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The Ministerial Office a Divine Office:

The highest order or state of a man is that of a Christian. Christians, though, like other men, by nature sinners, are saints in the sight of God, being sanctified through the blood of Jesus Christ. They are children of God, kings and priests, as they are one with Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, His King and Priest. There is within this state of Christianity no higher order, no higher or lower grade of holiness and sanctity, no Christian more a child of God, more a saint, a king, or a priest than others, but all alike participants of these divine privileges. As we read Gal. 3, 26. 28: "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." And as to our relation to one another, the Lord says: "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren." This being so, it must be maintained that pastors, or ministers, who are intrusted with the ministerial office, are of no higher order in the Church than the other members, called laymen. Their office does not invest them with such a priority. To grant it to them would be a violation of the words of the Master: "All ye are brethren." It would lead to the pernicious practise of the Roman Church to consider priests and bishops as having dominion over the faith of the Christians, and being mediators between God and the people.

All this, however, does not justify any one in thinking mean of, or disregarding, the *work* of the servants of the Church. It would be wrong indeed to overestimate the persons

The Proof-Texts of the Catechism with a Practical Commentary.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

PRAYER IN GENERAL.

(Concluded.)

John 16, 23: *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.*

When you address God in prayer, says Christ to His disciples, you speak to the *Father*; you are His children. How did you become such? Through Me. So, when praying, say: This do, Father, for Thy Son's sake, in whom we are made acceptable in Thy sight. Ask Him "*in My name,*" not in your own; go to Him relying on My merits, not on your own, and He cannot and will not refuse you. — To pray in Jesus' name means to pray in faith and firm confidence in Christ's merits. And go to Him for "*whatsoever*" it may be. There is no burden too great, no burden too small that you may not bring to the Lord in prayer. "Cast all your cares upon Him," says Peter. In order to make us bold to let our requests be known to God, the Lord not only promises that the Father will grant our

petition, but He confirms the promise with an oath: "*Verily, verily.*" And if the Lord delays in answering our prayers for a merciful purpose, let us remember that at Cana He said: "Mine hour has not yet come." "Not yet" — but come it will.

Matt. 21, 22: *All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

The all-embracing promise, "*All things, whatsoever ye shall ask,*" we considered in the previous text. The new element upon which all stress is to be here laid is *believing*.

We pray to "Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think," Eph. 3, 20, to the *almighty* God, to whom we have access through our Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. 5, 1, whose *sons* we are, John 1, 12, who promises with an oath that He will hear us, John 16, 23. Why, then, not banish all doubts from our minds and pray *believingly*? Why not fight down all doubts and obstacles which reason would interpose and cry out, "I believe, help Thou mine unbelief"? Doing this, we even in this day may hear the encouraging words, Man, woman, "great is *thy* faith; be it done unto thee as thou wilt."

1 Tim. 2, 1: "*I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.*"

With apostolic authority St. Paul exhorts (*parakalo*) Timothy that prayers "*be made for all men.*" Timothy is pastor at Ephesus. He is to teach his congregation this virtue and duty to make a practise of intercessory prayers "*for all men,*" *hyper*, = in behalf of, in the interest of, "*all men,*" for the world. Where there is life, there is breath; where there is faith, there is prayer. We pray in our own behalf, — sometimes through the devil's deceit and craftiness even this is neglected, — but to intercede before the throne of grace "*for all men,*" how little is that done, except in taking part, oftentimes in a lukewarm way, in the General Prayer pronounced from the pulpit of a Sunday! How necessary, therefore, to heed the exhortation of the apostle!

To what does he exhort? That "*supplications*," etc., be made "for all men." It is somewhat difficult to make a clean-cut distinction between and among these terms. The accumulation of the various terms designating prayer is undoubtedly made for the purpose of impressing us Christians with the great and various needs "*all men*" have for our prayers, and the plural forms of the nouns are to instigate us to pray much and fervently "*for all men*."

But let us attempt to discriminate between the more or less synonymous terms. *Supplications* (*deeseis*) are prayers that flow from the consciousness of a special need; they are prayers in which we petition God for this or that. *Prayers* (*proseuchas*) indicate prayers of a general character. The term *proseuche* expresses an act of adoration, an address to God made in reverential fear, coupled with childlike confidence. *Enteuxeis*, translated by *intercession*, sometimes has a wider application, but generally is best rendered as here by "*intercessions*." *Eucharistias*, *thanksgivings*, denotes the prayers in which thanks are offered to God for benefits received, for evils averted, for divine protection bestowed during the day, etc. (See Morning and Evening Prayers.)

So the passage may be paraphrased: Christians, intercessory prayers are of utmost importance; therefore pray much and often "for all men." Offer supplications "for all men" for their bodily and spiritual needs; specify these needs according to the times and circumstances; pray "for all men" in reverential fear, but in childlike boldness; intercede "for all men" before the throne of grace, for friend and foe; "give thanks" "for all men" for the benefits showered upon them by a gracious God.

This "*I exhort first of all*," says Paul. Not as though the intercessory prayer of believers were the thing of primary importance in their lives, but the words "*first of all*" say that this arrangement of universal church-prayers is the first part of that charge or administration which was now committed unto Timothy. Fellow-Christians, since "the effectual fervent prayer

of a righteous man availeth much," — ponder the thought, — what a stream of blessings would be poured out upon our congregations, upon the world, if all Christians would heed the apostle's exhortation to pray much, to pray fervently, "for all men"! If ever there was a time when the world needed these prayers of the Christians, that time is now.

This exhortation of the apostle finds its exemplification in our Bidding Prayer, pronounced from the pulpit Sunday after Sunday, in which, besides praying for the Church, we pray for "the President and Congress of the United States and all others in authority," for all sorts and conditions of men, "for all that travel by land and sea, for all that are in peril or need, for the afflicted in mind, body, or estate," etc.

What an exhortation, too, this text is to shake off all lukewarmness when the Bidding Prayer is said, and not to go through it, as is so often done, in a perfunctory manner!

Matt. 5, 44: *Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also speaks of the proper conduct of His disciples towards their enemies, and among other things says: "*Pray for them.*" So the passage is put here to show that Christians are to pray even for their enemies. The full import of the text becomes apparent from the context. Jesus says: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and *pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*"

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor," was and is a precept of the moral law. Thou shalt "hate thine enemy" was an addition to, and hence a perversion of, the Law by the scribes and the Pharisees. Nowhere in the Old Testament is there a command or even a permission to hate our enemies.

Authoritatively Christ opposes this perversion of God's holy Law. "But I say," over against what "ye have heard

that it hath been said." I say unto you: "Love your *enemies*." Thus Christ explains the term "neighbor." "Neighbor" includes one who is your enemy. Even he is to be the object of your love. In Luke 10, 29 a certain lawyer asks Jesus, "Who is my *neighbor*?" In the story of the Good Samaritan he receives the answer: Even your bitter enemy.

Now as to the passage itself. "*Love your enemies*" may be looked upon as the topic-sentence. The following phrases explain and develop the concepts: "love" and "enemies," exhibiting the great contrast between love and hate.

How may your "neighbors" manifest their *enmity*? They may "curse you," "hate you," "despitefully use you, and persecute you." How are you to manifest your *love*? "Bless them"—say loving words; "do good to them"—perform loving deeds; "*pray for them*," the climax of the manifestation of love, "*pray for them*"—thus showing love of the *heart*, from which source "blessing them" and "doing good to them" flows. The climactic way in which the concepts "love" and "enemies" are unfolded, and the juxtaposition of the thoughts: "*Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you,*" go to show that the greater the manifestation of hatred of our "neighbor" is, the greater should be our manifestation of love. This is not the conduct of natural man, but that of a child of God. Thus you, My disciples, says Christ, prove, thus it becomes apparent by your works, that you have received a mind from your *Father*. In the words of Jesus: "That ye may be the *children* of your *Father* which is in heaven."—We sigh: Lord Jesus, teach us so to pray and so to act!

Heb. 9, 27: *It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the Judgment.*

Are prayers for the dead justifiable? No. Scripture knows nothing whatsoever thereof. The question, however, requires an answer because of the Roman Catholic and the Greek

Churches in which prayers for the dead are offered in their so-called *mass*, according to which Christ is offered still to-day as a bloodless sacrifice for the sins of the living, and for the dead who swelter in purgatory. Both, the mass as well as purgatory, are unscriptural, hence godless inventions of the papists. According to the Council of Trent, "the holy Synod" teaches that "not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who here are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, it [the mass] is rightly offered, agreeably to a tradition of the apostles."

What monstrous doctrine — "departed in Christ," and still "not as yet fully purified"! But it is founded on "*tradition*," and tradition is not Scripture. When scribes and Pharisees propounded the question to Jesus: "Why do Thy disciples transgress the *tradition* of the elders?" He answered by a slashing counter-question: "Why do ye transgress the commandment of *God* by your *tradition*?" Matt. 15, 3. Indeed, it is true: "In *vain* do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the *commandments of men*." Matt. 15, 9.

Is there any ground for prayers for the dead in the Bible? The one simple passage quoted in our Catechism is all-sufficient and plain: "*It is appointed unto men once to die*." What next? After this a purgatory, or a hades, or an intermediate state in which there is another chance for the ungodly, or where prayer for such as are there detained might avail? Nothing of the kind. After death, what? "*But after this the Judgment*." Further comment is unnecessary.

Or take Prov. 11, 7: "When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish; and the hope of unjust men perisheth." Prayers for the wicked dead avail naught, and prayers for the faithful dead are unnecessary, for they live in bliss: "*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth*." Rev. 14, 13.

Where should we pray? Everywhere, 1 Tim. 2, 8; in private, Matt. 6, 6; in church, Ps. 26, 12.

1 Tim. 2, 8: *I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*

In chapter 2, St. Paul instructs Timothy on congregational prayer. In vv. 1—7 we are informed *for whom* a Christian congregation should pray; in vv. 8—15 we are told *who* is to pray publicly.

“Lifting up hands” was the Oriental fashion when addressing God; to-day the custom of folding hands in prayer predominates. The former posture is expressive of the truth that all blessings must come from heaven, from God, Ps. 28, 2; 63, 5; the latter indicates submission to, and trust in, God’s will.—“The men” are to lift up “holy hands.” The men are Christian men, believers, saints, *holy* men, whose imperfections are covered by Christ’s blood and righteousness. Christians, holy men, engage in work becoming Christians. Their handiwork tends to the welfare of the neighbor and to the glory of God. No tainted money, no grafted coin, no profiteering, soils the hands of “holy” men. A hypocrite may assume the posture of prayer as well as the true Christian, but a hypocrite cannot “lift up” or fold “holy hands.” Besides being cautioned to lift up “holy hands,” the men are also reminded to pray “*without wrath and doubting.*” Men, moving about among men, meet with more occasions and temptations than women do, to be offended by this act or that word of their fellow-men, to resent it, and to harbor *wrath* in their soul against their fellow-men. Men, moving among men, coming in contact with unbelievers, cannot avoid hearing scurrilous remarks and taunts about, and gibes at, religion and religious practises. Such poisonous remarks, often clothed in witticisms, may cause them to *doubt* this or that truth of the Word. Against these two sins—wrath and doubting—to which men are especially exposed, they are to be on their guard; against these especially they are to fight in the armor of God, to vanquish them, and so in the proper frame of mind address God. See Jas. 1, 6. 7.

Now, the point of the passage *in loco*. "I will," says the apostle, "that men pray *everywhere*" — *in every place*, not only at home, in the family circle, but also (see context) in public worship. Here, if circumstances so demand, Christian men, (*tous andras*), not women, should pray, and men should not be ashamed to pray.

But observe the "*everywhere*" — "*in any place.*" Prayer is not confined to a certain locality or place, but *everywhere* the Father may be "worshiped in spirit and in truth"; *everywhere* — in the lions' den, as did Daniel; in the fiery furnace, as did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; in the mountain, in the garden, as did our Savior.

Matt. 6, 6: *Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Again we are taken to the Sermon on the Mount. Treating of prayer, our Savior gives two cautions: 1. When praying avoid ostentation; 2. guard against the superstition as though "vain repetitions," "much speaking," made the prayer effectual. The first is a Pharisaic practise, the second heathenish. Our passage argues against the malpractise of the scribes and Pharisees.

"The hypocrites," scribes and Pharisees, says Jesus, "love to pray standing in the synagogs and in the corners of the streets, *that they may be seen of men.*" Prayer offered in this spirit and with this purpose in view is an abomination in the sight of God. To show the true spirit in which prayer is to be offered, the Lord employs beautiful, striking imagery. "But *thou, when thou prayest,*" act not as did the Pharisees; "enter into thy closet." This generally was an upper room in the Oriental house, called the oratory — the prayer-room. Here, the Lord would say, you are apart from men, in the privacy of your home. "Shut the door," secure the utmost privacy, avoid all possible opportunity for ostentation. When a boy,

the writer was permitted to visit a convent at a stated hour—the hour of convent prayer. Passing along the corridor, room after room, or rather cell after cell, stood wide open, the occupant, a nun, on her knees praying ostentatiously, “to be seen of men.” “Shut the door!”—“Pray to thy Father.” You and your Father are alone. “Thy Father seeth in secret,” He is with you, hears your petitions, and answers them. Prayer is a matter between you and Him. It is an affair of the heart. While praying, think of nothing else than your prayer; give your heart up to the Father.—

Observe the occasion which called forth this declaration of our Lord, and all thoughts as though prayer in public were displeasing to God are dispelled.—Moreover, the text—and this is the purpose for which our Catechism quotes it—establishes the fact that prayer may be, should be, offered also in the privacy of our “upper chamber.” God grant that every Christian home may know of an oratory!—

As to the propriety of prayer in *public* worship, it will suffice to quote a few self-explanatory passages from the hymn-book of the Old Testament believers, the psalms. David says, Ps. 26, 12: “In the *congregations* will I bless the Lord.” Ps. 27, 6 we read: “And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me; therefore will I offer *in this tabernacle* sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord.” Again, Ps. 22, 25: “My praise shall be of Thee in the great *congregation*; I will pay my vows before them that fear Him.”

Finally, *when* shall we pray? The answer we find in 1 Thess. 5, 17; Is. 26, 16.

1 Thess. 5, 17: *Pray without ceasing.*

Does this say that we are to walk about continually with folded hands, mumbling words of prayer? Are we not to sleep? to work? “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to *work* with your own hands, even as we charged you.”

1 Thess. 4, 11. "We commanded you, if any will not work, neither let him eat." 2 Thess. 3, 10. Never was there a more industrious Christian worker than St. Paul himself, who admonishes the Thessalonians: "Pray without ceasing." But during all the busy hours of each day, his thoughts were turned heavenward, awaiting "that blessed hope." His frame of mind was such as to be able at any time to call upon God, to pray, praise, and give thanks. "Prayer is to be the accompaniment of our whole life—a stream ever flowing, now within sight and hearing, now disappearing from view, forming the under-current of all our thoughts, and giving to them its own character and tone." (Findlay.) Cf. Eph. 6, 18; Luke 18, 1—7.

Is. 26, 16: *Lord, in trouble have they visited Thee; they poured out a prayer when Thy chastening was upon them.*

It is a sad fact that in days of sunshine and prosperity our prayers are often half-hearted, weak, faint. So the Lord in His wisdom sends us "trouble" for our good; He "chastens" us. He would thereby draw us nigh unto Him. "In trouble" the Christians are stirred up to prayer, to earnest, fervent prayer. In trouble we "visit" Him, look to Him for help. We remember that He is the Lord, Jehovah, our covenant God; we flee to His covenant of mercy, implore Him for forgiveness of our sins by which we have merited "trouble" and "chastening" a thousandfold, and we "pour out a prayer" from an overflowing, burdened heart for help and deliverance. "Before, prayer came drop by drop, but now they pour out a prayer; it comes now like water from a fountain, not like water from a still." (M. Henry.) — In affliction those will seek God early who before sought Him slowly. Hos. 5, 15. This is one of the chief purposes of "trouble" and "chastening" — to "visit" Him, and to "pour out a prayer" to Jehovah, the God of mercy.

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(To be continued.)