

PRAYER



by PAUL SÉDIR
circa 1910

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FOREWORD

Prayer is a prodigious act, to whose urgency and virtue all Masters of the Inner Life have drawn the attention of their disciples. Sédir did the same with his friends. In his books, in his letters and in his interviews, he spoke to them constantly about prayer.

We believe we are helping our friends to better understand, and to better practice prayer by finding reflections and exhortations for them from the works of our Friend which make up this volume.

(Émile Besson)



1. PRAYER

*“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,
ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”*
(John, XV:7)

Prayer is the most difficult undertaking which can be offered to man. However, everything around us prays: doesn't the stone which matures in the darkness of the mine seek the day? Doesn't the plant pierce the wall in order to find light? Beasts halt before the sun at least once a day; the ocean regularly rises to meet the Selenite¹ emanations which revive it; all of them ask Nature to sustain their powers. The atheist prays, since he works; the demon prays, since he covets; the pebble, since it strives to become a crystal. People desire happiness, the planets also by leaning on their poles; our intelligence itself is so vast only because it has asked so much. Does this mean that each of these beings has asked as it should? No. All of creation is imperfect; but it has a sense of this helplessness, and the foreboding of a higher stasis.

Every action is a request; and every being acts as it needs to, since it lives. A result is not achieved because of our will, but because by working towards its accomplishment, our energies – even the most physical – desire and hope for success.

Among beings it is man who most often refuses to recognize this law; and yet it is most particularly to him that it applies. I hope to show you how unreasonable such conduct is.

Understood in its true dignity, prayer is a desire for Heaven and a conversation with God. It is a grace and the source of grace; it is a seed in the soil of eternity, a work more precious than all masterpieces, greater than the world, more powerful, one might say, than God Himself. Don't be surprised, and let us set this notion aside. In the refined realms of reason we are in the lush forests of Love. Let us silence intelligence and open the windows of our hearts; let us contemplate the endless fields of eternal hills. What can't I make visible to you?

Two movements occur in prayer. Desire is humiliated, exalted and takes refuge in Divine Mercy, which is Christ; grace responds to Him, strives and lets itself be devoured by Him. These two are the mystical form of faith; and the more desire sinks into the abyss of humility, the more it attracts grace; the more our heart is nourished, the more the Word develops deep within us.

Prayer is the transport of our personality towards the Absolute. It surrenders to the Father, it throws itself into His arms, it converses with Him, but without words; it doesn't use the intellect; it is the heart which ultimately touches its total complement, which is astonished, falters, dies and is reborn, in an infinitely increasing beatitude.

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However, without the express help of Jesus we can do nothing. He, the Word, gives the vital power to all; He gives it to them again, through redemption. It is at the same time both universal

¹ Archaic term for inhabitants of the moon – PV.

and individual. He waits silently at the door of our heart and, at the first sign He opens His arms to us, only letting us see the clarity He radiates to the extent of what our sick eyes can bear.

Jesus stands in silence at the door of our heart.

He waits for passion, power and knowledge to finally reveal their true savor of bitter ashes. There He is, His noble eyelids lowered so that the depth of His gaze does not frighten the watchman; He holds back the words which would destroy; He hides His merciful hands, because their contact would kindle too soon the devouring fire of Love in the veins of the sinner.

Jesus wants us whole, from this body built by angels to the heart where He himself builds the temple He Himself intends to inhabit. And above all it is a voluntary offering which He desires. He could take it all; but, through a play of His tenderness, He loves only what we offer Him.

It is so that the gesture of this offering may spontaneously be born in us that Jesus sets disillusionments, shocks and thorns before us, for we do not want to listen to Him. Weariness and fear teach us prayer. As the man chased by the forest fire and maddened by remorse throws himself into the river, so we shall plunge into the blazing and fresh waves of Love.

Let us taste completely the savor of prayer. It is something more than an optional and particular practice. It is a universal act.

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God alone, in His appearance as the Word, possesses all the details of the cosmic plane. The fate of the microbe and that of the nebula are equally present to Him. There is nothing in us which doesn't come from Him: even the very desire which calls us to go to Him is inspired by Him; our free will only acts at the instant of our decision. Thus, the power to pray is a recompense.

Now, few people know how to pray. The apparent cause of this ignorance is education, practical concerns, environmental influences; but the real cause is older and deeper. Man cannot accomplish anything if his mind doesn't contain the ability corresponding to that act and if his body does not possess the organ corresponding to that ability. On the other hand, psychic abilities aren't abstractions; they are real and objective organisms, the members and viscera of the mind. In physics as well as in hyperphysics, everything begins with a small seed which work and suffering slowly develops. Just as a teenager who doesn't exercise walking has weak legs, so the person who doesn't pray atrophies the physio-psychic organ of prayer. If we cannot pray, it is because we have spent years, centuries perhaps before arriving here on earth, without thinking of God, without the concern of Heaven. So, let's start right away to repair this staggering neglect; not tomorrow, not tonight, but right now! How do we know that Death isn't waiting for us behind this door? Let's give all our attention to this enterprise; let's bring all our actions back to focus on it, and let every circumstance becomes a reason for us to pursue it and perfect it.

I have neither the desire nor the inclination to pray; I don't feel the need for it, you might say. Then begin to follow Christ through your deeds; make the simplest of efforts; and soon when are be chatting with your friends, stifle the first slander that comes to your lips; stop it at all costs. Soon you will feel the breath of the perverse demon who will whisper to you: "Go on, say it! This

is ridiculous, since it is true. How important is it?" And, if you want to defeat the tempter with all your strength you will have to call for help. And this cry may perhaps be your first prayer.

Often our heart of Light struggles within us, cries and complains. But our consciousness remains deaf. It hasn't built up its spiritual ears; it has well educated brain cells which can take in the voices of many beings, geniuses, sages or gods; yet it has neglected to take in the voice of the Friend. You probably see here why our first steps towards Heaven are anguish of remorse and repentance; the plow must tear the soil before the sowing.

Prayer is an ineffable act. Because it admits to being nothing, it can do anything; it transforms the horrible, fills the abyss and razes the mountains. Like refreshing dew, it assuages, washes and delivers. It is the fire, the anvil and the hammer. It is unknown and nothing is made manifest without it; ignorant, it teaches us everything; so simple that the most educated scholars don't understand it; it stammers, and cohorts of angels bend down to hear it; a wretched little vibration, the prestigious hands of the ardent Seraphs collect it trembling; an exhausted breath, it gives new life to life. Colorless tears are transmuted into shimmering gems, the root of joy, the wisdom of wisdom, the gentleness of strength, the perfection of speech, the fulfillment of promise, the universal medicine, such is prayer; such is its ever-living incarnation, Jesus Christ.

Prayer is the weapon which fights for God's justice, the double-edged sword that consumes wherever it finds the blight of iniquity. Through it the word of man, the magnificent sign of his greatness, rises back up to his Principle, rushes towards God and reaches the sources of Life. The human word recovers its original strength, becomes an action, attracts the Divine Action and is incorporated into that Word, its Creator. True prayer is the daughter of Love; it is the salt of the living knowledge and makes it germinate in our heart, its natural terrain. Impetuous, ardent, persevering, it knows interruption no more than eternity knows change. Heaven loves the fact that it is conquered "by violence" and that it attaches itself to it as the roots of the tree attach themselves to the nourishing earth.

Books cannot teach us to pray, nor can joys, and I don't know if there are a dozen men on earth who truly know how to pray. There are thaumaturges, of course, and saints; we see them praying, and their requests receive answers; but these amazing beings are, for the most part, like sentries passing on a password without always understanding it. They execute a directive; but prayer, this wonderful act, this terrifying temerity, this incomprehensible and obscure exchange, takes place in the beyond. Now, if these venerable men do not understand it, how would we, the rabble, know? And yet, despite our ignorance, our meanness, our nullity, they must pray. They must.

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Some people never pray, either because they don't think about it, or because they don't believe, or because they don't accept prayer. It's a matter of education, or culture, or flexibility in reacting to the knocks of Destiny. In these people, the immaterial organ of prayer is not yet developed, and their being consciousness ignores the use of the Invisible Powers. When the appetite of the immortal spirit is directed towards the Divine, and this always happens at some point in its evolution, then pious desires are born; however, every desire constructs its own organ

of action and form of expression. It is by virtue of this fact that sacred artists give a special outline to the heads of the holy characters they represent.

The more one puts off an effort, the more difficult it becomes; the less we pray, the less we can pray. It would therefore be wise to begin immediately, despite lack of inclination, taste, boredom, failure; the least circumstances should be used as reasons to ask Heaven for assistance. We are never troublesome to God, and never will we do what duty commands us to do too well.

Why pray, perhaps you're thinking, since the First Cause acts with justice, kindness and perfection? Prayer would then be childishness, it would show the blindness of our heart, or a tenacious selfishness. That would be the stubborn child who whines after his toy, the pride that considers itself important enough to disturb the universe at will, or the being who doesn't understand that his desire might not be satisfied!

I don't think so. If perfection and the ideal didn't exist, would Providence have had the cruel courage to sow its feelings in our depths? Man's path is similar to that of all other beings; let him follow in simplicity the spontaneous sense of life, delighting in it, and it will not be possible for him to err.

If an orangutan is seven times stronger than man, why should there not be invisible powers stronger than the inner powers encompassed by the term 'will'? When one of these colossuses grabs you by the neck and shakes you, like you do with a rabbit, what remains to you if not to cry for help? That's what prayer is all about. If you are attacked in the forest, and you are loved by your servants, they will defend you. As a result, we should be loved by the servants of Heaven, that is to say to do the Father's will; this is how our prayer will be heard.

Prayer is necessary. Not opportunistic prayer, nor economic prayer in served-up slices, nor faint-hearted prayer, nor selfish prayer. What is needed is a perpetual prayer which embraces the smallest details and the largest objects; a prayer of overflowing tenderness, and nevertheless impassive; a prayer which is naked, straight, sure of Jesus, but completely self-abasing; that's what it takes. From an incandescent heart falls the fresh rain of the good God upon the soil parched by hell. Surely God knows our needs before we reveal them to Him; however, because He loves us, He likes to see us have recourse to Him.

Before our King nothing is childish, nothing is irremediable. Before us, then, let everything appear as a seed of eternity. For he who, at this hour, assumes the office of prayer, there should be neither vigil, nor sleep, nor rest, nor reading, nor relaxation, but only prayer and sorrow. Let him force himself to the point of breaking. Let his body submit or let it fall. And, if the body falls, the mind will continue the work on the other side...

All desire is an appetite, a hunger. When it is God Whom one desires, it is called prayer; in reality, every desire, every effort is a prayer. To be hungry, our powers must be expended.

The work, whatever it may be, is therefore to prepare for prayer; it is even, with good example, the only true and fruitful prayer for the vast majority of men. For make no mistake, the so-called 'contemplatives' are not examples to follow; they constitute the exception. Nowhere

does Christ speak of tranquillity, ecstasy, spiritual marriage; I would say that all these are human embellishments, if I were not afraid of scandalizing you. Man's first duty is to live, act, and work; if time remains to him, he can engage in whatever study, whatever art he enjoys. He has the freedom to do so; he can also continue his duty and exceed it: that would be true mysticism.

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Prayer is the most superhuman of efforts. At the door of this temple which is our heart are people who are anxiously waiting for us to open the doors of the sanctuary where they can pray; and there are some who die of this desire. Many perceive God only through our hearts, and they are outraged and discouraged if our prayers are poorly done. We are responsible for these sufferings even if we're unaware of them; and we are even more responsible for them once we know. And when we unconsciously surrender to the desires of these beings, our voice is for them a harmony, a light and a dew.

In the spiritual universe, everything is in intimate cohesion, everything interpenetrates and communicates. A moral effort facilitates charity and prayer; an act of charity helps us to overcome and to pray.

The exhaustion of the good workman, the vigils of the wise, the agonies of the artist are prayers, prayers which are far more alive, more holy, more beautiful and more precious than mechanically recited *Our Fathers*.

To imitate Jesus by spreading good, suffering evil, giving of one's time to others, one's strength, one's intelligence, one's love; to suffer the evils of the past and the evil that will certainly come to us because of our good deeds, is another kind of prayer, the prayer of example.

When one exercises charity, discernment is useful; but not when you pray. Pray for those who ask for it, for those who do not know that prayer exists, for those who do not want prayer. First, remove from your prayer all it contains of personal compassion: have pity, but pity for the afflicted, not pity for how his pain affects you personally. Tell yourself, when pity remains silent within you, tell yourself that all men are fragile and miserable, but that you are the most fragile and the most miserable. Bring this into your heart; look for convincing motives, use this persuasion of yourself for hours if necessary; for without this compassion, your prayer would not take off. And pray trembling; for it is a terrible thing to be obeyed by God. Tremble for the favors obtained; keep silent on the graces which descend. The pure heart can command, and every being obeys it; but, if you think you are pure, isn't that proof that you are not? Remember that a thaumaturge that operates in the name of God equals zero; but that a thaumaturge who operates in his own name, even if he desires good, can only attain illusory quantities of negative grandeur.

The child of God also prays for those who persecute him. He prays in three ways. The easiest thing is to say: "Father, I ask you to forgive my enemies. The second is: "Father, I thank you for sending me this humiliation and I ask you not to punish my enemies." The third prayer is: "Father, I pray to you for my enemies, who are my benefactors, because they tell me better than my friends what I am; and that is why I ask you to bless them."

*

Suffering teaches prayer. Let's first learn not to complain. To lament is to falter; don't become impatient, panic, beg for consolation, or dwell upon one's sorrows. If you wish to grow, if you want the strong remedy to work, don't seek help in any being; seek refuge only in the Supernatural Doctor. If He tries to heal you, it is because He loves you. No one in the world loves you like Him; It is through crying that He watches you suffer.

When pain becomes unbearable, lock yourself in and in solitude weep, moan, and pray for hours, or days if necessary; but only show yourself before men, your brethren, with a calm appearance. Does such an effort seem impossible to you? No, many have endured it already. Does it seem pointless to you? No, no effort is useless; and this one above all, because it fits perfectly with the dignity of your soul, at the cost of your tears.

In truth, our tears belong only to God. They belong to the Father, because they are alive; they belong to the Word, because they save us; they belong to the Spirit, because they evoke peace; they belong to the Virgin, because they are sources of humility.

Tears are precious; let us take care not to exhaust their Divine source by shedding them for unworthy reasons. They should spread only in the most secret crypt of the heart and in the night of will, because stars spring from them and they pour hope upon unsuspecting despair.

The greatest suffering is compassion, which is communion with the suffering of others. But we are far from understanding it! We don't immerse ourselves enough in human suffering, we don't go far enough for the sick, the poor, the tortured. We don't have enough faith or simplicity, enough love. We listen to the moan of the incurable or the sob of the desperate from too far away. We should sit next to their bed, listen to them at length, cry with them and realize that we have nothing to say to them. We should hear the little ones complain: "Mom, I'm hungry" and see your wallet empty and suffer the sullen gaze of those wretches to whom you have come as saviors.

When you have been bruised by the walls of these Gehennas, then you will learn prayer, then your heart will bounce back to the heavens and bring down the miraculous answer.

Put yourself in the necessity to need God; ask Him for work, ask Him for trials; exhaust yourself carrying someone else's loads if yours are light. You will be worn out, exhausted, perhaps you will fall into the mud? It doesn't matter: anything is better than stagnating in indifference. It is only when his legs refuse to bear him that the man falls to his knees; exhaustion alone makes our arms cross themselves for supplications which overcome justice.

And then our prayers, naked and poor, but vibrant and immaterial, will reach their object and become earthly realities. It is essential that we become the sowers of divine graces.

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Prayer and action are also important; but they must both be accomplished without rigidity, with ease, with joy. For example, depriving oneself of a good cigar to please Christ is better than depriving oneself of it in order to acquire the virtue of temperance; to give alms out of reasoned

duty is less good than doing it out of spontaneous compassion. Virtues must spring from the source. Every effort of the disciple will be to keep his heart, his will, his consciousness for each of his actions, his feelings and his thoughts in God.

Don't act like the wise. On the beach of the infinite ocean they test it cautiously with their foot. Throw yourself into the sea; this will be the most piercing cry for help. The weak according to the Spirit harden themselves in order to evoke their strength. You people are strong enough to scrutinize your weakness. Alternate action with prayer. When you agonize because you acted, throw yourself into another agony: that of prayer.

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It is reactions which are the hardest work of praying. A Soldier of Christ asks, for example, that an embezzler be arrested; immediately, the corps of all the administrative machinery which this embezzler affects, the accomplices, those of the enemy, all its corresponding structures, its sciences, its factories, its intellectual centers, all the false angels of religion – in a word, all the servants of the Beast – all these react and try to overwhelm the servant of Heaven. The Army of Matter against the Army of the Spirit. So the Soldier of Christ, seeing all his efforts temporarily in vain, becomes discouraged, his calm is affected, he becomes irritated, and he criticizes: "That's it, here we go all over again."

Since our special work is rightly the clearest path of the inner life, let me give an example familiar to you: the illusions of prayer.

We are mistaken when we believe our prayer to be meaningless and void when a certain good nature doesn't accompany it. On the contrary, arid and painful prayer goes further. Don't confuse the ardor of imagination or psychic sensitivity with that complete offering of our self which alone constitutes prayer. All spiritual joy is a gratuitous, undeserved gift to which we have no right; love is beyond all this; love lives from privation.

So, when the sacred ardor of prayer delights you in this world, remember that dazzlement, transports and thunder is not from Heaven. Heaven is a shudder, a breath, an imperceptible touch at the foundation of your heart. And there you are moved, bathed in a supernatural freshness, filled with certainty, overflowing with goodness, ready to endure everything and to undertake everything. Such is the mode of eternal life.

2. THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer is essentially a prayer for peace, harmony and unity. The disciple who says it on behalf of someone who is suffering asks that peace might come to that man, to his body, to his heart, to his thoughts and to his life. And peace descends to the extent that he who asks, through the custom of his everyday life, has made himself one with the hidden One whom he implores, and Whose final legacy to His first servants was peace².

Nothing our Lord Jesus Christ thought, did or said came from anywhere else than Heaven; that is why He is philosophically incomprehensible; the mind cannot even consider that inflowing of the Absolute into the relative, nor that outflowing of the relative towards the Absolute, whose double curve is the very life of our Savior; it's the realization of the impossible, the materialization of the invisible, the existence of the inconceivable.

Thus, the model prayer which He gave to His disciples is not only an expression of the needs of the Universe; it is also a statement of the things that the Father deems useful to our personal beatitude as well as to the beatitude of Nature as a whole. This is an image of cosmic movement: it shows the components, the beginnings, the ends and the means. It represents the army of beings in its collective ascent, and the law of the perfecting of the human composite. It is, in a word, the image of Life.

It is therefore with good reason that certain mystics have discovered the rule of the extraordinary balance of individual consciousness within it, while others have recognized the secret of the creation of the world.

The first of these points of view is St. Teresa who develops it most clearly³. According to her, when the soul has recognized the *Father who art in heaven* by the methods of human knowledge, by the progressive operations of understanding, it enters into a state of abandonment and begins to practice the prayer of quietude whose first two requests of the Our Father describe the two phrases. The first is praise. *Hallowed by Thy Name* is, in fact, a rest after the tiring asceticism of purgative life and logical meditation. It is the first dawn of the contemplative life. The person has expended almost all its effort; the Creator is going to illuminate him as a response to the second request: *Thy kingdom come*. The quietude reaches his level here; joy descends into the soul and is sometimes communicated to the body, which can then become the stage for extraordinary phenomena.

But, once this first comfort has been tasted, a new period of work begins whose third request: *Thy will be done* lays the foundations by humility, by the complete inner annihilation of the person.

² This is from John 14:27, when, at the Last Supper, Jesus says to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" – PV.

³ St. Theresa spent much time teaching her Sisters how to pray. She believed the words of the Lord's Prayer should be joined to mental prayer, ever keeping God in mind. She suggested they took an hour to recite it, reflecting and meditating on each line after they said it. Her detailed commentary on it can be read in her book *The Way of Perfection* – PV.

The essence of this work is the assimilation of the Divine Will through the human will, whose life gradually becomes a constant sacrifice; the pains this effort produces are the signs of the new birth, of the mystical genesis of the Word within us. This is that *daily bread* which brings us a crumb each day; food so strong, so generous that regular souls cannot endure it. All the troubles, all the trials, all the persecutions, all the sufferings imaginable are, in reality, only the effects of this Divine remedy upon our inner spirit.

And the fifth request, *forgiveness*, must be the touchstone of all the virtues, the sign of regeneration, the objective and material proof that all parts of our being have assimilated the mystical bread, the living Word.

But let us leave to the souls of the elite the mysteries discovered by their exceptional efforts; and let us remain at the level where the common people live. Doesn't it offer us everything that our weakness is capable of overcoming? Put another way, in the Lord's Prayer it's enough to think of the words as stating real things, rather than allegories or vague abstractions. Examine each of these words in the full extent of its universal domain, in the full depth of its human sense; one alone would then suffice to fill your hours with enthusiasm, to pour into you all strength, to enlighten you with all certainty.

This Name of Father, the power, the wisdom, the goodness it evokes, the return to Him to whom everything should lead us; that reign over the world and over us, and over all parts of both, that effective, present, constant government – paternal at first, then royal; that will, Christ himself, which we wish to see realized, incorporated in everything, in the universe, in everything in our person; that bread, source and sum of every food imaginable in all the varieties of Nature's substances; those offenses, committed or suffered, the despairing reign of evil against which one must hope; those excellent temptations which make spiritual athletes of us and all beings; that evil which charms us and which we do not understand, which must be confronted, and from which the Father alone delivers us: what immense subjects to reflect upon, to admire, to worship! And what need is there, if one contemplates them with simplicity, in their hieroglyphic sense, of scholarly transcriptions and rituals?

The obscure tasks which we must undertake are no less arduous than the transports of speculative mysticism; they may be even more so. The Father gives to whom He wants and what He wants. That which is sublime now who can become foolish in an hour. It is therefore better to consider only the immediate effort and focus our energies on the present.

Here are some useful explanations, in the present state of our knowledge, to help understand the Lord's Prayer and to say it the best way possible, from the bottom of our hearts, uniting ourselves with the One who handed it down to us.

1. – *Our Father*. The notion of aid which is born in man's the heart should above all rise up, in good logic, to the Almighty Being. When Christ calls God 'the Father', it is to make us feel His infinite concern. The God of the Gospels is not the vindictive Jehovah of the Israelites, nor the indifferent and impassive Parabrahm of the Vedas⁴. The love He has for us makes Him concerned

⁴ *Parabrahm* is used in the Hindu religion to denote the supreme transcendental reality, an impersonal God beyond manifestation, not unlike the Ain of the Kabbalah – PV.

about our fate, distressed by our errors, happy for our healthy joys. If we only had our eyes open, we would be confounded by the spectacle of all the beings and all the powers that this God uses to give us life, to preserve it and cause it to grow in us. Far from chastising us, He watches for the slightest movements of repentance in order to throw Himself before the Prodigal Son, to reach out to him and comfort him. Nothing happens in our existence – we do not take a piece of bread, we do not touch a pebble – without the Father having foreseen it and, having judged it good, had permitted it. All this you know, but it isn't bad for you to hear it said, because often we do not dare to follow the logical consequences of spiritual intuition; the nature within us is fearful and trembles before Divine clarity. So, listen to the almost imperceptible voice of the Friend who says everything in the center of your heart and, when you have heard Him, obey Him in everything.

2. – *Who art in heaven.* The heaven of the Gospels isn't a paradise like the places of repose of the ancient religions; paradises are only planes of existence which are more or less superior to the earth, and most are where man's spirit relaxes and regains strength for a subsequent descent to some hell. Every place of existence is a paradise for some and a purgatory for others, depending on their previous merits. Among these "gardens of delights" are some where beauty, intelligence and splendor flourish a million times more abundantly than here on earth; but, although the happiness that can be enjoyed on those radiant spheres is as unimaginable to us as astronomical magnitudes compared to earthly measurements, one only remains for a limited time in those worlds. Whereas the Absolute, Heaven, the Kingdom of God offers us an eternal sojourn.

The Father resides beyond His creation, in the immutability of His permanence. He is everywhere, even in the kingdom of Death; He is on earth and on all worlds, since Jesus descended there.

3. – *Hallowed be Thy Name.* In specialized works you would have read esoteric adaptations of the Our Father, where they expound extravagantly on Kabbalistic terms more or less identical to the words which concern us here. Don't get too excited about these speculations. Of ten authors who write about such subjects, believe me when I say there isn't one who writes from experience. The Sephiroth do exist, and all the planes of which the Zohar and all the Lokas of which the Brahmins speak⁵, and many others; only it is very difficult to explore them while maintaining one's psychic balance. It's not curiosity that amateurs lack: it's ability.

Even the highest adepts know little or nothing about the essence of the Name, nor that of the Number. Do not attempt to expend extraordinary mental efforts on this; save your energy for your daily duty. Thus, you will sanctify the name of the Lord in a much more vivid, much healthier and fruitful way than by any kind of meditation. The tribute we pay to God with this request is the simple recognition of the nothingness we are before Him, and the infinite gratitude we should have for all His blessings. If there are beings in the world whose shoelaces we are not worthy to loosen⁶, all the more reason we are not worthy to raise our eyes to the Father. We could never love Him enough; we could never thank Him enough.

⁵ While the Kabbalah speaks of four worlds of increasing etheriality, being Assiah, Yetzirah, Briah and Aziluth, early Hinduism spoke of four planes not dissimilar in concept, called Kama Loka, Rupa Loka, Arupa Loka and Nirvana – PV.

⁶ This is a reference to John 1:27, when John the Baptist says: "He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose" – PV.

4. – *Thy kingdom come.* God is the Master of the Universe; but He waits for mankind to recognize this in order to clearly affirm His sovereignty. In the current state of things, He therefore leaves visible power to those beings who abuse the force He has given them. This usurpation doesn't happen without His tacit consent, it is true; but He hides from men the permanence of His concern; so that, looking up from below, it isn't His reign which blossoms, but rather that of gods, devils and men. Heaven's children must therefore desire the Divine manifestation – in other words, men's submission to their Creator – which is perfect in the Divine Plane where that manifestation constitutes the Kingdom of God through its biological realization, and which must gradually descend from the Absolute to be incarnated successively in each of the realms of the relative: in nebulae, in planets, in fluids, in animals, plants, minerals and men, in every being, collective or individual, invisible or visible.

God's reign in man is his physical, moral or intellectual health; God's reign over a planet is a physical, organic, social paradise; God's reign in the Universe will be total reintegration. And one of the crucial effects of Christ's work was to lay the foundations of this Divine and beatific sovereignty here on earth.

5. – *Thy will be done.* It's obvious that we don't know God's plans directly; that's the main reason why we must ask Him to accomplish them. We're certain of their excellence, intellectually at first, by definition, so to speak; and then we want to see them achieved out of love for their Author. The Absolute, in fact, is not the impassive, indifferent and impersonal Being the Pantheists claim; since He is the Absolute, He must firstly contain all the forms of relative life and, when He inclines towards a person, He takes the perfect form of their manner of being. As the Father of the world, God is interested in us, participates in our joys and sorrows, and loves to see our hands raised towards Him. His indulgent tenderness makes Him, the Almighty, seek our collaboration, however superfluous, in His work.

In short, we only have to worry about obeying those Divine Wills which concern us. The rest of the projects of Providence related to the progress of other people are not our business for now. But the view we formulate draws the attention to these universal projects of a quantity of agents, which grow with the increase of our own inner clarity. As for the designs which God has formed for us, He makes them known to us firstly through consciousness, and afterwards through the words of His envoys. These two codes suffice to resolve any uncertainties in the decisions we may have to make. All the rules they contain can be summed up in charity. However, as the desires of people all return to satisfying the self, none can help his brother without inconveniencing himself. The result is, that to do God's will is to tirelessly demolish one's personal desires, one's selfish will, one's selfish pleasures.

6. – *On earth as it is in Heaven.* This is the corollary of the realization of God's reign. Heaven is the place where the Father's will is perfectly executed; all forms of life on this plane are the very forms of that Divine Will and exist by it alone. Here on earth, life also comes from the Father in its principle; but, in its growth it sustains itself and corrupts itself with foods other than that of Eternity. Therefore, it's necessary on earth for the hunger of beings, the intimate nature of their desire to live, to change. The Father alone knows the time and means to operate this conversion; and that is why he is asked to fulfill His will. By this alone since it is His, it is perfect. To the

extent that men obey God, all of Nature heals itself, perfects itself and frees itself. The only study necessary is therefore to know the will of Heaven, and the only real work is to expend all our strength to achieve it.

7. – *Give us this day our daily bread.* The man who puts his trust in himself believes he is free; but he is merely a slave to his passions or desires. In some ways, both are baubles which the gods wave before the eyes of our minds to make us work according to their designs. And, just as every farmer cares for his servants and animals, these gods take care of us and provide us with what we need. But the food they give us is not always healthy; often too stimulating, it exhausts our bodies.

The bread that the Father intended for us alone is good. But what is it and where do we find it? Regarding food for the physical body, everything is prepared in advance to provide it to us. If some find that harsh, there is a just reason for their misery, a reason that we are better off not knowing, or even seeking. We are here on earth to learn, among other things, to submit to material proofs; we only have the right to judge ourselves. The foods of our other bodies: magnetic, astral, mental, psychic – some names which the esotericists give them, and whatever their number – are also prepared before our birth. Fluids, fires, feelings, ideas, inspirations come into us according to the need we have of them to do our work, and also according to our desire.

But all these things are only food for the envelopes of the spirit, and for the spirit itself, which, in turn, is only the vehicle of the soul, where wood sustains the eternal flame which flickers deep within us.

In this dark world where it languishes in exile, it seeks what is similar to it, which bears a reflection of the absolute, of freedom, of the supernatural; it is its bread, the bread of Divine life, for which alone we should ask the Father. Now, what is Divine par excellence in Creation, if not love, if not sacrifice?

Understand here, without losing calm or reason, that our being is very vast. All of us, even the latecomers, are kingdoms; it sends travelers across all the immense universe; the basest of our actions causes unsuspected reactions, and is perhaps itself the final ripple on the cosmic ocean of a pebble launched billions of miles from here. There are therefore all the sacrifices which the opportunities of family, social and intellectual life offer us and, in addition, all the others which the life of the deepest parts of our being bring us; everything that stirs in the immense forest of the unconscious, and which leads, inevitably and finally, to actions whose true cause, as well as the true meaning of which escapes us. In all this there is Divine Love; in all this there is, for our nature, suffering.

Suffering is therefore a grace, a favor, a blessing. Whatever it is, it is a sign of love; it is the bread of Heaven, it is what the disciple avidly desires, it is through it that our union with the great Sacrificed One is perfected; this it was who, by materializing, built the human nature of the God-Man⁷; this it is by means of which we find the paths trodden by His venerable feet.

⁷ There are enough words and phrases in the text to show clearly that Sédir was a Martinist. He talks of reintegration, stream and forests, of Men of Desire, and here of the God-Man, all words which will be very familiar to Martinists. This observation is important, since it shows that his Martinist education informs and

What is the life of this body of flesh? It is an assimilation and a de-assimilation proportionate to earthly matter. The lives of all our other bodies are similar processes. The life of our soul is the absorption of Divine Life. And Divine Life is Our Lord Jesus Christ. What did He do? He gave Himself to the world, not mentally, not with subjective compassion, but really, with flesh and blood, with all that existence comprises. Let us do the same to our small extent; let us give others of our time, our money, our comforts, our happiness, all of ourselves; the discomfort that will result for us – and which can range from simple boredom to the worst anxieties – this discomfort will be a piece of eternal wheat.

To help our inconstancy, our task is parceled into small parts. What man can make plans for his entire life, or even for a year? Because of this it is written that each day endures its own pain. One day lives as itself: it's like a parcel of land; it's a work, a complete action; you have to begin it and end it with a return to its Author. The nocturnal mystery prevents us from seeing the next day as it will be; and that is why Jesus only asks with us for the bread of today.

8. – *And forgive us our trespasses.* To obtain forgiveness from God, we must exercise it ourselves. In doing so, we imitate Christ, and He then takes us with Him. One can forgive by remembering universal justice first, and by then standing in the zero of humility. Once these passive, subjective exercises are followed, we can practice the most superficial kinds of pardons: pardoning the wrong by whichever of our organs suffered it⁸. That's when we can say the phrase in the Lord's Prayer without fear of condemning ourselves.

9. – *As we forgive those who trespass against us.* This Divine forgiveness is not an exchange; it is a reward for the mark of goodwill that we give by exercising forbearance. The other translation of this request, which speaks of forgiveness of debts, offers the same meaning. An attack suffered is always a debt paid; disobedience to God is always a debt incurred. To be able to say this verse, one must not fear what will be said, neither mockery or cunning.

10. – *And lead us not into temptation.* These words, which are exactly translated from the Vulgate, were not uttered by Christ, but He has allowed them to pass into custom, because they diminish to some extent the idea of the Devil's power, which encourage the faint-hearted. Christ said: *Do not let us succumb to temptation*; and, indeed, temptation itself comes from the Adversary, with God's permission, as the book of Job describes very well. There are two kinds of temptation; those which come from our own personal perversity and are the product of a devil's alliance with one of our powers; these are the most common and the least obdurate. Those which come from a direct visit by a soldier of Evil are much rarer, and reserved for men who are already strong. A temptation you resist is good work, one of the best perhaps. First, one cannot endure the onslaught without humility, trust in God, and struggle; all our powers are thus brought to bear; our mind, our personality become a battlefield; there the seven forms of evil constantly do battle with the seven forms of good. To triumph takes calm, presence of mind and decisiveness.

You've seen visitors tease the monkeys or the goats at the Jardin des Plantes. When the irritated animal gives a blow of its horn or cries, the man is satisfied and leaves happy; he got out

affects his writings – PV.

⁸ That is, whether it was something which offended the eye, the hearing, etc. – PV.

a little of the ill he had within him, unless the patience of the target of his suffering tired him out. There are beings around us, stronger and smarter than us, who tease us in this way; our debates make them laugh, though our sufferings seem horrible and hopeless and infernal to us. When we can't take it anymore, we cry out: *Do not let us succumb to temptation*, and a guard arrives, who removes the passing teaser, making him ashamed of his wickedness.

If temptation comes to us, the first precaution to take is to remain calm; don't get all excited. What seems great to us is so small before the greatness of the world. And if you are a soldier of Heaven, you will suffer the attack with patience, you will accept the fight with the aid of Heaven, and you will not ask the persecutor to go.

11. – *But deliver us from evil*. It is the universal evils that we want to be cured: physical diseases, ignorance, selfishness, social misery, ugliness, cruelty, slavery of all kinds. We cannot deliver ourselves; when a man constantly shows heroic virtue, it is not his virtue that heals him or enlightens him; his works are merely a gesture or a request; and the Father saves him because of that active prayer. I repeat, God does everything in us; we can only place ourselves in the best possible position to take advantage of His gifts, asking Him to enlighten the weakness of our discernment.

12. – The *Amen* and the Gnostic or Kabbalistic formula by which one sometimes ends the Lord's Prayer is self-explanatory⁹. It is the act of faith, without which nothing can be obtained or accomplished.

⁹ By this Sédir is referring to the words often added: "For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever." The Kabbalistic reference is to the words in Hebrew: "Atah, Malkuth, ve-Geburah, ve-Gedualh, le-Olahm", which mean the same, and are known in esoteric circles as the Kabbalistic Cross - PV.

3. THE ANGELIC SALUTATION

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessèd art thou amongst women,
And blessèd is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Pray for us sinners now,
And at the hour of our death. Amen.

This is what comprises this prayer, the most powerful after the Our Father, in Christianity and I could say of all religions. Putting us in relation with the first of Beings, it is the result of the collaboration of an angel and various people; as the Our Father, uniting us with the Father, was given to us by the Son.

The Angelic Salutation consists of three parts:

1. - The words of Gabriel (*Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee*);
2. - the greeting by which Elizabeth welcomed her cousin (*blessèd art thou amongst women and blessèd is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus*);
3. - the invocation (*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death; Amen*).

The first two parts are of very ancient use in the Church. They are found either verbatim or in an equivalent form in the liturgy of St. James the Minor, and in *the Antiphonary* of St. Gregory the Great; the third part is due to the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD. The Ave Maria is found in a collection of prayers of a 7th Century Patriarch of Alexandria, except for the last words (*now and at the hour of our death*), which are more recent and appear to have been added by the Franciscans. This prayer was introduced into France by Louis le Gros. Cromwell forbade it in England, during the time that Louis XIII offered his kingdom to the Virgin.

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What attachment and love does a mother feel towards her son! And when this son is Jesus, perfect beauty, the incarnation of gentleness, submission, filial piety and love, what adoration should His mother have for Him! What was her martyrdom to see her Son misunderstood, persecuted, slandered and finally arrested and unjustly condemned, flogged, crowned with thorns and tied to an ignominious cross! How much her heart must have bled to see Him die such a death!

And yet the angel had called her “full of grace”, “blessed among women”. If She who was the Immaculate One suffered in this way without ever complaining, what shame we should feel for our continual impatience and murmurings, we who indeed deserve more than our trials and who suffer justly!

Let us meditate on the example of heavenly resignation given to us by “the Mother of Sorrows”. And, like her, let us always say, “Here is the servant of the Lord.”

Just as Jesus was “the fruit of her womb”, we too, following the teachings of the eternal Wisdom that the Virgin represents, give birth to God in our souls. He will be born there when He finds a temple worthy of receiving Him, purified of passion and lust, stripped of greed, ennobled by the acceptance of the cross and inhabited by love. And this birth will be our regeneration.

4. HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF HEARD BY GOD

One could fill libraries collecting together everything that has been written on prayer. All of these suggestions are helpful, and every supplicant submits their request as best they can. I will limit myself here to indispensable information.

In short, prayer requires only one condition, but it is essential: that our voice rises up to God. I'm not speaking metaphorically: you should understand that this is completely different to meditation, autosuggestion, or voluntary concentration. Prayer is a cry of appeal and nothing else. It's all about being heard.

Of all the beings God is closest to us, because He is at the center of ourselves. But we can be – and we are too often – far from Him.

To make ourselves heard, our heart must speak the language of Heaven, and that language is charity; our person must become aware of his nothingness, and in this inner void infinity rushes in to fill it. Thus, belief is not enough; believing in God and not obeying Him is what only too many Christians do. I prefer those who claim not to believe yet obey the Divine Law. Praying without previously performing an act of charity can do nothing; whereas charity without faith still moves Heaven. Remember the wonderful stories of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan. It isn't faith that begets charity, it is charity that begets faith. Faith isn't an opinion of the brain, it's a conviction of the heart. To have faith in someone isn't to believe that the person exists; it's to trust them, and to trust them wholeheartedly.

Faith means love of God, as charity means love of one's fellow beings. These two flames grow through one another and feed one another. To live is to leave oneself. Through charity you go out of yourself towards the world in distress; through prayer you go within yourself, towards the good Father who loves your efforts.

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Then you have to be humble. God doesn't listen to the proud, those who believe themselves strong or learned or skillful. No one can believe himself to be such if he has ever cast a single glance towards the enormity of the powers which bear down on us, and towards the immensity of the unknown which surround us. That is a sensible level of humility, for it is the simplest. One mustn't think he's better or smarter than his comrades: it already makes it harder and requires a level of self-knowledge and a lot of unpleasant experiences, because only those who have suffered are forgiving.

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Rare is the disciple who descends to this kind of humility, by which he considers himself the least of men, the least good, the least intelligent, the least worthy of interest, by which we can see

that “we have nothing other than what we have received”, as the Apostle says¹⁰. By which we also find slander, insults and the most unjust attacks to be just; we receive them with joy and, far from fleeing from them, we seek them out. This goes beyond common opinion; this self-abasement is superhumanly difficult; we can’t descend those steep slopes on our own; we need the arms of an angel or pursuit by a demon; besides, angels and demons never come without both being present. So be fearless. When we have tasted the bittersweet liquor of humiliation, such a change takes place in the principles of our being that we come to love the persecutor, to thank him, to ask the blessings of Heaven to descend upon his head; we know for sure that he is beneficent towards us.

While all this may seem to lack logic, let’s remember how incapable and sick we are. Our pride, in truth, is illogical; this power, in my opinion, is weakness in conformity with the Spirit. The ultimate statement of our superb free will is the phrase used by the Virgin: “Let it be done unto me according to Thy will.” And, as soon as we consent to this abandonment, something unknown, hidden and very strong rises up in us. That mysterious energy is faith.

At least its chrysalis; trust in God is necessary when we pray.

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Faith carries prayer up to God. If you knew what faith is, nothing would seem difficult to you. When Jesus affirms that faith can move mountains, He’s not using a metaphor, He is stating a physical fact. When St. Philip Neri, I believe it was, ordered a mason who fell from a tower to stop and that man remained suspended halfway; when the parish priest of Ars sent the director of his orphanage to visit the empty attic, and found it filled with sacks of wheat¹¹, these saints had faith “as big as a grain of hemp¹².” They hadn’t called upon spirits, nor intoned mantras; they had asked the Father, and the Father had sent angels.

Thus, faith in us is truly a Divine, supernatural force, which creates where there is nothing and finds where there is nothing created. That beautiful and complete definition is by Jacob Boehme, the cobbler. How can the person who isn’t sure that God will grant their request truly want to receive it? Doesn’t irresolution, timidity, fear and skepticism prevent thousands of men from succeeding every day in these temporal undertakings which are so easy in comparison to the efforts needed for spiritual combat?

Doubt is one of the devil’s great weapons. If faith represents the immediate realization of one of the virtues of eternity, doubt is the mental illusion of one of the appearances of time. When you become disconcerted by an obstacle, you are preparing yourself for a certain fall; but if you contemplate it with resolve, it vanishes. A skeptic never gets anywhere, unless he has faith in his skepticism. What would the man who believed in God with all his might not accomplish, seeing that, when believing in another man, a woman or an idea, many have accomplished heroic acts?

¹⁰ This is a reference to Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 4:7 “What hast thou that thou didst not receive: now if thou didst receive it, why does thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” – PV.

¹¹ This is one of many miracles attributed to St. John Vianney of Ars, who was canonized in 1925 – PV.

¹² I could find no reference as to why having a ‘heart as big as a hemp seed’ would be a good thing. All I can point out is that another name for some varieties of hemp seed is *cannabis* seed... – PV.

You say that it's difficult to have faith? No, it seems impossible to you only because you've tied your own hands behind your back with your mind; you've locked yourself in a dungeon where you groan. Please have faith, and you will have it in an instant; drive away hesitation, and you will act as if you have faith; drive away pride, and you will see that doubt is nothing more than a mirage that intercepts Divine communications. Then your faith will not be, like that of superhumans, the deadliest poison to your soul, but on the contrary it will be its all-powerful tonic.

And besides, we're not alone. Our Friend is here. He prays with us; He is the desire of the request, the Messenger and the Response. His whole person is but a vast symphony of requests. When He once blessed this land with His most sweet presence, His words, His thoughts, His actions were all irresistible prayers.

Every cell of His body, every spark of His inner being was a living Prayer. What prays in us, and understand this, is His spirit; and our sighs have no virtues unless we have first incorporated ourselves into Him, through the practice of our feelings, thoughts and deeds all being offered to His service.

This assurance which I ask you to create within yourself – for one can do anything upon oneself – and which is indispensable to exercise the mystical priesthood, isn't an intellectual faith; it's a living faith, the one which confronts the impossible in everyday practical life; the one which remains serene in the face of the worst disasters; the one which stares at death without blinking, and whose march isn't slowed by the appearance of the darkest demons. Even the greatest of men have taken but a few steps on the road that leads to such a faith, and yet I earnestly invite you to create it within you; it is closer to us now than it was in the Middle Ages. It smolders: one effort and it will catch fire. Make this effort at the first opportunity.

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The fourth condition necessary for the request to be heard is to be on the path of Peace. Heaven is the world of peace. We must forgive those who have done us harm, not only mankind, but all beings, events, the invisible, ideas, feelings, things. We can only practice such forbearance if we trust that the Father doesn't test us unjustly. When we want to talk to Him, let us forget our troubles for a moment; then we can bear them more calmly and combat them all the better. And forgiveness is the best anesthetic to soothe our suffering self-esteem.

Fifth, we must address Heaven with a sense of gratitude both for the good things and the bad. If the former are moments of rest, the latter are the only means of our advancement, since we still fear the trials.

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Sixth, we must pay attention to what words are said; it must be done perfectly; not only by the intellect, but also the body and soul. This condition is difficult to achieve because we are constantly distracted. Lack of attention is a lack of fervor. To be attentive is to want; and it's impossible to want without love. In truth, Love is the key to all doors.

To combat distraction, pray aloud. If your heart is dry, pray by meditating, that is, by reflecting with your logical reasoning on each spoken word, weighing it and examining it.

During the day, some effective precautions can be taken to develop the power of attention. Refrain from unnecessary words, avoid wasting time, resist daydreaming and, above all, correct your flaws. Become a saint! This short sentence contains the secret of all moral, spiritual and even intellectual developments. But, alas! I'm afraid the recipe is too simple: the mysterious has so much appeal to us!

It suffices to dismiss distractions with the utmost calm, without growing tired. If three hours pass before the Our Father was properly said, it will have been three hours excellently employed; no effort is lost.

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The seventh is perseverance. Let the parable of the in unrighteous judge instruct us¹³. What you didn't get in a week, you might get after a year; if our voice has not been heard after a year, it may be heard after thirty. The old Hindu Rishis, in order to take the place of a simple god did penance for decades. We, being certain that the Master of the gods Himself inclines His ear to our voice, may well, after distraction or half-heartedness, repeat our request, even it meant depriving ourselves of sleep that night.

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In short, in prayer, it is not so much its intensity that matters as its preparation. If I devote a quarter of an hour a day to saying the names of the sick, I must first devote the other twenty-three hours and three quarters to living in Heaven, to living as a perfect disciple. Then my mind will be closer to Jesus, and all I have to do is express my desires to Him plainly, in perfect simplicity, without having to put myself into extraordinary states of consciousness.

This set of conditions must end up seeming quite difficult and complicated to you. It's just an appearance. In the spiritual, far more than in the material, everything is one, everywhere. Let us rest assured that even the most imperfect prayer is always effective; no prayer is ever lost.

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Those who believe that, because they have dedicated themselves to Christ, their lives must be quiet and monotonous are mistaken. Those who believe that, because they have dedicated themselves to Christ, their lives must be one long martyrdom are also mistaken. Both are correct only on this one point: to have dedicated themselves to Christ. But since they have given themselves to Christ, Whose omnipotence and all-goodness they are certain, what are they worried about? Since they are in the hands of the Father, let them do their duty properly. They ask for everything, that is enough. If He grants it, that's fine; If He refuses, that's fine; if He sends a trial, that's fine; if He sends some happiness, that's fine.

¹³ Sédir is referring to the story of the unjust judge in Luke 18:1 – 8, referring to perseverance – PV.

5. WHERE, HOW, WHEN TO PRAY

What conditions should true prayer fulfill?

It's the impulse of the supernatural within us towards the supernatural outside of us; of the supernatural, let me emphasize this word, of what is above Nature, the Created, Time, Space, conditions, beyond rites, in that luminous atmosphere where alone are found the great free breaths of the Spirit and the resplendent forms of the angels of Truth.

One can only pray by means of the conscious faculties. Many will therefore pray with their nerves, their intellect, their passionate greed, with the spirit of their flesh and bones. For these, liturgical observances are excellent, even indispensable; and, in short, who among us can affirm that their prayers are devoid of all the vapors of flesh and blood? But it's perfection that must be desired; and that's why I speak as if we were capable of a superhuman effort.

Where can one pray? Wherever it is possible to gather. According to Christ's counsel, locking oneself in one room, in the material and the spiritual¹⁴. In the material sense, because thus God alone and His angels see us; it is a great strength that good is accomplished in secret; it's pure. Our friends, even our family members who see us retreating to our room may believe that we are going to rest; thus, by this discretion, we will avoid the false reward of their esteem. In the spiritual sense, "locking oneself in one's room" means entering oneself, and closing the doors of the senses and memory that put the mind in communication with the external world. If you want your room to be pure, make it the temple of true worship, I mean exercise good; don't get angry, don't say pointless or malignant things.

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In churches we benefit from the orientation of the fluid environment, the collective enthusiasm, physical artifices such as the penumbra and the fairy-like light from the stained glass windows, the transport which the music pours over us, the often centuries-old atmosphere that previous generations have filled with sighs and thanksgiving¹⁵. All this is a great strength; it is not forbidden to take advantage of it.

If you pray better in church, go to church. If nature helps you, pray in the calm and beauty of the countryside. If your refusal to go to church scandalizes someone, sacrifice your comforts and do as everybody else does. But if you want to advance more quickly, choose to speak to God in the place that requires you to pay maximum attention.

Attaching importance to a form of prayer is a mistake; the Father hears all tongues. To attach importance to the place, the time, the attitude, the gestures of our prayers is a mistake. If humility

¹⁴ This references Christ's word on how to pray in Matthew 6:6 – "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet (*room*), 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" – PV.

¹⁵ Surely a reference to its *egregore*. We encounter this notion again, even more forcibly, in the last paragraph of the Chapter – PV.

prostrates me on the ground, that is good; but if I kneel while grumbling about the hardness of the floor, my kneeling is useless. No doubt, in some places energized by crowds, at certain times when favorable waves pass over us, prayer seems to rise easily; but this is an external impression. Heaven is everywhere, independent of hours and places, formulas and rituals. These things help, no doubt; but let's take care that they don't end up hiding spiritual realities from us. Prayer is essentially a conversation of the heart with the Divine Persons; and in order to be heard by them, only a conduct consistent with their Law is required. Nothing more.

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When should one pray? I will answer with the whole assembly of mystics: Always. To the believing man everything is a reason for prayer, that is to say to thank and to request. As soon as your eyes open, thank God for the rest He has procured for you; if the night was bad, thank Him even more for having had the opportunity for suffering, that is, purification and repentance.

Pray when your work gives you some free time, for the liveliest prayers are first and foremost a good model. But use every moment. A second – and this is important – a second of enthusiasm or recourse to Heaven acts both on our invisible universe and on the physio-spiritual organ of prayer. This organ isn't built in one fell swoop, but cell by cell. The physiology of the mind resembles that of the body; ten easy movements develop muscle more than a single but disproportionately large effort.

We must pray in the morning before commencing the work of the day; and during the day, whenever the opportunity arises.

Be on the lookout for these opportunities. Let's not forget that we can pray for everything: to reply to a letter, to make a visit, to close a business deal, for a financial transaction, for a bandage, to mitigate a blunder, to drive an engine, for a laboratory work, to search for documents, to obtain understanding or strength from others, to obtain the skill required at this moment in time, etc... Besides, as soon as you have a little mastery over yourself, it only takes a few seconds to call on Jesus.

As tired as one might in the evening after the day's work, it's still necessary, before falling asleep, to make a call for two or three minutes from the depth of the heart, in that tenuous state of connection with God which mystics call the forefront of the mind. These prayers are often granted.

We prefer to pray fervently, with enthusiasm and joy. That is understandable, but not essential. That poor little request, all dried up, all arid, naked, and so weak, is perhaps caught up by the Friend with even more pure and tender love. Moreover, it's the quality of conduct during the day which above all determines the quality of the evening prayer.

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During all those prayers which you have spoken in the nocturnal silence and solitude of your closed room, the objects around you will have heard them and will have been nourished by them. There are eyes and ears everywhere that observe us and listen to us. The trees, the flowers in the

midst of which you pass in prayer, the sidewalk where you walk, the hill and the stream you gaze at, the dog that follows, the passer-by you cross, all receive something. Your ancestors, whose shades¹⁶ remain in the home, your future children, whose spirits descend into the room where they will be born, all the invisible witnesses of your existence, those who venerate you, the giants who sometimes torment you, the good ones who aid you, the bad ones who lead you astray: all benefit from your prayer.¹⁷

Further, that prayer itself, springing from the center of life within us and directed towards the Master of Life, that prayer is a living being. This room, this flagstone, this rock where someone prays today, retain that clarity in their memory, and their memory is more faithful than ours. In ten years, even in ten centuries, the people who will pass by this place will be able to unexpectedly feel some inexplicable and salutary emotion.

¹⁶ The word Sédir uses is 'manes...au foyer', meaning the *household gods of the hearth* which, along with the 'lares et penates', were the ancestral gods of the home and hearth in ancient Roman times, which would have a shrine in the house and to which the household members, both family and slaves, would pray for good fortune. It is an interesting choice of metaphor – PV.

¹⁷ There is a distinctly Martinist flavor to this, since they believe that their meetings are always filled with the presence of the Past – or Passed – Masters of the Order, ever present if invisible – PV.

6. WHO DO WE PRAY TO?

Prayer is the impulse of our personality towards the Absolute. You understand that we must pray to God alone. This is rarely done. We usually address the god that we have chosen. When an honest woman goes to church to ask the good God for her bond to come out of the draw when she already has small annuities, it's not to God that her heart is praying, it's to the god of money. How many times do we behave like that good old lady?

Now, each god grants the requests of his faithful, as a king keeps the lucrative jobs for his courtiers. An ambitious man or a miser who pray for their ambition or greed will easily have their wish fulfilled by their gods; but they will go deeper along their false path. When a simple heart asks the Father for something which can harm his soul, the Father doesn't grant it; and this is one of the reasons why our prayers often remain sterile.

Speak to God alone. The first and the most irreducible of man's enemies is oneself; even Satan is less dangerous to us. Both of these two adversaries have an equally elusive approach; to fight them, we need a point of support outside the world, since they fill this world as they constitute the very strength of the universe. This support can only be God.

Pray to the Father; pray to Christ because He is God; praying to the Holy Spirit is too difficult; we are still too enmired in matter to be sensitive to that infinitely subtle presence.

And then there is a person to whom we can pray without fear of incurring a debt or of missing the Father: that is the Virgin Mary. As she is the humblest of all people, we can be sure that she will pass on our request in its entirety; and, because her Son always grants her requests, by addressing her, there is a greater chance of being listened to.

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The legends that show the angels collecting the prayers of the saints to carry them, from hierarchy to hierarchy, to the throne of God, are true. It isn't always angels, in the theological sense of the word, who fulfill this office. It matters little. All this is planned and ordered, everything returns to its mother; lights go to the Light, darkness goes to the Void. And both go up or down depending on their density. The request rises up as high as the applicant's purity gives strength to its wings. The prayers of men do not all come to the Father's feet; but when the sphere they touch becomes too ardent for them, it may indeed be that compassionate beings collect them, make them theirs, and present them to God as if for their own sake. That is how we are answered more often than we should be.

Popular devotion knows these guides, and addresses them with a confidence which is very often justified. It gives them names, although these higher beings prefer to remain unknown; they rightly fear that they will be invoked directly. This idolatry alters the transmission of their invisible influence and singularly complicates its consequences in the future. Indeed, they hear only that which bears the seal of Unity; and you would pray to them directly, but they would understand your desires less well than if you speak directly to God.

Besides, there are innumerable kinds of intermediaries. Don't ask any of them. What do we know about invisible beings? What certainty do we have that they are indeed in the true Light? Perhaps some of them would grant your request more quickly, but then you would owe them a debt – a debt which you'd have to pay sooner or later, both capital and interest. Ask only God, Christ, and the Virgin. That is to “knock”.¹⁸ “Seek” further; give yourself over to hardship; expend your strength helping others, and your intelligence to pursuing evil in all its coils; “knock”, that is, go all the way to the end of your strivings.

¹⁸ These familiar words refer to Matthew 7:7 – “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” - PV

7. PRAYING FOR THE SICK

To heal through prayer, you need loyalty, calm, benevolence; above all, we must be in constant union with our Christ, the Supernatural Doctor. This last condition contains and completes the others. Above all, it is in their dealings with women that men who wish to devote themselves to the sick must show themselves to be faithful. If you pray for the sick you must, above all, watch yourself, contain yourself, break the impulses of the ever-perennial dark forces of instinct. Above all, you must remember that a simple look of lust is equivalent to actual adultery. The evil you would commit by using your spiritual prestige against the grain would be very base, extremely vile, and filled with long and heavy consequences.

You need an imperturbable calmness. Calmness for yourself, calmness for your patients. More than other methods, therapeutics through prayer leads the one who uses it towards the Invisible, towards the most secret, unexplored regions of the Invisible, and therefore the most fertile in surprises. The tension of prayer, to which the mystic constantly obliges himself, elevates, refines and sensitizes his mind; he receives more than other men the repercussions of a host of good or bad events whose theater is the subtle worlds, and which come together to coalesce upon our earth and upon its inhabitants.

The higher the mystic climbs, the deeper he sinks into the depths, and the more the forces his mind breathes and assimilates are active and their mode of action disconcerting. To maintain balance of the mind, body and soul, the mystical therapist has only one recourse: composure, presence of mind, conspicuous caution, and perfect possession of himself.

Patients are even more subject to the penetration of influences, albeit without their knowledge. Their physiological imbalance makes them vulnerable; and their moral and bodily sufferings are the episodes of their battles against these invasions. He who heals them through prayer alone must therefore be doubly calm and strong: both for himself and for them, for all who lack resistance and balance. Especially in these present times, do not give succor to those of your patients who speak to you of magic, who claim to be victims of occult practices. In the first place this is extremely rare; and, in any case, it's better to discourage the patient from these kinds of concerns. If you happen to say a few words to your patients, in public or in private, never talk about occultism or witchcraft, even from a theoretical point of view, even to forbid them.

Thirdly, be good. Let the great indispensable precept of fraternal love be constantly before your heart and before your will; fraternal and pure love, stripped of familiar egotism, stripped of intellectual interest and sentimental prestige, love of spirit. Focus on each patient as much as you would focus on yourself; seek the words from among all words which will comfort him, the gesture that will relieve him; treat him with serene gentleness; ignore his impatience and forgive his unreasonableness, forget his ingratitude, and leave your comfort zone to satisfy his little despotisms. Don't miss any opportunity to pray for the unfortunate; practice makes perfect. Don't discuss, don't argue, don't despise. Don't look at whether it's a result of alcoholism or debauchery; see only flesh that suffers, only a being who is sorry. Be good as the Father is good, for everyone, in everything, everywhere. Avoid noisy joviality, avoid frowning. Smile. Greet everyone as most welcome visitors since they will be your motives to work, that is, opportunities to help our Master.

May His joy at seeing your obedience be your joy, and may it make you happy. Be happy. Keep yourself in the joy of the slaves of Love, and you will radiate effortlessly, and you will transmute the despair around you.

Finally, be united, live in unity, remain in union. Before you lift your finger, give a glance, say a word, consider whether your hand, eye and tongue are with Jesus. No slander, no blame, even in your intonation; no words in vain; only express yourself when talking about an absent person as if they were present. Don't even say bad things about animals, objects, time; anything at all. Think only of Christ; live only for Christ; obey only the voice of Christ in your conscience; act for the best; nourish your ego with food which is repugnant to it; help everything that lives to live; stand before the shy and the shameful poor. Jesus said to His disciples, "Fear nothing, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.¹⁹" Be those disciples.

You will see incurable people heal: don't be surprised, prostrate yourself and give thanks. You will see insignificant illnesses resisting your prayers and your spiritual fasts: don't be surprised either, prostrate yourself and abase yourself. Perhaps you will be led into terrifying hells; perhaps the angels will elevate you to ineffable ecstasy: don't be surprised, prostrate yourself and worship. Perhaps you will become parched in the deserts of despair; that is where God will be nearer than ever: prostrate yourself again, and still worship.

Cleave to the sick. It is written, "I was sick and you visited me²⁰." This identification of Jesus with the suffering is not a figure of rhetoric. Our Master cried every tear, He sweated every anguished drop; He came to connect all pain in Our Father, because where there is suffering there is spiritualization. He didn't care about the sin in the sick man, the cause of his illness; or with the captive about the crime, the cause of his imprisonment; or in the poor the defects that kept him in poverty. All He wanted to see were pitiful creatures; All He wanted to do was give Himself to them in order to comfort them. Our concern must therefore first be to focus on those, forgetting the reasons for their misfortune.

It's when you enter dirty rooms, when you look at rickety beds, when you breathe the thickened air of too narrow dwellings, that you will have to make use of the kind attention of your compassion. Sweep, wash, bandage, without embarrassment, discreetly; and don't preach. Hungry bellies have no ears, flesh that suffers isn't relieved by theories. Enduring bad moods and whims; it's all part of your work. May a refreshing dew spring from your heart upon these fevers.

Thus, humility is the first necessary condition to heal in the name of God. A constant and plenary humility; a humility that contains the forgiveness of offenses, forgetting them, and which reduces self-esteem to such a small measure that adversaries no longer find a place to wound it; a humility that contains all obedience and all renunciation, which engenders trust, unalterable joy, gentle peace, and which spreads abroad the sweet perfumes of eternal meadows.

A serious tacit commitment is made the minute the disciple appears before an invalid. He stands there in the name of Christ, in His name, he uses the powers which His sufferings have

¹⁹ This is taken from Matthew 28:10 and 20, when Jesus first meets with his disciples following His resurrection, and later on a mountain in Galilee – "Fear not", and "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" – PV.

²⁰ Matthew 25:36 – PV.

created: he takes His place, dare I say. The earthly intelligence of the invalid and the assistants may not see this formidable substitution; but their spirits see it, the angels see it, the invisible see it. Every instant we risk becoming usurpers. The ministry of the mystical thaumaturge is an overwhelming burden; it requires superhuman perseverance, bottomless humility.

The supreme prerogatives that Our Lord Christ received from the Father, He offers them to us perpetually; it's up to us to receive them. For that reason, let our spirit enter the palace where the legions of angels keep them; the keys to this palace are forged by works of fraternal love, the simplest but also the most difficult of which are abstention from slander, and defense of the absent when attacked. But it is not enough to make a visit to that wonderful palace from time to time; we must make ourselves worthy to inhabit it, to live there as if we were born there, to take on its customs, its language and its way of thinking. So, apply yourself systematically to this indulgence for the defects of your neighbor, to that discretion in your speech, to that rigor concerning your own defects, to that spontaneous reaching out to the weakest, which are the signs by which hearts inhabiting the Light are recognized.

You'll have to repeat the same effort a thousand times before your tongue refuses to utter a bad word; but then you will be friends of Christ and a citizen of Heaven; everything in it, its fruits, its sources, its harmonies, its energies, the eternal prototypes of the natural forces which positive science and occultism contrive to capture, will be at your disposal. In the name of Jesus you'll be able to command disease, tempests, death, wild animals, without training, without effort, without formulas, without rituals.

To heal mystically – that is to say completely – the entire succession of affected organs, from the spiritual center to the material body, from the ancestral origin of the disease to its final results in its descendants, you must live a double life. You must see, hear, think and act on earth; you must also see the angels and immortal spirits, speak to them, work with them, contemplate the heavenly landscapes, grasp Divine objects. Such is the existence of the free man.

Before we come to this point we can only heal the sick, help the unfortunate and pray for both; we can only do that, but these little things require the most rigorous attention to duty. When offering a cup of herbal tea to an invalid, we should pray to the Father that He will bless it, since we don't know anything about the special virtue of this remedy. And when fulfilling these vital obligations causes us to expend our energy, to become tired, to be misunderstood let us rejoice, for these sorrows, suffered by love, will reduce the debt of our brethren.

Our trials never exceed our strength; many times, without us perceiving it, God, through the intermediation of one of His servants, extends the due date of these debts, and allows us to avoid an illness, an accident or grief. The little good that we sometimes accomplish, often gives our good Father the pretext to deflect from our path the fatal trajectory of suffering once engendered by one of our faults; and, because of our striving to be the best, Divine Mercy moves this unpaid debt to our credit.

Nobody, not the soldier of Christ any more than the simple believer, has the right to take on the ills of others voluntarily, because nobody is the master of his body.

Docile Disciples of Jesus, you will therefore confine yourself to prayer alone in order to obtain the healing of the sick whom your charity will relieve at the same time. The observance of the evangelical maxims is the only method, the only training which our Master offers us to renew His miracles. When He restores health to some, He says to them, “Your faith has saved you²¹”, to others, “Your sins are returned to you²²”; but we have no right to demand faith or to seek the sins of those to whom we go; we can only ask for them, with them, or in their place, that Mercy might save them, by reinforcing our request with some sacrifice, with a spiritual fast. Just tell God the name of the invalid, adding, “Heal him, if that is your will²³.”

²¹ See Luke 7:50 – PV.

²² In the sense of sins being forgiven, there are numerous examples, including Luke 7:47-48, Mark 2:5, Matthew 9:5 and Luke 5:20. Of course, it’s not surprising to find most of the quotations are taken from Luke, the doctor – PV.

²³ This reflects the words of the leper in Matthew 8:2, who said to Jesus “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean” – PV.

8. PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

As I have often told you, we don't know how to thank; worse still, we don't think to thank. Repairing this forgetfulness is the business of will; curing this ignorance is a matter of feeling. I cannot want *for* you; for you to want, you have to be the one who wants. But perhaps I can help you to better understand your feelings.

Man is so naturally ungrateful that gratitude for what he has done only serves to cover his incurable vanity with a veil. "My God, I thank you for granting my prayer," often means, "My God, I was worthy of you granting me a favor... this sick man had been healed in response to my prayer. I know that it was neither I nor my prayer that healed him, but I brought him the doctor and I bought him the cure." From that to believing himself to be an exceptional being is but a short distance!

Now, giving thanks is the spiritual place of gratitude; it is also the inner state where the outpouring of recognition ends. To thank is to say 'thank you' twice²⁴, it is to cry out 'thank you'²⁵ in the ecstatic bliss of Love; 'thank you' for all that I know I have received, 'thank you' for all I don't know I have received; 'thank you' for all in us which knows how to receive; 'thank you' for everything which is in us that redresses any proud and wretched gesture against Divine alms.

Saying 'thank you' is the exhausted heart, wounded, thrown over into the dust, which "surrenders to mercy"²⁶ beneath the victorious arrows of Love, under the shower of the Father's blessings.

But, in order to say the words of true thanks, our heart still has to feel all that it receives, even when it appears to receive nothing; our heart still has to know that in addition to the physical, palpable, visible gift, accompanying it above, beneath, and from all sides of the small sphere of his consciousness, it always receives from everywhere an overabundant and inexhaustible stream.

This is the state in which you must first place your soul, your spirit and even your body, before uttering the words of thanksgiving. Please take care. And see once again that preparation for the act is more difficult than the act itself, seeing that it is more important.

²⁴ This phrase doesn't work in English. The French for 'thank you' is *merci*: the verb to thank is *remercier*, which literally means 'to thank again' – PV.

²⁵ While *merci* is the usual word for 'thank you', in this instance and in the four following phrases the word used is *grâce*, which means so much more than the English word 'grace'. In addition to grace, it can mean 'pardon', 'mercy', 'forgiveness', 'thanks', 'favor'; and the specific term *actions des grâces* (which is the title of this Chapter in French) specifically means 'thanksgiving'. It is important to bear such things in mind, for when a francophone reads this passage, all those images will be in their mind's eye at the same time, giving them a far richer image of what is being painted than simply 'thank you' – PV.

²⁶ Here the word *merci* is being used in its other sense, that of 'mercy', giving the dual tension of a phrase which could be read both as "surrenders to mercy" and "surrenders to thank you." From this is it hoped the reader will grasp the exquisite poetry of Sédir's words as he uses both the same word to emphasize different qualities and different words with the same meaning to emphasize the boundless nature of God's love – PV.

9. SHOULD WE PRAY FOR THE DEAD

What would it take to know Death?

His kingdom is separated from this earth by an abyss; and nothing which our planet has provided to us can cross that precipice.

As for death itself, we can only see it as a collection of contradictions. A death, for example, is at the same time a birth; it's one of our greatest sorrows, and yet it's an invaluable grace; it's the most radical of separations, and yet our ancestors remain there with us; it's a very great journey, and yet only one step needs to be taken to accomplish it; it's rest, and yet they still work on the other side; the deceased go elsewhere, and yet at the same they're still sometimes attached to the corpse for a very long time; everyone must suffer death, and yet there are beings who still don't know it; finally, it is the most implacable form of fatality, although it is possible to overcome it.

If we are, in fact, spiritualists, if we conform our deeds to our beliefs, the Queen of Terrors finds herself losing her prestige of dread and her halo of mystery to our eyes. She becomes deliverance, a step forward, an entrance into a new world. Then we see the Grim Reaper come with serenity; we welcome his inevitable visit with a smile; for it is from God that he holds his power, and his strength is one form of the strength of the Word. The fear that men feel at his approach, if they're not drunk enough to take them out of themselves, is all physical and takes its origin from the inertia of matter. Old men suffer more than young men, because their physical spirits, being accustomed to this world, this light, this atmosphere, familiar objects, fear losing all these regular neighbors, are apprehensive about the unknown they sense, and cling desperately to the dark cocoon that is their home. But the self generally remains calmer, and the contractions which grievously strike the spectators of that final agony are, for the most part, only completely automatic physical spasms.

The phenomena of death are as it were unknown. The exact and complete description of death is not written anywhere; the place to which souls go is hidden; and the air of the land of the dead is unhealthy to the living.

Death is only a return of the soul to the land from which it was lent to us at our birth. If a person returns it in good faith, they don't suffer. If a person refuses, there are inevitable tears, wounds and regrets until the deceased understands the wisdom of a confident resignation. Good people suffer very little; those who, on the contrary, have made idols of themselves and their qualities, experience the emptiness of their glories. The body, the double, the feelings, the mental functions, the memory, the professional skill, the particular tastes, all of this is taken back by the earthly gods for purification, repair, and storage in a special place, to be made use of later, either by the one who had already received the deposit, or by someone from the same spiritual family.

The only true death is the loss of the Light; all other deaths are simply transformations. Just as our intellect doesn't know how to evolve if it doesn't pass from one opinion to another, so our self cannot regain its own place if it doesn't experience multitudes of transient organisms.

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What should we do with the dead?

In general, we don't have to concern ourselves with them; we have no duty towards them. We aren't forbidden to think of them, to continue to cherish them, to miss them. But they mustn't be called back, either through magic or by the simpler means of Spiritualism.

It's not that everything is wrong in Spiritualism. Its philosophical foundation – reincarnation conceived as a consequence of Divine Justice – is true. But attempting incursions into the land of the dead is reckless; we know nothing of that kingdom, its borders, the road which leads to it, nor its inhabitants. One exposes oneself to unforeseen dangers, hazardous encounters, errors and deceptions.

The practice of Spiritualism is an attack on the established order of things, no matter how good the intention of the practitioner. Whenever you want to set foot in an apartment which you aren't meant to enter, you have to pay the caretaker. That's why Spiritualism and the use of the occult arts generally bring material misfortune.

For those who trust in God, Spiritualism is at best useless. Besides, the spirits know no more about the secrets of the universe than us; and they can spontaneously be heard by us well enough in an emergency.

There is also no need to pray for the dead. Through prayer our spirit will seek out the one for whom it prays, and bring them before the Lord. But our minds are not pure enough to go to the land of the dead.

Besides, the dead don't need us. Nobody leaves this earth before their hour; nobody remains at any point without having work to do there. If our parents, our friends depart, it is because they have things to do elsewhere. The Father watches over everyone. When a beloved person leaves us, new sympathies surround them; they have guides, they have helpers; and wherever their rightful destiny carries them, it's for their perfection.

Let's fight against revolt and against despair. Our groans can only hold our dead back here on earth in an abnormal way. Let them go; they'll return. They often return even in a very material way; for if the ancestor smiles with such profound tenderness upon his great-grandson, it's because their spirits meet and remember the years which have passed, when perhaps they toiled together and were happy together. But let's respect the veil that Divine Goodness has fortunately cast upon the mystery of existences.
