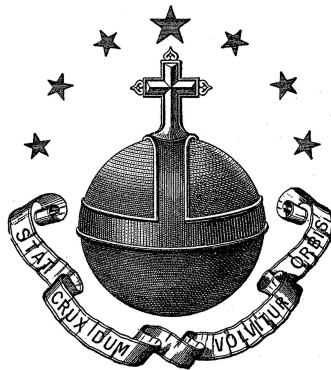


A C a r t h u s i a n

[Dom André Poisson, 1923-2005]

Letter to a Friend on the Prayer of the Heart



Translated by a Cistercian
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Introduction

You have asked me to speak to you about the prayer of the heart. The request was put to me already a few years ago. I answered then that I could not launch into a subject with which I was insufficiently acquainted. Meanwhile, time has passed. I have acquired some little experience from what I have seen in others and from discoveries made in my own search for the Lord. I will, therefore, entrust you with a few thoughts, on the condition that you do not overrate their importance.

As you know, the prayer of the heart is the fruit of long experience in the spirituality of the Eastern Church. What I have to say has much in common with that tradition, certainly; but I am well aware that my way of presenting it is too personal. What I shall be talking about may not be the *real* prayer of the heart.

I do not intend to draw up a rigid framework or fixed structure. Rather, I want to point you in a certain direction, to indicate a path you must follow, without knowing in advance exactly where it will lead. The prayer of the heart is not a goal to be reached. It is a manner of being, a manner of listening and moving forward.

Before you begin to read what I have written, I propose that you enter into prayer and ask the Spirit of the Lord to enlighten us both. For I have no other desire than to help him illuminate our hearts.

Abba, hallowed be thy name

When I pray, I do not address the God of the philosophers, nor even, you might say, the God of the theologians. I speak to my Father, or rather, *our* Father. To be more precise still, I speak to him whom Jesus so intimately called *Abba*. When the disciples asked him to teach them to pray, the Lord simply said: 'When you pray, say: *Abba*.' To call God by that name is to know with certainty that we are loved. Our certainty is not in the order of learned ideas, but of intimate conviction. We may have the impression of reaching this certainty—our faith—after a certain amount of thinking, meditation, and interior listening. Ultimately, however, it is a

gift. We believe in a Love to be found in our hearts because the Father himself, having glorified his Son, sent us his Spirit.

It is because the Father loves me that I may speak to him with utter trust and assurance. I do not come to him propped up by my merits or good reasons, but with confidence in the infinite tenderness that Jesus's *Abba* has for his Son. He is my *Abba* too.

He is Father. What does that mean?

He gives life. He gives it, not as an object distinct from himself, which he might pass on as a gift. He gives it in giving himself. The only gift he can give is his own Person. From that gift comes a Son, a Son who loves him boundlessly. The Father's love for his Son is absolute. The Son in return *is* love for his Father.

This is the *Abba* whom I address. He is the One can give me life, a life perfectly modelled on his own. Here and now he wants me to be in his image and likeness, not by virtue of some outward veneer, but by engendering me from his own being.

That is what I mean when I pray, '*Abba*, hallowed be thy name'. May you, *Abba*, be perfectly yourself in me. May your name of Father become perfect reality in the relation that is growing between us. I ask you to be my Father, to bring me forth in your image and likeness by pure love so that I, in return, may, by your gift, become a movement of love 'towards you' (cf. Jn 1:1).

The prayer of the heart is simply a means to find the way which will lead me into this attitude with regard to the Father, by which he hallows his name in me. In me and in all his children. In his only Son, comprising the Only-Begotten and all his brethren.

To pray is to receive the Father and to participate in the life he gives us by grace. To receive the Father is to let him bring forth his Son and give birth to the Kingdom in my heart. Thereby, the Spirit can create indestructible bonds between me and the Father, bonds that will extend to all my brethren.

Seeing with the heart

Which path should we take to attain that encounter with the Father which we yearn for? Which of our faculties has he given us for this purpose? Our intelligence, perhaps: our capacity for thought and reasoning? Let us take note of Jesus's answer: 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to these little ones: yes, Father, for such was your gracious will' (Mt 11:25f.). It seems astonishing: the path is closed to the intelligent, to people skilled in thinking and evaluation. It is not for them that God has kept the unravelling of his secrets.

But has not God given us our brain, our ability to think, form ideas and imagine things, as a means to enter into relation with others?

True, all these faculties are God-given. They are good, indispensable, and we should not despise or belittle them. But we should recognise their limits.

When I think of something—or let us rather say, of *someone*, someone close—with my head and not my heart, I keep him at a distance. I may get an idea of him. I may manoeuvre him about a bit to assess him, but I do not commit myself to him in any way. I am not really engaged. I keep a distance. I stay safe with regard to this person. I do all I can to know the other without being carried away or tarnished by the life that flows from his heart. I want to remain free before him. In some cases, this procedure might be appropriate. But if I am looking for love, it is surely not the way to follow.

Jesus continues his teaching: 'All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Mt 11:27). 'All things have been handed over to me by my Father.' This means, precisely, that between Father and Son distance is done away with. Neither seeks to preserve independent security with regard to the other. Having accepted reciprocal engagement, they can know one another mutually by a knowledge of love which is presented as a mystery reserved for initiates: 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son.' No one

knows, for no one risks openness of heart. If we want to know the Father, we must consent to receive that knowledge from the Son, to the extent that he finds our heart ready to embrace it.

In order really to know God, I must relinquish all my securities. I must eliminate the distance which thoughts and preconceptions have let me keep with regard to him. I must own my vulnerability. However well I have kept it hidden, I must, in the clear light of day, accept it and live through it, which is to say: I must permit my heart's true responses to express themselves. From that moment on, I shall be able to enter into relation with the Father and the Son, and with all my brothers and sisters in humanity.

In concrete terms, this is about consenting to live at the level of my heart. I must grant it the right to exist, to make its presence felt, and to express itself in its own language, that is, through deep emotions: trust, joy, and enthusiasm, but also fear, sometimes anguish, and anger. I do not mean by this that we should live at the level of superficial sensibility. On the contrary, we should allow these profound movements to develop in us and lead us to a truthful encounter with the Other. This is what it means to be 'a little one': someone who spontaneously expresses himself and lets himself be seized by love for the Other who stands before him. How hard to have the courage to be little!

What I am saying here is aligned both to the Gospel account and to normal psychological processes. The two levels are distinct, obviously, but complementary and intertwined. We must learn to perceive *everything* through the loving gaze with which Jesus sees all creatures and even the divine Persons. This is what I mean by 'seeing with the heart': to accept that the Son reveals the Father to me at the only level at which I am able to take on the revelation; the level at which, by virtue of my humanity, there is in me an image of the intimate relation between the Father and the Son, that is, in my heart.

Towards purity of heart

We do not need exhaustive experience of the human condition, or the spiritual life, to realise that we are held captive by an almost boundless world of disorder in the form of sins, affective imbalance, unhealed wounds, destructive habits, and so forth. All these things make up the impurities of our heart.

We have just noted that our heart speaks through the emotions. Now, all the disorders I have listed lead to emotions in disarray. They express themselves almost without our noticing; they order us about; they tear us apart; they close us to God; and they tie us down in an automated kind of evil. All this from within our heart! 'But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder etc. These are what defile a person' (cf. Mt 15 18-20). If I want to cleanse my being, to remove its blemish, I must begin by purifying my heart.

In the face of this urgent need to put things right, we tend to resort to what might be called 'traditional asceticism'. It is a proven method, worked out by many generations of monks and men of good will with minds made up to break the bonds that enslave them. Such asceticism calls upon all the resources of our will, energy, and perseverance, in the light of faith and love. It has clear merits, and we should not abandon it. But it also has limits.

In what concerns the genuine purification of the heart, we must go beyond human techniques. On this subject, we would do well to reread St Bruno's exhortations to his friend Raoul:

What, then, must we do, beloved friend? What indeed, except believe in the divine counsels, in the Truth that cannot let us down. This is how it addresses us all: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and bear heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' Is it not a terrible and useless torment to be racked by one's desires, to be constantly bruised by the cares and anxieties, fears and sorrows, to which these desires give rise? What could be a heavier burden than one that, in sheer injustice,

weighs the spirit down from a sublime dignity towards such dark depths? (*Letter to Raoul*, IX).

There is, then, one kind of purification in which the first necessity is to turn towards Jesus, to come to him, and to be comforted by him. He invites us to do just that straight after asking us to give up claims to wisdom and intelligence in order to become like little children. To enter upon the way of the heart is to realise that the only real purity comes as a gift from Jesus.

'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls' (Mt 11:29). The basic purification takes effect from the moment at which the uncleanness and disorder with which I am afflicted reach out for Jesus. This undertaking is no easier than traditional asceticism, but more effective, for it establishes us in the truth: the truth about ourselves, being now compelled to confront the reality of our sin; and the truth about Jesus, who is truly our souls' Saviour, not in some general, distant way, but at the level of immediate, tangible contact with each uncleanness that afflicts us. I must learn to present them to him as an irrevocable gift, either spontaneously, as appropriate circumstances arise, or in a single profound movement of my heart, which yearns finally to recover its true freedom.

Whenever, then, I am made aware of one such paralysing bond, what matters most is not to declare war on this particular servitude, for in most cases I would be lopping the stem without getting at the roots. What matters is to expose the roots and bring them to light, however ugly they may be, however unpleasant to acknowledge. I must own them as they really are and give them, by a free and conscious act, to the Lord. In such circumstances, the traditional invocation, 'Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner', runs no risk of being an empty formula. It is an endlessly repeated profession that a new encounter will take place between the purifying Heart of Jesus and my own unclean heart.

Obviously this process contains an element of pure human psychology. Why should that surprise us? Is the work of grace not always modelled on the structural reality of nature? In this present case, our nature bolsters God's

Redemption, which comes to transform my heart, to heal my wounds in a personal encounter with the risen Jesus.

Proceeding in this way, we gradually develop the habit of returning to him ceaselessly, above all when faced with the shadowy, dark, and troubling sides of ourselves.

To begin with, this disposition of the heart is frightening. We have too often heard that we should give the Lord only what is beautiful and good, that we may not offer him anything but virtuous deeds. But do we not, thinking along such lines, contradict the Gospel? Jesus himself insists that he has not come for the healthy but for the sick. Without false shame, then, we must learn to approach the divine physician as men and women who are genuinely ailing; who faithfully acknowledge everything in us that is false, mendacious, and opposed to God. He alone can heal us.

My body as place of encounter with the Word

The expression, 'prayer of the heart', is often considered to be symbolic, as if the 'heart' stood for an interior, and therefore purely spiritual, reality. This interpretation is inaccurate. Every movement of the heart that contributes to our relation with the Father is linked to our sensible, material being. From experience, perhaps at some cost to our health, we know that truly profound emotions attain our physical heart. We cannot enter the prayer of the heart unless we accept to live deliberately and determinedly at the level of our body.

That is how God made us. The Genesis account shows God shaping man from the dust of the earth. It simultaneously affirms, with great confidence, that this material being is truly in God's image and likeness. Our body is not an obstacle in our relation with God. On the contrary, it is the very work of God, who himself formed us as sons and called us to receive him as our portion.

The dispensation of God's Son's incarnation consistently places us before the same perspective. The early Church fought a fierce battle to uphold the reality of

Jesus's humanity. He was born in the flesh; in the flesh he lived, taught, suffered, and died; in the flesh he rose again.

These are the human works of God's Word, by which we have received life, and each day continue to receive it. God's Word comes to us in human words. Our sin is not cleansed symbolically, but by bloodshed, by blood gushing from the Body of Jesus. In his flesh he truly died and rose again. Both our bodies and our souls are saved by his material resurrection.

Finally, we did not receive the Spirit until the Son had risen bodily from the dead. He, the Son of Mary, sends the Spirit from the Father's bosom, for this is the work, not of the uncreated Word, but of the incarnate Word after sharing our condition and becoming one of us.

We experience the incarnation daily through the sacraments and the liturgy, in community life, and by the fact of belonging to the Body of the Church. Such is the immediate basis, the presence in our life, of Christ's corporeal reality. We must learn to welcome Christ as he comes to us and speaks to us in our body. We should be in no hurry to shed this intermediary, which, perhaps, we tend to consider an impurity in our relation with God. That is false. The body is not an impurity, but the very place of encounter with our *Abba*.

Even as it is impossible to approach life in community as if our brothers were disincarnate beings of pure spirit, to be reached somehow beyond their physical wrapping, it would be a denial of the reality of God's love to turn the physical, material, palpable presence of the Son-with-us into an abstraction. Indeed, the Eucharist we daily celebrate is the celebration of an act which brought about a profound transformation in Christ's Body and Blood, not by leaving them behind or going beyond them, but by giving them their full significance. As material reality, they *are* the Son of God. Similarly, our own body, with its heaviness, limits, and constraints, *is* the reality of what we are. It is my body that touches that other reality of which Jesus said: 'This is my Body.' The encounter of these two corporeal realities initiates my living communion with God. 'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you [...]. Just

as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me' (Jn 6: 53; 57).

This state of affairs implies that I cannot possibly pray without praying in my body. When I turn towards God, I cannot abstract my incarnate reality. It is not merely a question of religious discipline if certain gestures are prescribed, if certain material conditions direct me, when I turn to God. These are pointers to the one and only truth: God loves me the way he made me.

Why should I want to be more spiritual than he?

This is how I shall learn to live at the level of my body with its constraints, whether I eat, sleep, or rest, whether I am ill or exhausted. Between God and me, such experiences are not obstacles. On the contrary, they make up the fabric of a perfect continuity between God's innermost reality and my concrete everyday life. Who has not had the experience, sometimes terribly painful, of feeling confined, almost imprisoned, on account, for example, of fragile health? If our heart is true, we can say but one thing: it is God who comes to us through such painful constraints. They are truly the points at which God's love makes an entry into our lives. Our heart receives God to the extent that it attends to this reality. We are tempted to see it as inferior to our spiritual calling. Let us be on our guard against the permanent lie that the Father of Lies thus seeks to instil into our hearts.

Let us not pretend to be pure spirits. We are much better than that. We are children of God.

The Spirit prays within me

We talk about prayer, but do we know what it is to pray? Do I even know what true prayer consist of? To be honest, I admit that I don't. I feel a profound interior calling to walk in a certain direction, but I am surrounded by darkness.

Happily, 'the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God' (Rm 8:26f.).

Prayer is in my heart; it gushes forth from my heart. And still, I do not produce it on my own. The Spirit has been given me and dwells in my heart. He it is who prays in me, coming from the Heart of God, desiring to set my heart ablaze with the fire that burns in his.

We know all the passages in which St Paul goes over this again and again, but do we not tend to regard them as pure theory, or, to choose a nobler expression, as 'realities of faith', that is, the sort of things we talk of with conviction but live out in utter darkness? I tend to imagine the presence of the Spirit in my heart as something that pertains exclusively to a divine level, a level I can access only through intellectual formulae. The reality itself would seem to lie far beyond my experience. Is that really what St Paul's is telling us?

By way of a response to this excessive attitude, should we require an authentically Christian life to manifest an *experience* of the Spirit, like that of the Apostles receiving flames of fire on the morning of Pentecost? Such has never been the Church's teaching.

Between the two extremes there is, though, an attitude that is true—and accessible to every Christian. It recognises the Spirit's presence in our lives as having a direct impact on our being, on our loving relations with others, and on our prayer.

If we recall the different stages we have talked about, a pattern of progression emerges. We stop thinking of prayer as something that goes on in the head, in imaginings or systems of thought. We enter into our heart. There we find a disordered world of feelings and wounds. They spring from our heart and need purification. We then discover the effective possibility of integrating all these wounds of our heart into the flow of the Redemption by exposing them to the light and by offering them deliberately to the redemptive work of Jesus.

Without having spelled it out, we have reached a point at which we talk of the Spirit's movement in us. If we live through the stages I have just described, it is

because the Spirit of the Lord is *actually* at work in us. From the complex store of our emotions, the Spirit help us to disentangle what with patience and perseverance we can offer to the Lord's grace of purification and resurrection. Everything we have talked about is already the Spirit's work. Let us continue along those same lines.

Over and above the disordered movements of our heart, we can, especially as the work of Jesus begins to restore order, recognise movements that are less disordered and that, little by little, even end up well-ordered. Without our noticing, the depth of our heart spontaneously learns to stir and move towards the Lord. Only afterwards, with hindsight, do we ascertain that the Spirit of the Lord was indeed at work in our heart, discreetly and silently. As peace is established in our depths, a mysterious vitality begins to stir. We must learn to co-operate with it.

This is how we learn to take on *all* the movements of our heart, the good, the less good, and even the bad, in order to direct them towards God. Those that are good come directly from the Father and return to him. The others need to be transformed and assumed into Jesus's death and resurrection. All of them must be integrated intentionally into the vital action of the Spirit poured out in our heart. We must learn to be alert to the movements of our heart, to unite them freely, intentionally to the work of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

None of this presupposes 'mystical' grace. In gentleness and simplicity, we simply become aware that our heart is alive with a life that can be offered to the Holy Spirit. He will lead it into his movement towards the Father.

According to St Paul, the Spirit pleads within us with sighs 'too deep for words'. The phrase is worthy of note. The normal activity of the Spirit is not to give clear ideas or insights, or indeed to give us anything at all; it is to lead us to the Father. 'For all who are led by the Spirit are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "*Abba!* Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God' (Rm 8:14ff.). The Spirit is a witness; he is a vital force

that leads us on. Never should we try to explain him out, identify him, or pin him down to control him. That would be to expel him from our hearts, to quench the Spirit. We must grant him total freedom to pray in us in his veiled and hidden, mysterious way, which we will know by the fruits it produces. In so far as we find ourselves learning to pray, enabled, without knowing how, to beseech God and to be answered by him, we have a sign that, in spite of our obvious weakness, the Spirit is praying in us.

Discovering the Father's love in my weakness

Time has come to pick up the main lines of what we have been saying; to pick them up and tie them together, for they represent the fundamental attitude of the prayer of the heart.

The spontaneous reflex of any human being is to fear weakness. As soon as we find that, in one area or another, we cannot count on our own strength, an anxiety seizes us that, in some cases, may turn into despair.

Now, everything we have dealt with so far leads towards the loss of personal securities by exposing what we have called our vulnerability, hidden disorders, the limitations of our creaturely condition, and so forth. At each juncture, we have said to ourselves that there is only one way out: to own the reality of what we are and to let the Lord take it in hand.

Think of Jesus calming the storm. Panic-stricken at the tempest shaking their boat, the Apostles wake Jesus, who turns to them and asks with amazement: 'Why are you afraid, you of little faith?' Then, by a movement of the hand, he stills the waves.

Why, then, should I be afraid of my weakness? It is there. For a long time, I refused to face it. Little by little, I set about taming it. But now I have no choice but to admit that it is part of me. It is not an exterior accident that I can one day get rid of for good; indeed, if I tried to forget it, the Father would soon bring it back to my mind, by permitting a sin before which I could not possibly deny my reality as a sinner, or by letting my health play up in such ways that I would have

to admit defeat and surrender defencelessly to the Father's love. Without any possibility of doubt, he would let me know the limits of my strength.

The novelty is that my weakness no longer represents danger, but rather a way of entering into contact with God. I must gradually let myself be won over by it, seeing it, not as a worrying aspect of my personality, but as a dimension willed or accepted by the Father. Far from being a last and desperate resource, it forms a fundamental structure in the order of divine life as it is given me. When I am surprised by a frailty so far undiscovered in myself, my reflex will no longer be panic, but an attempt to see where the Father is hidden in it.

An obvious question comes to mind: Is this transformation of weakness, with all its appearance of failure, into a victory of Love a kind of catching up whereby God turns evil into good? Or is it in fact a fundamental dimension of divine dispensation? Much could be said on this subject. Suffice it to observe simply that, even in the natural order, genuine love is always a victory of weakness. We do not love by dominating, possessing, or imposing ourselves on the Beloved, but by defenceless acceptance of the Other coming to us. In return, we ourselves are sure of being fully accepted without judgement, condemnation, or comparison. For two beings who love one another, trials of strength must cease. A mutual understanding arises from within and assures us that we shall never have to fear harm from the Other.

Although destined to remain incomplete, this experience can be convincing enough. Yet it is only a reflection of divine reality. When, with our hearts, we begin really to believe in the Father's infinite love, we are somehow impelled to descend ever further into a positive and joyful acceptance of dispossession, unknowing, and powerlessness. In this, there is no unhealthy self-abasement. We are simply crossing the threshold into the world of love and trust. Almost without noticing, we enter into communion with divine life. The relations of Father, Son, and Spirit are, at a level far beyond our understanding, a perfect form of weakness fully assumed in communion.

Closer to our own experience, the intimate love of the Thrice-Holy manifests itself in the incarnate Son's relation to his Father. Are we not struck by the serenity and boundless assurance with which Jesus calmly declares that he has nothing of his own and can do nothing of his own, except what he sees the Father do? Who among us would consent to such poverty? Yet this is the way to follow if we really want to live in the depths of our heart such as the Father created it and transfigured it by the death and resurrection of his Son.

It is in this direction that Mary points us. The *Magnificat* is, in a single cadence, simultaneously a song of triumph and a hymn of thanks by someone utterly poor. The two go together. From the outset, she recognised and accepted her utter weakness; thus she was ready to receive the Son given her by the Father. She became the Mother of God since, of all creatures, she was closest to God's poverty.

Entering Silence

If we follow the path I am indicating, we can expect that intellectual activity will gradually subside during our time of prayer. Likewise, all kinds of distractions and diversions will cease as our heart's emotions are channelled elsewhere. In an almost self-generated movement, the prayer of the heart leads into silence. Sometimes, this experience will be particularly powerful, and we shall inevitably be exposed to a 'temptation of silence', if you will admit the expression.

Silence is a good that exerts a seductive force on every heart that gains some experience of its savour. But there are many kinds of silence. Not all are good. Indeed, most are distortions of the true prayer of silence.

The first temptation is to make of silence an act, notwithstanding a conviction that we are doing the exact opposite. Seeing that the intellect has paused, that the heart is at rest, we fancy ourselves in real silence of the soul. Although indisputably real, this kind of silence results, in fact, from a pressure of the will, which, in the last analysis, is the most subtle, most pernicious of acts. Far from disposing our heart to be open to God, it confines it to a self-imposed, artificial

attitude that—as the fruit of our own endeavour—ultimately fails to welcome the Lord. People of energetic will encounter here a major obstacle to real Godward openness. Materially speaking, their silence is great, but it is a silence turned in on itself and relying on itself.

Another temptation is to make silence an end in itself, fancying that the prayer of the heart, or any kind of contemplative life, exists for the sake of silence. We do not pass beyond the material reality to the Person of the Father, or the Son, or Holy Spirit. What counts is my own experience, not a real relation of love and openness with regard to God. We are not at prayer, but engaged in auto-contemplation.

An analogous temptation is to consider silence a self-contained reality, sufficient to itself. As soon as the various noises of the senses, intellect, and imagination have subsided, a sense of well-being settles within us—and that is enough. We do not ask for more; we refuse to look for more. Anything that might reintroduce thoughts of some kind, even of the Lord, or from him, appears as an obstacle. Here and now, silence is the only divine reality. Prayer has vanished. Left is only an idol called Silence.

In spite of all this, genuine silence is a most important reality, to be prized highly. But if we really want to enter it, we must, from the bottom of our heart, give it up; not bring it into disrepute, nor underrate it, nor cease to pursue it, but give it up as an end in itself.

Above all, we must avoid thinking real silence the fruit of our own labour. I am not called upon to construct it from scratch, like some work to be produced. Too often we think of silence as a matter of simply establishing peace in our intellectual faculties, imagination, and sensibility. There is an aspect of silence in this, but not the full reality.

We also need silence in the depth of our heart, in so far as it overlaps with our will: any desire other than that of doing the Father's will must be pacified. Instead of reaching out to impose itself on the rest of my being, my will, too, must remain utterly at God's disposal, in a state of listening and welcome. Then

the possibility arises of entering into a genuine silence of my entire self before God, a silence born of my innermost being's conformity to the Father, whose image and likeness it is.

God alone is sufficient; everything else is void. Genuine silence manifests this fundamental reality of all prayer. There is truly silence in the heart from the moment at which all impurity opposed to the Father's reign has vanished. Real silence only enters a heart that is pure, that has come to resemble the Heart of God.

That is why a truly pure heart can keep perfect silence even when immersed in all sorts of work. The dissonance between it and God has ceased. Genuine silence continues to reign in such a heart even when its intellect and sensibility, in order to obey God's will, are at work.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.'

CHRISTMAS 1983