we are alone. We have the company of Jesus, that Friend, Lord and Master who is the only one capable of filling our heart.

Jesus is present with all His soul, body, blood, and divinity, as God and as man, alive and acting, in the sacrament of the Eucharist. There Jesus is completely, with a presence that surpasses all others in perfection, and His presence in the Eucharist exists so that we can recognize Him and help Him in the poor and those in need, in the sick and the prisoner, in our companion at work, at school, in the university, in our parents and our friends, so that we can have the spiritual strength and power to live His Word and be holy members of the Church. All of these things are fruits and signs that our love for Jesus in the Eucharist is real. Jesus Himself has stayed in the Eucharist to enter us and transform us into Him, and the door through which He enters our heart is adoration and communion.

That is why this second pillar is so important. It is direct contact with Jesus who wanted to stay especially with us. St. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest adorers of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, said that to be a friend of someone there is only one path: spend time with him, talk with him, tell him things, listen to him, be with him. This pillar is absolutely necessary to be the friend of Jesus. These are some of the forms of growing in this personal friendship:

THE VISIT TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT

Visiting a friend is always a way of showing our friendship and love, and if they have done us some favor, it will be a test of gratitude and “duty” of good education. Visiting the Friend *par excellence* is a test of gratitude, sign of love, and a debt of adoration to Christ Our Lord there present.

We remember some thoughts of the encyclical *Mysterium Fidei*: “While the Eucharist is reserved in churches and oratories, Christ is truly the Emmanuel, that is to say, God with us.” And the encyclical continues: “There is no other nation that has God so close as we have our God. This proximity gives us an incomparable dignity: orders the customs, nourishes the virtues, consoles the afflicted, strengthens the weak” (*Mysterium Fidei*, 67). All this well merits a ‘thank you.’ Christ could have chosen not to stay in the tabernacle; He has stayed not because of His necessity, but because of our necessity: He knew that we would need Him. These are ingenious desires of love: ‘I will be with you until the end of the world.’

Christian life revolves around Christ, in such a way that He is “the spiritual center of the religious community and the parish community, and even more, of the universal Church and of all humanity,” and He is the center, at the same time, of our affections and aspirations, “the center of every heart”(ibid, 68). How amazing, then, if in the afternoon or evening, we end with a Visit to the Blessed Sacrament!

It is a duty to adore. Also, in the tabernacle the Eucharist should be adored, because there Christ is substantially present through the conversion of the bread and wine, that according to the Council of Trent, is appropriately called ‘transubstantiation.’

If there were only one Tabernacle in the whole world, we would feel ourselves lucky to be able to go even just once in our life to adore Him there. God has made it easier, simpler, and available to everyone, and so . . . those who go enjoy his intimate treatment, open their heart to Him, praying for themselves and all who are dear to them, and praying for the peace and salvation of the world.

We can only understand somewhat the reason for the Eucharist if we put ourselves in the place of those who are in love: “Heart speaks to heart.” Almost without words, the presence and the look say everything. “He looks at me and I look at Him,” said an old man to the Curé de Ars. There, without realizing it, we are contemplatives. I know that He is here. I am really in front of God.

Through experience, everyone knows what it is to visit a friend. “I was walking by and came to visit you.” These would be the words we could say to Jesus when we pass by, even if it is for no more than a minute, genuflecting in front of the Tabernacle and then continuing on our way.

“I wanted to talk with you for a bit, that’s why I came . . .” we can say when we stop to visit for a minute our Friend, when we take a moment to have an intimate conversation. It is the moment when we can pour out our heart to our Friend, when we are listened to, when we ask for those we love, for those we would like to bring close to Him.

In the visit to the Blessed Sacrament, you should make an act of spiritual communion, telling Jesus that you want to receive Him in faith and in love, making a profound act of loving union between Him and ourselves so that his loving presence is intensified, more conscious in us. It is good to begin our visit like this to be able to enter quickly in union with Jesus who looks at us and listens to us, who knows our thoughts, sadnesses, joys and desires, who is waiting for us in each tabernacle. For this he has stayed in the Eucharist!

It was the year 1510. Pope Julius II, in his urge to restore the buildings of the Vatican, had put one of his architects in charge of the plans for a palace. As the architect fell behind, the Pope began to be irritated. When, finally, the architect went to present him the plans, he brought his seven-year-old son with him, and when they arrived at the door of the Pope’s office, he gave the plans to his son and sent him inside, while the architect waited outside. The Pope, surprised, understood the maneuver immediately. He examined the plans and was satisfied by the well-done work, and wanting to compensate the child, he said: “Do you see that urn? There are coins in it. Put your hand in and take all that you can in your hand.” The child refused, but the Pope insisted: “Why don’t you want to take them?” “You give them to me, because your hand is bigger and will grab more,” the child said. The Pope laughed, satisfied, put his hand in the urn, and in one fist filled the two hands of the child.

Like Julius II, you need big hands to help others. The Visit to the Blessed Sacrament is also a special moment to remember others, their needs, their dreams, their souls, and their worries.

Christ had his time of prayer in the afternoon, St. Matthew tells us. After having blessed, multiplied and distributed the loaves and fish to five thousand men, he sent them away and went off alone to the mountain to pray.

The visit to the Blessed Sacrament is apostolic. It is the hour of the apostle that entrusts the works of his hands and asks for souls for the vineyard of the Lord. “The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. So ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers to the harvest.” Being an apostle is a desire that Christ sows in clean hearts. It is the glow of His light, the flavor of His salt. It is the holy craziness of wanting to love God more than everything else and desiring that others love

Him the same way. It is stoking the fire that Christ brought to the earth, blowing it in the same direction as Christ, to enkindle the love of God in souls.

The Visit is the hour of apostolic plans that, before they can become reality, are silent and fruitful prayer. That prayer, like incense, “rises to the God of my life.”

HOLY MASS

To break knowingly a Commandment of the Church in a grave matter is mortal sin. This brings us to think that going to the Holy Mass should be something vital for a Christian.

We know that Sunday Mass is a precept of the Church and that therefore every Christian should live it, but not only as an obligation. It’s true that in a certain way the Church “obliges” us to go to Mass on Sundays, but the accent shouldn’t be on the obligation, but rather on asking ourselves, Why?, given that the Church, in these matters, is the voice of Jesus, and uses these laws not as an end in themselves. It is not an obligation for the sake of an obligation, but rather that these laws of the Church always have the function of “protecting” and of giving those goods that He himself has left us, the Mass being the most important and vital, given that in it, the saving act of Jesus is renewed: His death and resurrection for us for the forgiveness of our sins. No other kind of prayer has the force and the grace of the Mass, nothing else is equal or even comes close, because its value is infinite.

But as the Church is mother, and as mother knows the weakness and fragility of her children, who—at times for laziness, for ignorance, or for other reasons that each person knows—don’t understand the vital importance of the Holy Mass, like a good mother in love obliges her child to take the medicine he needs to be healthy, in the same way our Mother Church shows us the importance of taking this unique medicine, that saves us from the worst sickness, through a precept.

As Pope Paul VI wrote on August 22, 1973: “More than ever, the observance of this precept conserves its gravity and fundamental importance. The Church has made it easy to make this observance. Those who are conscious of the content and of the functionality of this precept should consider it not only as a primary duty, but also a right, a necessity, an honor, a chance which a living and intelligent believer cannot renounce without serious motives.”

What is the Holy Mass?

The Mass is the renovation of the sacrifice on Calvary, but in a bloodless way. Between the sacrifice of the Mass and the sacrifice of the Cross there is this difference and this relation: that on the

Cross, Jesus Christ offered himself, pouring out his blood and making us worthy, while on our altars he sacrifices himself without pouring out his blood and he applies to us the fruits of his passion and death. Without the merits of Christ, I cannot be saved, nor sanctify my work, nor give glory to God, nor do apostolate. I need the Mass because the work of our redemption is carried out as many times as the sacrifice of the Cross is celebrated on the altar.

Why go to Mass?

The Holy Mass is the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and we have the ends proper to every sacrifice. The laudative end or the end of adoration of God the Father; the eucharistic end or that of giving thanks for the redemption and the benefits received; the propitiatory or that of reparation for sins committed; and the impetratory or of petition for the necessities that we have. If we think for a moment about ourselves, we see the obligation and the necessity that we have for these ends. Without them, our life would be very small and without meaning, and we would be crushed by the weight of our sins and our needs. What's more, if we feel the need to do apostolate, we know that all of our efforts to bring souls closer to God would be in vain without his grace. "Without me you can do nothing." (Jn 15:5) We should fully convince ourselves of our need for the Holy Mass to do apostolate. One very important characteristic of the apostolic person is love of the Mass. The Mass links the priest and the faithful to the most sublime of all businesses: redeeming the world. Not with the objective of improving structures, which is secondary, but for the conversion of the human heart. For this reason, the Mass has to be the center of the whole life of the Christian community. Don't you want to be a saint and to help others to be saints?

How can we live the Mass?

The first condition is go. Not to arrive running late, without a few minutes beforehand, because we are not machines and it's hard for us to change from one situation to another, calm ourselves and put ourselves in the right mood. It's good to arrive a few minutes beforehand and put ourselves in the presence of God, preparing ourselves for what we are going to realize and asking Jesus for a good disposition: If the soil is well prepared, the rain can enter more easily to the inside and make it more fertile.

It is not good to wait for the last minute, especially on Sundays. The best for the best. If I arrive tired, worn out after a thousand activities, it will be difficult to get anything out of it.

Upright posture, correct responses, alert mind, heart in love, and decided will. We are going to learn, to adore, and to receive. That's why it helps to be close to the altar and not stay in the back, so that the people who arrive late and all the movement of the doors don't distract us.

Be attentive to the words of the priest, given that each mass has special prayers; attentive to the colors, that indicate the season we are in; attentive to the readings of Sacred Scripture and to all the signs that the Mass makes present and that have a special message for those who participate. Learn in the Liturgy of the Word with the sacred readings and the homily, proclaiming our faith and praying for all; adore during the sacrifice of Christ, really present through the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ; receive Christ himself in Communion, which is the most perfect participation in the Holy Mass.

When you enter the line to receive communion, detain yourself a moment in the greatness and holiness, in the impressiveness of what is about to happen: Jesus is present. When the priest pronounces the words of the consecration, the bread and wine stop being what they were just a moment ago, and are converted in the body and blood of Jesus, the Lord makes himself present on the altar to come later to make himself present in our heart. Jesus will enter you! And after receiving communion, enter in a silent conversation with our Guest and Friend.

After the personal thanksgiving during the sacred silence—and once the Mass has ended—the faithful are also advised, after the eucharistic banquet, not to forget to pray a sincere and opportune thanksgiving, corresponding to their capacity, state and occupations.

“After receiving communion, since you have Jesus there, close the eyes of your body and open the eyes of your soul to look into your heart” (Saint Theresa of Jesus).

The one who grows in the spiritual life doesn't go to Mass only on Sundays. The Mass, during the week and even daily, is the center and height of our day, where we offer all that we are and all that we have done. Together with the body and blood of Jesus, we offer to the Father all that we are and we ask him for all that we need in our prayer.

Be Oriented

In the past, the Churches were oriented . . . it was a European custom to put the altar facing the orient because in that direction lies Jerusalem. The whole living temple should be oriented, turned toward Jesus, toward the eucharistic mystery. All that we do should be in some way consulted, shared, and purified in Christ. Our heart should be turned toward the tabernacle because there is the sun. From

this arises the need of passing by the tabernacle, of taking time to clarify our first and most important activity of the afternoon, of learning, listening, and sharing.

We are the beneficiaries of the greatest treasure in the world. When the real presence of Jesus becomes living and experiential, everyone realizes immediately that something is happening in the life of that person. It is shown in how the person genuflects, how he prays, how he visits, how he greets.

THE THIRD PILLAR: LOVE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

“Woman, behold your son . . . son, behold your mother” (Jn 19: 26-27).

Love of Mary is one of the keys for persevering. She teaches us spiritual infancy, that consists in trusting absolutely in our Father: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). Mary teaches us this trust because she herself had it, she recognized herself as a little child in the arms of her Father God and she trusted in his words. She is our Lady, given that she leads our hearts toward her son Jesus. The Virgin brings us to Jesus. This is very important, because devotion to the Virgin is essential for Christian life. There cannot be a fully Christian life that isn’t marian.

Mary is called “the all-powerful supplicant,” that is to say, she is the most powerful intercessor before God. In moments of danger and fear, even in adult men it is common that they remember their mother, it is an instinct rooted in the depths of our being. For the Christian, Mary is also the one to whom we run in every moment, the one who protects us, sustains us, and reminds us that we have a Father who does not abandon us. She, “the most pure,” sustains our purity, whatever age we are and in whatever situation in which we find ourselves. She teaches us to love with a pure heart and to guard in our heart each one of the words and attitudes that Jesus has for us, the ones we understand and the ones we don’t, given that she also did the same. “His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Lk. 2:19). And finally, she teaches us to be faithful to what Jesus asks us: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn. 2:5). And if we do like her, our watered down life will be converted in the best wine.

Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Monforte says that there is only one enmity loved and blessed by God, and that is the enmity between Mary and the ancient serpent, begun in the beginnings of humanity according to what Genesis tells us: “I will put enmity between you (the devil) and the woman (Mary) and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head” (Gen 3:15). Those who are with Mary know that with her, with the Mother, the devil can’t come near them. She will crush his head.

How do we belong to Mary?

The three Hail Mary's at night

It's a promise of the Virgin, with ancient origins, that she is present and will be present "now and at the hour of our death," for those who call her each night. With the three Hail Mary's, we also ask for purity of body and soul and for our perseverance in the faith.

The visit to an image of the Virgin

There's a famous history of the conversation that the poet Paul Claudel had one afternoon looking at the image of the Virgin in Notre Dame; the poet says to her, "I come just to look at you and to know that you are here."

We are invited to do the same, to go to look at her, like children in the face of fear or suffering or great joy run to look at their mother, wanting only to know that she is there. To look at her and touch her with the love of a child.

The secretary of Pope Paul VI often told that next to the Pope's room there was an image of the Virgin over a panel of velvet. At the foot of the image, the velvet was all worn out because the Pope, each time that he passed by, with the love of a son would touch the foot of the Mother.

The Prayer of the Angelus

Have you ever contemplated the painting of Millet, "The Angelus"? A man and a woman at the middle of the day, in their work, with their basket and their wheelbarrow in the middle of the country. From a far off churchtower comes "the harmonious sound of the bell": it's the hour of the Angelus. He takes off his hat; she bows her head; the two of them pray to the Virgin the well-known words of the Gospel.

In St. Peter's Square in Rome, at midday, the Holy Father appears to pray with the Christians who come there. It's the hour of the Angelus. In your daily work, in the workshop, in class, in the office, on the street, the hour of the Angelus always arrives. It's the moment at midday that invites us to take a moment to pray. Paul VI tells us: "Our word about the Angelus is just a simple but lively exhortation to maintain the custom of this prayer where and when it be possible. It is a simple prayer that even after many centuries conserves its value and its freshness without changes."

Have you read the story of the first Angelus that was heard on earth? Saint Luke and Saint John tell it. "The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin

betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, 'Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.' But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The Angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus . . .' Mary said, 'Behold, the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word.'" (Lk 1:26-38)

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14)

At the hour of the Angelus, we come to keep this appointment with the Virgin; and that blessed hour of noon that makes its way around the world is like a lit torch which we all carry, like the Christians, that night in Ephesus, after the Fathers gathered at that Council in the year 431 AD had defined the divine maternity of the Virgin.

It's the prayer of great characters: the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, the Virgin, the Archangel Gabriel. Then we, the ones who pray and aspire to the glory of the resurrection. It familiarizes us with devotion to the Holy Spirit, to Our Mother Saint Mary and to the angels.

The Rosary

The Rosary is contemplating the scenes of our dear ones, Jesus Christ, the Virgin, the Angels, and it is making a "commentary" in a dialogue of praise and petitions.

All Christians' daily life is a mix of joys and pains and hopes of better days. There are mysteries of joy, of sorrow, and of glory. All of us are called to be saints and for that reason all of the circumstances of our lives are 'sanctifiable'; in all of them the mysterious encounter with Christ is possible and the presence of His Mother is necessary. The Lord also wanted to have his Mother to be born, to grow, to live and to die. The Rosary is the life of Jesus told by the Virgin and contemplated by us. Wherever there is a son who knows to call on his mother, there can be a Christian that prays the Rosary. There are Rosaries of pilgrimage, prayed walking to the sanctuaries of the Virgin, family Rosaries in the evenings of ordinary days; Rosaries prayed slowly by the sick, or rapidly by people driving; Rosaries said in the hustle and bustle of the street; little Rosaries in the mind of children; strong Rosaries in the hands of youth; Rosaries prayed in chorus by couples in love; Rosaries of friends in the hands of the priest. All different and all the same.

With the background of the Hail Mary, the most important scenes from the life of Jesus play before the eyes of our soul. The entire Rosary consists of the joyful, sorrowful, luminous and glorious

Mysteries, which put us in vital communion with Jesus Christ, through—you could say—the Heart of his Mother. At the same time, our heart can include in these decades of the Rosary all of the facts entailed by the life of the individual, the family, the nation, the Church, humanity. Personal experiences and those of our neighbors, above all of the people closest to us or those who we carry most in our heart. In this way the simple prayer of the Rosary syntonizes with the rhythm of human life.

How great it would be for the beautiful custom of praying the Rosary as a family to become common again. Do you want to love the Virgin? Then, talk with her. How? Praying the Rosary to our Lady.

It is the best prayer to Mary, and it is called the Rosary because each Hail Mary is like a rose that we give to the Virgin. In this prayer we meditate on the mysteries of the life of Jesus and we ask the Virgin to protect us “now and at the hour of our death.” Maybe if the whole Rosary seems to you like a lot, you could begin with one decade until you are able to pray the whole thing.

You can accomodate this prayer to the circumstances of your day. To those who find it hard to pray this prayer because it seems to them repetitive, I say what a friend told me: “A person in love doesn’t think that he already said a loving phrase yesterday and the day before and the day before.”

THE FOURTH PILLAR: BEGINNING AND ENDING THE DAY WITH JESUS

This is a pillar with two moments as a goal: that all of our day be offered to Jesus (thoughts, work, study, entertainment, rest, etc.). Everything we do is for Jesus, we do everything with Him and we do everything like Him.

The first battle of the day is getting out of bed with a leap. Then comes morning prayer. The new day that is beginning is to be well spent. God doesn’t lose battles. If we are united with Him, we will never be defeated. In Him we will always be victorious. Each morning we have to raise our arms like Moses. The battles of our day today need our morning prayer. To be able to work well we need to use our hands and our head; but in order to sanctify our work, we need in addition to raise our hearts to God. We will later, exult and be glad because since sunrise we have been filled with God's mercy.

It is the first prayer of the day; as soon as we jump out of bed, we should offer all our day to Jesus. We do this by tracing the sign of the cross over our forehead, our eyes, our lips, our heart and our hands.

- We offer our forehead: this means that offer to the Lord our intelligence, all our thoughts, our decisions, our criteria, our study.
- We offer our eyes: through this offering, we intend to see everything with the eyes of Jesus, and so have a Christian perspective of life, of my work and study, of my relationships, of my possessions.
- We offer our lips: this entails offering to the Lord all that we say, our conversations with others, our prayer, our apostolic efforts.
- We offer our heart: by doing this, we ask Jesus to enable us to love with His same love, to give us His feelings and attitudes, so that He may be the center of our lives.
- We offer our hands: through this offering we place in God's hands all our work and activities of the day, and especially so that our testimony of life may “build the Kingdom of God” in that place where God has set us: at the office, at the university, in high school, at home or at work.

Review the Day with Jesus

In Medieval castles the nightly round of the castle was something indispensable and effective. Has an enemy closed in? How are the doors? If something was wrong, it was necessary to solve the problem, and after that comes security and peace. At the end of each day, the round of our own “castle” is the examination of conscience, to remedy what is lacking or needs to be changed, to say a sincere “thank you” . . . and after that, peace.

The person who runs a business never neglects to take account of the day’s work. Is there any business worth more than that of eternal life? Examine your conscience to know yourself better and to improve. In the lintel of the oracle of Delphi there was inscribed the phrase “know yourself,” and Saint Paul recommended to his readers: “That each one examine his works.” (Gal 6:4)

The examination is a sign of interior life. If there is struggle in your soul, that indicates that you are moving forward and, in doing so, find some resistance. The examination supposes humility. It moves us to acknowledge our defects, to recognize that we don’t amount to much, that we are sinners; but also that we want to be better. The examination also supposes love of God and desire to get rid of everything that separates us from Him.

How to do the examination of conscience? There are three important sides of our day: our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and our work. How have I prayed? How have I treated others? How have I worked? Your standards of piety, your interactions with family members

and friends, your professional work. It matters how I have done these things. In response to the concrete reality of our life, we can contrast how Jesus acted, and from that make a resolution to improve.

The examination is not something you do just one day. It is rather a daily exercise, because holiness requires daily perseverance. When you examine your conscience, all the aspects of your life are to be considered: your faith, your personal vocation, the effectiveness of your apostolate, your professional work, your feelings, etc. In the serene reflection of each night, we discover with surprise that our faults are of an earthbound vulgarity and that they repeat themselves like the squeak of a rusty wheel. During the storms of summer my mother sent us to the highest floor of the house to put buckets where water came in through the roof. They were just drops; no one would have drowned; but things were very clear: where the drops stained the floor, the ceiling had a leak in that exact place. Our faults, although small, repeat themselves every day. Note, if you would like, the results of your examination of conscience for one week and you will discover the leaks in your life. The one who doesn't fix the leak, ends up fixing the entire house.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the youth, in the evening, "returned to himself," did his examination of conscience, saw his bitter reality and remembered the house of his father, where he had "more than enough food to eat." From that moment on, he began to be better: "I will get up, go to my father and say to him . . ." (cf. Lk 15:11-32). The banquet with music and the joy of the father begin in our examination of conscience. In the evening of our day, it is necessary to do an examination of conscience, because God our Father is waiting at the doors of the banquet for the return of his child.

At night, it is good to go back with the Lord over everything that we have done so that we can see the things that God has given us and maybe for the accelerated pace of the day, we didn't realize. In this way we can give Him thanks for all of it. We can also discover those messages that God has sent us through another person (maybe a correction, for example, or a petition) or through some book, or in a moment of prayer. This will allow us to respond better to these things that God has asked us to do or to stop doing.

It is also important to observe with Jesus the things we have done wrong because of weakness or because of bad decisions, to ask for forgiveness and to be able to repair and improve these weak points. Together with this examination, it is recommended to ask Our Lady's intercession to be pure in mind and body by praying the three Hail Marys of the night.

It is not recommended to pray this prayer in bed, because at that late hour we are generally tired, and sleepiness makes us do this revision poorly and superficially. Therefore, it is better to take a moment before going to bed to pray this prayer. Also, at the beginning it is helpful to write down the things that we discover, because if later we see that they are repeated for several days, it is a sign that this is a point to work on.

SOME ADVICE TO CONCLUDE

The first is worth gold

When I started to play cards, my “mentor” in the game told me as a first lesson: “You have to win the first hand—play everything you have.” I give you the same advice with respect to these pillars of your faith life: “Give it all you’ve got.” Start with all of them at the same time, laying the foundations well from the beginning. If you are stingy at the beginning . . . It’s better to start doing all the pillars, because what you are looking for is to create the habit of prayer. Conversion happens in a moment, but holiness is the work of a lifetime. As your life goes on, you will be able to pray each pillar more profoundly. But, again, start them all together. What table is supported by only one foot?

Be careful of melodramas

“Persevere in prayer with faith and constancy through the drynesses and darknesses, even though it seems to have no sensible attraction; this is a very good state and fitting for sanctifying yourself. Prayer prayed like this will, with time and without any other measures, conduct you to the presence of God” (St. John Baptist of La Salle). Sentiments are part of the human being, and in themselves are neither good nor bad; instead, their value depends on where they lead us. In prayer, feelings (or consolations) also are present, and therefore they can help us if they push us to go deeper in our interior life. In this sense, they are a grace that God sends us to help us and we have to accept this grace, give thanks for it, and make it grow. But so that we don’t stay in the purely sensible. God from time to time purifies us, taking away the feelings so that we don’t look so much for the consolations of God but rather for the God of the consolations. A lack of feelings is many times one of the first obstacles for those who are beginning, but if God has taken them from us, take courage! It means that you are growing!

We’re not angels

The posture of your body is important. It seems trivial or superficial to speak about this subject, but this is a trick: we're not angels and therefore we need our bodies to pray. It would be an error to think that the body doesn't play a part in prayer—it's all in us that prays, our bodies and our souls, and one posture isn't the same as the other.

The postures of the body, like the place where I am, help me to concentrate on what I am doing, and change with each type of prayer. At the same time, the postures are a sign of what is happening inside of me: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, and asking for forgiveness. And just as my body changes when I am happy, sad, or surprised, so also the expression of my body changes in my relationship and dialogue with God. It is a different thing to pray kneeling or seated than to pray fallen in the seat or in bed.

It is difficult to pray lying in bed, fallen in the kneeler, or sleeping in an armchair.

Although they come slaying

Perseverance. "I will not leave the path, although they come slaying", says an old epic poem.

"Patience is the field where God sows." Do not grow impatience at your slow advancement. We shouldn't pretend to attain the highest level of prayer in a matter of weeks. Prayer is a journey in which one learns with time, and even the difficulties, problems and sins, can be utilized and taken advantage of by God so that we move forward on this path. The only prayer that is strong and effective is that prayer that is persevering, like the prayer of the insistent friend (cf. Lk 11:5-8), that knocks at whatever time and with insistence at the door of the Friend, since it knows that "to the one who knocks it shall be opened" and that "all who seek, find" and that "to the one who asks it shall be given." (Mt 7:7-8). "The one who perseveres in prayer, even if he has sins and temptations and falls of a thousand kinds that the devil puts in his path, I am certain that the Lord will take him to safe haven" (St. Theresa of Jesus).

The Three S's

So that this prayer doesn't become the victim of our whims, there is a rule called the Three S's: Specific duration, specific place, and specific time.

Specific Duration: You should give a prudent amount of time to each moment of prayer, and each part of the prayer should keep a proportion with the whole. If, for example, you meditate ten minutes, the first three minutes will be dedicated to lead us into the presence of God, then you will read

and do the meditation properly speaking, and in the final minutes the necessary petition and thanksgiving, and the proposal, if there is one.

Specific Place: We are prone to distraction, to forget ourselves in a thousand things. For that reason, having a specific place to pray makes us have fewer distractions. Like the king sits in his throne and receives audiences, each day the Lord invites you to the hall where He sits in his throne, which could be a chapel or your room. The best place to do the meditation is in the church, in the chapel of the school or university or hospital, or in the parish, because there Jesus is present in the Eucharist, and the environment is, in itself, one of prayer and silence. But perhaps this is impossible for someone. Then you have to find alternatives: your room, a place in your house that is peaceful, an empty classroom, and then have a crucifix or an image and light a candle, etc. That is to say, use everything that helps you and predisposes you for prayer.

Specific Time: This means the moment of the day in which we place each one of the four pillars. It is convenient that each pillar be done at the same time of the day, so that, when it becomes a habit, it is easier not to forget it. For example, for the meditation the best moment is early in the morning, because our mind is free from the problems and other things that could distract us or make us anxious, and one starts the day with renewed strength. Each one should find the best moment according to one's schedule. When it is difficult to find a good moment throughout the day, it may well be worth getting up fifteen minutes earlier to do the meditation. Like time will become like gold, a spiritual oasis in your daily life.

Solid but flexible

Some years ago I was staying in the house of some friends for several days. When I arrived, I went out, enthusiastic, onto the balcony of this 18th floor apartment. What a view! I could see the whole city and the coasts of the neighboring country. My excitement turned into worry when I noticed, to my surprise, that the light hanging from the ceiling moved slightly back and forth. When I asked my friend's parents why, they told me that every tall building needs to have, from the foundations up, a certain oscillation and movement, and the movement of this one was four inches. These buildings are constantly submitted to strong winds because of their height and the resistance that their walls offer. Therefore, they need a construction that will give them at the same time solidity and flexibility, because if the building were totally rigid, it would begin to crack and weaken in the face of the strong winds. Solidity and flexibility are two characteristics to keep in mind.

Solid: A prayer pillar is something that is sufficiently solid so that you build over it a great and high building, and that should at the same time be capable of a certain flexibility, that allows it to be firm without cracking and to move without deformation. The building of our spiritual life is the house that we should build “upon the rock,” (cf. Mt 7:24-27) as Jesus says, if we don’t want to be overthrown. We all know the strong winds of problems, of great sorrows, of doubts, of temptations, are winds that we will have to resist many times through life. Therefore, the four pillars should be solid, that is to say, we should not do them superficially and half-heartedly, knowing that today’s effort to do them well and profoundly will be the best inversion for the moment of testing.

Flexible: We also know that not all days are the same and that we can’t foresee absolutely everything; therefore the pillars should also have a certain flexibility that allows them to move and adapt to a new situation without becoming deformed or diluted. Each day is different from the day before, so we should be realistic, keeping the necessary flexibility to adjust our schedule if it is necessary or the place for prayer. At the same time, we should be honest with ourselves, not allowing flexibility to become an easy excuse to dispense with the pillars because of the slightest inconveniences.

To conclude

“Nothing is learned without a little effort. I ask you, for the love of God, to consider as well-employed the attention you give to this prayer; since I know that if you have it, in a year, or perhaps half a year, with the favor of God you will acquire it. See how little time it takes for a gain as great as that of laying a good foundation” (St. Theresa of Jesus).

“Prayer is the law of holiness to such an extent that, when God wants to elevate souls to a greater holiness He doesn’t increase their virtues, but rather their spirit of prayer, their capacity to pray. He draws them closer to himself, and in this lies the whole secret of holiness” (St. Peter Julian Eymard).

This is the end of the four pillars: to help us so that this contact with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is prolonged throughout our day. If this fountain of our friendship with God wells up in the most important moments, all our works and thoughts will be easily directed to Him, and everything we do will become an offering: “through Him, with Him and in Him.”

The practice of the four pillars is not a charm or an amulet. Nor is it a matter of doing mechanically a series of pious norms that are disconnected from our lives. The pillars are means that

enable us to place our trust in God and to invoke His protection. They are steps that allow us to grow closer to Christ and to be increasingly docile to the motions and inspirations of the Holy Spirit. They expose us to the action of God in us, letting ourselves be transformed in our criteria, options and attitudes.

FINAL CONCLUSION

All Christians are missionaries. Each one of them is called, in their place and concrete situation, to build the Kingdom of God, to make Jesus present there where God has placed them, to be the leaven of Christ that leavens the immense dough of humanity, in every environment, place, work, situation . . . This is our mission as Christians. But at the same time, this leaven should also be at work in me, and this is principally done through prayer. It is through prayer that the Holy Spirit models our hearts into the image of Christ and impulses us to announce Him and give testimony of Him.

The mission includes all of our lives, all that we do, and for this reason everything needs to be always guided and illuminated by the comforting presence of Jesus. “I see that a new missionary era is arising, that will come to be a radiant day full of fruits, if all Christians respond with generosity and holiness to the solicitations and challenges of our time. Like the apostles after the Ascension of Christ, the Church should unite herself in the Cenacle with Mary the mother of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:14), to implore the Spirit and obtain strength and courage to live out the missionary command. We also, much more than the apostles, have need of being transformed and guided by the Spirit” (John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 92).

The four pillars are an amazing path through which our prayer will improve drastically. In this way, the action of the Holy Spirit can become reality in us, and the promise of Christ will be fulfilled: “And I am with you always until the end of the world” (Mt 28:20). It only needs to find from our side the faithful response: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).