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VATICAN - "AVE MARIA" by Mgr Luciano Alimandi - In prayer we receive the power of Christ!

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - To step outside our own little "world" where, – because our nature, tainted by sin, has become totally self-centred – usually, everything revolves around, "me", we need prayer. Only if we open to God with humility and trust, can the light and the power of His truth enter our hearts and enlighten our minds. "Raise up ancient doors, let the king of glory enter" (Ps 23, 7), these inspired words of the psalmist, urge us to let the "King of glory" the Lord Jesus, enter our being. The "doors" of the soul's higher powers– intellect, memory and will - need to open and this "movement" is helped first of all by prayer. Humble and trustful prayer has the power not only to 'open' our own doors, but also those of others. If the doors of the heart are closed to Christ, all our efforts are useless.

The grace of the present moment flows only into a soul open to the Lord in prayer. A person who believes in the power of prayer, puts prayer before everything: finding refuge and strength in it before any kind of pastoral action; acting accompanied by prayer and with prayer bringing action to completion. This we are taught by the saints!

What wisdom we hear on this matter, in the words of Saint John of the Cross: "The most active who think to embrace the world with their preaching and exterior works, should remember that it would be of more benefit for the Church and far better pleasing to God, not to mention the good example they would give, if they were to spend at least half that time with Him in prayer, even if they have not reached the level of such lofty prayer. Certainly then, with less fatigue, they would obtain more with one work than with a thousand, through the merit of their prayer and through the spiritual strength thus obtained, otherwise everything would be reduced to striking blows with the hammer and doing next to nothing, indeed doing nothing and even harm. God forbid that the salt should become insipid, because then anything which seems to produce some good effect externally, in actual fact achieves nothing, since only by virtue of God can good works be performed" (commentary, Spiritual Canticle B, verse 29, 3).

Prayer also has the power to purify: it purifies our intentions and leads us to seek the will and glory of God in everything we do, putting aside our own advantage and honour. All the saints were persons of prayer and the most 'active' among them, were those who prayed the most. When Mother Teresa of Calcutta was asked about the power behind her Congregation, she pointed to the example of her sisters in the chapel, in adoration in front of the Blessed Sacrament from the early hours of the morning. It was here that the Missionaries of Charity found the strength to spare no effort to help the poorest of the poor! A giant of holiness, Saint Pio da Pietrelcina, gave first place to prayer all through his life: dedicating several hours of the day to prayer, and the older he became the longer and the more intense became his prayer.

The Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI is making a call to prayer one of the strong points of his Magisterium. Recently in Lourdes he said Lourdes: "Mary comes to remind us that prayer which is humble and intense, trusting and persevering, must have a central place in our Christian lives. Prayer is indispensable if we are to receive Christ's power. "People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone" (Deus Caritas Est, 36). To allow oneself to become absorbed by activity runs the risk of depriving prayer of its specifically Christian character and its true efficacy. The prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Bernadette and to Lourdes pilgrims, concentrates within itself the depths of the Gospel message. It introduces us to contemplation of the face of Christ. From this prayer of the humble, we can draw an abundance of graces." (Benedict XVI, homily in Lourdes, 14 September 2008).

The teaching of the Church and the lives of the saints clearly show that in order to progress the soul must advance on the path of prayer. Rather adding "prayer" to "prayer", or multiplying devout "exercises", it is a question of learning to live in the presence of God, as He looks lovingly on all his creatures.

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How true this is when we are in front of the tabernacle, where the Blessed Sacrament is preserved! Here is the real presence of Jesus: He sees us, He waits for us, he loves us… just as we are. To spend time in silence in front of Jesus in the Eucharist is a most eloquent prayers and so easy that everyone can do it. You only have to want to! May the maternal mediation of Mary and the example of the saints fortify us in the decision to follow Jesus on the path of prayer, the best path of all! (Agenzia Fides 24/9/2008)

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