

## Homily for 31 October 2018, Wednesday of the 30th Week in Ordinary Time

(Lk13:22-30) The month of October, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, is a fitting 31-day vigil in preparation for All Saints' Day. Mother Mary is known by many other titles – some far more illustrious – but I'd wager that she has won more saints for God as Queen of the Rosary than under any other title. Why? – because Our Lady of the Rosary is prayer's sovereign mistress. St. Paul said, 'Pray without ceasing!' (1Thes5:17) This same teaching comes from Christ Himself. (Lk18:1) Prayer isn't rocket science, but there are some ironclad laws. For example: The more we pray, the happier and holier we will be. There are also some good rules of thumb: When it comes to prayer, sooner is better than later, hours rather than minutes, slower rather than faster. With regard to this last rule of thumb, imagine you were at boot camp and your drill instructor ordered you to get eight hours' worth of sleep in only four hours! 'Just sleep quickly!' he shouts out glibly. Bad joke, right? Well prayer, like sleep, has its own natural rhythm. Like slumber, prayer can't be hurried along either. At prayer, let's strive to be like tourists for whom the journey is everything, not like commuters who are solely intent on arriving at their final destination: the last 'amen.'

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, St. James made an astonishing discovery. Although the tiniest of members, the tongue gives direction to our entire spiritual life, even as a tiny rudder steers an enormous ship. (Jas3:4-12) When our tongue speeds through vocal prayers, then our entire person, body and soul, ends up in a hurry. It's as if our time were too precious to waste on God. In this way, many unwittingly squeeze God out of their prayers. According to the spiritual masters, we must quiet even the inner faculties of our soul – our reason and will – in order to arrive at true contemplation of God. How much more important is it, then, to tame a top-speeding tongue? St. Augustine said, 'He who sings, prays twice.' Why? – Because no other invention prolongs our prayer better than song does. And when the 'amen' is finally sung, it doesn't merely relieve our boredom or anxiety, it crowns our joy. If only we would sing our Rosaries! The Vietnamese virtually chant theirs.

The Latin term, 'ex opere operato,' means 'from the work done.' It refers to the built-in efficacy of a sacrament as an action of Christ, whereby it confers grace upon others no matter what the priest's inner dispositions are. This provision guarantees God's part in our salvation. 'Ex opere operantis,' on the other hand, literally means 'from the work of the doer.' This is our part in our own salvation. Compared to God's part, our most heroic efforts are nothing. Nevertheless, God has made us full partners in our own salvation, even as Mother Mary was a full partner in the world's salvation. If we're ever lost – God forbid! – it won't be because God failed to do His part. In a certain sense, then, everything depends on us – on the inner dispositions with which we welcome God's grace. Just as breath is the sure sign of life, so too is prayer the infallible sign of this inner disposition. No wonder St. Alphonsus Liguori could say, "Whoever prays is saved, whoever does not pray is lost." Likewise, whoever breathes is alive, whoever doesn't breathe is dead.

"Father, even if I prayed on my knees day and night, I couldn't win a sliver of the grace

that is mine at Holy Mass through one valid consecration.” Pilgrim! It’s God’s job to fill the world with His air, but it’s our job to breath it in. Sacramental grace may engulf us, but we still have to be in the state of grace; we still have to pray. When we do so, let’s speak with God, not at Him as if He were some inanimate object! People who speed through their prayers at a robotic, hyper conversational pace seem to think that, like the sacraments, the efficacy of prayer is also ‘ex opere operato.’ Well, in today’s gospel, we learn that it’s not. On the contrary, the man in the parable thought his prayer would open doors despite the faulty dispositions of his heart, yet he was refused. He prayed in vain for the master to admit him into the house, which represents heaven. Our inner disposition isn’t an elevator with two stops: the states of sin and grace. Rather, it’s a long ladder reaching to heaven, upon which sanctifying grace is the first rung. Without it, we can’t even mount the ladder of holiness, let alone scale its lofty heights where our reverent decorum at prayer – whether in word or posture – is a valid indicator of our intense devotion.

In his classic work entitled ‘The Secret of the Rosary,’ St. Louis de Montfort wrote the following: “It is sad to see how most people say the Rosary. They say it astonishingly fast, slipping over part of the words. We could not possibly expect anyone, especially the most important person, to think that a slipshod address of this kind was a compliment, and yet we imagine that Jesus and Mary will be honored by it! Small wonder, then, that the most sacred prayers of our holy religion seem to bear no fruit, and that, after saying thousands of Rosaries, we are still no better than we were before... I beg you to restrain your natural impulsiveness when saying your Rosary, and make some pauses in the middle of the Our Father and Hail Mary...” If that weren’t enough, St. Louis de Montfort actually designates with small crosses 10 pauses within the Our Father and 6 within the Hail Mary, in addition to an extra pause between prayers. Then he concludes with this observation: “At first, you may find it difficult to make these pauses because of your bad habit of saying prayers in a hurry; but a decade said recollectedly in this way will be worth more than thousands of Rosaries said in a hurry, without pausing or reflecting.” (SOR, 127) Amen!

Here follow the Our Father and Hail Mary with the recommended pauses:

Our Father who art in heaven, + hallowed by thy name, + thy kingdom come, + thy will be done + on earth as it is in heaven. + Give us this day + our daily bread, + and forgive us our trespasses + as we forgive those who trespass against us, + and lead us not into temptation, + but deliver us from evil. Amen. +

Hail, Mary, full of grace, + the Lord is with thee, + blessed art thou among women, + and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. +Holy Mary, Mother of God, + pray for us sinners, now + and at the hour of our death. Amen. +