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**CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
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**TOPIC: DEVELOPING A LIFE OF PRAYER IN AN
AFRICAN PARISH**

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DECLARATION

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INTRODUCTION

The Second Vatican Council aimed at a radical renewal of Christian life, what we would call a return to the sources, the grass roots. As Christians, Christ is the radical center of our lives and we are called to follow him in holiness. This can be achieved through prayer, since prayer touches our central relationship with God.

From time immemorial great men and women travelled the path of prayer. The Scriptures provide us with ample evidence, where prayer formed part of their daily schedule, touching their life situation and circumstances. Similarly the Saints, whether religious or lay, are clear examples of people, who through prayer and their particular charisms, were able to bear witness to their call as Christians. Today, the challenge is to us, whether in this secularised world are we able to lead people to Jesus?

This research conducted at Malolo has a two fold aim: First, it will serve as a model to enable priests, religious and missionaries to strive, enrich and develop the spiritual lives of their parishioners. Secondly, it will enable their parishioners to appreciate their state of life and be true images of God, through their witness in words and actions. The topics dealt herein shed light on the Biblical basis of prayer, my personal reflection, assessment of research and the recommendations/proposals for improving the life of prayer in the parish.

PART ONE

THE BIBLICAL BASIS OF PRAYER

As Christians we are called to follow Christ closely. To know and experience Him we need to take the Bible as the basis for our nourishment and inspiration. The Bible is not only the book par excellence, but it is much more the living Word of God, speaking and moving the hearts of people from time immemorial. It would be impractical on my part to speak on prayer without basing my essay on the Bible. For St Augustine, "The Bible itself is the revealed history of the activity of Christ in the world, yes even the Old Testament speaks of him, the one mediator between God and man. Scripture therefore speaks of Christ in all its parts."¹ It is God who takes the initiative in calling people into that encounter known as prayer. Ours is the response to that invitation. As God gradually reveals himself, and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call.

1.1 PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:

God has always called people to prayer. In the *Old Testament* prayer is bound up with human history, for it is the relationship with God in historical events. To have a clear meaning and understanding of prayer in the Old Testament we would have to begin by considering the great men and women who shed some light on prayer. There is no doubt they were persons of prayer, people of deep faith, feeling God's presence and action in history and their human ability to relate to God.

¹Gervase Corcoran, *Prayer and St. Augustine* (Dublin: Carmelite Centre of Spirituality, 1986), p. 7.

1.1.1 PRAYER OF FAITH ATTRIBUTED TO ABRAHAM:

Prayer is revealed in the Old Testament beginning with Abraham. *The call of Abraham* is beautifully illustrated in chapter 12 of the Book of Genesis. Abraham was a man of faith and he expressed it by deeds. He hearkened to the voice of God to leave his country and go to a forsaken land. Later he was also ready to sacrifice his only son Isaac. To drive my point home, what made Abraham to approach God in prayer, was that God had first approached him through the call and promise. Abraham's heart was entirely submissive to the Word of God and he obeyed.

In Gen 18:16-33 we have the unceasing prayer of Abraham, pleading God to spare the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is the sinfulness of the people that brought God's wrath on them. Abraham bargains with God to save the cities even if only ten innocent people are found among them. But God did not find ten righteous people to move away His anger.

1.1.2 MOSES - A MAN OF PRAYER:

From the midst of the burning bush God calls Moses to be his ambassador in the work of salvation. *Moses' intimacy with God* is depicted well in Exodus 33:7ff, where it is said that God talked to him as a man talks with his friend. There are a number of instances where Moses prayed. The most striking one is that of Ex 32:7-14, where Moses had gone up to Mount Sinai to receive the tables of the law from God. His delay in returning made the people furious and they asked Joshua to make them a God who will be their leader. This attitude of the people made God angry and he decided to destroy the people.

It is at this juncture that Moses pleads with God. For they were God's people that He brought forth and it would be a point for the Egyptians to speak about, and worst still the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be unfulfilled.

This episode makes clear the power of prayer. Even if it doesn't point to a change of mind in the deeper sense of what God truly wants to accomplish, it shows God's response to the human condition, truly intending to destroy if renewed prayer and conversion do not remove the cause of his anger.

1.1.3 ELIJAH - JEREMIAH - THE PROPHETS:

The prophets are known to be men of prayer for prophetic inspiration involved a strong sense of the presence and action of God. In their encounter with God, the prophets drew light and strength for their mission. Through prayer they are able to be persons of action. The prophets mission was to instil a deep sense of faith in people and call for conversion. A move from mere external ritualism to deeper internal commitment.

Elijah, a great figure lived in the presence of the Lord. He burned with zeal for Him. His mission as spokesperson was successful; because of his deep intimacy with God he was not afraid to risk his life. He openly confronted the king and the injustices done to the people. He prayed for the widows son in 1 King 17:21; he prayed for death as he heard that Jezebel sought to take his life 1 Kg 19:4, because of his burning zeal for the Lord 1 Kg 19:14. These are a few examples.

Jeremiah' experience with prayer makes clear the meaning of calling upon God in times of trouble. He prays for the defeat of Israel's enemies in Jer 10:25; there is a prayer of repentance in Jer 14:7-9; prayer for one's enemies 29:7; the people request Jeremiah to pray to the Lord and ask him to show them what to do in Jer 37:7. Here we see that he prays for ten days and then informs them that God is willing to have mercy on them and to build them up again provided they remain in their own land (42:7-21).

1.1.4 THE PRAYER OF HANNAH:

The first book of Samuel opens by recounting her sadness at being barren. She prayed silently in the shrine at Shiloh, that if God would give her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord's service (1 Sam 1:9-11). She conveys her desire to the priest Eli and he in turn blessed her and assured her that God would hearken to her prayer.

The occasion for her canticle of praise is the joy in offering her son to the Lord. It is *one of the beautiful Old Testament canticles*. "The central theme is the reversal of human values and stations. The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he also exalts..."²

1.1.5 THE PRAYER OF THE KING:

One of the great prayers that scripture places on the lips of David is *his act of thanksgiving* after hearing from the prophet Nathan the oracle of the promise for his house and his heirs (2 Sam 7: 18-29). He thanks God for the gracious promise concerning the future of his house. He praises God for the great deeds in history especially in freeing Israel from

²John Wright, *A Theology of Christian Prayer* (New York:: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1987), p. 6.

Egypt and for making them his people through the covenant. He begs that God would continue to bless him and he intercedes for his house and his nation.

1.1.6 SOLOMON: THE BUILDER OF A HOUSE OF PRAYER:

In the long and beautiful prayer in 1 Kings 8, Solomon expresses an understanding of God as merciful and responsive to human needs and human prayer. It also expresses the center of Israel's life as the temple and the destiny of Israel to spread the worship of God throughout the world.

This prayer was offered on the solemn dedication of the temple. He underlines the great significance of the temple in the prayer life of the people. He recognises that the temple cannot contain God, still he trusts that God's name will dwell there and that when people turn to him in prayer in the temple he will hear them (1 Kg 8: 27-30). His prayer also includes every supplication made here, either individually or collectively by Israelites, asking that as God knows their hearts, he answer them according to all their ways. Prayer reaches out to include forgiveness.

1.1.7 THE PSALMS:

The Psalms are the masterpiece of prayer in the Old Testament. The Psalms arose from the communities of the Holy Land and the diaspora, but embrace all nations. They are based on real situations and they refer to experiences either in the life of an individual, or in the story of the people of Israel. They represent two inseparable qualities that is personal and

communal. They recall to mind the saving plan of God in the past yet extend into the future even to the end of history.

Psalms were used in the community especially when people gathered for prayer in the temple or the synagogue. "The liturgy (i.e., formal worship of the community in the temple) was a drama: there were various roles to be played, there was movement, gesture, music, dialogue. The body played a part in the liturgy."³

In brief we could say that the psalmist is aware of God and meets God in his own life, place and body, and in the life and company of his own people. He is also aware of himself and much more of what God has done and is doing. Though God is transcendent beyond our reach, yet he is intimately involved with us. The best place and time for praising God is the liturgy gathered as community. Even when prayed in solitude there is in the psalms a constant awareness of the rest of the community with whom life, salvation and prayer are shared. The honesty of the psalmist is seen by the way he expresses himself by feelings and emotions.

1.2 PRAYER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Right at the start I would like to quote the letter to the Hebrews 1:1ff, "In many and in varied ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom..." *Prayer is fully revealed to us when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* Here I would like to concentrate on two important persons of prayer - the prayer of Mary and the Prayer of Jesus.

³Dermot Connolly, *A Book of Praises* (Duhlin: Veritas Publication, 1987), p. 9.

1.2.1 THE PRAYER OF MARY:

Mary's prayer is revealed to us at the fullness of time. The angel's greeting to Mary at the annunciation as *the blessed one, full of grace*, implies a choice on the part of God of granting her the privilege to enjoy the presence of the Lord. Her response, "I am the handmaid of the Lord " is one of great faith, to be wholly God's. We are told she kept all things in her heart which manifests a contemplative heart, keeping God's word.

In the *Magnificat*, prayer finds its fullest expression. It can be divided into three parts. In the first place she thanks God for what He has done to her personally which implies a sense of gratitude, trust, humility and praise. Secondly, she moves on to show how God works in history, where the Lord shows mercy to those who fear him, rejects the proud etc. Thirdly, she recalls God's faithfulness to the promises he made to Abraham and Israel, and is realised in her.

Mary represents Israel and she prays as a member of God's people as we have it in the Gospel of John, chapter two. Hence the prayer of Mary has meaning only in relation to Jesus and his prayer.

1.2.2 THE PRAYER OF JESUS:

We can't deny the fact that Jesus learnt to pray from his mother, his surroundings and the prayer of the people in the synagogue at Nazareth and the temple in Jerusalem. But gradually his prayer springs from a secret source and was very intense. Jesus' life from his

birth to his death and glorification is prayer. In the Gospels we will find Jesus praying in different places, at different times and at special occasions.

I would like to quote some references from the Gospels about Jesus *praying in different places*. Jesus prays at home (Lk 2:39-40; 51-52), Jesus prays in the synagogue (Lk 4:16-22), Jesus prays in the temple (Lk 2:41-50, 19:45-46), Jesus prays in lonely places (Lk 5:16, Mk 6: 45-46, Mt 6:5-6), Jesus prays everywhere "in Spirit" (Jn 4:21-24), Jesus prays within ourselves (Jn 14:23).

We also find Jesus *praying at different times*. In the morning (Mk 1:35), during the day continually (Lk 8:1), before nature (Mt 6:25-34), while dealing with people (Jn 11:41-42, Mt 18:5-10), in the night (Lk 6:12).

Jesus had *special occasions of Prayer*. In the Gospels we have a number of instances where we find Jesus allotting special occasions for prayer. Before choosing the twelve who were to be his heralds of the Good News, an enormous task, he went out to the mountain to pray, and the Gospel of Luke says that "all night he continued in prayer" (Lk 6:12-13). "After feeding thousands in the wilderness Jesus went up a mountain by himself and spent the night in prayer once again" Mt 14:19. This night of prayer preceded the great sermon on the bread of life, when Jesus was to call for faith in himself and his mission. Another instance was that of the transfiguration where opposition began to grow and the life of Jesus was coming to an end, Jesus took three apostles along with him.

Toward the end of his public life Jesus offers prayers on four different occasions.

Three times for others, once for himself. In Mt 19:13 the prayer offered, was for little children, whose mothers brought them to him so that he might lay hands on them and pray. In Jn 11:41-42, before raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus prayed in gratitude to God. In 12:18, on the last day in the temple Jesus spoke in anguish. Here he made his prayer of submission, "Father glorify thy name" Jn 12:18. The last of the four prayers was at the last supper. Jesus prayed that the apostles faith may not fail so that they might strengthen their brethren.

The Gospel accounts shed immense light on the life of Jesus as a *man of prayer*. This prayer was not peripheral or incidental to his life, rather it enfolds his deep and essential relationship to God, making the way for the context and inspiration of his mission. The Gospel according to Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ' ministry. Jesus prays at the decisive moments of his mission, before the Father's witness to him during the baptism and transfiguration, before his own fulfillment of the Father's plan of love by his passion. In Luke 2:49 we have the incident where he stayed back in Jerusalem and when Mary asked him why did he do this, he answered, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Two explicit prayers of Jesus during his public ministry are worth noting, that of *Matthew 11:25-27, parallel to Luke 10:21-23*. "I thank thee Father, Lord of heaven and earth...anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." The second prayer is the account of *John 11:41-42*, at the raising of Lazarus. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou has heard me...that they may believe that thou didst send me".

At his *passion and death* Jesus prayed first for himself, for his own glorification, that he might fulfill his mission of glorifying the Father. Jesus' glorification is the manifestation of his sonship, through obedience to his Father, in accepting death on the cross. Jesus prays for the apostles and also for his future followers and believers and for their unity. We also have three prayers as he hung on the cross. *First*, for the persecutors that the Father forgive them; they act out of ignorance. The *second* is the only time where he does not address God as Father, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me" (Ps 22, Mk 15:34, Mt 27:46). The *third* one is the handing of his spirit to the Father, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

Jesus' prayer in Glory: Jesus life of prayer did not end with his death but continues now, on our behalf. St. Paul speaks of Jesus as one who died, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God who intercedes for us Rom 8:34, Hb 7:25. It is because Jesus unites himself with our prayers that they are efficacious, as we learn from the Gospel of Matthew 18:19-20, where it says, "Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst". We are able to pray because the gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to us through Jesus' prayers. "I will pray the Father and he will give you another counselor..." (Jn 14:16-17).

1.2.3 JESUS' TEACHING ON PRAYER:

The Gospels gives us *Jesus explicit teaching on prayer*. He takes us from where we are and leads us progressively towards the Father. From what we know he builds up his prayer. further he reveals the newness by means of parables.

Jesus insists on conversion of heart, reconciliation with one another, love of enemies, prayer for persecutors, prayers to the Father in secret, not heaping up empty words, forgiveness from the heart, and purity of heart. These are basic necessities for one who desires prayer to be fruitful or heard. Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gift, so he teaches us a filial boldness. *"Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it"* (Mk 11:24). For such power of prayer and of faith in all things is possible to him who believes. Jesus says that the prayer of faith consists not only in saying "Lord", "Lord", but by disposing heart to do the will of Father.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL/SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER

The prayer of the great people in the Bible that we have seen are prototypes of prayer. These people do not explicitly give us the meaning of prayer nor what it is. Rather as I see it, it is their existential life that seeks refuge in prayer, enabling us to understand the implications of these prayers. John Robinson in his book "Honest to God", entitled one chapter, "The ground of our being". He writes, God the unconditional is to be found only in, with and under the conditioned relationship of this life.⁴

The reflections to follow will bring out the hidden treasures that lie behind these prayers in the Bible. I would term them the pre-requisites for prayer that enables one to attain to that state of union with God through prayer. Thomas Merton says, "Man has a fundamental duty to orientate his entire being and his life to God. The growth and goal of the spiritual man is to realise the end for which he was created i.e. the personal and ultimate union with God in Christ by love."⁵

2.1 AN INNATE DESIRE/YEARNING FOR GOD:

Prayer is not an invention, nor did it originate out of the blue. It is the innate yearning

⁴op .cit., p. 37.

⁵John Higgins, *Thomas Merton On Prayer* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1971), p. 25.

that bids the person to pray. So prayer begins with a desire for God. Before any words are spoken, there is a reaching out of our souls towards God, a turning of our hearts. We find our lives incomplete, our weary spirit sinks, something is missing within, that cannot be expressed. Out of this great need our hearts turn to God. Unfortunately we are not sensitive to what is going on within us. We are so busy, worried and distracted that we have no time to enter within ourselves and speak to him.

The *first step* that the great people of prayer place before us, in our spiritual journey, is *to pay attention to the inner movements of our lives*. Their lives reflected a yearning/longing to be in touch with the other dimension of life. The Psalms, 42 and 38 sing, "as the deer that yearns for running streams so my soul is yearning for you my God". Here the psalmist is writing in exile and is expressing the basic longing of the human heart to behold the face of God.

2.2 DEPENDENCE ON GOD:

A person who is in touch with God, open to the voice of the Spirit, will be aware of what it means to be a creature, to be totally dependent and gifted with existence, life, etc. The dependence on God for all good things, nature, family, prosperity, forgiveness etc, is expressed in the prayer of the Israelites, which belongs to the first part of the covenant formula (Ex. 6:7, Lev. 26:12). The second part of the covenant formula expressed their condition as God's people, their cultic prayer, their praise and worship; supplication voiced by the community publicly assembled was essentially important. It was in this prayer that they realised and deepened their identity as a nation, as the people whom God had made his own

and given a special destiny.⁶

Jesus' personality is essentially constituted by his relationship to God as his Father, a relationship found in his life of prayer. Jesus is before all the *Son* in his relationship to God and this shapes his relationship to all people. Jesus shows himself humble and dependent on God in prayer. His prayer shows complete obedience to the Father's will, gratitude for the Father's gift, praise for the Father's deeds, carrying out the mission given to him by the Father.

2.3 PRAYER ACCOMPANIED BY CONFIDENCE AND TRUST:

This is another aspect of the prayer of the great people. An *extraordinary confidence and trust* of being heard. We see in the prayers of David and Solomon that the petition usually ends in thanksgiving, anticipating the favorable response that God will grant their prayers. God's silence is not a proof of indifference or ineffectiveness, but of his love. The prayer of Jesus in the garden of Olives, in his agony shows a high level of intensity in prayer fulfilling God's will. He sought God's will. We are invited to place our trust and confidence in God through prayer. Mk 11:24 states whatever you ask in prayer believe you will receive it.

2.4 PRAYER OF FAITH:

To yearn for God is already to have faith in God. When we pray we are calling upon

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

a personal God, not seeking the unknown but the known. Our yearning is not a sign of doubt or disbelief, it is an act of trust. We yearn for God because we know God and trust God.

The prayer of faith brings to expression an essential dimension of our relationship with God. Personal relationships really begin and grow only as they are expressed. Similarly, symbolizing and expressing in prayer the relationship between God and ourselves establishes, sustains, strengthens and deepens that relationship. For the whole initiative of drawing us into a personal relationship is from God. Our acceptance establishes and makes it grow. Prayer implies *a total commitment to God*. It involves belief in God and love for one another. This shows the basic characteristic of Christian prayer.

2.5 DEEP INTIMACY LEADS TO ACTION:

First and foremost to be a person of action you need to be a contemplative. This is the impression that the great figures of the Bible and saintly people give us. "Man's activity therefore must always be born of his prayer and must resemble it. Hence, although it is his function in life to divinize the world in Christ Jesus, his first and essential duty and desire is to be united in personal contact with God in Christ."⁷ The Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 4:12, says, "the Word of God is something alive and active". Taking the Word of God to heart, pondering on it, is to be filled and nourished by that Word. The personalities of the Bible were people who had this intimacy with God. The Word was in their mouths and in their hearts. Whenever they spoke, it was God's Word that they proclaimed. They were people who experienced transformation in their lives by being submissive to the Word of God. If

⁷John Higgins, *Thomas Merton on Prayer* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1971), p. 95.

genuine prayer becomes an integral reality of the heart, all life and living will flow within this framework. Love, communion, intimacy, growth, selflessness. This enables us to reach out to the poor, the needy, the oppressed, to situations of injustice, turmoil and wars.

In the lives of the Prophets, especially, we see their complete dedication to the task of prophesying the Word only after having received it in their hearts. In them there was no duplicity. They openly condemned the injustices that were done to the people of God by kings and rulers. We are given in Ex 15:1-18 and in 1Kg 19:16 the intense converse of Moses and Elijah through their experience with God. Jesus too was a staunch protector of those who were being dominated. We know that he was able to challenge the social structures and religious complacency that existed in the society. As part of his prophetic mission, Jesus was involved in healing, touching, caring for those who needed his love. As part of prophetic call we must stand within the situation and needs of all people and bring them before the face of God in prayer.

2.6 FOCUS ON PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PRAYER:

"The greatest good we can do for others is not just to share our riches with them, but to reveal their riches to themselves."⁸ The prayers we have seen throw immense light on public and private forms of prayer. Their prayers grew out of their own experience. They were not taught to pray. Their Jewish religious background made them faithful to their religious calling as Jews. We ought to reveal the riches and capacity that each person has to encounter God as human beings through prayer. This is our task.

⁸Joseph Healey, *A Fifth Gospel* (New York: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 104.

Jesus himself prayed in public in the synagogue, in the temple and to his Father in secret. I would say that Jesus himself recommended that where two or three are gathered in his name there is he in the midst of them. Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Matthew highlights some important recommendations on how we should perform our acts. The admonishments include how we should practice piety, alms giving, prayer. The beautiful prayer, the Our Father, that Jesus taught us to pray, is found here. We are advised to *close our door and pray in secret* so that what the Father sees done in secret he will reward.

It is a proved fact that for prayer you need to be in an atmosphere of silence so that God may enter in. In silence we can better establish ourselves with God and with each other. We are told in the Scriptures that Jesus often went to the mountain or to a quiet place to pray.

We also *encounter God through the liturgical celebrations, the sacraments, the assemblies*. Praying together builds up the people of God as a family where the Father forms the center of our celebration. United as Christians, we share that unity for which Christ prayed, that we may all be one as the Father and the Son are one. The prayer of the Church brings forth solidarity with those who are unable to give praise to God. As we pray it is Christ who is praying in us.

2.7 PRAYER SHOULD BE HABITUAL AND FREQUENT:

To live the richness of the Christian life we regularly *need to keep time and space apart to touch the core of our being*. To encounter God presupposes a deeper commitment to pray without ceasing. Jesus is a wonderful model for us in everything. Many have followed

in his footsteps and have reached that state of intimacy with God through prayer and love. As I have already stated before that Jesus was a man of prayer I need not repeat it again. I would like to give here some important teaching of some saints that enabled them to be in intimacy with God by their simple methods.

St Teresa says, "For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him whom we knows loves us."⁹ To be an athlete you need to struggle daily. Frequent and habitual practices will enable to keep the person fit to win the race. It is said, practice makes a man perfect. So the same principle stands good. For if one does not struggle to overcome distractions, dryness, temptations and sleep during prayer the person will never be able to achieve that blessed state that prayer offers. St. Teresa took fifteen years to attain union with God in prayer. She stands out as one who fought strenuously to overcome all sorts of distractions. She advises us to have a strong determination to pray. She insists on *three pre-requisite for prayer: Humility, Detachment and Charity*. St John of the Cross insists on giving up everything to attain to that state of Union. "To possess God desire the possession of nothing."¹⁰ Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a seventeenth century Carmelite mystic, would encourage us to keep the presence of the Lord during the day.

⁹Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *St Teresa of Avila, Vol I*. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1987), p. 96.

¹⁰Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *St John of the Cross* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1979), p. 103.

2.8 PROFOUND CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

The Old Testament prayer is to be seen only *in the light of the person and prayer of Jesus*. For Jesus is the revealed Word of God. For St. Augustine says, "Scripture speaks of Christ in all its parts. Prayer begins and ends with Christ." Prayer is the fruit of Divine initiative, a response to God who has first loved us, to the extent of sending his Son into the World that we would have life through him. So we pray within the context of the New Covenant, which joins us to God in giving us a share in Jesus' own relationship to God as Father.

The God that we worship through prayer is the same *personal God revealed in the Old Testament*, but now *he is known to us as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He is not only the Father of Jesus but our father too because of this intimate relationship we have with Jesus Christ. As sons and daughters we share in his sonship and daughtership so to speak. We are able to relate to him as "Abba Father" because of the gift of Christ' Spirit. Each one of us is individually related to him as his child because it is the Spirit of Jesus that enables us to cry out Abba Father.

Another aspect that is clearly enfolded in the New Testament is the fact that the Father is the source of all good. The Old Testament covenant formula speaks of "I will be their God and they shall be my people"(Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12), but now 2Cor 6:18 says, I will be a Father to you and you shall be my son and daughter. The great prayer that Jesus taught us covers the essentials of all prayers where we see the Father as the source of daily bread, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from ultimate trial and evil.

To end up this section I would say that Christian prayer *unites us as a family of God, his sons and daughters*. The prayer is always made in the plural *for us*. God too is addressed as our Father. This is the beauty of Christian prayer, where we together raise our minds and hearts to the Father, through the Son in the Spirit.

PART THREE

ASSESSMENT OF THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED AT MALOLO IN TANZANIA

As God himself takes the initiative of bringing people into close intimacy with himself, we are called to respond graciously to this invitation by surrendering ourselves totally to him. Quite often we sit with our hands folded thinking that God will do everything. This is sheer laziness and an illusion. St. Teresa would say "in the face of so many enemies it's not possible for us to sit with our hands folded; there must always be this care about how we are proceeding interiorly and exteriorly."¹¹

The Father is so loving that he makes it easier for us to encounter him. This is clearly seen by the fact that he offered his Son to us so that we might have life and have it to the full. In John's Gospel Jesus says, "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9). The Gospel of John itself is a book of prayer where the relationship of the Father and Jesus is depicted beautifully. Hence our prayer should flow from the relationship we have with Jesus, who has revealed to us the Father, in his presence and person. In the measure He sees that they receive him so he gives and is given, says St Teresa. So our high vocation to be children of God necessarily demands a total self commitment to the invisible who is made visible to us through our encounter with Jesus in prayer.

All are called to this encounter whether lay or religious. The people whom I

¹¹Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh, *St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. Two*. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1980), p. 223.

informally interviewed at *Malolo parish* belong to the *Morogoro diocese* and are practicing Christians. They have this call through baptism to be children of God and to attain union with God. They hold firm their belief in the presence and power of God, but when faced with difficulties they swing and their faith is threatened. To summarise the rich contribution and to drive home the basic points I have divided the assessment into two headings. The first will highlight the positive aspects of their lives and understanding on prayer and the second will say something about the negative aspects that seem to hinder for the spiritual life and growth of the people. This will help in a general way to grasp their life and prayer.

3.1 POSITIVE POINTS:

3.1.1 NO THEORIZING ON PRAYER:

The first point that struck me was the simplicity of the people in regard to their faith. What distinguishes us who are educated from those uneducated, is that we spend time in speculating whereas ordinary people believe with faith. This is the impression I got while I interviewed people. Gradually as I posed the question to them on what is prayer, they were silent, unable to answer because they never spent time theorizing about prayer, nor in analyzing its meaning nor its form or structure. For them prayer is not something new. It is *deeply rooted in tradition and is at the very core of their life.*

So prayer is living spiritually as an integral part of their life. It is speaking or communicating with God. It is the flow of words from the heart to a God who is attentive and sensitive to the needs and desires of the people. Therefore prayer is *speaking to God of their day to day life experiences, bringing before this great God their joys, sorrows, desires,*

problems etc. St. Teresa does not consider the mere rattling of words as vocal prayer. "For her reciting prayer without attention to God is not prayer at all. If a person does not think whom he is addressing and what he is asking for, and who it is that is asking and or whom he is asking, I do not consider that he is praying at all even though he be constantly moving his lips."¹² But at the same time she has great regard for vocal prayer when she says what we call vocal prayer is not only noble in itself but also an occasion for what she calls perfect contemplation.

3.1.2 DEPENDENCE ON GOD:

The people are conscious that they are limited in space, time, place and in whatever they do. They are also aware that they die, things perish, life is passing away. These enables them to depend on God for all their needs. They recognise *God as the source of all life*. A clear example is of their life situation where they live in a deserted and dry area. They have no wells but they have a stream that flows throughout the year whether there is rain or not. They depend on this stream for all their basic needs. They attribute the power and presence of God to this stream by which they are able to survive and earn their living.

3.1.3 FORM OF PRAYER IS INTERCESSORY:

The form of prayer that they use is intercessory. It takes into consideration both the prayer of petition and the prayer of thanksgiving. Their prayers are spontaneous, simple and open. They flow spontaneously from their life experiences and in simple words. For them the

¹²Thomas Dubay, *Fire within* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 76.

prayer of petition and thanksgiving go together. Hence prayer is linked to the whole of life gathered in family and community.

Their dependence on God necessarily forces them to approach God in prayer for their needs. The needs that they pray for are health, children and daily food. Thanksgiving is offered for having received it. Mbiti says, "Through prayer man expresses his anxieties and gratitude, his fears and hope, his confidence and assurance, his faith and intimacy."¹³ This is seen in these peoples lives.

Attending Church service is seen as an occasion for prayer. For Africans the *community dimension plays an important role.* It is to be admired because it unites them as one family of God where he is the head and they the children. The community prayer is stressed especially when they gather on Sundays. It is here that they come together to give praise and thanks to God for the week that has passed and for the wonderful things they received. And to raise their petitions and prayers for their individual needs and the needs of the community. Special prayers are offered for those absent due to sickness or some grave reason.

3.1.4 PRAYER INVOLVES SINGING, DANCING, CLAPPING:

For these people in particular the *movement of the body is very essential in prayer.* God has created them with this body. To give him praise and thanks is to use the body to the best of their capacity. It is the praise of God for the gift of life. Through these means they

¹³John Mbiti, *Bible and Theology in African Christianity* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 191), p. 72.

forget their very selves and are immersed in prayer. There is a story where a dervish was asked why he worshipped God through dance. He replied that to worship God means to die to self; dancing kills the self. When the self dies all problems die with it. Where the self is not, Love is, God is. Hence for them prayer is not some abstract thing; rather it is a joyous praise to God for life bestowed on them. It is the community as a whole that tries to meet God through these means.

3.1.5 THEY BELIEVE IN THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER:

I think that in many cultures, as in this one, there is a common phenomenon that attributes sickness, misfortune, accidents and other calamities to be caused by human beings using spiritual or mystical power. For them prayer is the powerful weapon that wards off such power. Their prayers are intensified and through prayer evil can be conquered. *Prayer affirms that Jesus Christ is Lord over all principalities.* He brings healing. The wisdom books speak of the fear of the Lord as the first stage of wisdom. This enables them to be afraid of such evil powers and to be in touch with God through prayer.

3.1.6 TRINITARIAN PRAYER:

In African Traditional Religion prayer is often through intermediaries especially ancestors. When these people embrace Christianity their prayer takes on a Trinitarian dimension. Hence, prayer is to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. The Father becomes the center of our prayer and the Son is the intermediary who replaces the ancestors and raises our prayer to the Father in the Spirit because of the sonship we share with the Son. It is the

Spirit that enables us to cry Abba Father. *Christ is seen as the intercessor for them* because of their devotion to the Sacred Heart which is so strong in this parish.

Their devotion to Our Blessed Mother, to Saint Felicity and others are considered associates whereby they manifest the power and love of God. Their veneration for them shows a sense of solidarity to those who were believed to be already sharing eternal life with Christ. As we show our love and appreciation for the saints by praising and thanking God for them, they pray for us as we pray for one another. There is *not much of devotion to the Saints as it was before Vatican II*.

3.2 NEGATIVE POINTS:

After having a glimpse of the positive side of their life of prayer now I turn to the negative side where the lack of certain basic requirements for the growth and development of the life of prayer is clearly noticed.

3.2.1 PRAYER NOT ROOTED IN LIFE:

Quite often we take many things for granted such as prayer, the gift of life, air, etc. Since these people have become so accustomed to their life and situation they forget to pray. The slogan they use is that to be occupied in many errands is to pray, or to put it another way, to work is to pray. This becomes a mere illusion because life and prayer go hand in hand. The one cannot be separated from the other.

They rarely think of God because their life has taken a different approach of work and life. Their growth and development based on *family background and the environment, has played an important role in the formation of their prayer life.* "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realisation of ecclesial communion and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church."¹⁴ It is said that the family is the first school of formation in all dimensions whether moral, physical, spiritual or psychological. But this is not the case in these families, with the exception of a few of them, who do perform their Christian duties well in the upbringing of their children.

3.2.2 LACK OF INTEREST ON THE PART OF THE PRIESTS:

Jesus' mission can be summarised as preaching, healing and drawing people into intimacy with himself. This mission of Jesus has to be carried out by priests. But unfortunately the basic teaching of Jesus is neglected and the priority is given to the celebration of Mass. The preaching on Sundays is frequently done by the catechists. The homilies are the best moments to nourish the people on different teaching of the Gospels which is the best book of prayer, but not given due value.

As there are, in many parishes, different groups such as altar boys, youth groups, prayer groups, legion of Mary, to name a few, in this parish, these groups have not been started. This is one of the major reasons for the deterioration of the spiritual life of the people. If a plant is not watered its growth will be a stagnant growth. So too our life and this is the observed fact of these peoples life.

¹⁴The Catechism of the Catholic Church, On Prayer, in *Part Three, Section Two, Article 4*, p. 516.

3.2.3 PRAYER NOT UNCEASING:

In the Gospels and in Paul's letters we are recommended to pray without ceasing. This is seen lacking in this parish as a whole. Since prayer is not rooted in life and the foundation is weak it becomes difficult to keep the presence of God throughout the day. As individual acts give rise to habits so does habits in their turn give rise to virtue. To build up a relationship with a person you need to meet frequently, speak to each other, spend time together. For them there is no specified time, in some families there is no family prayer, hence overall they lack constancy. From the fruit you can know the tree. From their lives I could see that they lack commitment to their Christian life. *Their prayers come to the fore only in times of need* making God a commodity to be sought in times of difficulties.

3.2.4 PRAYER OF THE PEOPLE IS MERE EXTERNAL:

There is no doubt that the people like external forms of prayer. They are somewhat like the people in the middle ages in Spain who loved vocal prayer. We have innumerable incidents where external forms of prayer were carried out. One case is that of *Bernardo Robles* who left a large sum of money to the Carmelite convent in Avila in Spain. In exchange he *specified and demanded certain things* that they should fulfill such as where he was to be buried, and required that one nun continually kneel before the Blessed Sacrament holding a candle in her hand...¹⁵ This incident highlights one fact that it is *not love that bids these people offer such sums but their salvation*. It is trying to please God. Similarly the

¹⁵Jodi Bilinkoff, *The Avila of Saint Teresa* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.50.

question about external forms of prayers of these people is whether they are really flowing out of the heart. They are very fond of external gestures, they feel good but they run the risk of falling into mere entertainment and forget the true understanding of prayer as love.

It is said, to know a person you need to live with the person. So living with these people I can say only that few of the families are truly dedicated Christians living their life in conformity to the Gospel values, daily prayers in the family, purity of life and devotion to the sacraments. The rest are just nominal Christians where the Gospel values are discarded and their lives are permeated by all forms of evils that are observed in any society.

3.2.5 LACK OF INDIVIDUAL/PERSONAL PRAYER:

There is a story about a man who was so accustomed to pray from a book. One day unfortunately he forgot to carry it. He said to God I will recite the alphabet very slowly and you, to whom all prayers are known, can put the letters together to form the prayers I can't remember. This story helps us to give time for individual prayer letting God speak and we listen. It is observed in these people that it is very difficult for them to pray individually or personally. They are not accustomed to it because of the very upbringing of the family. A person, to understand himself better, needs to spend time alone. His conviction flows from his deeper understanding of self. Whereas these people depend on others for everything, it is only when the head of the family says let us pray that they pray. This is mere automatic forms of worship which does not flow from the person's heart.

3.2.6 LACK OF SILENCE AND INTERIOR PRAYER:

The word silence doesn't seem to mean much to them. They are aware that when a person dies it is then that they mourn with the family. But to be silent in prayer doesn't make sense. For them prayer is speaking to God. Here *prayer tends to be a monologue rather than a dialogue*. An old man was asked by a priest what God talked to him about. The man replied God does not talk, but listens. Then the priest asked what do you talk to him about? The man replied I do not talk either, I just listen. The four stages of prayer could be summarised thus: I talk, you listen. You talk, I listen. Neither talks, both listen. For an interior prayer silence is a must. This story will illustrate that prayer should be reciprocal, which is rarely seen in these people.

3.2.7 LACK OF FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD:

One of the authors wrote something like this if all is well I am a Christian but if things go wrong then I turn towards soothsayers, magicians etc. *Faith implies a total self commitment to Jesus whether things go well or things go wrong*. But in the life of these people they are so afraid of the mystical and spiritual powers that brings about harm either to them or to the family. In the midst of sickness or suffering they immediately think that some evil person has done this. This suggests that the formation of their Christian doctrine and faith has not been deeply rooted in them. They try to seek immediate answers for their problems. All this implies a lack of faith and trust in God.

3.2.8 LACK OF LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOUR:

The basic commandment that grounds our Christian life is the commandment of the love of God and love of neighbor. Deuteronomy chapter 6:4 ff says, "hear O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and might... " Jesus invites us to love one another as he has loved us, to the extent of laying down one's life for another. The letter of St. John says, "if any one says he loves God and hates his brother he is a liar" (1Jn 2:4). Our relation to God must flow from our relation to one another. Whatever we do or say should be done and said with love.

For these people the meaning of love is limited to the family or tribe. The sense of tribalism is so strong that their love is limited to their tribe. They have not yet transcended their boundaries. The English proverb runs, "I for myself God for others" suits well here where people think of themselves and their own selfish desires and neglect those who are really in need of help. These people are very slow to assist and help others. Hence the word love does not speak to them of the deeper theological expression that it gives. Love for them takes on rather a narrow and a sexual connotation. Their lives needs to deepen and broaden out beyond their narrow horizon to embrace fully the teaching of Christ whose mission was to draw all people to God.

PART FOUR

PROPOSALS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE LIFE OF PRAYER IN THE PARISH

The starting point for a life of prayer is to know that we are created for and called to love. The wholeness of human beings depend upon living out the great commandment: love of God and love of neighbour. For the *final goal that all Christians are called is to love*. This can be achieved through our generous response as Christians. Now the question arises, how Christians in general and these people of Malolo live out fully what it means to be a Christian while trying to come to terms with a culture intent on swallowing up Christian values and goals. Are these people ready to live their Christian life of love transcending their narrow mentality of tribalism, structures, shamba, society etc?

The recommendations/proposals that are to follow are the fruits of reflection based on part three. It will highlight the very essential elements that the people are unaware and ignorant about, and hence will enable the people to enter deeper into their call as Christians and will pave the way for appreciating and living their vocation, which is union with God through love. For every human person is called to communion with God.¹⁶

¹⁶Austin Flannery. *Vat Council II, GS no 19*. (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), p. 824.

4.1 RESPONSIBILITY ON THE PART OF PRIESTS:

Priests have to be the replicas of Jesus.¹⁷ They should reflect Jesus in their words and actions. They can *give witness to Jesus only when they give themselves totally to prayer which is the basic requirement for them to be men of action.* Their close intimacy with Jesus will enable them to give Jesus to their people. For the English proverb says, "you cannot give to others what you do not have." God's Word must be deeply rooted in them so that, imbibed and strengthened by this Word, they will be able to nourish their people through their soul stirring homilies, sound guidance in the confessional and their comfort and concern in times of need. All these responsibilities will flow only when the priests lives are permeated with God's Word. They will be true shepherds leading their people into good pastures that is Christ Himself.

4.2 CONSCIENTIZATION ON THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS:

The message of the universal call to holiness and to a deep prayer life has never entered the ears and hearts of these people. The first century preacher, *St. Paul*, would tell his hearers in Eph 3:19 that they should be filled with the utter fullness of God. *St. Teresa* a 16th century mystic would write of generous married people, seriously living their Gospel obligation forthrightly saying that there is no reason why people in the world should not attain to the very highest mansions of prayer growth, to the transforming union.¹⁷ *St. Paul and St. Teresa were aware of the high vocation that each and every Christian is called: to ultimate union with God.*

¹⁷Thomas Dubay, *Fire Within* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), p. 2.

People even today think that holiness is the property of priests and religious. The reason being that people are never catechized or educated in the basic tenets of faith and doctrine. The teaching of Lumen Gentium chapter five highlights the basic call of every Christian. "It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state, or walk of life, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love."¹⁸

Hence it is our duty and mission to conscientize people through our homilies, talks and groups that we form, of the basic call of every Christian, to possess God, to be united to him in love. This can be achieved through prayer and close intimacy with Jesus.

4.3 TO AWAKEN THE LIFE OF PRAYER THAT IS DORMANT IN PEOPLE:

The people are satisfied with this minimum public form of worship that of Sunday. Life and prayer cannot be separated. Life without prayer is a life which fails to acknowledge the essential dimension of existence. It is a life which remains satisfied with what it sees, without discovering the grandeur, and the ethical aspect of the human destiny.¹⁹ *If we want to learn to pray we must first of all identify ourselves with every aspect of this reality.* Created in the image and likeness of God we are called to enjoy and appreciate the things of the world, giving thanks to God for this creation. We are images of God that should reflect God himself through our living. William Blake says, "we are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love."²⁰ This hints both at man's longing for exposure

¹⁸Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II, LG no 40* (Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1975), p. 364.

¹⁹Carlo Carretto, *In Search of the Beyond* (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 87.

²⁰Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Image Books, 1971), p. 9.

and the fear of what may be involved to come within its transforming power.

The early monks laid stress on simple prayer made up of short phrases drawn from psalms or other parts of the scripture. They did not go about looking for extraordinary experiences. They kept their minds and hearts empty of care and concern, so that they might forget themselves and give themselves entirely to the love and service of God.

St Basil and St. Therese would be great models for these people to awaken their lives of prayer and give glory to God. Private prayer for St. Basil the Great is prayer that is carried on while the ascetic is at work or going about his ordinary duties... while one's hands are busy with their tasks we may praise God sometimes with the tongue or if not with the heart.... Thus in the midst of our work we can fulfil the duty of prayer, giving thanks to him who has granted strength to our hands."²¹

St. Therese of Lisieux would teach us to *encounter God through the ordinary way*. It is by performing our ordinary duties extraordinarily well so that we can attain to that blessed state that we are called. She says, "take the word of God into the presence of God and let the spirit of God enlighten us as we expose ourselves in the world."²²

²¹Ibid., p. 48.

²²Frances Hogan, *Suffering And Prayer in the Life of St. Therese* (Darlington: Darlington Carmel, 1988), p. 61.

4.4 TO FORM PRAYER GROUPS:

To conscientize and to awaken the life of prayer, that is not given importance in their lives, the forming of different groups in the parish could be a wonderful help. Prayer is the fundamental reality of our lives as Christians. We are formed by our prayer as we find our center in God. Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.²³ There is a great challenge before us, to teach these people to pray. It is at this juncture that we have to take the responsibility of opening up the treasures that were hidden within for years. *Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I, says the Lord.* It is the Lord himself who uses such opportunities to reveal his love and mysteries. These are the best moments where people can learn and at the same time share their experiences. Through the prayer groups they will learn to appreciate prayer and thus their actions, their emotions, their habits and their hearts will be centered toward God and their neighbours. Think of the apostles who requested Jesus to teach them to pray. And Jesus taught them by words and actions.

The early monks were not escapists rather they sought God. They left the world in order to find out how to love and to pray, putting their full energies into what they were doing. By living together and through prayer they were able to experience what their heart desired. This is the fruit of their coming together as a community, renouncing the world, their riches and family, to form a community of love and prayer and through it to achieve the state of sanctity.

²³Roberta C. Bondi, *To Pray and To Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 11.

4.5 NEED FOR SOLITUDE:

To be in close union with God we need to give ourselves time to be alone. Jesus is the best model for us. He spent time in solitude. The saints took the Gospels as the hand book of their lives. They lived what was written there. The great Anthony said, "the one who abides in solitude and in quiet is delivered from fighting their battles- those of hearing, speech and sight- then that person will have but one battle to fight, the battle of the heart."²⁴

To be a good musician you need to study the notes, learn the techniques of musicians and practice frequently to get the hang of it. Similarly to be an athlete you need to keep your body fit by daily exercises and be trained by an expert. It is said, *practice makes a man perfect*. The same applies to prayer. For a good prayer life the atmosphere and pre-requisites are essential. Is 32:17 says, silence is the way to foster holiness. Silence paves the way for God to take charge of our lives. It is not just exterior silence alone but interior silence too. *St. John of the cross would say, what we need most in order to make progress is to be silent before this great God, with our appetites and our tongue, for the language he best hears is silent love*. In the living flame of love he would say God does not fit in an occupied heart.

St. Teresa would suggest humility, detachment and charity as the pre- requisites for obtaining peace, which is absolutely necessary for a life of prayer.²⁵ Sts. John's and Teresa's teaching are based on the Gospels. In Lk 14:33 Jesus says, "whoever of you does not

²⁴Ibid., p. 10.

²⁵Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The collected works of St. Teresa of Avila, vol. II*, (Washington: ICS Publication, 1980), p.29.

renounce all that he has cannot be my disciples." Titus 2:12 says, "what we have to do is to give up everything that does not lead to God". *To follow Jesus there is no, more or less, ifs or but. It is a radical call to serve and love Jesus.* This is the greatest challenge for each and every Christian whether rich or poor, to give ourselves, our heart completely to him. In the living flame of love St. John of the cross would say, the soul that does not shake off its cares and quiet its appetites is like one who drags a cart up hill.

4.6 SHIFT FROM EXTERIOR TO INTERIOR PRAYER:

St. Augustine would tell us how he sought God in many places and eventually found him within himself. The desert fathers sought to push themselves to greater levels of interiority... for they knew it was in the heart that they would find God.²⁶ These people too as we have seen in the previous chapter were fond of external forms of prayer. It is here that I would suggest St. Teresa's prayer of recollection. She would tell us God is everywhere. However quietly we speak he is so near that he will hear us. We need no wings to go in search of him but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon him present within us. We must talk to him as we talk to our father... tell him our troubles, speak to him...If one prays in this way, the prayer may be only vocal but the mind will be recollected because the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself to be with God.²⁷

The essence of this method is a living intimacy of love between the soul and the Divine Master. The communion must be maintained during the day so that it pervades the

²⁶George Maloney, *Prayer of the heart* (Indiana: Maria press, 1981), p.105.

²⁷op. cit., p.140.

whole life whether by prolonging this look of pure love, or by reciting vocal prayer.²⁸ If we remember what a great friend we have within us, it would be impossible to abandon ourselves to vanities and things of the world. Do we not spend time with our guests who come to visit us. We are so engrossed in conversation that we do not know how time passes. We must teach people in these forms of encountering Jesus in ordinary ways.

4.7 THE THREE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES:

Sin and passion take away our ability to see and understand our relationship with God, ourselves and one another. Instead we find ourselves swallowed up by distorted habits, feelings and attitudes about possessions, status, work, society, sex, family and tribe.²⁹ Hence our prayer shares in the damage because it is part of us.

*For our journey towards God the three theological virtues are very essential. Faith, hope and love are closely related to our three faculties: intellect, memory and will. St. John of the cross would say that these three theological virtues causes darkness and emptiness in the respective faculties leading the soul to be united to God. Faith causes darkness and void of understanding in the intellect, hope begets an emptiness of possession in the memory and charity produces the nakedness and emptiness of affections and joy in all that is not God.*³⁰

²⁸Gabriel and Thomas, *St. Teresa of Avila: Studies in her life, doctrine and times* (Westminster: The Newmann Press, 1963), p.84.

²⁹Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and To Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 38.

³⁰Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *The collected works of St. John of the Cross* (Washington: ICS Publication, 1979), p.119.

4.8 THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER:

A good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree, bad fruits. A person who has committed himself to a life of total surrender to God through prayer will experience profound effects in terms of life satisfaction, finding purpose and meaning in life, involvement in social and political causes, the ability to forgive and relate to others, etc. Prayer not only comforts, it challenges the person to move toward a greater spiritual maturity.³¹

St. Therese when she heard of the notorious criminal Pranzini who had been condemned to death for many murders, prayed for him though she knew by herself she could not ransom him. Her prayer was this, "my God I am sure you are going to forgive Pranzini and I have so much confidence in your mercy that I shall go on being sure even though he does not go to confession, or show any sign at all of being sorry; but because he is my first sinner, please give me just one sign to let me know."³² Her prayer was heard when she read in the newspaper *La Croix* that the priest had been holding the crucifix to him and as if moved by inspiration he had seized it and kissed the sacred wounds three times. This was a sign she received and after this her desire to save souls grew day by day.³³

Through prayer the person develops himself fully physically, morally, psychologically and spiritually. The person enjoys a deep sense of peace and a strong sense of the presence

³¹Margaret Poloma and George Gallup, *Varieties of prayer* (Philadelphia: Trinity press international, 1991), p.128.

³²St. Therese, *The story of a soul* (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clarke Books, 1973), p.52.

³³*Ibid.*

of God through prayer. Prayer has helped people to gain deeper insights into biblical truths and has inspired them to perform specific actions. The person who practices prayer is not moved by any feeling or emotions, rather all things that occur in his midst are nothing compared to what he experiences with God. The prayer itself becomes an agent in transforming the lives of others that they may be drawn closer to the will of God. Edgar Jackson says, "Prayer changes things, prayer is a key to power, self-improvement and better life."³⁴

4.9 PRAYER REACHES ITS CLIMAX IN THE LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOUR:

Our love for God and one another can be expressed in the way that Dorotheos describes in the form of a circle, where Christ is at the center of the circle, and outside the circle is the world. The lives of human beings are represented by many straight lines drawn from outside to the center. The closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another. The closer they are to one another the closer they are to God. Similarly vice versa, the more turned away we are from God the greater distance that separates us from one another.³⁵ This is a beautiful way of understanding the basic commandment that of the love of God and love of neighbour. They go together and one cannot be separated from the other.

Love is the basis of the whole spiritual life. Our prayer should remind us that the perfect love of God and one another had its beginning and end in the gift of God to the world in Jesus Christ in whose life and death we share. Created in God's image prayer opens up the

³⁴Edgar Jackson, *Understanding Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1982), p. 23.

³⁵Roberta Bondi, *To Pray and To Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 38.

mystery of God where all are called to union with Christ. Hence our prayer should echo what St. Paul says, "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,(Gal. 3:26-28). St. Thomas Aquinas says, "the only begotten Son of God wanting to enable us to share in his divinity assumed our nature, so that by becoming man he might make men God."³⁶ This is the dignity of every Christian to image God in our words and actions.

Hence *through prayer they will be able to transcend their narrow mentality of tribalism, love and self centredness, and be open to the spirit who has called all people into the one family of God* where love reaches the fullest expression. No greater love has a man than that he lays down his life for his friend.

³⁶Kenneth Leach, *Through Prayer* (London: Sheldon Press, 1988), p. 3.

CONCLUSION

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection says , we do not always have to be in church to be with God. We can make of our hearts an oratory where we can withdraw from time to time to converse with him there. Everyone is capable of familiar conversation with God. He recommends to a gentleman, that a brief lifting up of the heart, a brief remembrance of God, an act of adoration is enough, for it pleases God and it strengthens us in the most dangerous of circumstances.³⁷ This is what we have to instil into the minds and hearts of people, that we are not to move far away to seek God but we are to find him in our daily lives and circumstances. St. Teresa would say, we are to find him in the midst of the pots and pans.

The growth and intensity of the prayer life of individuals will depend on their self giving, determination and the attitude they have towards prayer. The deeper their prayer life, the greater their commitment to God and one another. The friendship between partners grows as their knowledge and love for each other grows. The greater their desire and longing to encounter the Lord the better will be their knowledge, experience and love of God. As the disciples approached Jesus and asked him to teach them to pray, we ought to turn to the Gospels and listen to Jesus praying most intimately. Jesus is the best example of prayer, for he is the Teacher and Master of prayer. Prayer marked all the most significant moments of his life. If we want to be people of prayer we ought to imitate Jesus. Make Jesus' prayer our own, in our daily life joys, struggles and pains.

³⁷Salvatore Scieurba,(tr). *Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. The Practice of the Presence of God* (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1994), p.107.

St. Benedict told his disciples, " And first of all, whatever good work you undertake, pray most urgently that the Lord will bring it to completion. If the very Son of God prayed to the Father in the accomplishment of his work, how much more ought we, sons and daughters of God, initiate our work with heartfelt, confident imploring prayer."³⁸ Yes, we ought to pray always with faith and confidence that God will listen. But people find it difficult to pray and it is here what we need to keep in mind, what St. Paul says, we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit comes to our aid.

It is only through our encounter with Jesus in prayer, the Scriptures, the Sacraments, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, that we can really experience this filial love of God. And we are able to acknowledge God as Father who has made us his children through the sonship we share in Christ. It is at this juncture that Christ' words come to my mind where he says, "but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you"(Jn 15:15). This is the climax of prayer where we share the intimate friendship of the Trinity.

³⁸Basil Pennington, *Challenges in Prayer*. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), p. 95.

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