

January 2024

Dear Brethren:

Our temporary difficulties, whatever they may be, do not take away from our regard and our love for you. You are not forgotten in our prayers. We thank you for the same concern that you show for us all.

Every year, when it is my turn to address you in the January *Monthly Letter*, I think that it is for the last time, considering my age. But up until now, God has willed it differently. God alone knows the timing.

I had a father who, in his old age, loved reading and crafting. But because of cancer, he was deprived of his eyesight for the last few years of his life. Since he lived alone, I would go and see him often. On one occasion, I asked my father the following question: "Since you can't read nor occupy your time as you used to, don't the days seem long to you?" He answered: "No, they don't. At least I have time to pray."

Jesus Christ said that His faithful people would encounter situations that would bring about all kinds of circumstances in their lives. As we go through those experiences, God measures our degree of faith. We were called to acquire implicit trust in God, the Father, in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Way of Life that they have allowed us to understand. That requires much perseverance and will on our part, which is sometimes terribly hard and even impossible if we do not take time to pray. That is the reason for Jesus Christ's exhortation: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always . . ." (Luke 21:36), and "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19).

Do we take the time to pray? And if we do, how do we pray? Do we go before God with hearts that are weighed down by the cares of this life or excesses of all kinds? Or, on the contrary, do we experience a close contact with God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ?

When Jesus Christ lived in His flesh body, He was aware of how much strength of character was required not to succumb to despondency. The called who watch themselves in order to grow in the perfection of God's Way of Life do receive the strength that they need. They are successful because they apply Jesus Christ's exhortation: "Pray always." It takes perseverance and patience. It regulates the strength of each of us as we undergo the events that hit our lives.

But when we pray, do we really feel the connection with God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ? Or, are our minds drifting because we are still imbued with this world's lifestyles? Jesus Christ in the flesh—our example—could not do without an intimate relationship with His Father in order to be able to confront all the things that He had to experience. Teaching us how to pray, He says: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matthew 6:7). Do not use vain repetitions! In other words, all that we say and ask should be right and sincere, without hypocrisy and selfishness. We recognize our needs and we remember how Christ reassures us in order to dispel any doubt in our minds: ". . . your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him" (Matthew 6:8).

Therefore, the purpose of prayer is not only to make certain requests to God; it is also to maintain our communion with Him. As the Son of man living in the flesh, Jesus Christ showed how vital it was for Him to have a close and intimate contact with His Father, like a little child who holds his parent's hand. In one instance, Christ thanked His Father before He was granted His request. "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always . . ." (John 11:41–42). Lazarus was still lying in his grave! Christ said: "I knew that thou hearest me always." "And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him [but on what condition?], because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

When we pray, we must analyze our attitudes. In what state of mind are we? What is the content of our prayers? Do we lack faith? Are our prayers selfish, or do we sincerely remember others? Do we pray earnestly: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)? That request comes before the other ones in this example.

When the trial was at its most intense, because Jesus Christ knew what harrowing and agonizing hours lay ahead for Him, He prayed: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). Do we have such an orientation when we make a request to God? Do we really believe that He is able to understand our problems and our needs, and that He will answer our prayers as He wills and when He wills?

Here, the example of Jesus Christ shows that without prayer, it is impossible to cope and to manifest faith and trust in God. Christ keeps exhorting us: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Let us not grow slack in our prayers. Let us strive to be close enough to God. He does not forsake His own and He makes a wonderful promise to them: "And all things, whatsoever


ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matthew 21:22). As God wills and when He wills! Let us appreciate the greatness and the goodness of our Heavenly Father and of His Son Jesus Christ.

To you all, we send our most affectionate and respectful greetings.

Your brother in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. Aviolat".

Jean Aviolat

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jon W. Brisby".

Jon W. Brisby