



**CROSIER GENERALATE**

**Starting Afresh from A Place of Light**

## **IN HOLY SPIRIT PRAYING**

**Keep Yourselves in the Love of God**

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I love praying. I don't say I'm good at it. I don't claim to be a contemplative adept. I don't pretend to be consistent. I wouldn't prize my praxis as saintly and exemplary for others. But, I do love praying. In some ways I think I always have. Praying is a major component of my Crosier religious vocation, our commitment to God.

The jubilee celebration organizers have asked that this year's message for the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, before the 2010 celebration, I devote an article to prayer. The offer to do so is intriguing and even stimulating for me. A privilege. I hesitate to put pen to paper, as though I am sure I will be helpful to others. But I do relish the opportunity to share some insights and life impressions I've gained, thanks to the way of life we Crosiers have professed, and the time devoted to praying and learning about what that experience in praying means. In putting together these thoughts, however, I prefer to use a more aphoristic style (something I learned from Abbot Primate Bernardo Olivera) rather than a systematic essay.

**"They were devoted to praying."** In the description given in Acts (2.42), the description cited by early Canons Regular as constitutive of their own apostolic way of life, the fourth "devotion" named in Acts was devotedness to praying. It wasn't just a dedication to saying prayers, it was a devotedness to praying. It was not an *officium*, an obligation, a duty. It was a privileged devotedness. I don't recall that I've ever loved the duty of 'the office', but I do love praying.

**The chapter entitled Prayer in the Crosier Constitutions.** One of the best commentaries I find on this chapter three of the Constitutions is chapter four's title: "Other Aspects of our Daily Life". 'Other' is clearly 'other' than prayer. I learned this by reading the record of the 1967 Chapter of Renewal. Other is next to, secondary to, in addition to daily praying, our praying day by day. Praying is more central and foundational, even more key, than the 'other' traditional monastic observances noted in Constitutions chapter four. These two chapters (viz. 3 and 4) were almost separated in the 1967 Chapter, by inserting the content of chapter five (on the Apostolate) between them. But, clearly the original writers insisted that the title "other aspects" had to refer to "other than prayer", so the original ordered series remained. But even then, chapter three entitled "Prayer" was not chapter one of the Crosier Constitutions. Chapter One had to be on the foremost purpose of our life, community life, just as in Augustine's Rule the two-fold love of God and neighbor clearly and emphatically precedes the next chapter in the Rule on prayer. Prayer is connected both to the foremost emphasis on community life, as supportive of a life of love, and to other aspects of our daily life, as consequent and contingent to praying.

**In holy Spirit praying, keep yourselves in the love of God.** This apt biblical quotation from Jude 20 seems to me to match the concern of our Constitutions 16.2: In prayer we open ourselves to the activity of the Holy Spirit – dwelling in our midst, working within and among us – to transform us into the image of Christ, enabling the role relationship of Son, speaking intimately to Abba. Praying is always a Trinitarian dynamic. God's Spirit, in praying, trans-

forms us from simply ourselves into minding God, having the mind of the beloved Son. Love, as spiritual energy, works us over into the Beloved, addressing Love the Source and Aim of our living. Unus in uno ad unum.

**Excessus mentis.** Especially during the 12th Century, the Cistercian Century, professional religious men of prayer worked out a stimulating and fruitful interpretation of the phrase from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "If I make sense, it is for you; if I'm out of my mind, it is for God." (2 Cor 5.13). Praying, in this sense, is an altered state of consciousness: an excess beyond mind, more than it is a diminishment or deficiency of human minding. Minding God expands and intoxicates the mere ho-hum day-to-day way of thinking and reasoning. It is gifted internal activity, stimulated by faith at work within. Praying is so much more than turning our minds and hearts to God. Praying has to do with exceeding our mind's normalcy and dim-witted capacity. There is gracious room for ecstasy and even occasional dizzying rapture in praying.

**Eros and agape.** I have always felt that praying is neither a duty nor a bore. Professional prayer, for religious, is passionate and erotic. Pope Benedict notes the positive erotic dimension so essential to Christian living in his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*. Praying in holy Spirit may have days of flattened affect and even deep melancholy and remorse. But at depth, praying is spirited and infused with the dynamic and gripping Love of God: the right and left hands of a hands-on Father at work within and among us, as Irenaeus insists, when speaking of the mission of the incarnate Son and influencing Spirit of the Father. Part of the delight of praying is its eros. Augustine always insisted that desire (eros) is of the essence of prayer, in fact, is praying. Even if you cannot always be "saying prayers" you can always cultivate desire. This erotic dimension of praying has intimate and essential links to the connection of a life of prayer and a life of religious chastity. Perhaps the modern functional connecting of celibacy and ministry has missed something of the religious eros of a life devoted to praying.

**Listening without ceasing to the Word of God.** Being devoted to praying entails listening without ceasing to the Word of God, listening for God to speak, to reveal, to touch, to delight, to enlighten, to influence, to taste good. Attending to beauty so ancient, so new, (*animadversio* - noticing) was what snapped Augustine out of dull aversion to conversion to God. Sharpening his inner equipment, refining his soul, his *capax dei*, was an integral part of the developed religious experience for our spiritual father. Among the five "inner senses" (expounded by Origen), for Augustine (along with most western theologians) the prized inner sense was that of seeing. For Gregory of Nyssa, however, there were two other paths to developing the "praying equipment" of the soul. In addition to spiritual insight and contemplative gazing (so prized by Platonists), the grasping and grip, the seizure by things divine (prized by the Stoics) worked over Gregory's understanding of prayer, until he himself developed a more existential mode of religious understanding, using a third sense, that of interpersonal, relational engagement (*commercium*). God, thus, is less like an object seen or gripped (*begrip*) and more like a person, a subject, who relates and touches and tantalizes, even seduces and intrigues (Jer. 20.7). Praying is noticing being loved and, however haltingly and too late, to love as response. "You have called to me and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness... You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you."

**That our prayer deepen and mature.** When I was a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child, I prayed like a child. When I was a novice in the Order of the Holy Cross, I took



on praying as a way of life. I thank God for time and study and reflection, for meditative formation, for guided contemplation and occasional experiences of mystic *unus spiritus* afforded by the Crosier religious way of life. Maturation in prayer is more humbling, gracious and overwhelming than it is prideful posturing over accomplishments in prayer. It is, nevertheless, with a rich appreciation of the charism and way of life we have been given, that we can claim how prayer takes pride of place in our day to day life, enabling prayer to deepen and mature. The old Crosier spiritual classic *Vestis Nuptialis* distinguishes phases and programmatic stages of growth in spiritual life. We may today be more skeptical about assured grades of progress, but we continue to recognize that personal experience and life history do make a qualitative difference in the life of prayer. Prayer can mature.

**We must help them pray.** "Teach us to pray, Lord," was a sincere request addressed to Jesus by his would-be religious adherents. He did. He taught a prayer. But he also taught praying, a relationship, an engagement, a belief, a way of notice and gratitude. John Paul accented that what he would like from religious in today's church is that they form homes of communion and schools of prayer. Somebody in the Church should do it! Why not religious? Our own Constitutions insist we intend to do just that. Our General Chapter reiterated our religious commitment to make our own prayer a canonical witness to the transcendent in our world and a public school for welcoming others into this communion of the Father with all his sons and daughters, in the holy Spirit of the Beloved Son. It is a privileged and special vocation we Crosiers have fostered through the 800 years we have lived and loved. We believe that by persevering in praying we are apostolically present in our world.

When I come to having to end a moment of faith-sharing, I always recognize the remorse of further things unsaid, accents unmarked, emphases unadorned. But I do love praying. That I did say.

