

## 5. Finding the treasure in the field

The treasure of prayer is hidden in the field of our community, of our common prayer, of our ecclesial prayer. If one understands this, one understands almost everything, for one learns how we are formed toward prayer and how prayer can and must be rekindled in us, each day, “seven times a day” (Ps 118:164; RB 16:1), and always. Sometimes we have the impression that the community does not help us pray, that we would pray much better by ourselves. Perhaps we would pray better, but we would not learn to pray like Jesus taught us and teaches us. We would not learn the “we” of every invocation of the Our Father, and this would limit our access to the Father, because the God of Jesus Christ is “our” Father and not just “mine.”

If one does not learn this, prayer will not make us grow in love, neither of God nor of our brothers and sisters. Fraternal love does not arise from us, but is the Father’s response to his children who pray to him together. As in the Cenacle of Pentecost: the prayer of the disciples, united to Mary, created the space over which the fire of the Holy Spirit of God descended, and immediately the communion in prayer became communion in love. The first summary with which the Acts of the Apostles describes the Christian community shows it as a community gathered in prayer: “All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Then Pentecost happened, the gift of the Spirit, in response to their prayer. Only after Pentecost is the prayer community described as a fraternal community that shares all: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44–45). “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common” (Acts 4:32).

It is important to be attentive to how the primitive community was formed, because this is the only way that our communities too can be formed and especially reformed. In the whole New Testament, and then all through the history of the Church and of the religious Orders, we see that it is from a unity of prayer that welcomes the Spirit that there is born a unity in fraternal charity. It is useless to invert the processes: if we do not begin and re-begin from common prayer, – but from a prayer that truly begs for grace, that truly makes us stand as beggars before the Father, like Jesus –, we cannot insist that our communities become communities of brothers and sisters who love each other and hence draw the world to Christ. It is not enough for our prayer to attract vocations, and perhaps for this reason be outwardly beautiful: our prayer must draw the entire world to Christ, and for this reason must be inwardly true, inwardly poor and mendicant, that is it must most of all draw God to us. Do not all the day Hours of the Office begin with the words of Psalm 70, which cry out: “O God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me!”? Unity of prayer draws the Holy Spirit and fraternal unity draws the world to Christ, that is, enables us ourselves and all humanity to find the treasure of life, that for which it is worthwhile living and giving life: Jesus Christ himself.

Here we reach the peak of Christian prayer, on which I want to meditate briefly at the end of our Course. If prayer seeks the treasure of heaven hidden in the field of common life, in what does the joy of finding the treasure consist, of finding it after having dug in the earth that was hiding it?

Jesus himself made us clearly understand that the peak of our praying together is Himself. He tells us this in a fundamental passage in the Gospel according to Matthew: "Truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Mt 18:19–20).

The presence of Christ among us when we gather in prayer, when we gather to ask something of the Father, is the treasure hidden in the field that we are called to discover with joy. "There am I among them," says Jesus. Where? Christ is present in our praying to the Father together, he is present in the prayer that we make together. To be gathered in his name and to be gathered to pray to the Father seem to be the same thing. For the Father the name of Jesus is like an absolutely convincing, irresistible "recommendation." It is the name of the Son in whom the Father is pleased without measure, as God says after the Baptism of Jesus and on the mountain of the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17, 17:5).

The treasure that we seek and find in the field of the Church's common prayer is Christ, the well-beloved Son of God, who, because we are united to Him, draws down upon us the love of the Father. And the Father's love is the gift of the Holy Spirit, the dove of the Paraclete who fills us with his gifts: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22), all gifts that describe the qualities of a fraternal life that is humble and loving, full of attention and mercy toward each other.

The fruit of prayer is at the same time both filial and fraternal, it is an identification with Christ who unites us to the brothers and sisters of our community and to all humanity. The fruit of prayer lived out with truth and fidelity is at the same time both mystical and ecclesial, for it consists in union with Christ, Bridegroom of the Church. It is a fruitful union, like every spousal union, which generates in us and among us children of God who live as brothers and sisters. It is a union that makes the ardor expressed in the Song of Songs feel familiar to us, as it was to St. Bernard and to so many mystics, but alongside that also the missionary passion of the Apostolic writings of the New Testament.

Putting our life at the service of this prayer fills us with radiant joy, for the treasure is at the same time a profound intimacy with Jesus Christ and a heart that is "expanded" to the world's dimensions, passionate about the salvation of all human beings.

The Church is always renewed, and our communities with her, when we allow the fire of the Spirit to kindle in and among us love for Christ and the love of Christ, that is, a heart that burns with passion for Jesus and with His passion for the salvation of the whole world.