

Without PRAYER we cannot LIVE

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"I am only a poor friar who prays", Padre Pio would often say of himself. Above all when someone would attribute to him the merits of a miracle and he had to make them understand that miracles come from Our Lord and that we, all of us, may obtain them, if we ask with faith. *"Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you (Mt 7,8),* Jesus promised us.

But prayer is not just a means to obtain grace and divine intervention. This, in fact, is a marginal aspect, a consequence of prayer that should be instead, *"a close sharing between friends... taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us."*

This is how St. Therese of Lisieux expressed herself and, in equally straight-forward terms, St Teresa of Jesus wrote: *"For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy."*

Less poetically and in a more didactic way, the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that *"the Lord leads all persons by paths and in ways pleasing to Him, and each believer responds according to his heart's resolve and the personal expressions of his prayer."*

Certainly it is not always easy to pray. There are moments in which fatigue, worry and discouragement or just the world's distractions, which are very frequent in this period of the summer holidays, become an obstacle that we would like to believe, at times, insurmountable in order to open ourselves in prayer with God. Padre Pio too experienced this feeling of "uselessness" in his prayer, but he would not allow himself to be overcome by it and would continue to raise his mind to the Lord, even when he experienced moments of interior aridity and he had no desire to pray. *"It is true,"* he wrote to a spiritual child and more like an elder brother than a teacher, *"that given our condition, it is not in our power to keep our mind always fixed on God, however let us try as far as we can to live in His presence. And this we can and must do, recalling every now and then the great truth that God sees us. We must direct to Him all our actions; we must raise up more often our souls to God."* This advice which is valid even today to all of us, can be a very good antidote against the devious temptation of putting off prayer if we do not find the right climate for recollection. This temptation would lead us, without our realising, to a spiritual suicide if it is true, as

it is true, what St. Gregory of Nazianzus said: *"We must remember God more often than we draw breath."*

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, moreover, reminds us that *"the Tradition of the Church teaches the faithful certain rhythms of prayer so as to nourish continual prayer. Some are daily, such as morning and evening prayer, grace before and after meals and the Liturgy of the Hours. Sundays are centred on the Eucharist and are kept holy primarily by prayer."*

Padre Pio would invite his spiritual children *"to receive communion daily"*, to *"never neglect approaching the sacred banquet of the divine lamb."*

To all the devotees of our fellow saint, above all to the many (by now millions) who have come to venerate his mortal remains or who will come in the following weeks of the summer season, my wishes are that no summer sirens may make us forget our life of prayer and that we keep Sunday holy bearing in mind the words of the 49 martyrs of Abitene, who testified to them by the giving up of their lives: *"Without Sunday we cannot live."* ■