

# Conforti: The Need of Prayer

*"The breath and nourishment of our life." Prayer is an inherited, instinctive, and irresistible need, due to human limits.*

## Prayer is a congenital, instinctive and irresistible need of the human person

This is why the obligation of prayer as an act of worship and an aspect of religion is so rooted in the human heart, that it has survived all kinds of catastrophes and it can be traced back to the origins of the world. We could say that the entire Hebrew religion was an offering and a



prayer to the God of Jacob and the One awaited by the peoples. The same can be said about paganism: in the most barbarian nations, even though they could not have an adequate idea of God, lost as they were in the darkness of idolatry, they nevertheless offered Him prayers and sacrifices everywhere. Plutarch was therefore right when he wrote: You shall find towns without walls, without a government, without laws, but nowhere on earth shall you find peoples without altars, without prayers, without offerings, without God.

My dear people, either through solemn pomp or coarse simplicity, the human race has always felt a need for God, it has always believed that the divine help is indispensable for carrying out the most humble to the most noble actions. This is why this ancient saying is still renowned today: *a Jove initium - everything has its beginnings in Jupiter.*

For us reasoning creatures, prayer is a congenital, instinctive and irresistible need. This loving correspondence between heaven and earth, this invisible exchange between man and God, shall never pass away. The world shall grow old, men may become extremely evil, but they shall never succeed in breaking that chain which binds the effect to its cause, the creature to the Creator.

*(1913, 6 January, Parma, Homily on the Feast of the Epiphany; FCT 21, 39-40)*

## Prayer is a necessity due to our limits

The universe is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God, a constant invitation to the reasoning creature to bless His Creator; [...]; while man at every turn encounters difficulties in his path, resistance and obstacles

warn him that he possesses limited strength and power, and they persuade him of his littleness and, therefore, of the need to turn to the One who holds all things in His hands and rules over all created things, the One who directs, coordinates and moves all things, gently but infallibly, towards His most wise purposes.

This is why Religion constantly reminds us that our temporal destiny is also in God's hands; that everywhere and always the help of God is indispensable and necessary to us; that we would fall back into nothingness if God withdrew His hand, that no building could stand unless God sustains it; that every science is insufficient, all foresight is defective and every wisdom falls short unless it is enlightened and guided by God. If this is true of the natural order, what must we say about the supernatural order, to which we were elevated by divine mercy? *Without me*, said the Divine Master, *you can do nothing - sine me nihil potestis facere* [John 15:5]. Augustine observes that He does not say we can do very little, but nothing, just as the branch cut off from the vine can produce nothing. Of ourselves, adds the Apostle, without divine grace, we are incapable of forming a thought that is worthy of eternal life.

*(1913, 6 January, Parma, Homily on the Feast of the Epiphany; FCT 21, 40)*

John Chrysostom insists that prayer is necessary to the spiritual life, just as nerves are necessary to the body, if it is to stand upright and walk, just as the dew and water are necessary to the plants, if they are to live and grow, just as the foundations are necessary to a building, so that it does not collapse, just as the walls are to a town, to protect it from falling easily into the hands of the enemy. How true this is! [...]

Saint Giuseppe Benedetto Cottolengo and Don Bosco were men of prayer, which gave them the strength and the help to triumph over all the obstacles that stood in the way of the fulfillment of their great plans; [...] by their example they eloquently tell us that nothing is more powerful than the man who prays.

*(1918, 8 February, Parma, Lenten Letter; FCT 26, 210-214)*

We must pray unceasingly precisely because it is impossible to lead a correct life, achieve perfect holiness and obtain the salvation of our neighbor without a special help from God.

*(1914, 6, October, Parma, First Allocution to the first Diocesan Synod; FCT 22, 360)*

After the beautiful sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave the first norm of sincere and zealous prayer: it must be done in secret. He also added that its efficacy does not depend on the use of many words, but in its

spontaneity and motivation, which is always a spirit of trust and love. Divine norms that reduce this first expression of the soul to its pure simplicity. Since prayer is the cry of the soul that loves and feels itself far from the infinite life that it loves: it is love and need, the confession of our weakness and the loving omnipotence of God, it is life to the soul as the breath is to the body.

*(1917, 14 January, Parma - Cathedral, Homily "Pater noster"; FCT 17, 6)*



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