

a. Inasmuch as our prayer is directed toward the attainment of benefits of the first class, that is, of graces which we need immediately, perseverance can obviously not be an essential condition of our prayer. Either we can not attain our object by prayer, or a transient prayer which has the other necessary qualities must suffice for its attainment. The first supposition is contrary to the divine promises; therefore the alternative must stand; *b.* When there is question of benefits and graces of the second and third class, we must concede that perseverance or continuance in prayer is neither impossible, nor is it unreasonable. God is willing to grant us His almighty help, but at the same time He desires that we, being convinced of its necessity, implore it all the more eagerly, and thereby become more worthy to receive it when He shall be pleased to grant our petitions. Therefore

4. *Resignation* to the will of God is a necessary condition for the efficacy of our prayer. This quality of our prayer needs no lengthy explanation; its application to prayer is self-evident.

Finally the petition for a certain benefit, in order to be reasonable and permissible, must include the following two attributes: (*a*) The object prayed for must not be harmful, but profitable; (*b*) it must not be opposed to the will of God.

Conclusions.—Careful observation will convince us that prayer is often wanting in one or more of the above qualities. Often that which one seeks to obtain by prayer is not promoted of God's glory and of the salvation of souls, even considered from a human point of view, much less in the designs of Providence.

In cases where the object of prayer in itself presents no difficulties, it is often defective for want of devotion or perseverance. But oftenest our prayer is wanting in confidence and trust, which want originates in the feeble faith of the person praying, or in too little reliance on the promises of Christ and in the merits of His redemption. Thus there is nothing to surprise us if we are not heard.

Again, we must never forget that very many, and generally the most precious gifts of divine grace are bestowed secretly. Remember the many and great benefits conferred daily and hourly by God on mankind, universally and individually. Considering them, it is presumption to maintain that in a special case the prayer of the Church, or of a community, or of an individual, was not granted. The opposite is fully proved by the goodness, bounty, and mercy which God shows so profusely to us.

We must, moreover, never lose sight of the principle that the promises made to prayer concern directly only the supernatural order of salvation. To the goods of the temporal order they are applicable only relatively. If we, therefore, experience that our prayers relative to temporal things remain unheard, we must, instead of doubting the divine promises, be firmly convinced that the attainment of the object for which we prayed was, under the circumstances, not conducive to our real welfare. We must, moreover, be convinced that God, in order not to leave our petition un-granted, conferred on us some other real benefit.

Finally, when the refusal of our prayer is clearly and unmistakably established, the reasons for this may be the following: (*a*) Perhaps the person praying was wanting in effort, or in cooperation with graces formerly received, a deficiency which can not be repaired by prayer alone. (*b*) Or the prayer itself is wanting in one or the other necessary qualities, especially in confidence. (*c*) God does not intend to refuse the desired grace, but, for reasons of His own, delays it (*d*) God gives us in place of what we asked some other grace more salutary to us.

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The Veneration and Invocation of Saints, and the Efficacy of Prayer

Part I

CHAPTER IV of IV

The Qualities of Prayer



**"Remember your prelates who have spoken the word of God to you;
whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation"
(Heb. xiii. 7).**

**"Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me, as I am also of Christ"
(1 Cor. iv. 16).**

The Qualities of Prayer

FOR greater convenience of explanation, we condense the various qualities of prayer taught by theologians as conditions of its efficacy into the following four:

(1) Devotion; (2) Confidence; (3) Perseverance; (4) Resignation to the will of God.

Treating of prayer, some theological authors demand, above all, the intention of praying. This intention is indeed so necessary that it does not belong to the qualities or attributes of prayer, but to its very essence. For whosoever has not the intention or will to pray may recite a formula of prayer with the greatest attention, yet does not really and truly pray.

Again, the teachers of the spiritual life tell us that prayer must be "in the name of Jesus." This being a condition insisted upon by our divine Lord Himself, it also belongs to the essence of prayer. It means that we offer up our prayer to God in the name of Jesus His Son, that is, with reference to Him and in the firm confidence that we shall be heard on His account and because of His promises. Again, to pray in the name of Jesus means to pray according to His manner and in His spirit.

We now proceed to explain the qualities of true prayer:

1. *Devotion*.—What is meant by devotion in prayer? Devotion in prayer means: (a) that our prayer must be attentive; that is, the person praying must direct his thoughts as uninterruptedly as possible to his prayer, viz., to the formula he uses to state the object of his desires, and above all to God, to whom his prayer is directed. (b) The person praying must know and acknowledge his own needs, and that of himself he has no claims whatsoever on God, and thus engender in himself sentiments of true humility, (c) These sentiments must, moreover, embrace reverence for God and the acknowledgment of dependence on Him, thus giving to prayer the character of piety, (d) All this must culminate in full abandonment to God, the Giver of all good things. This abandonment is an essential part of our divine cult.

As to the question whether devotion, and what grade of it, is necessary in prayer, and whether prayer without it loses its entire efficacy, and especially its imploring efficiency, it is evident that prayer without devotion is ineffective; it is simulation. An example of this, that is, of a man pretending to pray and not praying in reality, is given us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (*Luke xviii. 10-12*). To determine accurately what grade of devotion, that is, what degree of attention, humility, and piety is necessary to render prayer from a formality into a reality, is possible only when all the circumstances, dispositions, and qualities of mind of the person praying can be taken into account. Suffice it to remark that when all the other conditions, together with the intention of praying, combine, strict but reliable theologians declare that the true essence of prayer is compatible with a less degree of attention and recollection.

2. *Confidence*.—There is no doubt but that strong confidence, or the firm hope of being heard, contributes much to the perfection of prayer and renders it especially

effective. Therefore confidence, like devotion or attention, must be reckoned among the essential qualities or attributes of prayer. For it is inconceivable that a rational being should resolve on presenting a petition when he has not the least hope of its being granted. In this case his petition would be entirely useless, and therefore irrational. Again, it is inconceivable that God should have regard for a prayer or the petition of a man who has absolutely no confidence in His mercy. A prayer without confidence is hypocrisy, rather than true and sincere supplication. If we address a petition to God without the confidence that He can and will grant it, He must rather feel offended than honored thereby. How, then, shall He feel moved to grant us new benefits? If we nevertheless receive them, it is the effect of His bountiful goodness, and not the result of our sham prayer.

Therefore, to be effective, our prayer must be inspired by confidence. The apostle St. James inculcates this, saying: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering; for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord" (*James i. 6-7*). By these words the apostle designates not a common and ordinary confidence, but one firm and steadfast. At the same time he speaks in general; that is, his words have reference not only to extraordinary petitions, but to everything for which we are accustomed to pray.

Moreover, the explicit and positive promises made by Christ in regard to prayer manifestly have the purpose of inspiring the person praying with firm confidence and the sure hope of being heard. If, then, our prayer be wanting in this quality, we do not pray in the spirit of Christ, nor in the terms in which we ought to pray, and can not claim the fulfilment of His promises.

3. *Perseverance*.—To understand properly in how far perseverance is a quality of prayer, we must, above all, know what may be the objects of our prayer. Of these there are three classes. To the first class belong those cases in which a person needs divine help at the present moment or at least at a time definitely near, and seeks it through prayer. Such a petition would be, for instance, to obtain the necessary and effective aid of divine grace for overcoming an existing transient temptation, or the conversion of a certain sinner approaching death. To the second class belongs the avoidance of temporal evils, or of continuous temptations, or the conversion of a certain sinner now in good health. To the third class belong such benefits which can be granted only for a later period, perhaps at the hour of death. The grace of final perseverance is the foremost among these.

Having stated the preliminary conditions, the answer to the question of perseverance in prayer is:

a. Inasmuch as our prayer is directed toward the attainment of benefits of the first class, that is, of graces which we need immediately, perseverance