

out of prayer. We do not pray because we are going to get something, we pray because God wants us to, since prayer is something we do primarily for God.

And we must be on our guard against prayer becoming self-centered, that its themes and movements revolve around us instead of God. The Gloria of the Mass says this, when we pray "We give Thee thanks because of Thy great glory." We thank God not for what He has done or will do for us, but because of Who He is.

If the majority of our prayers are prayers of petition, asking God favors for ourselves or others, and only occasional prayers are reserved for adoration, contrition and gratitude, then the time we give to prayer is unbalanced. Our wants and desires should not take precedence over God and His glory.

The *Pater Noster* is a perfect example of this. It is a very adult prayer isn't it? That is, when you give a gift to a child, they do not resort immediately to gratitude or praise. I can remember one of my nephews receiving a Christmas gift (we took turns opening them), tearing the paper aside and then delighting in the contents. His mother said, "Who gave you that gift?" "I don't know," he replied. "Well, look at the tag and it will tell you." "It's from Uncle Jim." "What do you say to Uncle Jim?" "Thanks Uncle Jim!" And immediately he went to playing with the toy.

This was quite different from my mother's reaction. I could give her a small rock in a cardboard box and before she saw the gift there were lots of oh-you-shouldn't-haves. You see the difference. In the *Pater*, the thanks is first, then we get to what we need. So is the Requiem Mass a very adult prayer.

With those general principles being said, let me go into some particulars. That is, if you go to a traditional Requiem, you will experience several things at once, and

(though not in any necessary order) the first of these is the presentation of a number of ceremonies, using various instruments, gestures and clothing. This is because much of what we see and hear at a Requiem is meant for the living. And we are not angels. Knowledge comes through the senses, so the senses must be addressed. St. Augustine says the following in his great work The City of God:

All this, that is, the preparing of the bodies, the kind of burying, the pomp of funerals, is rather a consolation for the living than a help for the dead. The bodies of the dead must not be treated with disrespect or thrown away, especially those who have died in innocence and faith, because the Holy Ghost used these members like so many organs and vessels to do his work. If therefore our father's ring or clothes, or things of that kind, are dear and cherished, according to our love for him, for the same reason these bodies are to be honored, for they are nearer and united to us more closely than the clothes we wear. For our bodies are not for an ornament or as an aid to us, but these bodies belong to the nature of man; whence the funerals of the great and just men of old were considered as works of piety, and their burials celebrated; while they lived they chose the place of their tomb; they told their children how their bodies were to be carried; Tobias burying the dead merited heaven according to the words of the Angel; while the Gospel tells us with what care and honor they placed in the tomb the body of the Lord. Surely all this signifies not that there is any sense in the dead body, but that, by the providence of God, who is pleased by these works of mercy, these ceremonies tell of the faith in the resurrection from the dead.

## The Requiem Mass, II

Indeed some are confused by the traditional Requiem. I once celebrated a Solemn High Requiem Mass and afterwards I overheard a lady in a loud voice who complained to the deacon, "I couldn't understand a thing that little priest was saying." He dispelled her confusion by responding, "Oh, that's okay ma'am, he wasn't talking to you." Perhaps with what is being written and said about the old rites in our times – such as this conference – will further dispel some of the confusion. I hope so.

But as to the past inhibiting, well, long may it reign. Indeed, it does inhibit the priest, the choir, and everyone who goes to it. The Mass is not mine; the Mass is not yours. It has been given to us, bequeathed as a precious inheritance.

To understand the Requiem a little deeper, I wish to begin with some basic principles of prayer, since every Mass is a prayer. As St. Pius X once said, the greatest prayer is the Roman Office (the Mass), the second greatest is the Divine Office (the breviary) and the third greatest is the People's Office (the Rosary) These principles I have taken from a sermon preached by my assistant, Fr. Caleb Kick, FSSP.

If prayer is seen in its true light, it will appear as a line of communication which we must keep open between ourselves and God. It is a channel through which our love flows to God and God's love back to us, but love is often beyond our capacity to put into words. The wordlessness of love is a regular occurrence between lovers. So in the Rite of St. Gregory on the whole, there is no over-emphasis or over-reliance upon words. The words are there, but so is much silence, and the thought that someone must be talking or singing the whole time is foreign to the old Mass, and foreign to love.

Our Lord said as much. "And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard." (Mt. 6.7) Our good Lord was not saying that long prayers are bad, or prayers with many words; He is simply emphasizing that our minds and our hearts rather than the tongue and the mouth are the basic organs of prayer. And we should often recall that one, single moment in which we have thought of God exclusively; thought of Him with love and gratitude; thought of Him with submissiveness to His will or with repentance for our sins; one such moment is likely far more pleasing to God than our many words.

Furthermore we need to pray *attente ac devote*, with attention and devotion. These two words are from a prayer which is said before reciting the Divine Office. But prayer is not nullified by the involuntary distractions which plague us all. The human mind is often like the instability of a little child; restless, squirming, running from one thing to another, incapable of the sustained effort which prayer demands.

But our prayer is still acceptable to God, nay, very acceptable, even if we spend the whole time of prayer doing nothing but brushing away distractions. If we have made a good intention, and given an honest effort to complete the intention, then our prayer is good.

And more to the point of right intention is the fact that prayer is a duty, a matter of justice, since God wants us to pray. From this basic understanding we see immediately how foolish it would be for anyone to excuse himself from prayer because he doesn't feel like praying. Prayer is not a matter of mood any more than it is a matter of convenience. And we cannot justify a lack of prayer by the absence of feeling, or that we do not seem to get anything