

# CHAPTER 20

## PRAYER, WHICH IS THE CHIEF EXERCISE OF FAITH, AND BY WHICH WE DAILY RECEIVE GOD'S BENEFITS <sup>F495</sup>

*(The nature and value of prayer, 1-3)*

### 1. FAITH AND PRAYER

From those matters so far discussed, we clearly see how destitute and devoid of all good things man is, and how he lacks all aids to salvation. Therefore, if he seeks resources to succor him in his need, he must go outside himself and get them elsewhere. It was afterward explained to us that the Lord willingly and freely reveals himself in his Christ. For in Christ he offers all happiness in place of our misery, all wealth in place of our neediness; in him he opens to us the heavenly treasures that our whole faith may contemplate his beloved Son, our whole expectation depend upon him, and our whole hope cleave to and rest in him. This, indeed, is that secret and hidden philosophy <sup>F496</sup> which cannot be wrested from syllogisms. But they whose eyes God has opened surely learn it by heart, that in his light they may see light [<sup><193609></sup> Psalm 36:9].

But after we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God, and in our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Father willed all the fullness of his bounty to abide [cf. <sup><510119></sup> Colossians 1:19; <sup><430116></sup> John 1:16] so that we may all draw from it as from an overflowing spring, it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him, what we have learned to be in him. Otherwise, to know God as the master and bestower of all good things, who invites us to request them of him, and still not go to him and not ask of him—this would be of as little profit as for a man to neglect a treasure, buried and hidden in the earth, after it had been pointed out to him. Accordingly, the apostle, in order to show that true faith cannot be indifferent about calling upon God, has laid down this order: just as faith is born from the gospel,

so through it our hearts are trained to call upon God's name [<sup><451014></sup>Romans 10:14-17]. And this is precisely what he had said a little before: the Spirit of adoption, who seals the witness of the gospel in our hearts [<sup><450816></sup>Romans 8:16], raises up our spirits to dare show forth to God their desires, to stir up unspeakable groanings [<sup><450826></sup>Romans 8:26], and confidently cry, "Abba! Father!" [<sup><450815></sup>Romans 8:15].

Now we must more fully discuss this last point, since it was previously only mentioned in passing and, as it were, cursorily touched upon. <sup>F497</sup>

## 2. THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

It is, therefore, by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father. For there is a communion of men with God by which, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, they appeal to him in person concerning his promises in order to experience, where necessity so demands, that what they believed was not vain, although he had promised it in word alone. Therefore we see that to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bidden to ask of him in prayers. So true is it that we dig up by prayer the treasures that were pointed out by the Lord's gospel, and which our faith has gazed upon.

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name [cf. <sup><290232></sup>Joel 2:32]. By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and, in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us. Hence comes an extraordinary peace and repose to our consciences. For having disclosed to the Lord the necessity that was pressing upon us, we even rest fully in the thought that none of our ills is hid from him who, we are convinced, has both the will and the power to take the best care of us.

### 3. OBJECTION: IS PRAYER NOT SUPERFLUOUS? SIX REASONS FOR IT

But, someone will say, does God not know, even without being reminded, both in what respect we are troubled and what is expedient for us, so that it may seem in a sense superfluous that he should be stirred up by our prayers—as if he were drowsily blinking or even sleeping until he is aroused by our voice? But they who thus reason do not observe to what end the Lord instructed his people to pray, for he ordained it not so much for his own sake as for ours. Now he wills—as is right—that his due be rendered to him, in the recognition that everything men desire and account conducive to their own profit comes from him, and in the attestation of this by prayers. But the profit of this sacrifice also, by which he is worshiped, returns to us. Accordingly, the holy fathers, the more confidently they extolled God’s benefits among themselves and others, were the more keenly aroused to pray. It will be enough for us to note the single example of Elijah, who, sure of God’s purpose, after he has deliberately promised rain to King Ahab, still anxiously prays with his head between his knees, and sends his servant seven times to look [<sup><111842></sup> 1 Kings 18:42], not because he would discredit his prophecy, but because he knew it was his duty, lest his faith be sleepy or sluggish, to lay his desires before God.

Therefore, even though, while we grow dull and stupid toward our miseries, he watches and keeps guard on our behalf, and sometimes even helps us unasked, still it is very important for us to call upon him: First, that our hearts may be fired with a zealous and burning desire ever to seek, love, and serve him, while we become accustomed in every need to flee to him as to a sacred anchor. Secondly, that there may enter our hearts no desire and no wish at all of which we should be ashamed to make him a witness, while we learn to set all our wishes before his eyes, and even to pour out our whole hearts. Thirdly, that we be prepared to receive his benefits with true gratitude of heart and thanksgiving, benefits that our prayer reminds us come from his hand [cf. <sup><19E515></sup> Psalm 145:15-16]. Fourthly, moreover, that, having obtained what we were seeking, and being convinced that he has answered our prayers, we should be led to meditate upon his kindness more ardently. And fifthly, that at the same time we embrace with greater delight those things which we acknowledge to have

been obtained by prayers. Finally, that use and experience may, according to the measure of our feebleness, confirm his providence, while we understand not only that he promises never to fail us, and of his own will opens the way to call upon him at the very point of necessity, but also that he ever extends his hand to help his own, not wet-nursing them with words <sup>F498</sup> but defending them with present help.

On account of these things, our most merciful Father, although he never either sleeps or idles, still very often gives the impression of one sleeping or idling in order that he may thus train us, otherwise idle and lazy, to seek, ask, and entreat him to our great good.

Therefore they act with excessive foolishness who, to call men's minds away from prayer, babble that God's providence, standing guard over all things, is vainly importuned with our entreaties, <sup>F499</sup> inasmuch as the Lord has not, on the contrary, vainly attested that "he is near... to all who call upon his name in truth" [<sup><19E518></sup> Psalm 145:18, cf. Comm. and Vg.]. Quite like this is what others prate: that it is superfluous for them to petition for things that the Lord is gladly ready to bestow, while those very things which flow to us from his voluntary liberality he would have us recognize as granted to our prayers. That memorable saying of the psalm attests this, and to it many similar passages correspond: "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears toward their prayers" [<sup><600312></sup> 1 Peter 3:12; <sup><193415></sup> Psalm 34:15; cf. 33:16, Vg.]. This sentence so commends the providence of God—intent of his own accord upon caring for the salvation of the godly—as yet not to omit the exercise of faith, by which men's minds are cleansed of indolence. The eyes of God are therefore watchful to assist the blind in their necessity, but he is willing in turn to hear our groanings that he may the better prove his love toward us. And so both are true: "that the keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps" [<sup><19C104></sup> Psalm 121:4, cf. Comm.], and yet that he is inactive, as if forgetting us, when he sees us idle and mute.

*(The rules of right prayer, 4-16)*

### **First Rule: reverence, 4-5**

#### **4. DEVOUT DETACHMENT REQUIRED FOR CONVERSATION WITH GOD**

Now for framing prayer duly and properly, let this be the first rule: that we be disposed in mind and heart as befits those who enter conversation with God. <sup>F500</sup> This we shall indeed attain with respect to the mind if it is freed from carnal cares and thoughts by which it can be called or led away from right and pure contemplation of God, and then not only devotes itself completely to prayer but also, in so far as this is possible, is lifted and carried beyond itself. Now I do not here require the mind to be so detached as never to be pricked or gnawed by vexations, since, on the contrary, great anxiety should kindle in us the desire to pray. Thus we see that God's saintly servants give proof of huge torments, not to say vexations, when they speak of uttering their plaintive cry to the Lord from the deep abyss, and from the very jaws of death [cf. <sup><19D001></sup>Psalm 130:1]. But I say that we are to rid ourselves of all alien and outside cares, by which the mind, itself a wanderer, is borne about hither and thither, drawn away from heaven, and pressed down to earth. I mean that it ought to be raised above itself that it may not bring into God's sight anything our blind and stupid reason is wont to devise, nor hold itself within the limits of its own vanity, but rise to a purity worthy of God.

#### **5. AGAINST UNDISCIPLINED AND IRREVERENT PRAYER**

These two matters are well worth attention: first, whoever engages in prayer should apply to it his faculties and efforts, and not, as commonly happens, be distracted by wandering thoughts. For nothing is more contrary to reverence for God than the levity that marks an excess of frivolity utterly devoid of awe. In this matter, the harder we find concentration to be, the more strenuously we ought to labor after it. For no one is so intent on praying that he does not feel many irrelevant thoughts stealing upon him, which either break the course of prayer or delay it by some winding bypath. But here let us recall how unworthy it is, when God admits us to intimate conversation, to abuse his great kindness by mixing sacred and profane; but just as if the discourse were between us and an ordinary man, amidst our prayers we neglect him and flit about hither and thither.

Let us therefore realize that the only persons who duly and properly gird themselves to pray are those who are so moved by God's majesty that freed from earthly cares and affections they come to it. And the rite of raising the hands means that men remember they are far removed from God unless they raise their thoughts on high. As it is also said in the psalm: "To thee... I have lifted up my soul" [<sup><192501></sup>Psalm 25:1; cf. 24:1, Vg.]. And Scripture quite often uses this expression, "to lift up prayer" [e.g., <sup><233704></sup>Isaiah 37:4], in order that those who wish God to hear them may not settle down "on their lees" [cf. <sup><244811></sup>Jeremiah 48:11; <sup><360112></sup>Zephaniah 1:12]. In short, the more generously God deals with us, gently summoning us to unburden our cares into his bosom, the less excusable are we if his splendid and incomparable benefit does not outweigh all else with us and draw us to him, so that we apply our minds and efforts zealously to prayer. This cannot happen unless the mind, stoutly wrestling with these hindrances, rises above them.

We have noted another point: not to ask any more than God allows. For even though he bids us pour out our hearts before him [<sup><196208></sup>Psalm 62:8; cf. <sup><19E519></sup>Psalm 145:19], he still does not indiscriminately slacken the reins to stupid and wicked emotions; and while he promises that he will act according to the will of the godly, his gentleness does not go so far that he yields to their willfulness. Yet in both, men commonly sin gravely; for many rashly, shamelessly, and irreverently dare importune God with their improprieties and impudently present before his throne whatever in dreams has struck their fancy. But such great dullness or stupidity grips them that they dare thrust upon God all their vilest desires, which they would be deeply ashamed to acknowledge to men. Certain profane authors <sup>F501</sup> made fun of and even detested this effrontery, but the vice itself has always held sway; and hence it came to pass that ambitious men chose Jupiter as their patron; the miserly, Mercury; those greedy for knowledge, Apollo and Minerva; the warlike, Mars; the lecherous, Venus. Even so today, as I have just suggested, men in their prayers grant more license to their unlawful desires than if equals were jestingly to gossip with equals. Yet, God does not allow his gentle dealing to be thus mocked but, claiming his own right, he subjects our wishes to his power and bridles them. For this reason, we must hold fast to John's statement: "This is the confidence

we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” [<sup><620514></sup> 1 John 5:14].

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AIDS RIGHT PRAYER

But because our abilities are far from able to match such perfection, we must seek a remedy to help us. As we must turn keenness of mind toward God, so affection of heart has to follow. Both, indeed, stand far beneath; nay, more truly, they faint and fail, or are carried in the opposite direction. Therefore, in order to minister to this weakness, God gives us the Spirit as our teacher in prayer, to tell us what is right and temper our emotions. For, “because we do not know how to pray as we ought, the Spirit comes to our help,” and “intercedes for us with unspeakable groans” [<sup><450826></sup> Romans 8:26]; not that he actually prays or groans but arouses in us assurance, desires, and sighs, to conceive which our natural powers would scarcely suffice. And Paul, with good reason, calls “unspeakable” these groans which believers give forth under the guidance of the Spirit; <sup>F502</sup> for they who are truly trained in prayers are not unmindful that, perplexed by blind anxieties, they are so constrained as scarcely to find out what it is expedient for them to utter. Indeed, when they try to stammer, they are confused and hesitate. Clearly, then, to pray rightly is a rare gift. These things are not said in order that we, favoring our own slothfulness, may give over the function of prayer to the Spirit of God, and vegetate in that carelessness to which we are all too prone, in this strain we hear the impious voices of certain persons, saying that we should drowsily wait until he overtake our preoccupied minds. But rather our intention is that, loathing our inertia and dullness, we should seek such aid of the Spirit. And indeed, Paul, when he enjoins us to pray in the Spirit [<sup><461415></sup> 1 Corinthians 14:15], does not stop urging us to watchfulness. He means that the prompting of the Spirit empowers us so to compose prayers as by no means to hinder or hold back our own effort, since in this matter God’s will is to test how effectually faith moves our hearts.

**Second Rule: We pray from a sincere sense of want, and with penitence, 6-7**

## 6. THE SENSE OF NEED THAT EXCLUDES ALL UNREALITY.

Let this be the second rule: that in our petitions we ever sense our own insufficiency, and earnestly pondering how we need all that we seek, join with this prayer an earnest—nay, burning—desire to attain it. <sup>F503</sup> For many perfunctorily intone prayers after a set form, as if discharging a duty to God. And although they admit it to be a necessary remedy for their ills, because it would be fatal to lack the help of God which they are beseeching, still it appears that they perform this duty from habit, because their hearts are meanwhile cold, and they do not ponder what they ask. Indeed, a general and confused feeling of their need leads them to prayer, but it does not arouse them, as it were in present reality, to seek the relief of their poverty. Now what do we account more hateful or even execrable to God than the fiction of someone asking pardon for his sins, all the while either thinking he is not a sinner or at least not thinking he is a sinner? Unquestionably something in which God himself is mocked! Yet, as I have just said, mankind is so stuffed with such depravity that for the sake of mere performance men often beseech God for many things that they are dead sure will, apart from his kindness, come to them from some other source, or already lie in their possession.

A fault that seems less serious but is also not tolerable is that of others who, having been imbued with this one principle—that God must be appeased by devotions—mumble prayers without meditation. Now the godly must particularly beware of presenting themselves before God to request anything unless they yearn for it with sincere affection of heart, and at the same time desire to obtain it from him. Indeed, even though in those things which we seek only to God's glory we do not seem at first glance to be providing for our own need, yet it is fitting that they be sought with no less ardor and eagerness. When, for example, we pray that "his name be sanctified" [<sup><400609></sup>Matthew 6:9; <sup><421102></sup>Luke 11:2], we should, so to speak, eagerly hunger and thirst after that sanctification.

## 7. IS PRAYER AT TIMES DEPENDENT UPON OUR PASSING MOOD?

If anyone should object that we are not always urged with equal necessity to pray, I admit it. And to our benefit James gives us this distinction: "Is



anyone among you sad? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing” [<sup><590513></sup>James 5:13 p.]. Therefore common sense itself dictates that, because we are too lazy, God pricks us the more sharply, as occasion demands, to pray earnestly. David calls this a “seasonable time” [<sup><193206></sup>Psalm 32:6; 31:6, Vg.] because, as he teaches in many other passages [e.g., <sup><199419></sup>Psalm 94:19], the more harshly troubles, discomforts, fears, and trials of other sorts press us, the freer is our access to him, as if God were summoning us to himself.

At the same time Paul’s statement is no less true, that we must “pray at all times” [<sup><490618></sup>Ephesians 6:18; <sup><520517></sup>1 Thessalonians 5:17]. For however much after our heart’s desire affairs may prosperously flow and occasion for happiness surround us on all sides, still there is no point of time when our need does not urge us to pray. A certain man has abundant wine and grain. Since he cannot enjoy a single morsel of bread apart from God’s continuing favor, his wine cellars and granaries will not hinder him from praying for his daily bread. Now if we should consider how many dangers at every moment threaten, fear itself will teach us that we at no single time may leave off praying.

Still, we can better recognize this fact in spiritual matters. For when should the many sins of which we are conscious allow us nonchalantly to stop praying as suppliants for pardon of our guilt and penalty? When do temptations yield us a truce from hastening after help? Moreover, zeal for the Kingdom of God and his glory ought so to lay hold on us, not intermittently but constantly, that the same opportunity may ever remain ours. It is therefore not in vain that constancy in prayer is enjoined upon us. I am not yet speaking of perseverance, of which mention will be made later,<sup>F504</sup> but Scripture, admonishing us to “pray constantly” [<sup><520517></sup>1 Thessalonians 5:17], accuses us of sloth, for we do not realize how much we need this attentiveness and constancy. By this rule, hypocrisy and wily falsehoods toward God are debarred from prayer—indeed, are banished far away! God promises that “he will be near to all who call upon him bin truth” [<sup><19E518></sup>Psalm 145:18, cf. Comm.], and states that those who seek him with all their heart will find him [<sup><242913></sup>Jeremiah 29:13-14]. For this reason, they who delight in their own foulness aspire not at all. Lawful prayer, therefore, demands repentance. Hence arises the commonplace in Scripture that God does not hearken to the wicked

[<sup><430931></sup> John 9:31], and that their prayers [cf. <sup><202809></sup> Proverbs 28:9; <sup><230115></sup> Isaiah 1:15]—just as their sacrifices [cf. <sup><201508></sup> Proverbs 15:8; 21:27]—are abominable to him. For it is right that they who bar their hearts should find God’s ears closed, and that they who by their hardheartedness provoke his severity should not feel him conciliatory. In Isaiah he threatens in this way: “Even though you multiply your prayers, I will not listen; for your hands are full of blood” [<sup><230115></sup> Isaiah 1:15, cf. Vg.]. Again, in Jeremiah: “I cried out... and they refused to listen;... they will cry out in return, and I will not listen” [<sup><241107></sup> Jeremiah 11:7,8,11.] For he counts it the height of dishonor for wicked men, who all their lives besmirch his sacred name, to boast of his covenant. Consequently, in Isaiah he complains, when the Jews “draw near to him with their lips... their hearts are far from him” [<sup><232913></sup> Isaiah 29:13 p.]. He does not, indeed, restrict this to prayers alone but declares that falsity in any part of his worship is abhorrent to him. That statement of James applies here. “You seek, and do not receive because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions” [<sup><590403></sup> James 4:3]. It is indeed true, as we shall again see a little later, <sup>F505</sup> that the prayers poured out by the godly do not depend upon their worthiness; yet John’s warning is not superfluous: “We receive from him whatever we ask because we keep his commandments” [<sup><620322></sup> 1 John 3:22], while a bad conscience closes the door to us. From this it follows that only sincere worshipers of God pray aright and are heard. Let each one, therefore, as he prepares to pray be displeased with his own evil deeds, and (something that cannot happen without repentance) let him take the person and disposition of a beggar.

### **Third Rule: We yield all confidence in ourselves and humbly plead for pardon, 8-10**

#### **8. WE COME AS HUMBLE SUPPLIANTS FOR MERCY**

To this let us join a third rule: that anyone who stands before God to pray, in his humility giving glory completely to God, abandon all thought of his own glory, cast off all notion of his own worth, in fine, put away all self-assurance—blest if we claim for ourselves anything, even the least bit, we should become vainly puffed up, and perish at his presence. We have repeated examples of this submission, which levels all haughtiness, in God’s servants; each one of whom, the holier he is, the more he is cast

down when he presents himself before the Lord. Thus spoke Daniel, whom the Lord himself commended with so great a title: “We do not pour forth our prayers unto thee on the ground of our righteousnesses but on the ground of thy great mercy. O Lord, hear us; O Lord, be kindly unto us. Hear us, and do what we ask... for thine own sake... because thy name is called upon over thy people, and over thine holy place” [<sup><270918></sup>Daniel 9:18-19, cf. Vg.]. Nor does he, by a devious figure of speech, as some men do, mingle with the crowd as one of the people. Rather he confesses his guilt as an individual, and as a suppliant takes refuge in God’s pardon, as he eloquently declares: “When I had... confessed my sin and the sin of my people” [<sup><270920></sup>Daniel 9:20 p.]. David also enjoins this humility by his own example: “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for no man living is righteous before thee” [<sup><19E302></sup>Psalms 143:2; cf. Comm. and <sup><19E202></sup>Psalms 142:2, Vg.]. In such a form, Isaiah prays: “Behold, thou wert wroth, for we sinned... The world is founded upon thy ways, therefore we shall be saved... And all of us have been full of uncleanness, and all our righteousnesses like a filthy rag; we all have faded like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, scatter us. There is no one who calls upon thy name, who bestirs himself to take hold of thee. For thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast made us to melt away in the hand of our iniquities. Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay, thou art our potter and we are the work of thy hand. Be not angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold now, consider, we are all thy people” [<sup><236405></sup>Isaiah 64:5-9, cf. Comm.].

Observe that they depend on no assurance whatever but this alone: that, reckoning themselves to be of God, they do not despair that he will take care of them. Likewise, Jeremiah: “Though our iniquities testify against us, act... for thy name’s sake” [<sup><241407></sup>Jeremiah 14:7]. For some unknown author, whoever he may be, has written these very true and holy words attributed to the prophet Baruch: “The soul that is sorrowful and desolate for the greatness of her evil, bowed down and feeble,... the hungry soul, and the eyes that fail give glory... to thee, O Lord. It is not for the righteousnesses of the fathers that we pour out our prayers before thee, and beg mercy in thy sight, O Lord our God” [Baruch 2:18-19 p., cf. Vg.]; but because thou art merciful, “be merciful unto us, for we have sinned before thee” [Baruch 3:2].

## 9. THE PLEA FOR FORGIVENESS OF SINS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF PRAYER

To sum up: the beginning, and even the preparation, of proper prayer is the plea for pardon with a humble and sincere confession of guilt. Nor should anyone, however holy he may be, hope that he will obtain anything from God until he is freely reconciled to him; nor can God chance to be propitious to any but those whom he has pardoned. Accordingly, it is no wonder if believers open for themselves the door to prayer with this key, as we learn from numerous passages of the Psalms. For David, asking for something else than remission of his sins, says: “Remember not the sins of my youth, and my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember me, for thy goodness’ sake, O Lord” [<sup><192507></sup> Psalm 25:7]. Again: “See my affliction and my toil, and forgive all my sins.” [<sup><192518></sup> Psalm 25:18 p.] Also, in this we see that it is not enough for us to call ourselves to account each day for recent sins if we do not remember those sins which might seem to have been long forgotten.

For the same prophet, elsewhere having confessed one grave offense, on this occasion even turns back to his mother’s womb, in which he had contracted the infection [<sup><195105></sup> Psalm 51:5], not to extenuate the guilt on the ground of corruption of nature but that, in gathering up the sins of his whole life, the more rigorously he condemns himself, the more easily entreated he may find God. But even though the saints do not always beg forgiveness of sins in so many words, if we diligently ponder their prayers that Scripture relates, we shall readily come upon what I speak of: that they have received their intention to pray from God’s mercy alone, and thus always have begun with appeasing him. For if anyone should question his own conscience, he would be so far from daring intimately to lay aside his cares before God that, unless he relied upon mercy and pardon, he would tremble at every approach.

There is also another special confession when suppliants ask release from punishments. It is that at the same time they may pray for the pardon of their sins. For it would be absurd to wish the effect to be removed while the cause remained. We must guard against imitating foolish sick folk, who, concerned solely with the treatment of symptoms, neglect the very root of the disease. We must make it our first concern that God be favorable

toward us, rather than that he attest his favor by outward signs, because he wills to maintain this order, and it would have been of small profit to us to have him do us good unless our conscience, feeling him wholly appeased, rendered him altogether lovely [Cant. 5:16]. Christ's reply also reminds us of this; for after he had decided to heal the paralytic, "Your sins," he said, "are forgiven you" [<sup><400902></sup> Matthew 9:2]. He thus arouses our minds to that which we ought especially to desire: that God may receive us into grace; then, that in aiding us he may set forth the fruit of reconciliation.

But besides that special confession of present guilt, with which believers plead for the remission of every sin and penalty, the general preface that gains favor for prayers must never be passed over, for unless they are founded in free mercy, prayers never reach God. John's statement can be applied to this: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive... and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" [<sup><620109></sup> 1 John 1:9, Vg.]. For this reason, under the law prayers had to be consecrated with blood atonement [cf. <sup><011208></sup> Genesis 12:8; 26:25; 33:20; <sup><090709></sup> 1 Samuel 7:9] in order that they should be accepted, and that the people should thus be warned that they were unworthy of so great a privilege of honor until, purged of their defilement, they derived confidence in prayer solely from God's mercy.

## 10. REFERENCE TO ONE'S OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Now the saints sometimes seem to shout approval of their own righteousness in calling upon God for help. For example, David says: "Keep my life, for I am good" [<sup><198602></sup> Psalm 86:2 p.]; and similarly, Hezekiah: "Remember... O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth... and have done what is good in thy sight" [<sup><122003></sup> 2 Kings 20:3 p.; cf. <sup><233803></sup> Isaiah 38:3]. By such expressions they mean nothing else but that by their regeneration itself they are attested as servants and children of God to whom he promises that he will be gracious. He teaches through the prophet, as we have already seen <sup>F506</sup> that his eyes "are upon the righteous, his ears toward their prayers" [<sup><193415></sup> Psalm 34:15; cf. 33:16, Vg.]. Again, through the apostle John: "We shall receive... whatever we ask if we keep his commandments" [<sup><620322></sup> 1 John 3:22 p.]. In these statements he does not set the value of prayer according to the merits of works, but he is pleased to establish the assurance of those who are duly

aware of guileless uprightness and innocence, as all believers ought to be. Indeed, what the blind man whose sight was restored says in John's gospel—that God does not listen to sinners [<sup><430931></sup> John 9:31]—has been drawn from the very truth of God, provided we understand “sinners” in the customary usage of Scripture, as all persons who slumber and repose in their own sins without any desire for righteousness. For no heart can ever break into sincere calling upon God that does not at the same time aspire to godliness. To such promises, then, correspond the saints' attestations, in which they mention their purity or innocence in order that they may feel, what all God's servants should hope for, made manifest to themselves.

Again, while they are before the Lord comparing themselves with their enemies, from whose iniquity they long to be delivered by his hand, they are commonly found using this sort of prayer. Now it is no wonder if in this comparison they put forward their own righteousness and simplicity of heart in order that, from the equity of the cause itself, they might the more move the Lord to provide them with assistance. The godly man enjoys a pure conscience before the Lord, thus confirming himself in the promises with which the Lord comforts and supports his true worshipers. It is not our intent to snatch this blessing from his breast; rather, we would assert that his assurance his prayers will be answered rests solely upon God's clemency, apart from all consideration of personal merit.

#### **Fourth rule: We pray with confident hope, 11-14**

### **11. HOPE AND FAITH OVERCOME FEAR**

The fourth rule is that, thus cast down and overcome by true humility, we should be nonetheless encouraged to pray by a sure hope that our prayer will be answered. These are indeed things apparently contrary: to join the firm assurance of God's favor to a sense of his just vengeance; yet, on the ground that God's goodness alone raises up those oppressed by their own evil deeds, they very well agree together. For, in accordance with our previous teaching that repentance and faith are companions joined together by an indissoluble bond, although one of these terrifies us while the other gladdens us, <sup>F507</sup> so also these two ought to be present together in prayers. And David briefly expresses this agreement when he says: “I through the

abundance of thy goodness will enter thy house, I will worship toward the temple of thy holiness with fear” [<sup><190507></sup>Psalm 5:7]. Under God’s goodness he includes faith, meantime not excluding fear. For not only does his majesty constrain us to reverence but through our own unworthiness, forgetting all pride and self-confidence, we are held in fear.

But “assurance” I do not understand to mean that which soothes our mind with sweet and perfect repose, releasing it from every anxiety. For to repose so peacefully is the part of those who, when all affairs are flowing to their liking, are touched by no care, burn with no desire, toss with no fear. But for the saints the occasion that best stimulates them to call upon God is when, distressed by their own need, they are troubled by the greatest unrest, and are almost driven out of their senses, until faith opportunely comes to their relief. For among such tribulations God’s goodness so shines upon them that even when they groan with weariness under the weight of present ills, and also are troubled and tormented by the fear of greater ones, yet, relying upon his goodness, they are relieved of the difficulty of bearing them, and are solaced and hope for escape and deliverance. It is fitting therefore that the godly man’s prayer arise from these two emotions, that it also contain and represent both. That is, that he groan under present ills and anxiously fear those to come, yet at the same time take refuge in God, not at all doubting he is ready to extend his helping hand. It is amazing how much our lack of trust provokes God if we request of him a boon that we do not expect.

## PRAYER AND FAITH

Therefore nothing is more in harmony with the nature of prayers than that this rule be laid down and established for them: that they not break forth by chance but follow faith as guide. Christ calls this principle to the attention of all of us with this saying: “I say unto you, whatever you seek... , believe that you will receive it, and it will come to you” [<sup><411124></sup>Mark 11:24 p.] <sup>F508</sup> He confirms the same statement in another place: “Whatever you ask in prayer, believing” etc. [<sup><402122></sup>Matthew 21:22]. James is in accord with this: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men simply and without reproaching... Let him ask in faith, with no wavering” [<sup><590105></sup>James 1:5-6 p.]. There, opposing faith to wavering, he most appropriately expresses the force of faith.

Nonetheless, what he adds must also be noted: that they who in doubt and perplexity call upon God, uncertain in their minds whether they will be heard or not, will gain nothing [cf. <sup><590107></sup>James 1:7]. He even compares these persons to waves that are driven and tossed hither and thither by the wind [<sup><590106></sup>James 1:6].<sup>F509</sup> Hence, in another passage, James calls what is right and proper “the prayer of faith” [<sup><590515></sup>James 5:15]. Then, since God so often affirms that he will give to each one according to his faith [<sup><400813></sup>Matthew 8:13; 9:29; <sup><411124></sup>Mark 11:24], he implies that we can obtain nothing apart from faith.

To sum up, it is faith that obtains whatever is granted to prayer. Such is the meaning of Paul’s famous statement, which the unwise too little regard: “How will anyone call upon him in whom he has not believed? And who will believe unless he has heard?” [<sup><451014></sup>Romans 10:14 p.]. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing from the Word of God.” [<sup><451017></sup>Romans 10:17.] For, deducing step by step the beginning of prayer from faith, he plainly asserts that God cannot be sincerely called upon by others than those to whom, through the preaching of the gospel, his kindness and gentle dealing have become known—indeed, have been intimately revealed.

## **12. AGAINST THE DENIAL OF CERTAINTY THAT PRAYER IS GRANTED**

Our opponents do not at all ponder this requirement. Therefore, when we enjoin believers to be convinced with firm assurance of mind that God is favorable and benevolent to them, they think we are saying the most absurd thing of all. Still, if they made any use of true prayer, they would really understand that without that firm sense of the divine benevolence God could not be rightly called upon. Since no one can well perceive the power of faith unless he feels it by experience in his heart, what point is there in arguing with men of this stripe, who clearly show that they have never had anything but an empty imagination? For the value and need of that assurance, which we require, is chiefly learned from calling upon him. He who does not see this shows that he has a very insensate conscience. Let us, then, pass over this class of blind persons, and cleave firmly to the statement of Paul’s: God cannot be called upon by any except those who



have learned of his mercy from the gospel [<sup><451014></sup>Romans 10:14], and have surely been persuaded that it has been prepared for them.

Now what sort of prayer will this be? “O Lord, I am in doubt whether thou wilt hear me, but because I am pressed by anxiety, I flee to thee, that, if I am worthy, thou mayest help me.” This is not the way of all the saints whose prayers we read in Scripture. And the Holy Spirit did not so instruct us through the apostle, who enjoins us to “draw near to the heavenly throne... with confidence, that we may receive... grace” [<sup><580416></sup>Hebrews 4:16 p.]; and when he teaches elsewhere that we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in Christ [<sup><490312></sup>Ephesians 3:12]. If we would pray fruitfully, we ought therefore to grasp with both hands this assurance of obtaining what we ask, which the Lord enjoins with his own voice, and all the saints teach by their example. For only that prayer is acceptable to God which is born, if I may so express it, out of such presumption of faith, and is grounded in unshaken assurance of hope. He could have been content with the simple mention of faith, yet he not only added confidence but also fortified it with freedom or boldness, that by this mark he might distinguish from us the unbelievers, who indeed indiscriminately mingle with us in our prayers to God, but by chance. The whole church prays in this way in the psalm: “Let thy mercy be upon us, even as we have hoped in thee” [<sup><193322></sup>Psalms 33:22, Comm.]. Elsewhere the prophet lays down the same condition: “In the day when I call, this I know, that God is with me” [<sup><195609></sup>Psalms 56:9, Comm.]. Likewise: “In the morning I will make ready for thee, and watch.” [<sup><190503></sup>Psalms 5:3, see Comm.] From these words we conclude that prayers are vainly cast upon the air unless hope be added, from which we quietly watch for God as from a watchtower. Paul’s order of exhortation agrees with these: for before he urges believers “to pray at all times in the Spirit” with watchfulness and perseverance [<sup><490618></sup>Ephesians 6:18], he bids them first take up “the shield of faith,... the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” [<sup><490616></sup>Ephesians 6:16-17].

Here let my readers recall what I said before: that faith is not at all overthrown when it is joined with the acknowledgment of our misery, destitution, and uncleanness. <sup>F510</sup> For however much believers may feel pressed down or troubled by a heavy weight of sins, not only bereft of all

things that might obtain favor with God, but laden with many offenses that justly render him terrifying, nevertheless they do not cease to present themselves; and this feeling does not frighten them from betaking themselves to him, since there is no other access to him. For prayer was not ordained that we should be haughtily puffed up before God, or greatly esteem anything of ours, but that, having confessed our guilt, we should deplore our distresses before him, as children unburden their troubles to their parents. Moreover, the boundless mass of our sins should amply furnish us with spurs or goads to arouse us to pray, as the prophet also teaches us by his example: “Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee [<sup><194104></sup>Psalm 41:4]. I, indeed, confess that in these darts there would be deadly stings if God did not help us. But according to his incomparable compassion, our most gracious Father has added a timely remedy, by which, calming all perturbation, assuaging cares, casting out fears, he may draw us gently to himself—nay, removing all rough spots, not to mention hindrances, he may pave the way.

### **13. GOD’S COMMAND AND PROMISE AS MOTIVE FOR PRAYER**

First, bidding us pray, by the precept itself he convicts us of impious obstinacy unless we obey. <sup>F511</sup> Nothing could be commanded more precisely than what is stated in the psalm: “Call upon me in the day of tribulation” [<sup><195015></sup>Psalm 50:15; 49:15, Vg.]. But because among the duties of godliness the Scriptures commend none more frequently, I need not dwell longer on this point. “Seek,” says the Master, “and you will receive; knock, and it will be opened unto you.” [<sup><400707></sup>Matthew 7:7.] However, a promise is here also added to the precept, as is necessary; for even though all admit that the precept ought to be obeyed, still the majority would flee from God when he calls if he did not promise to be easily entreated and readily accessible.

When these two things have been established, it is certain that those who try to wriggle out of coming directly to God are not only rebellious and stubborn but are also convicted of unbelief because they distrust the promises. This is all the more noteworthy, since hypocrites on the pretense of humility and modesty haughtily despise God’s precept and discredit as well his kindly invitation—even defraud him of the chief part

of his worship. For having rejected sacrifices in which all holiness then seemed to rest [<sup><195007></sup> Psalm 50:7-13], he declares that to be called upon in the day of need is highest and precious above all else [<sup><195015></sup> Psalm 50:15]. Therefore, when he requires what is his, and spurs us to eager obedience, there are no colors of doubt, however alluring, that can excuse us. So then, all the passages that keep occurring in the Scriptures, in which calling upon God is enjoined upon us, are as so many banners set up before our eyes to inspire us with confidence. It would be rashness itself to burst into God's sight if he himself had not anticipated our coming by calling us. Therefore he opens a way for us in his own words: "I will say to them, 'You are my people'; they will say to me, 'Thou art our God'" [<sup><381309></sup> Zechariah 13:9 p.]. We see how he precedes those who worship him, and would have them follow him, and thus not to fear for the sweetness of the melody that he himself dictates. Especially let that noble title of God come to our minds, relying upon which we shall without trouble overcome all obstacles. "O god... thou who hearest prayer! To thee shall all flesh come." [<sup><196501></sup> Psalm 65:1-2.] For what is more lovely or agreeable than for God to bear this title, which assures us that nothing is more to his nature than to assent to the prayers of suppliants? From this the prophet infers that the door is open not to a few but to all mortals, for he addresses all in these words: "Call upon me in the day of affliction; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" [<sup><195015></sup> Psalm 50:15]. According to this rule, David claims for himself the promise given him, that he may obtain what he seeks. "Thou,... O God, hast revealed to the ear of thy servant... ; therefore thy servant has found courage to pray." [<sup><100727></sup> 2 Samuel 7:27, cf. Vg.] From this we conclude that he was fearful except in so far as the promise had encouraged him. So elsewhere he arms himself with this general doctrine: "He will do the will of those who fear him" [<sup><19E519></sup> Psalm 145:19; 144:19, Vg.]. Indeed, we may note this in the Psalms: that if the thread of prayer were broken, transition is sometimes made to God's power, sometimes to his goodness, sometimes to the faithfulness of his promises. It might seem that David, by inserting these statements inopportunistly, mutilates his prayers, but believers know by use and experience that ardor burns low unless they supply new fuel. Accordingly, among our prayers, meditation both on God's nature and on his Word is by no means superfluous. And so by David's example, let us

not disdain to insert something that may refresh our languishing spirits with new vigor.

#### **14. MEN SHOULD PRAY CONFIDENTLY, WITHOUT TERROR BUT WITH REVERENTIAL FEAR**

It is strange that by promises of such great sweetness we are affected either so coldly or hardly at all, so that many of us prefer to wander through mazes and, forsaking the fountain of living waters, to dig out for ourselves dry cisterns [<sup><240213></sup>Jeremiah 2:13], rather than to embrace God's generosity, freely given to us. "The name of the Lord is an impregnable citadel," says Solomon; "the righteous man will flee to it and be saved." [<sup><201810></sup>Proverbs 18:10 p.] But Joel, after he has prophesied the frightful ruin that threatens, adds this memorable sentence: "All that call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered" [<sup><290232></sup>Joel 2:32; <sup><451013></sup>Romans 10:13]. This we know actually refers to the course of the gospel [<sup><440221></sup>Acts 2:21]. Scarcely one man in a hundred <sup>F512</sup> is moved to approach God. He himself proclaims through Isaiah: "You will call upon me and I shall hear you. Nay, before you call, I will answer you" [<sup><236524></sup>Isaiah 65:24 p.]. Elsewhere he also vouchsafes this same honor to the whole church in common, as it applies to all the members of Christ. "He has called to me and I shall hearken to him; I am with him in tribulation to rescue him." [<sup><199115></sup>Psalm 91:15.] <sup>F513</sup> Still, it is not my purpose, as I have already said, <sup>F514</sup> to list every passage but to choose certain pre-eminent ones, from which we may taste how gently God attracts us to himself, and with what tight bonds our ungratefulness is bound when, amidst such sharp pricks, our sluggishness still delays. Accordingly, let these words ever resound in our ears: "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, who call upon him in truth" [<sup><19E518></sup>Psalm 145:18; cf. 144:18, Vg.]. It is the same with the words we have quoted from Isaiah and Joel, with which God assures us that he is attentive to our prayers, and is even pleased as by a sacrifice of sweet savor when we "cast our cares upon him" [cf. <sup><600507></sup>1 Peter 5:7; also <sup><195522></sup>Psalm 55:22; 54:23, Vg.]. We receive this singular fruit of God's promises when we frame our prayers without hesitation or trepidation; but, relying upon the word of him whose majesty would otherwise terrify us, we dare call upon him as Father, while he deigns to suggest this sweetest of names to us.

It remains for us, provided with such inducements, to know that we have from this enough evidence that he will hearken to us, inasmuch as our prayers depend upon no merit of ours, but their whole worth and hope of fulfillment are grounded in God's promises, and depend upon them, <sup>F515</sup> so that they need no other support, nor do they look about up and down, hither and thither. We must therefore make up our minds that, even though we do not excel in a holiness like that which is praised in the holy patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, yet because we and they have a common command to pray and a common faith, if we rely upon God's Word, in this we are rightly their fellows. For God, as has been seen above, <sup>F516</sup> declaring that he will be gentle and kind to all, gives to the utterly miserable, hope that they will get what they have sought. Accordingly, we must note the general forms, by which no one from first to last (as people say) is excluded, provided sincerity of heart, dissatisfaction with ourselves, humility, and faith are present in order that our hypocrisy may not profane God's name by calling upon him deceitfully. Our most gracious Father will not cast out those whom he not only urges, but stirs up with every possible means, to come to him. Hence arises David's way of praying, to which I have recently referred: "Behold, Lord, thou hast promised thy servant therefore thy servant has today taken heart and found what he might pray before thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art God, and thy words will be true. Thou hast spoken of these benefits to thy servant. Now begin and do it" [<sup><100727></sup> 2 Samuel 7:27-29, cf. Vg.]. As also elsewhere: "Grant unto thy servant according to thy word." [<sup><19B976></sup> Psalm 119:76 p.] And all the Israelites together, whenever they arm themselves by remembering the covenant, sufficiently assert that since God so enjoins, one is not to pray fearfully. In this they followed the examples of the patriarchs, especially Jacob, who, after he confessed himself to be less than the many mercies he had received at God's hand [<sup><013210></sup> Genesis 32:10], says that he is nevertheless encouraged to ask greater things because God had promised that he would do them [cf. <sup><013212></sup> Genesis 32:12-13].

But whatever pretenses unbelievers present, when they do not flee to God whenever necessity presses, do not seek him, and do not implore his help, they defraud him just as much of his due honor as if they made new gods and idols, since in this way they deny God is the author of every good

thing. On the other hand, nothing is more effective to free the godly from every misgiving than to be fortified with this thought: there is no reason why any delay should hinder them while they obey the commandment of God, who declares that nothing pleases him more than obedience.

Hence what I have previously said is shown again in clearer light: that a dauntless spirit of praying rightly accords with fear, reverence, and solicitude, and it is not absurd if God raises those who lie prostrate. In this way expressions seemingly discordant beautifully agree. Jeremiah and Daniel say that they lay their prayers before God [<sup><244209></sup>Jeremiah 42:9; <sup><270918></sup>Daniel 9:18]. Elsewhere Jeremiah says: “Let our supplication fall before thee that the remnant of thy people may be pitied” [<sup><244202></sup>Jeremiah 42:2 p.]. On the other hand, believers are often said to “lift up prayer.” So speaks Hezekiah, when he asks the prophet to intercede on his behalf [<sup><121904></sup>2 Kings 19:4]. And David longs to have his prayer rise up “as incense” [<sup><19E102></sup>Psalms 141:2]. That is, although, persuaded of God’s fatherly love, they gladly commit themselves to his safekeeping and do not hesitate to implore the assistance that he freely promises, still they are not elated by heedless confidence, as if they had cast away shame, but they so climb upward by the steps of the promises that they still remain supplicants in their self-abasement.

*(God hearkens even to defective prayers, 15-16)*

## 15. HEARKENING TO PERVERTED PRAYER

Here more than one question is raised: for Scripture relates that God has granted fulfillment of certain prayers, despite the fact that they have burst forth from a heart not at all peaceful or composed. For due cause, yet aroused by passionate wrath and vengeance, Jotham had vowed the inhabitants of Shechem to the destruction that later overtook them [<sup><070920></sup>Judges 9:20]; God in allowing the curse seems to approve ill-controlled outbreaks. Such passion also seized Samson, when he said: “Strengthen me, O God, that I may take vengeance on the uncircumcised” [<sup><071628></sup>Judges 16:28 p.]. For even though there was some righteous zeal mixed in, still a burning and hence vicious longing for vengeance was in control. God granted the petition. From this, it seems, we may infer that,

although prayers are not framed to the rule of the Word, they obtain their effect.

I reply that a universal law is not abrogated by individual examples; further, that special impulses have sometimes been imparted to a few men, by which it came about that a different consideration applied to them than to the common folk. For we must note Christ's answer when his disciples heedlessly desired him to emulate the example of Elijah, that they did not know with what sort of spirit they were endowed [<sup><420955></sup>Luke 9:55].

But we must go farther: the prayers that God grants are not always pleasing to him. But in so far as example is concerned, what Scripture teaches is revealed by clear proofs: that he helps the miserable and hearkens to the groans of those who, unjustly afflicted, implore his aid; therefore, that he executes his judgments while complaints of the poor rise up to him, although they are unworthy to receive even a trifle. For how often did he, punishing the cruelty, robberies, violence, lust, and other crimes of the ungodly, silencing their boldness and rage, also overturning their tyrannical power, attest that he helps those wrongly oppressed, who yet beat the air with praying to an unknown god? And one psalm clearly teaches that prayers which do not reach heaven by faith still are not without effect. The psalm lumps together those prayers which, out of natural feeling, necessity wrings from unbelievers just as much as from believers, yet from the outcome it proves that God is gracious toward them [<sup><19A706></sup>Psalm 107:6,13,19]. Is it because he with such gentleness attests the prayers to be acceptable to him? Nay, it is by this circumstance to emphasize or illumine his mercy whenever the prayers of unbelievers are not denied to them; and again to incite his true worshipers to pray the more, when they see that even ungodly wailings sometimes do some good.

Yet there is no reason why believers should turn aside from a law divinely imposed upon them, or should envy unbelievers, as if from having gotten what they wished they had made great gain. We said that in this way God was moved by Ahab's reigned penitence [<sup><112129></sup>1 Kings 21:29]<sup>F517</sup> in order to prove by this evidence how easily entreated he is toward his elect when they come with true conversion to appease him. Therefore, in Psalm 106, he blames the Jews because, having found him receptive to their pleas [<sup><19A608></sup>Psalm 106:8-12], they shortly after reverted to the stubbornness

of their nature [<sup><19A643></sup>Psalm 106:43; cf. <sup><19A613></sup>Psalm 106:13 ff.]. This is also perfectly clear from the history of the Judges: whenever the Israelites wept, even though their tears were false, yet they were rescued from their enemies' hands [cf. <sup><070309></sup>Judges 3:9]. Just as God causes his sun to shine alike upon the good and the evil [<sup><400545></sup>Matthew 5:45], so he does not despise the weeping of those whose cause is just and whose distresses deserve to be relieved. Meanwhile, in listening to the prayers of the evil, he no more grants them salvation than he supplies food to those who despise his goodness.

In the cases of Abraham and Samuel, more difficult questions seem to arise—the one, instructed by no word of God, prayed for the people of Sodom [<sup><011823></sup>Genesis 18:23]; the other prayed for Saul, even against a downright interdiction [<sup><091511></sup>1 Samuel 15:11]. Jeremiah acted similarly when he prayed that the destruction of the city be averted [<sup><243216></sup>Jeremiah 32:16 ff.]. For although they suffered a refusal, it seems hard to judge them as not having faith. But this solution, I trust, will satisfy moderate readers: relying upon the general principles by which God bids us bestow mercy even upon the unworthy, they did not utterly lack faith, although in this particular instance their opinion deceived them. Augustine somewhere wisely states: “How do the saints pray in faith when they seek from God what is against his decree? They pray according to his will, not that hidden and unchangeable will but the will that he inspires in them, that he may hearken to them in another way, as he wisely decides.”<sup>F518</sup> Rightly said. For he so tempers the outcome of events according to his incomprehensible plan that the prayers of the saints, which are a mixture of faith and error, are not nullified. But this ought no more to be held as a valid example for imitation than as excusing the saints themselves; that they exceeded due measure, I do not deny. Therefore, where no certain promise shows itself, we must ask of God conditionally. Here that statement of David is apposite: “Awake... unto the judgment which thou hast commanded” [<sup><190706></sup>Psalm 7:6 p.]. For he shows that he was instructed by a special oracle to seek a temporal benefit.



## 16. OUR PRAYERS CAN OBTAIN AN ANSWER ONLY THROUGH GOD'S FORGIVENESS

This also is worth noting: what I have set forth on the four rules of right praying is not so rigorously required that God will reject those prayers in which he finds neither perfect faith nor repentance, together with a warmth of zeal and petitions rightly conceived.

I have said<sup>F519</sup> that, although prayer is an intimate conversation of the pious with God, yet reverence and moderation must be kept, lest we give loose rein to miscellaneous requests, and lest we crave more than God allows; further, that we should lift up our minds to a pure and chaste veneration of him, lest God's majesty become worthless for us.

No one has ever carried this out with the uprightness that was due; for, not to mention the rank and file, how many complaints of David savor of intemperance! Not that he would either deliberately expostulate with God or clamor against his judgments, but that, fainting with weakness, he finds no other solace better than to cast his own sorrows into the bosom of God. But God tolerates even our stammering and pardons our ignorance whenever something inadvertently escapes us; as indeed without this mercy there would be no freedom to pray. But although David intended to submit completely to God's will, and prayed with no less patience than zeal to obtain his request, yet there come forth—sometimes, rather, boil up—turbulent emotions, quite out of harmony with the first rule that we laid down.

We can especially see from the ending of the Thirty-ninth Psalm with what violent sorrow this holy man is carried away, so that he cannot control himself. "Let me alone," he says, "before I depart, and be no more." [<sup><193913></sup>Psalm 39:13, Comm.] One might say that this desperate man seeks nothing except to rot in his evils, with God's hand withdrawn. Not that he deliberately rushes into that intemperance, or, as the wicked are wont, wishes to be far from God, but he only complains that God's wrath is unbearable. In those trials also there are often uttered petitions not sufficiently consonant with the rule of God's Word, and in which the saints do not sufficiently weigh what is lawful and expedient. All prayers marred by these defects deserve to be repudiated; nevertheless, provided

the saints bemoan their sins, chastise themselves, and immediately return to themselves, God pardons them.

They likewise sin with regard to the second rule;<sup>F520</sup> for they must repeatedly wrestle with their own coldness, and their need and misery do not sharply enough urge them to pray earnestly. Now it often happens that their minds slip away and well-nigh vanish; accordingly, in this respect there is also need for pardon, lest our languid or mutilated, or interrupted and vague, prayers suffer a refusal. God has planted in men's minds by nature the principle that their prayers are lawful only when their minds are uplifted. Hence the rite of lifting up the hands, to which we have previously referred<sup>F521</sup>—one common to all ages and peoples, and still in force. But how rarely is there one who, in raising up his hands, is not aware of his own apathy, since his heart stays on the ground?

With regard to seeking forgiveness of sins, although no believers neglect this topic, yet those truly versed in prayers know that they do not offer the tenth part of that sacrifice of which David speaks: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" [<sup><195117></sup>Psalm 51:17, cf. Vg. and Comm.].

Accordingly, men should always seek a twofold pardon because they are aware of many offenses, the feeling of which still does not so touch them that they are as much displeased with themselves as they ought to be, but also because, in so far as it has been granted them to benefit by repentance and fear of God, stricken down with a just sorrow on account of their offenses, they pray that the wrath of the judge be averted.

Most of all it is weakness or imperfection of faith that vitiates believers' prayers, unless God's mercy succor them; but no wonder God pardons this defect, since he often tests his own with sharp trials, as if he deliberately willed to snuff out their faith. Hardest of all is this trial, where believers are compelled to cry out, "How long wilt thou be angry with the prayer of thy servant?" [<sup><198004></sup>Psalm 80:4: cf. 79:5, Vg.], as if prayers themselves annoyed God. So when Jeremiah says, "God has shut out my prayer" [<sup><250308></sup>Lamentations 3:8], there is no doubt that he was stricken with violent perturbation. Innumerable examples of this kind occur in Scripture, from which it is clear the faith of the saints was often so mixed and troubled with doubts that in believing and hoping they yet betrayed

some want of faith. But because they do not reach the goal desired, they ought the more to endeavor to correct their faults, and each day come nearer to the perfect rule of prayer. Meanwhile they should feel too the depths of evil in which those have been plunged who bring new diseases upon themselves in their very remedies, seeing that there is no prayer which in justice God would not loathe if he did not overlook the spots with which all are sprinkled. I do not recount these matters in order that believers may confidently pardon themselves for anything but that by severely chastising themselves they may strive to overcome these obstacles; and although Satan tries to block all paths to prevent them from praying, they should nonetheless break through, surely persuaded that, although not freed of all hindrances, their efforts still please God and their petitions are approved, provided they endeavor and strive toward a goal not immediately attainable.

*(The intercession of Christ, 17-20)*

## 17. PRAYER IN THE NAME OF JESUS

Since no man is worthy to present himself to God and come into his sight, the Heavenly Father himself, to free us at once from shame and fear, which might well have thrown our hearts into despair, has given us his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to be our advocate [<sup><620201></sup> 1 John 2:1] and mediator with him [<sup><540205></sup> 1 Timothy 2:5; cf. <sup><580806></sup> Hebrews 8:6 and 9:15], by whose guidance we may confidently come to him, and with such an intercessor, trusting nothing we ask in his name will be denied us, as nothing can be denied to him by the Father. And to this must be referred all that we previously taught about faith. For just as the promise commends Christ the Mediator to us, so, unless the hope of obtaining our requests depends upon him, it cuts itself off from the benefit of prayer.

For as soon as God's dread majesty <sup>F522</sup> comes to mind, we cannot but tremble and be driven far away by the recognition of our own unworthiness, until Christ comes forward as intermediary, to change the throne of dreadful glory into the throne of grace. As the apostle also teaches how awe should dare with all confidence to appear, to receive mercy, and to find grace in timely help [<sup><580416></sup> Hebrews 4:16]. And as a rule has been established to call upon God, and a promise given that those

who call upon him shall be heard, so too we are particularly bidden to call upon him in Christ's name; and we have the promise made that we shall obtain what we have asked in his name. "Hitherto," he says, "you have asked nothing in my name; ask and you will receive." [<sup><431624></sup> John 16:24, Comm.] "In that day you will ask in my name" [<sup><431626></sup> John 16:26, Vg.], and "whatever you ask... I will do it that the Father may be glorified in the Son" [<sup><431413></sup> John 14:13, cf. Comm. and Vg.].

Hence it is incontrovertibly clear that those who call upon God in another name than that of Christ obstinately flout his commands and count his will as nought—indeed, have no promise of obtaining anything. Indeed, as Paul says, "all God's promises find their yea and amen in him" [<sup><470120></sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20]. That is, they are confirmed and fulfilled.

## 18. THE RISEN CHRIST AS OUR INTERCESSOR

And we ought carefully to note the circumstance of the time when Christ enjoins his disciples to take refuge in his intercession, after he shall have ascended into heaven. "In that hour," he says, "you will ask in my name." [<sup><431626></sup> John 16:26.]

It is certain that, from the beginning, those who prayed were not heard save by the Mediator's grace. For this reason, God had taught in the law that the priest alone entering the sanctuary should bear the names of the tribes of Israel upon his shoulders and the same number of precious stones on his breastplate [<sup><022809></sup> Exodus 28:9-21], but the people should stand afar off in the court, and there join their petitions with the priest. Nay, the sacrifice even had value in ratifying and strengthening the prayers. Therefore, that foreshadowing <sup>F523</sup> ceremony of the law taught us that we are all barred from God's presence, and consequently need a Mediator, who should appear in our name and bear us upon his shoulders and hold us bound upon his breast so that we are heard in his person; <sup>F524</sup> further, that our prayers are cleansed by sprinkled blood—prayers that, as has been stated, are otherwise never free of uncleanness. And we see that the saints, when they desired to obtain something, based their hope on sacrifices, for they knew them to be the sanctions of all petitions. "May he remember your offering," says David, "and make your burnt sacrifice fat!" [<sup><192003></sup> Psalm 20:3 p., cf. Comm.] Hence we infer that God was from

the beginning appeased by Christ's intercession, so that he received the petitions of the godly.

Why, then, does Christ assign a new hour wherein his disciples shall begin to pray in his name unless it is that this grace, as it is more resplendent today, so deserves more approval among us? And he had said a little before in the same sense: "Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask" [<sup><431624></sup> John 16:24]. Not that they understand absolutely nothing about the office of Mediator, since all the Jews were steeped in these rudiments, but because they did not yet clearly understand that Christ by his very ascension into heaven would be a surer advocate of the church than he had been before. Therefore, to console their grief at his absence with some uncommon benefit, he takes upon himself the office of advocate, and teaches that they had hitherto lacked the peculiar blessing that will be given them to enjoy when, relying upon his protection, they more freely call upon God. Thus the apostle says that the new way is consecrated by his blood [<sup><581020></sup> Hebrews 10:20]. The less excusable is our frowardness unless we embrace with both arms, as the saying is, this truly inestimable benefit, which is destined for us alone.

## **19. CHRIST IS THE ONLY MEDIATOR, EVEN FOR THE MUTUAL INTERCESSION OF BELIEVERS**

Now, since he is the only way, and the one access, by which it is granted us to come to God [cf. <sup><431406></sup> John 14:6], to those who turn aside from this way and forsake this access, no way and no access to God remain; nothing is left in his throne but wrath, judgment, and terror. Moreover, since the Father has sealed him [cf. <sup><430627></sup> John 6:27] as our Head [<sup><400206></sup> Matthew 2:6] and Leader [<sup><461103></sup> 1 Corinthians 11:3; <sup><490122></sup> Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; <sup><510118></sup> Colossians 1:18], those who in any way turn aside or incline away from him are trying their level best to destroy and disfigure the mark imprinted by God. Thus Christ is constituted the only Mediator, by whose intercession the Father is for us rendered gracious and easily entreated.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding, the saints still retain their intercessions, whereby they commend one another's salvation to God. The apostle mentions these [<sup><540201></sup> 1 Timothy 2:1], but all depend solely upon

Christ's intercession, so far are they from detracting from his in any way. For as they gush forth from the emotion of love, in which we willingly and freely embrace one another as members of one body, so also are they related to the unity of the Head. When, therefore, those intercessions are also made in Christ's name, what else do they attest but that no one can be helped by any prayers at all save when Christ intercedes? Christ does not by his intercession hinder us from pleading for one another by prayers in the church. So, then, let it remain an established principle that we should direct all intercessions of the whole church to that sole intercession, and indeed, especially for this reason should we beware of ungratefulness, because God, pardoning our unworthiness, not only allows individuals to pray for themselves but also permits men to plead for one another. For when God has appointed advocates of his church who deserve to be duly rejected if each one prays exclusively for himself, what sheer presumption is it to abuse this generosity so as to dim Christ's honor?

## 20. CHRIST IS THE ETERNAL AND ABIDING MEDIATOR

This babbling of the Sophists is mere nonsense: that Christ is the Mediator of redemption, but believers are mediators of intercession. <sup>F525</sup> As if Christ had performed a mediation in time only to lay upon his servants the eternal and undying mediation! They who cut off so slight a portion of honor from him are, of course, treating him gently! Yet Scripture speaks far differently, disregarding these deceivers, and with a simplicity that ought to satisfy a godly man. For when John says, "If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Christ Jesus" [<sup><620201></sup> 1 John 2:1], does he mean that Christ was an advocate for us once for all, or does he not rather ascribe to him a constant intercession? Why does Paul affirm that he "sits at the right hand of the Father and also intercedes for us" [<sup><450834></sup> Romans 8:34 p.]? But when, in another passage, Paul calls him "the sole mediator between God and man" [<sup><540205></sup> 1 Timothy 2:5], is he not referring to prayers, which were mentioned shortly before [<sup><540201></sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-2]? For, after previously saying that intercession is to be made for all men, Paul, to prove this statement, soon adds that "there is one God, and... one mediator" [<sup><540205></sup> 1 Timothy 2:5].

Augustine similarly explains it when he says: "Christian men mutually commend one another by their prayers. However, it is he for whom no one

intercedes, while he intercedes for all, who is the one true Mediator.” The apostle Paul, although an eminent member under the Head, yet because he was a member of Christ’s body, and knew that the greatest and truest priest of the church had not figuratively entered the inner precincts of the veil to the Holy of Holies but through express and steadfast truth had entered the inner precincts of heaven to a holiness real and eternal, also commends himself to the prayers of believers [<sup><451530></sup>Romans 15:30; <sup><490619></sup>Ephesians 6:19; <sup><510403></sup>Colossians 4:3]. And he does not make himself mediator between the people and God, but he asks that all members of Christ’s body mutually pray for one another, “since the members are concerned for one another, and if one member suffers, the rest suffer with it” [<sup><461225></sup>1 Corinthians 12:25-26, Cf. Vg.]. And thus the mutual prayers for one another of all members yet laboring on earth rise to the Head, who has gone before them into heaven, in whom “is propitiation for our sins” [<sup><620202></sup>1 John 2:2, Vg.]. For if Paul were mediator, so also would the rest of the apostles be; and if there were many mediators, Paul’s own statement would not stand, in which he had said: “One God, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ” [I Tim. 2:5], “in whom we also are one” [<sup><451205></sup>Romans 12:5], “if we maintain unity of faith in the bond of peace” [<sup><490403></sup>Ephesians 4:3]. Likewise, in another passage Augustine says: “But if you seek a priest, he is above the heavens, where he is making intercession for you, who died for you on earth.” [Cf. <sup><580726></sup>Hebrews 7:26 ff.] <sup>F526</sup>

But we do not imagine that he, kneeling before God, pleads as a suppliant for us; rather, with the apostle we understand he so appears before God’s presence that the power of his death avails as an everlasting intercession in our behalf [cf. <sup><450834></sup>Romans 8:34], yet in such a way that, having entered the heavenly sanctuary, even to the consummation of the ages [cf. <sup><580924></sup>Hebrews 9:24 ff.], he alone bears to God the petitions of the people, who stay far off in the outer court.

*(Rejection of erroneous doctrines of the intercession of saints, 21-27)*

## **21. ONE WHO TAKES REFUGE IN THE INTERCESSION OF SAINTS ROBBS CHRIST OF THE HONOR OF MEDIATION**

Regarding the saints who, having died in the flesh, live in Christ, if we attribute any prayer to them, let us not even dream that they have any other way to petition God than through Christ, who alone is the way [<sup><431406></sup>John 14:6], or that their prayers are accepted by God in any other name. Now Scripture recalls us from all to Christ alone, and our Heavenly Father wills that all things be gathered together in him [<sup><510120></sup>Colossians 1:20; <sup><490110></sup>Ephesians 1:10]. Therefore, it was the height of stupidity, not to say madness, to be so intention gaining access through the saints as to be led away from him, apart from whom no entry lies open to them.

But who will deny that this was commonly done in some periods, and is done even today wherever popery flourishes? To obtain God's benevolence they repeatedly thrust forward the merits of the saints, and for the most part overlooking Christ, entreat God in their names. Is this not, I ask you, to transfer to the saints that office of sole intercession which, as we affirmed above, belongs to Christ?

Then who, whether angel or demon, ever revealed to any man even a syllable of the kind of saints' intercession they invent? For there is nothing about it in Scripture. What reason, then, did they have to invent it? Surely, when human wit is always seeking after assistance for which we have no support in God's Word, it clearly reveals its own faithlessness. But if we appeal to the consciences of all those who delight in the intercession of the saints, we shall find that this arises solely from the fact that they are burdened by anxiety, just as if Christ were insufficient or too severe. First, by this perplexity they dishonor Christ and strip him of the title of sole Mediator, which, as it has been given to him by the Father as a unique privilege, ought not to be transferred to another. Also, by this very thing they obscure the glory of his birth, and make void the cross; in fine, they strip and deprive of its praise all that he has done or suffered! For all these things lead to the conclusion that he alone is, and is to be deemed, the Mediator. At the same time they cast out the kindness of God, who manifests himself to them as the Father. For he



is not Father to them unless they recognize Christ to be their brother.<sup>F527</sup> This they plainly deny unless they reflect that he has brotherly affection toward themselves, than which nothing can be gentler or more tender. Therefore Scripture offers him alone to us, sends us to him, and establishes us in him. “He,” says Ambrose, “is our mouth, through which we speak to the Father; he is our eye, through which we see the Father; he is our right hand, through which we offer ourselves to the Father. Unless he intercedes, there is no intercourse with God either for us or for all saints.”<sup>F528</sup> If they object that the public prayers they offer in churches conclude with the appended phrase “through Christ our Lord,” this is a trivial evasion.<sup>F529</sup> For Christ’s intercession is no less profaned when mingled with prayers and merits of the dead than if it were completely omitted and dead men alone were mentioned. Then, in all their litanies, hymns, and proses,<sup>F530</sup> where they leave no honor unapplied to dead saints, Christ goes unmentioned.

## 22. VENERATION OF SAINTS

But stupidity has progressed to the point that we have here a manifest disposition to superstition, which, once it has cast off the bridle, never ceases to play the wanton. For after men began to concern themselves with the intercession of saints, gradually they attributed to each a particular function, so that for a diversity of business sometimes one intercessor would be called upon, sometimes another. Then each man adopted a particular saint as a tutelary deity, in whose keeping he put his trust, Not only were gods set up according to the number of cities, something for which the prophet long ago upbraided Israel [<sup><240228></sup>Jeremiah 2:28; 11:13], but even according to the population.

But, since the saints relate all their desires to the will of God alone, contemplate it, and abide in it, he who attributes to them any other prayer than that by which they pray for the coming of God’s Kingdom is thinking of them stupidly and carnally and even contemptuously. Very far indeed from this is what they invent for the saints: that each one in his private affection is partial to his own worshipers.<sup>F531</sup>

And finally, there are very many who do not refrain from the horrid sacrilege of calling upon the saints now not as helpers but as determiners

of their salvation. Here is where wretched men fall, when they stray from their lawful position, that is, the Word of God.

I pass over the grosser portents of ungodliness, which—although they are detestable to God, angels, and men—still do not cause these men to feel shame or disgust. Prostrate before a statue or picture of Barbara, Catherine, and such saints, they mutter, “Our Father.” So far are the pastors from concerning themselves with curing or restraining this madness that, attracted by the odor of gain, they approve and applaud it, But while they turn aside blame from themselves for so foul a transgression, yet under what pretext will they defend calling upon Eligius or Medard <sup>F532</sup> to look down from heaven upon and help their servants, or the holy virgin to bid her Son do what they request? It was forbidden in the ancient Council of Carthage to direct prayers at the altar to saints; <sup>F533</sup> and it is likely that, while the holy men there could not entirely silence the force of wicked custom, they at least imposed moderation so that public prayers might not be vitiated by this form: “Saint Peter, pray for us.” How much farther has this devilish insolence spread when men do not hesitate to transfer to the dead what properly belonged to God and Christ?

### **23. CONFUSED INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE USED TO SUPPORT INTERCESSION OF SAINTS**

Now those who maintain that this sort of intercession is based upon Scriptural authority labor in vain on this point.

One often reads, they say, of angels’ prayers—and not only that, but one speaks of believers’ prayers borne up to God’s presence through their hands. <sup>F534</sup> But if they want to compare with angels saints departed from the present life, they must prove they are ministering spirits to whom is appointed the task of looking after our salvation [<sup><580114></sup>Hebrews 1:14], to whom was assigned the task of guarding us in all our ways [<sup><199111></sup>Psalm 91:11], “who surround us” [<sup><193407></sup>Psalm 34:7], who warn us and cheer us, who stand watch for us. All these tasks are assigned to angels but not to saints. How preposterously they confuse dead saints with angels is amply clear from the very diverse functions whereby Scripture distinguishes one from the other. No one will dare perform the office of an advocate before an earthly judge unless admitted to the bar. Whence,

therefore, have worms such great license as to force upon God pleaders to whom we do not find the office assigned in Scripture? God willed to appoint the angels to care for our salvation. Consequently, they attend sacred assemblies, and the church is for them a theater in which they marvel at the varied and manifold wisdom of God [<sup><490310></sup>Ephesians 3:10]. Those who transfer to others what is peculiar to the angels assuredly confound and pervert the order laid down by God, which ought to have been inviolable.

They proceed with the same nimbleness in quoting other testimonies. God said to Jeremiah: “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people.” [<sup><241501></sup>Jeremiah 15:1.] How would he thus speak of the dead, they ask, if he did not know that they intercede for the living? <sup>F535</sup> I infer, on the contrary, that since, as appears from this, neither Moses nor Samuel interceded for the Israelites, then it follows directly that there was no intercession by the dead. For who of the saints should be believed to be working for the salvation of the people when Moses ceased, who while he lived surpassed all others in this task by a wide margin? If, therefore, they pursue these trifling subtleties—namely, that the dead do intercede for the living, since the Lord says, “If they interceded” [cf. Jeremiah 15:1, cf. VG 1560]—then I shall argue far more plausibly in this way: In the extreme need of the people Moses was not interceding, since it was said of him, “If he interceded.” Therefore, it is likely that no one else intercedes, since all are far beneath Moses in gentleness, goodness, and fatherly concern. Obviously, by their scoffing these men get to the point of wounding themselves with the very weapons wherewith they thought themselves handsomely accoutered.

But it is absurd so to twist a simple statement, for the Lord is only declaring that he will not spare the offenses of the people, even though some Moses or Samuel happened to be their advocate, to whose prayers he had shown himself so well disposed. From a similar passage in Ezekiel this very clear meaning is derived: “Even if these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job,” says the Lord, “were in the city,” they would not deliver their sons and daughters by their righteousness, “but they would deliver only their own lives” [<sup><261414></sup>Ezekiel 14:14 p.]. Here there is no doubt that he meant, “if two of them happened to come alive again,” for the third then survived—that is, Daniel—who, as is well established, when in the flower

of youth had furnished an incomparable proof of godliness.<sup>F536</sup> Let us, then, pass over those whom Scripture clearly shows to have fulfilled their course. For this reason, Paul, when he speaks of David, does not teach that he aided his posterity by prayers but only that he served his own generation [<sup><441336></sup> Acts 13:36].

## 24. THE DEPARTED SAINTS NOT ENGAGED IN EARTHLY CARES

Again they object: “Shall we then deprive them of every desire for godliness who breathed nothing but godliness and mercy their whole life long?”<sup>F537</sup> Certainly, as I have no desire to examine too curiously what they were doing or contemplating, so it is by no means likely that they are borne about hither and thither by various and particular desires but rather that they yearn for God’s Kingdom with a set and immovable will; and this consists no less in the destruction of the wicked than in the salvation of believers. But if this is true, no doubt their love is also contained within the communion of the body of Christ, and is not open wider than the nature of that communion allows. Now even though I grant they pray for us in this way, still they do not abandon their own repose so as to be drawn into earthly cares; and much less must we on this account be always calling upon them!

And it does not follow that this is to be done because men who live on earth can commend one another in their prayers [cf. <sup><540201></sup> 1 Timothy 2:1-2; <sup><590515></sup> James 5:15-16]. For this activity serves to foster love among them, while they, as it were, share one another’s needs and bear their burdens mutually, band this, indeed, they do because of the Lord’s precepts, and are not destitute of his promise—two things that always hold the chief place in prayer. All reasons of this sort are lacking in the case of the dead; when the Lord withdrew them from our company, he left us no contact with them [<sup><210905></sup> Ecclesiastes 9:5-6], and as far as we can conjecture, not even left them any with us.

But if any man contend that, since they have been bound with us in one faith, it is impossible for them to cease to keep the same love toward us, who, then, has disclosed that they have ears long enough to reach our voices, or that they have eyes so keen as to watch over our needs? Our

adversaries, indeed, babble in their own shadows something or other about the radiance of God's face shining upon the saints, in which, as in a mirror, they may gaze upon the affairs of men from on high.<sup>F538</sup> Yet what is it to affirm this, especially with such boldness as they dare to do, about to wish through a drunken dream of our brain to break into and penetrate God's secret judgments apart from his Word, and to trample upon Scripture? For Scripture often declares that the prudence of our flesh is at enmity with God's wisdom [<sup><450806></sup>Romans 8:6-7, Vg.]. Scripture wholly condemns the vanity of our mind [<sup><490417></sup>Ephesians 4:17]; laying low our whole reason, it bids us look to God's will alone [cf. <sup><051232></sup>Deuteronomy 12:32].

## 25. INVOCATION OF THE NAMES OF THE PATRIARCHS NOT RELEVANT

They most wickedly distort the other testimonies of Scripture that they adopt to defend their falsehood. But Jacob, they say, asks that his name and the name of his fathers Abraham and Isaac be invoked over his posterity [<sup><014816></sup>Genesis 48:16].<sup>F539</sup> First, let us see what this form of invocation is among the Israelites. For they do not call upon their fathers to help them but they entreat God to remember his servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, their example lends not the least support to those who address the saints themselves. But since these blockheads in their stupidity grasp neither what it is to call upon the name of Jacob nor why they should call upon it, we need not wonder if they childishly falter over even the form itself! This expression occurs more than once in Scripture. For Isaiah says that the women are called by the men's name [<sup><230401></sup>Isaiah 4:1] when they have them as husbands and live under their care and protection. Therefore, calling upon the name of Abraham over the Israelites occurs when they refer the origin of their race to him, and honor him in solemn remembrance as their author and parent. Now Jacob does this not because he is concerned about spreading the renown of his own name but because he knows that the complete blessedness of his posterity consists in the inheritance of the covenant that God had made with him. Because he sees that they will have the highest good of all, he prays that they may be reckoned among his kindred. For that is only transmitting to them the inheritance of the covenant. They in turn, by introducing a

remembrance of this sort into their prayers, do not have recourse to the intercessions of the dead but remind the Lord of his covenant, in which our most merciful Father has promised that he will be favorable and beneficent toward them for the sake of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

How little the saints otherwise leaned upon the merits of their fathers is attested by the common voice of the church in the prophet: “For thou art our Father, though Abraham does not know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. Thou, O Lord, art our Father, and our Redeemer” [<sup><236316></sup> Isaiah 63:16]. And while, indeed, they so speak, they add at the same time: “Return, O Lord, for the sake of thy servants” [<sup><236317></sup> Isaiah 63:17 p.], yet not thinking about any intercession but paying attention to the benefit of the covenant. But now, since we have the Lord Jesus, in whose hand the everlasting covenant of mercy is not only made but confirmed to us, then whose name should we rather put forward in our prayers?

And since these good teachers hold that the patriarchs were by these words established as intercessors, I should like to know from them why, in so large a throng, Abraham, the father of the church, holds not even the meanest place among them. It is well known from what dregs they derive their advocates. Let them answer me how fitting it is that Abraham, whom God put before all the rest, and whom he raised to the highest degree of honor, should be forsaken and suppressed! Indeed, since it was plain that such usage was unknown to the ancient church, it pleased them, in order to hide its novelty, to be silent concerning the ancient patriarchs, as if diversity of names would excuse a recent and corrupted custom.

But the objection of some, that God is asked “for... David’s sake” to have mercy on the people [cf. <sup><19D210></sup> Psalm 132:10], does not support their error but is rather an especially strong refutation of it. For if we consider what a character David bore, he is separated from the whole assembly of the saints to establish the covenant made in his hand by God. So also is the covenant considered, rather than the man, and under a figure the sole intercession of Christ is declared. For what was peculiar to David, in so far as he was a type of Christ, surely does not apply to others.

## 26. THE SAINTS HAVE PRAYED AS WE OUGHT TO PRAY

But some are obviously influenced by the fact that we often read of the prayers of the saints being heard. <sup>F540</sup> Why? Because they prayed, of course. “In thee they trusted,” says the prophet, “and were saved... they cried... and were not confounded.” [<sup><192204></sup> Psalm 22:4-5; cf. 21:5-6, Vg., slightly modified.] Let us also, therefore, pray after their example that, like them, we may be heard. But our opponents unbecomingly and absurdly reason that only those who were once heard will be heard. How much better does James say it! “Elijah,” he says, “was a man like ourselves, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and the heavens gave rain, and the earth gave its fruit.” [<sup><590517></sup> James 5:17-18 p.] Why? Does he infer some singular privilege of Elijah with which we should take refuge? Not at all! But he teaches the unending power of godly and pure prayer to exhort us to pray likewise. For with ill will we interpret God’s readiness and good will in hearing prayers unless we are by such proofs confirmed in a greater trust in his promises, in which he declares that he will incline his ear not to one or another, nor to a few, but to all who shall call upon his name.

All the less excusable is this ignorance because they seem, as if deliberately, to despise so many Scriptural warnings. Time and again David was rescued by God’s power. Was this that he might appropriate this power to himself so that we might be rescued at his request? He himself affirms far otherwise: “The righteous shall wait for me, until thou recompense me” [Psalm 142:7; cf. 142:8, Vg. and LXX]. Likewise: “The righteous shall see, and rejoice, and hope on the Lord [<sup><195206></sup> Psalm 52:6; 64:10]. Behold, “this poor man cried to God,” and he “answered him” [<sup><193406></sup> Psalm 34:6]. <sup>F541</sup> There are many prayers of this sort in the Psalms, by which, in this way, he calls upon God to hearken duly to what he asks, that the righteous be not put to shame but, by his example, be encouraged to good hope. Let us now be satisfied with one example: “Therefore every holy one will pray to thee in a seasonable time” [<sup><193206></sup> Psalm 32:6; 31:6, Vg.]. This passage I have the more willingly cited because these wranglers who are not ashamed to lend a hireling tongue to defend the papacy pretend that it proves intercession of the

dead.<sup>F542</sup> As if David meant something other than to show the fruit that will come forth from God's kindness and gentleness when he is heard!

And we ought to note this in general: that the experience of God's grace, both toward us and toward others, is no common aid in confirming faith in his promises. I do not recount the many passages wherein David sets before himself God's benefits as occasion for confidence because they will readily occur to the readers of the Psalms. By his own example, Jacob had previously taught the same thing: "I am unworthy of all thy mercies and of... the truth that thou hast showed unto thy servant. With my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I go forth with two companies" [<sup><013210></sup>Genesis 32:10]. He, indeed, claims the promise but not the promise alone; rather, he adds the effect, that he may more courageously in the future trust that God will be the same toward him. For he is not like mortals, who weary of their own generosity, or whose resources are spent, but is to be esteemed for his own nature, as David wisely does. "Thou hast redeemed me," he says, "O true God." [<sup><193105></sup>Psalms 31:5 p.] After praising God for his salvation, he adds that He is trustworthy. For if he were not forever like himself, from his benefits a sufficiently firm reckoning could not be adduced to trust him and call upon him. But when we know that as often as he helps us he gives us an example and proof of his goodness and good faith toward us, we need not fear lest our hope put us to shame or deceive us.

## **27. CONCLUDING REFUTATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF INTERCESSION OF SAINTS**

Here is the sum total: Scripture, in the worship of God, sets the chief matter before us: how we should call upon him in prayer. Consequently, as he requires of us this duty of piety, holding all sacrifices secondary to it, to direct prayer to others involves manifest sacrilege. Consequently, it is also said in the psalm: "If we have stretched out our hands to a strange god, shall not God search this out?" [<sup><194420></sup>Psalms 44:20-21; 43:21-22, Vg.]. Again, only out of faith is God pleased to be called upon, and he expressly bids that prayers be conformed to the measure of his Word. Finally, faith grounded upon the Word is the mother of right prayer; hence, as soon as it is deflected from the Word, prayer must needs be corrupted. But it has already been shown that<sup>F543</sup> if one takes the whole of



Scripture into account, this honor is there claimed for God alone. What pertains to the office of intercession we also see is peculiar to Christ, <sup>F544</sup> and no prayer is pleasing to God unless this Mediator sanctifies it. Yet even if believers reciprocally offer prayers before God for the brethren, we have shown that this detracts nothing from Christ's unique intercession. <sup>F545</sup> For all together, relying upon this, commend both themselves and others to God. We have, moreover, taught <sup>F546</sup> that it is inappropriately applied to the dead, of whom we nowhere read that they have been bidden to pray for us. Scripture often urges us to do our duty by one another but has not one syllable of the dead. Indeed, James by joining these two exhortations—to confess our sins to one another, and to pray for one another [<sup><590516></sup> James 5:16]—tacitly excludes the dead.

Therefore this one reason is enough to condemn this error: prayer rightly begun springs from faith, and faith, from hearing God's Word [<sup><451014></sup> Romans 10:14,17], where no mention is made of fictitious intercession; for superstition has rashly taken to itself advocates who had not been given by God. For, while Scripture is replete with many forms of prayer, no example is found of this advocacy, without which in the papacy they believe no prayer to exist. Furthermore, it is obvious that this superstition has arisen from lack of faith. For either they were not content with Christ as pleader or they entirely deprived him of this credit. And this latter point is easily proved from their shamelessness, because, in contending that we need the advocacy of the saints, they have no stronger argument than to object that we are unworthy to approach God intimately. <sup>F547</sup> This we admit to be very true indeed, but we conclude from it that those who account Christ's intercession worthless unless George and Hippolytus and such specters come forward <sup>F548</sup> leave nothing for Christ to do.

*(Kinds of prayer: private and public, 28-30)*

## 28. PRIVATE PRAYER

But even though prayer is properly confined to entreaties and supplications, there is such a close connection between petition and thanksgiving that they may conveniently be included under one name. For those kinds which Paul lists fall under the first part of this division [cf.

<540201> 1 Timothy 2:1]. In asking and beseeching, we pour out our desires before God, seeking both those things which make for the extension of his glory and the setting forth of his name, and those benefits which conduce to our own advantage. In giving thanks, we celebrate with due praise his benefits toward us, and credit to his generosity every good that comes to us. David, therefore, has combined these two functions: “Call upon me in the day of need; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” [<sup><195015></sup> Psalm 50:15]. <sup>F549</sup> Scripture with good reason enjoins us to use both constantly. For as we have stated elsewhere, the weight of our poverty and the facts of experience proclaim that the tribulations which drive and press us from all sides are so many and so great that there is reason enough for us all continually to groan and sigh to God, and to beseech him as suppliants, For even if they be free of adversities, the guilt of their transgressions and the innumerable assaults of temptations ought still to goad even the holiest to seek a remedy. But in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving there can be no interruption without sin, since God does not cease to heap benefits upon benefits in order to impel us, though slow and lazy, to gratefulness, short, we are well-nigh overwhelmed by so great and so plenteous an outpouring of benefactions, by so many and mighty miracles discerned wherever one looks, that we never lack reason and occasion for praise and thanksgiving.

And to explain these things somewhat more clearly, since, as has already been sufficiently proved, <sup>F550</sup> all our hope and wealth so reside in God that neither we nor our possessions prosper unless we can have his blessing, we ought constantly to commit ourselves and all that we have to him [cf. <sup><590414></sup> James 4:14-15]. Then whatever we determine, speak, do, let us determine, speak, and do under his hand and will—in a word, under the hope of his help. For all are declared accursed by God who, placing confidence in themselves or someone else, conceive and carry out their plans; who undertake or try to begin anything apart from his will, and without calling upon him [cf. <sup><233001></sup> Isaiah 30:1; 31:1]. And since, as we have said several times, <sup>F551</sup> he is honored in the manner due him when he is acknowledged the author of all blessings, it follows that we ought so to receive all those things from his hand as to accompany them with continual thanksgiving; and that there is no just reason for us to make use of his benefits, which flow and come to us from his generosity, with no

other end, if we do not continually utter his praise and render him thanks. For Paul, when he testifies that they “are sanctified by the word... and prayer” [<sup><540405></sup>1 Timothy 4:5], at the same time hints that without the word and prayer they are not at all holy and pure for us. (“Word” he evidently understands, by metonymy, as “faith.”) Accordingly, David, when he has perceived the Lord’s generosity, beautifully declares a “new song” has been put into his mouth [<sup><194003></sup>Psalm 40:3]. By this he naturally hints that if we fail to offer him praise for his blessing, our silence is spiteful, since as often as he blesses us he provides us with occasion to bless him. So Isaiah also, proclaiming God’s singular grace, urges believers to a new and uncommon song [<sup><234210></sup>Isaiah 42:10]. In this sense, David elsewhere speaks: “O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise” [<sup><195115></sup>Psalm 51:15; 50:17, Vg.]. In like manner, Hezekiah and Jonah testify that this will be the outcome of their deliverance: that they may sing the praises of God’s goodness in the Temple [<sup><233820></sup>Isaiah 38:20; <sup><320209></sup>Jonah 2:9]. David prescribes the same rule to all the godly in common. “What shall I render to the Lord,” he says, “for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.” [<sup><19B612></sup>Psalm 116:12-13; cf. Comm. and 115:12-13, Vg.] And the church follows this rule in another psalm: “Make us safe, O our God... that we may confess <sup>F552</sup> thy. . . name, and glory in thy praise” [<sup><19A647></sup>Psalm 106:47; 105:47, Vg.]. Again: He has had regard for the prayer of the solitary, and has not despised their prayers. This will be written for a later generation, and the people created shall praise the Lord... to proclaim his name in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem [<sup><19A217></sup>Psalm 102:17,18 (Comm.), 21; cf. <sup><19A102></sup>Psalm 101:21, Vg. and LXX]. Indeed, whenever believers entreat God to do something for his name’s sake, as they profess themselves unworthy to obtain anything in their own name, so they obligate themselves to give thanks; and they promise that they will rightly use God’s benefit, to be the heralds of it. So Hosea, speaking of the coming redemption of the church: “Take away,” he says, “iniquity, O God, and accept that which is good, and we will render the bullocks of our lips” [<sup><281403></sup>Hosea 14:3, Vg., see Comm.].

Not only do God’s benefits claim for themselves the extolling by the tongue, but also they naturally win love for themselves. “I loved the Lord,” says David, “because he heard the voice of my supplication.”

[<19B601> Psalm 116:1; cf. Comm. and <19B515> Psalm 115:15, Vg.] Also, elsewhere recounting what help he had experienced: “I shall love thee, O God, my strength” [<191801> Psalm 18:1 p.]. But praises that do not flow from this sweetness of love <sup>F553</sup> will never please God. Even more, we must understand Paul’s statement that all entreaties not joined with thanksgiving are wicked and vicious. For he speaks thus: “In all prayer,” he says, “and supplication with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God” [<500406> Philippians 4:6 p.]. For since many by peevishness, boredom, impatience, bitter grief, and fear are impelled to mumble when praying, he bids believers so to temper their emotions that while still waiting to obtain what they desire, they nonetheless cheerfully bless God. But if this connection ought to be in full force in things almost contrary, by a still holier bond God obligates us to sing his praises whenever he causes us to obtain our wishes.

Now even as we have taught that by Christ’s intercession are consecrated our prayers, which would otherwise have been unclean, so the apostle, enjoining us to offer a sacrifice of praise through Christ [<581315> Hebrews 13:15], warns us that our mouths are not clean enough to sing the praises of God’s name until Christ’s priesthood intercedes for us. We infer from this that in the papacy men have been strangely bewitched, since the majority of them wonder why Christ is called “the Advocate.”

The reason why Paul enjoins us both to pray and to give thanks without ceasing [<520517> 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Cf. <540201> 1 Timothy 2:1,8] is, of course, that he wishes all men to lift up their desires to God, with all possible constancy, at all times, in all places, and in all affairs and transactions, to expect all things from him, and give him praise for all things, since he offers us unailing reasons to praise and pray.

## 29. NECESSITY AND DANGER OF PUBLIC PRAYER

This constancy in prayer, even though it has especially to do with one’s own private prayers, still is also concerned somewhat with the public prayers of the church. Yet these can neither be constant nor ought they even to take place otherwise than according to the polity agreed upon by common consent among all. This I grant you. For this reason, certain hours, indifferent to God but necessary for men’s convenience, are agreed

upon and appointed to provide for the accommodation of all, and for everything to be done “decently and in order” in the church, according to Paul’s statement [<sup><461440></sup> 1 Corinthians 14:40]. But this does not preclude each church from being both repeatedly stirred up to more frequent use of prayer and fired by a sharper zeal if it is alerted by some major need. There will be, moreover, toward the end, a place to speak of perseverance, which has close affinity with constancy.<sup>F554</sup>

Now these matters have nothing to do with the vain repetition<sup>F555</sup> that Christ willed to be forbidden to us [<sup><400607></sup> Matthew 6:7]. For Christ does not forbid us to persist in prayers, long, often, or with much feeling, but requires that we should not be confident in our ability to wrest something from God by beating upon his ears with a garrulous flow of talk, as if he could be persuaded as men are. For we know that hypocrites, because they do not reflect that they have to do with God,<sup>F556</sup> make the same pompous show in prayers as they would in a triumph. For that Pharisee who thanked God that he was not like other men [<sup><421811></sup> Luke 18:11] doubtless praised himself in men’s eyes, as if he would from praying latch on to renown for holiness. Hence that vain repetition which for a similar reason is in vogue today in the papacy. While some pass the time in saying over and over the same little prayers, others vaunt themselves before the crowd with a great mass of words. Since this talkativeness childishly mocks God, it is no wonder that it is forbidden by the church in order that nothing shall resound there except what is earnest and comes forth from the depths of the heart.

Near and similar to this corrupt element is another, which Christ condemns at the same time: hypocrites, for the sake of show, pant after many witnesses, and would rather frequent the market place to pray than have their prayers miss the world’s applause [<sup><400605></sup> Matthew 6:5]. Inasmuch as this goal of prayer has already been stated<sup>F557</sup>—namely, that hearts may be aroused and borne to God, whether to praise him or to beseech his help—from this we may understand that the essentials of prayer are set in the mind and heart, or rather that prayer itself is properly an emotion of the heart within,<sup>F558</sup> which is poured out and laid open before God, the searcher of hearts [cf. <sup><450827></sup> Romans 8:27]. Accordingly, as has already been said, the Heavenly Teacher, when he willed to lay down the best rule for prayer, bade us enter into our bedroom and there,

with door closed, pray to our Father in secret, that our Father, who is in secret, may hear us [<sup><400606></sup>Matthew 6:6]. For, when he has drawn us away from the example of hypocrites, who grasped after the favor of men by vain and ostentatious prayers, he at the same time adds something better: that is, to enter into our bedroom and there, with door closed, pray. By these words, as I understand them, he taught us to seek a retreat that would help us to descend into our heart with our whole thought and enter deeply within. He promises that God, whose temples our bodies ought to be, will be near to us in the affections of our hearts [cf. <sup><470616></sup>2 Corinthians 6:16].

For he did not mean to deny that it is fitting to pray in other places, but he shows that prayer is something secret, which is both principally lodged in the heart and requires a tranquillity far from all our teeming cares. The Lord himself also, therefore, with good reason, when he determined to devote himself more intensely to prayers, habitually withdrew to a quiet spot far away from the tumult of men; but he did so to impress us with his example that we must not neglect these helps, whereby our mind, too unsteady by itself, more inclines to earnest application to prayer. In the meantime, as he did not abstain from praying even in the midst of a crowd if the occasion so presented itself, so we should lift up clean hands in all places, where there is need [<sup><540208></sup>1 Timothy 2:8]. <sup>F559</sup> Finally, we must consider that whoever refused to pray in the holy assembly of the godly knows not what it is to pray individually, or in a secret spot, or at home. Again, he who neglects to pray alone and in private, however unremittingly he may frequent public assemblies, there contrives only windy prayers, for he defers more to the opinion of men than to the secret judgment of God.

Moreover, that the common prayers of the church may not be held in contempt, God of old adorned them with shining titles, especially when he called the temple the “house of prayer” [<sup><235607></sup>Isaiah 56:7; <sup><402113></sup>Matthew 21:13]. For he taught by this term that the chief part of his worship lies in the office of prayer, and that the temple was set up like a banner for believers so that they might, with one consent, participate in it. A distinctive promise was also added: “Praise waits for thee, O God, in Zion, and to thee shall the vow be performed” [<sup><196501></sup>Psalm 65:1, Comm.]. By these words the prophet intimates that the prayers of the

church are never ineffectual, for God always furnishes his people occasion for singing with joy. But even though the shadows of the law have ceased, still there is no doubt that the same promise pertains to us, since God was pleased by this ceremony to foster the unity of the faith among us. For not only has Christ sanctioned this promise by his own mouth, but Paul holds it to be universally in force.

### **30. NOT CHURCH BUILDINGS BUT WE OURSELVES ARE TEMPLES OF GOD**

Now as God by his word ordains common prayers for believers, so also ought there to be public temples wherein these may be performed, in which those who spurn fellowship with God's people in prayer have no occasion to give the false excuse that they enter their bedroom to obey the Lord's command. For he, who promises that he will do whatever two or three gathered together in his name may ask [<sup><401819></sup>Matthew 18:19-20], testifies that he does not despise prayers publicly made, provided ostentation and chasing after paltry human glory are banished, and there is present a sincere and true affection that dwells in the secret place of the heart.

If this is the lawful use of church buildings, <sup>F560</sup> as it certainly is, we in turn must guard against either taking them to be God's proper dwelling places, whence he may more nearly incline his ear to us—as they began to be regarded some centuries ago—or feigning for them some secret holiness or other, which would render prayer more sacred before God. For since we ourselves are God's true temples, if we would call upon God in his holy temple, we must pray within ourselves. Now let us leave this stupidity to Jews or pagans, for we have the commandment to call upon the Lord, without distinction of place, “in spirit and in truth” [<sup><430423></sup>John 4:23]. At God's command the Temple had indeed been dedicated of old for offering prayers and sacrificial victims, but at that time the truth lay hidden, figuratively represented under such shadows; now, having been expressed to us in living reality, it does not allow us to cleave to any material temple. And not even to the Jews was the Temple committed on the condition that they might shut up God's presence within its walls but in order that they might be trained to contemplate the likeness of the true temple. Therefore Isaiah and Stephen gravely rebuked those who thought God in

any way dwells in temples made with hands [<sup><236601></sup>Isaiah 66:1; <sup><440748></sup>Acts 7:48-49].

*(The use of singing, and of the spoken language, 31-33)*

### 31. ON SPEAKING AND SINGING IN PRAYER

From this, moreover, it is fully evident that unless voice and song, if interposed in prayer, spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God.<sup>F561</sup> But they arouse his wrath against us if they come only from the tip of the lips and from the throat, seeing that this is to abuse his most holy name and to hold his majesty in derision. This is what we gather from Isaiah's words, which, although they extend farther, also are concerned with reproofing this fault, "The people," he says, "draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, and they have feared me by the command and teaching of men." [<sup><232913></sup>Isaiah 29:13; cf. <sup><401508></sup>Matthew 15:8-9.] "Therefore, behold, I will... do a great and marvelous miracle among this people; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the prudence of their elders shall vanish." [<sup><232914></sup>Isaiah 29:14 p., cf. Vg.]

Yet we do not here condemn speaking and singing but rather strongly commend them, provided they are associated with the heart's affection. For thus do they exercise the mind in thinking of God and keep it attentive—unstable and variable as it is, and readily relaxed and diverted in different directions, unless it be supported by various helps. Moreover, since the glory of God ought, in a measure, to shine in the several parts of our bodies, it is especially fitting that the tongue has been assigned and destined for this task, both through singing and through speaking. For it was peculiarly created to tell and proclaim the praise of God. But the chief use of the tongue is in public prayers, which are offered in the assembly of believers, by which it comes about that with one common voice, and as it were, with the same mouth, we all glorify God together, worshiping him with one spirit and the same faith. And we do this openly, that all men mutually, each one from his brother, may receive the confession of faith and be invited and prompted by his example.



## 32. CHURCH SINGING

It is evident that the practice of singing in church, to speak also of this in passing, is not only a very ancient one but also was in use among the apostles. This we may infer from Paul's words: "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind" [<sup><461415></sup> 1 Corinthians 14:15]. Likewise, Paul speaks to the Colossians: "Teaching and admonishing one another... in hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to the Lord." [<sup><510316></sup> Colossians 3:16 p.] For in the first passage he teaches that we should sing with voice and heart; in the second he commends spiritual songs, by which the godly may mutually edify one another. Yet Augustine testifies that this practice was not universal when he states that the church of Milan first began to sing only under Ambrose; the occasion being that when Justina, the mother of Valentinian, was raging against the orthodox faith, the people were more constant in vigils than usual. Then the remaining Western churches followed Milan. For a little before he had said that this custom had come from the Eastern churches. <sup>F562</sup> He also indicates in the second book of his *Retractions* that the practice was taken up in Africa in his day. "A certain Hilary," he says, "an ex-tribune, attacked with malicious reproof, wherever he could, the custom, then just begun at Carthage, of singing hymns from the book of Psalms at the altar, either before the offering or when what had been offered was being distributed to the people. At the bidding of my brethren, I answered him." <sup>F563</sup> And surely, if the singing be tempered to that gravity which is fitting in the sight of God and the angels, it both lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our hearts to a true zeal and eagerness to pray. Yet we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words. Augustine also admits in another place that he was so disturbed by this danger that he sometimes wished to see established the custom observed by Athanasius, who ordered the reader to use so little inflection of the voice that he would sound more like a speaker than a singer. But when he recalled how much benefit singing had brought him, he inclined to the other side. <sup>F564</sup> Therefore, when this moderation is maintained, it is without any doubt a most holy and salutary practice. On the other hand, such songs as have been composed only for sweetness and

delight of the ear are unbecoming to the majesty of the church and cannot but displease God in the highest degree.

### 33. PRAYER SHOULD BE IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE

From this also it plainly appears that public prayers must be couched not in Greek among the Latins, nor in Latin among the French or English, as has heretofore been the custom, but in the language of the people, which can be generally understood by the whole assembly. For this ought to be done for the edification of the whole church, which receives no benefit whatever from a sound not understood. Those who have no regard for either love or kindness ought at least to have been moved a little by the authority of Paul, whose words are perfectly clear. “If you bless with the spirit,” he says, “how can he who occupies the place of the unlearned respond to your blessing with ‘Amen,’ since he is ignorant of what you are saying? For you indeed give thanks, but the other is not edified.” [<sup><461416></sup> 1 Corinthians 14:16-17 p.] Who can marvel enough, then, at the unbridled license of the papists, who, after the apostle thus openly decries it, are not afraid to make their wordy prayers resound in a foreign language, of which they themselves often understand not one syllable, and do not wish others to understand either?

But for us Paul prescribes otherwise what is to be done. “What am I to do?” he says. “I will pray with the spirit, I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.” [<sup><460415></sup> 1 Corinthians 4:15.] By the word “spirit” he means the singular gift of tongues, which some, though endowed therewith, abused, since they cut it off from the mind, that is, the understanding<sup>F565</sup> however, we must unquestionably feel that, either in public prayer or in private, the tongue without the mind must be highly displeasing to God. Besides, the mind ought to be kindled with an ardor of thought so as far to surpass all that the tongue can express by speaking.

Lastly, we should hold that the tongue is not even necessary for private prayer, except in so far as either the inner feeling has insufficient power to arouse itself or as it is so vehemently aroused that it carries with it the action of the tongue. For even though the best prayers are sometimes unspoken, it often happens in practice that, when feelings of mind are

aroused, unostentatiously the tongue breaks forth into speech, and the other members into gesture. From this obviously arose that uncertain murmur of Hannah's [<sup><090113></sup> 1 Samuel 1:13], something similar to which all the saints continually experience when they burst forth into broken and fragmentary speech.

As for the bodily gestures customarily observed in praying, such as kneeling and uncovering the head, they are exercises whereby we try to rise to a greater reverence for God.

*(The Lord's Prayer: exposition of the first three petitions, 34-42)*

### **34. THE LORD'S PRAYER AS NECESSARY HELP FOR US**

Now we must learn not only a more certain way of praying but also the form itself: namely, that which the Heavenly Father has taught us through his beloved Son [<sup><400609></sup> Matthew 6:9 ff.; <sup><421102></sup> Luke 11:2 ff.], in which we may acknowledge his boundless goodness and clemency. For he warns us and urges us to seek him in our every need, as children are wont to take refuge in the protection of the parents whenever they are troubled with any anxiety. Besides this, since he saw that we did not even sufficiently perceive how straitened our poverty was, what it was fair to request, and what was profitable for us, he also provided for this ignorance of ours; and what had been lacking to our capacity he himself supplied and made sufficient from his own. For he prescribed a form for us in which he set forth as in a table all that he allows us to seek of him, all that is of benefit to us, all that we need ask. From this kindness of his we receive great fruit of consolation: that we know we are requesting nothing absurd, nothing strange or unseemly—in short, nothing unacceptable to him—since we are asking almost in his own words, Plato, on seeing men's want of skill in making requests to God, which, if granted, would often have been disadvantageous to them, declares this, taken from an ancient poet, to be the best prayer: "King Jupiter, bestow the best things upon us whether we wish for them or not, but command that evil things be far from us even when we request them." <sup>F566</sup> And, indeed, the heathen man is wise in that he judges how dangerous it is to seek from the Lord what our greed dictates; at the same time he discloses our unhappiness, in that we cannot even open our mouths before God without danger unless the Spirit

instructs us in the right pattern for prayer [<sup><450816></sup>Romans 8:16]. This privilege deserves to be more highly esteemed among us, since the only-begotten Son of God supplies words to our lips that free our minds from all wavering.

### 35. DIVISION AND MAIN CONTENT

This form or rule of prayer consists of six petitions. The reason why I do not agree with those who distinguish seven headings <sup>F567</sup> is that by inserting the adversative “but” the Evangelist seems to have meant to join those two members together. It is as if he had said: “Do not allow us to be oppressed by temptation but rather bring help for our weakness, and deliver us from falling.” Ancient writers of the church also agree with us, <sup>F568</sup> so that what has been added in seventh place in Matthew exegetically ought to be referred to the sixth petition.

But even though the whole prayer is such that throughout it God’s glory is to be given chief place, still the first three petitions have been particularly assigned to God’s glory, and this alone we ought to look to in them, without consideration of what is called our own advantage. The three others are concerned with the care of ourselves, and are especially assigned to those things which we should ask for our own benefit. So, when we ask that God’s name be hallowed, because God wills to test us whether we love and worship him freely or for hope of reward, we must then have no consideration for our own benefit but must set before ourselves his glory, to gaze with eyes intent upon this one thing. And in the remaining petitions of this sort, it is meet to be affected in precisely the same way.

And, indeed, this yields a great benefit to us, because when his name is hallowed as we ask, our own hallowing in turn also comes about. But our eyes ought, as it were, to be closed and in a sense blinded to this sort of advantage, so that they have no regard for it at all, and so that, if all hope of our own private good were cut off, still we should not cease to desire and entreat this hallowing and the other things that pertain to God’s glory. In the examples of Moses and Paul, we see that it was not grievous for them to turn their minds and eyes away from themselves and to long for their own destruction with fierce and burning zeal in order that, despite

their own loss, they might advance God's glory and Kingdom [<sup><023232></sup>Exodus 32:32; <sup><450903></sup>Romans 9:3]. On the other hand, when we ask to be given our daily bread, even though we desire what is to our benefit, here also we ought especially to seek God's glory so as not to ask it unless it redound to his glory. <sup>F569</sup> Now let us turn to the interpretation of the prayer.

*(“Our Father, who art in heaven”)*

### 36. “OUR FATHER”

First, at the very threshold we meet what I previously mentioned: <sup>F570</sup> we ought to offer all prayer to God only in Christ's name, as it cannot be agreeable to him in any other name. For in calling God “Father,” we put forward the name “Christ.” With what confidence would anyone address God as “Father”? Who would break forth into such rashness as to claim for himself the honor of a son of God unless we had been adopted as children of grace in Christ? He, while he is the true Son, has of himself been given us as a brother <sup>F571</sup> that what he has of his own by nature may become ours by benefit of adoption if we embrace this great blessing with sure faith. Accordingly, John says that power has been given to those who believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God, that they too may become children of God [<sup><430112></sup>John 1:12].

Therefore God both calls himself our Father and would have us so address him. By the great sweetness of this name he frees us from all distrust, since no greater feeling of love can be found elsewhere than in the Father. Therefore he could not attest his own boundless love toward us with any surer proof than the fact that we are called “children of God” [<sup><620301></sup>1 John 3:1]. But just as he surpasses all men in goodness and mercy, so is his love greater and more excellent than all our parents' love. Hence, though all earthly fathers should divest themselves of all feeling of fatherhood and forsake their children, he will never fail us [cf. <sup><192710></sup>Psalms 27:10; <sup><236316></sup>Isaiah 63:16], since he cannot deny himself [<sup><550213></sup>2 Timothy 2:13]. For we have his promise: “If you, although you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father, who is in heaven” [<sup><400711></sup>Matthew 7:11 p.].? Similarly, in the prophet: “Can a woman forget her... children?... Even if she forgets,

yet I shall not forget you.” [<sup><234915></sup>Isaiah 49:15 p.] But a son cannot give himself over to the safekeeping of a stranger and an alien without at the same time complaining either of his father’s cruelty or want. Thus, if we are his sons, we cannot seek help anywhere else than from him without reproaching him for poverty, or want of means, or cruelty and excessive rigor.

### **37. “OUR FATHER”: A FORM OF ADDRESS THAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE US**

And let us not pretend that we are justly rendered timid by the consciousness of sins, since sins daily make our Father, although kind and gentle, displeased with us. For if among men, a son can have no better advocate to plead his cause before his father, can have no better intermediary to conciliate and recover his lost favor, than if he himself, suppliant and humble, acknowledging his guilt, implores his father’s mercy—for then his father’s heart cannot pretend to be moved by such entrearies—what will he do who is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort [cf. <sup><470103></sup>2 Corinthians 1:3]? Will he not rather heed the tears and groans of his children entreating for themselves, since he particularly invites and exhorts us to this, than any pleas of others, to whose help they in terror have recourse, not without some signs of despair, since they are distrustful of their Father’s compassion and kindness? He depicts and represents for us in a parable [<sup><421511></sup>Luke 15:11-32] this abundance of fatherly compassion: a son had estranged himself from his father, had dissolutely wasted his substance [verse 13], had grievously offended against him in every way [verse 18]; but the father embraces him with open arms, and does not wait for him to ask for pardon but anticipates him, recognizes him returning afar off, willingly runs to meet him [verse 20], comforts him, receives him into favor [verses 22-24]. For in setting forth this example of great compassion to be seen in man, he willed to teach us how much more abundantly we ought to expect it of him. For he is not only a father but by far the best and kindest of all fathers, provided we still cast ourselves upon his mercy, although we are ungrateful, rebellious, and froward children. And to strengthen our assurance that he is this sort of father to us if we are Christians, he willed that we call him not only “Father” but explicitly “our Father.” It is as if we addressed him: “O

Father, who dost abound with great devotion toward thy children, and with great readiness to forgive, we thy children call upon thee and make our prayer, assured and clearly persuaded that thou bearest toward us only the affection of a father, although we are unworthy of such a father.”

But because the narrowness of our hearts cannot comprehend God’s boundless favor, not only is Christ the pledge and guarantee of our adoption, but he gives the Spirit as witness to us of the same adoption, through whom with free and full voice we may cry, “Abba, Father” [<sup><480406></sup> Galatians 4:6; <sup><450815></sup> Romans 8:15]. Therefore, whenever any hesitation shall hinder us, let us remember to ask him to correct our fearfulness, and to set before us that Spirit that he may guide us to pray boldly.

### **38. “OUR FATHER”: A FORM OF ADDRESS THAT SETS US IN THE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE BRETHREN**

However, we are not so instructed that each one of us should individually call him *his Father*, but rather that all of us in common should call him *our Father*. From this fact we are warned how great a feeling of brotherly love ought to be among us, since by the same right of mercy and free liberality we are equally children of such a father. For if one father is common to us all [<sup><402309></sup> Matthew 23:9], and every good thing that can fall to our lot comes from him, there ought not to be anything separate among us that we are not prepared gladly and wholeheartedly to share with one another, as far as occasion requires.

Now if we so desire, as is fitting, to extend our hand to one another and to help one another, there is nothing in which we can benefit our brethren more than in commending them to the providential care of the best of fathers; for if he is kind and favorable, nothing at all else can be desired. Indeed, we owe even this very thing to our Father. Just as one who truly and deeply loves any father of a family at the same time embraces his whole household with love and good will, so it becomes us in like measure to show to his people, to his family, and lastly, to his inheritance, the same zeal and affection that we have toward this Heavenly Father. For he so honored these as to call them the fullness of his only-begotten Son [<sup><490123></sup> Ephesians 1:23]. Let the Christian man, then, conform his prayers

to this rule in order that they may be in common and embrace all who are his brothers in Christ, not only those whom he at present sees and recognizes as such but all men who dwell on earth. For what God has determined concerning them is beyond our knowing except that it is no less godly than humane to wish and hope the best for them. Yet we ought to be drawn with a special affection to those, above others, of the household of faith, whom the apostle has particularly commended to us in everything [<sup><480610></sup> Galatians 6:10]. To sum up, all prayers ought to be such as to look to that community which our Lord has established in his Kingdom and his household.

### **39. COMPARISON OF PRAYER AND ALMSGIVING**

Nevertheless, this does not prevent us from praying especially for ourselves and for certain others, provided, however, our minds do not withdraw their attention from this community or turn aside from it but refer all things to it. For although prayers are individually framed, since they are directed to this end, they do not cease to be common. All this can easily be understood by a comparison. There is a general command of God's to relieve the need of all the poor, and yet those obey it who to this end succor the indigence of those whom they know or see to be suffering, even though they overlook many who are pressed by no lighter need because either they cannot know all or cannot provide for all. In this way they who, viewing and pondering this common society of the church, frame particular prayers of this sort do not resist the will of God when in their prayers, with God's people at heart, in particular terms, they commend to God themselves or others whose needs he has been pleased to make intimately known to them.

However, not all aspects of prayer and almsgiving are indeed alike. For liberality of giving can be practiced only toward those whose poverty is visible to us. But we are free to help by prayer even utterly foreign and unknown persons, however great the distance that separates them from us. This, too, is clone through that general form of prayer wherein all children of God are included, among whom they also are. To this may be referred the fact that Paul urges the believers of his time to lift pure hands in every place without quarreling [<sup><540208></sup> 1 Timothy 2:8]. In warning them that



strife shuts the gate to prayers, his intention is that they offer their petitions in common with one accord.

#### 40. “OUR FATHER... IN HEAVEN”

That he is in heaven [<sup><400609></sup> Matthew 6:9] is added. From this we are not immediately to reason that he is bound, shut up, and surrounded, by the circumference of heaven, as by a barred enclosure. For Solomon confesses that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him [<sup><110827></sup> 1 Kings 8:27]. And he himself says through the prophet that heaven is his seat, and the earth, his footstool [<sup><236601></sup> Isaiah 66:1; <sup><440749></sup> Acts 7:49; cf. ch. 17:24]. By this he obviously means that he is not confined to any particular region but is diffused <sup>F572</sup> through all things. But our minds, so crass are they, could not have conceived his unspeakable glory otherwise. Consequently, it has been signified to us by “heaven,” for we can behold nothing more sublime or majestic than this. While, therefore, wherever our senses comprehend anything they commonly attach it to that place, God is set beyond all place, so that when we would seek him we must rise above all perception of body and soul. Secondly, by this expression he is lifted above all chance of either corruption or change. Finally, it signifies that he embraces and holds together the entire universe and controls it by his might. Therefore it is as if he had been said to be of infinite greatness or loftiness, of incomprehensible essence, of boundless might, and of everlasting immortality. But while we hear this, our thought must be raised higher when God is spoken of, lest we dream up anything earthly or physical about him, lest we measure him by our small measure, or conform his will to our emotions. At the same time our confidence in him must be aroused, since we understand that heaven and earth are ruled by his providence and power.

To sum up: under the name “Father” is set before us that God who appeared to us in his own image that we should call upon him with assured faith. And not only does the intimate name “Father” engender trust but it is effective also to keep our minds from being drawn away to doubtful and false gods, permitting them to rise up from the only-begotten Son to the sole Father of angels and of the church. Secondly, because his throne is established in heaven, from his governing of the universe we are forcibly reminded that we do not come to him in vain, for he willingly

meets us with present help. “Those who draw near to God,” says the apostle, “must first believe that God exists, then that he rewards all who seek him.” [<sup><581106></sup>Hebrews 11:6 p.] Here Christ declares both of these things to his Father: that our faith rests in himself, then that we should surely be persuaded that our salvation is not overlooked by him. For he deigns to extend his providence even to us. By this elementary instruction Paul prepares us to pray properly. For before enjoining us to make our petitions known to God [<sup><500406></sup>Philippians 4:6], he thus prefaces the injunction: “Have no anxiety about anything” [<sup><500406></sup>Philippians 4:6]; “the Lord is at hand” [<sup><500405></sup>Philippians 4:5]. From this it is clear that those who do not feel assured that “God’s eye is upon the righteous” [<sup><193415></sup>Psalms 34:15; cf. <sup><600312></sup>1 Peter 3:12] in doubt and perplexity turn ever their prayers within their minds.

#### 41. THE FIRST PETITION

The first petition is that God’s name be hallowed [<sup><400609></sup>Matthew 6:9]; the need for it is associated with our great shame. For what is more unworthy than for God’s glory to be obscured partly by our ungratefulness, partly by our ill will, and so far as lies in our power, destroyed by our presumption and insane impudence? Though all ungodly men should break out with their sacrilegious license, the holiness of God’s name still shines. The prophet justifiably proclaims: “As thy name, O God, so thy praise unto all the ends of the earth” [<sup><194810></sup>Psalms 48:10]. For wherever God becomes known, his powers cannot fail to be manifested; might, goodness, wisdom, righteousness, mercy, truth—these should captivate us with wonderment for him, and impel us to celebrate his praise. Because, therefore, God’s holiness is so unworthily snatched from him on earth, if it is not in our power to assert it, at least we are bidden to be concerned for it in our prayers.

To summarize: we should wish God to have the honor he deserves; men should never speak or think of him without the highest reverence. To this is opposed the profanity that has always been too common and even today is abroad in the world. Hence the need of this petition, which ought to have been superfluous if even a little godliness existed among us. But if holiness is associated with God’s name where separated from all other names it breathes pure glory, here we are bidden to request not only that

God vindicate his sacred name of all contempt and dishonor but also that he subdue the whole race of mankind to reverence for it. <sup>F573</sup>

Now since God reveals himself to us partly in teaching, partly in works, we can hallow him only if we render to him what is his in both respects, and so embrace all that proceeds from him. And his sternness no less than his leniency should lead us to praise him, seeing that he has engraved marks of his glory upon a manifold diversity of works, and this rightly calls forth praises from every tongue. Thus it will come about that Scripture will obtain a just authority among us, nor will anything happen to hinder us from blessing God, as in the whole course of his governance of the universe he deserves. But the petition is directed also to this end: that all impiety which has besmirched this holy name may perish and be wiped out; that all detractions and mockeries which dim this hallowing or diminish it may be banished; and that in silencing all sacrileges, God may shine forth more and more in his majesty.

## 42. THE SECOND PETITION

The second petition is: that God's Kingdom come [<sup><400610></sup> Matthew 6:10]. Even though it contains nothing new, it is with good reason kept separate from the first petition; for if we consider our languor in the greatest matters of all, it behooves us to extend our discussion in order to drive home something that ought to have been thoroughly known of itself. Therefore, after we have been bidden to ask God to subject and finally completely destroy everything that casts a stain upon his holy name, there is now added another similar and almost identical entreaty: that "his Kingdom come" [<sup><400610></sup> Matthew 6:10].

But even though the definition of this Kingdom was put before us previously? I now briefly repeat it: God reigns where men, both by denial of themselves and by contempt of the world and of earthly life, pledge themselves to his righteousness in order to aspire to a heavenly life. Thus there are two parts to this Kingdom: first, that God by the power of his Spirit correct all the desires of the flesh which by squadrons war against him; second, that he shape all our thoughts in obedience to his rule,

Therefore, no others keep a lawful order in this petition but those who begin with themselves, that is, to be cleansed of all corruptions that

disturb the peaceful state of God's Kingdom and sully its purity. Now, because the word of God is like a royal scepter, we are bidden here to entreat him to bring all men's minds and hearts into voluntary obedience to it. This happens when he manifests the working of his word through the secret inspiration of his Spirit in order that it may stand forth in the degree of honor that it deserves. Afterward we should descend to the impious, who stubbornly and with desperate madness resist his authority. Therefore God sets up his Kingdom by humbling the whole world, but in different ways. For he tames the wantonness of some, breaks the untamable pride of others. We must daily desire that God gather churches unto himself from all parts of the earth; that he spread and increase them in number; that he adorn them with gifts; that he establish a lawful order among them; on the other hand, that he cast down all enemies of pure teaching and religion; that he scatter their counsels and crush their efforts. From this it appears that zeal for daily progress is not enjoined upon us in vain, for it never goes so well with human affairs that the filthiness of vices is shaken and washed away, and full integrity flowers and grows, But its fullness is delayed to the final coming of Christ when, as Paul teaches, "God will be all in all" [<sup><461528></sup> 1 Corinthians 15:28]. <sup>F574</sup>

Thus this prayer ought to draw us back from worldly corruptions, which so separate us from God that his Kingdom does not thrive within us. At the same time it ought to kindle zeal for mortification of the flesh; finally, it ought to instruct us in bearing the cross. For it is in this way that God wills to spread his Kingdom. But we should not take it ill that the outward man is in decay, provided the inner man is renewed [<sup><470416></sup> 2 Corinthians 4:16]! For this is the condition of God's Kingdom: that while we submit to his righteousness, he makes us sharers in his glory. This comes to pass when, with ever-increasing splendor, he displays his light and truth, by which the darkness and falsehoods of Satan's kingdom vanish, are extinguished, and pass away. Meanwhile, he protects his own, guides them by the help of his Spirit into uprightness, and strengthens them to perseverance. But he overthrows the wicked conspiracies of enemies, unravels their stratagems and deceits, opposes their malice, represses their obstinacy, until at last he slays Antichrist with the Spirit of his mouth, and destroys all ungodliness by the brightness of his coming [<sup><530208></sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:8].

### 43. THE THIRD PETITION

The third petition is: that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven [<sup><400610></sup>Matthew 6:10 p.]. Even though it depends upon his Kingdom and cannot be separated from it, still it is with reason added separately on account of our ignorance, which does not easily or immediately comprehend what it means that "God reigns in the world." It will therefore not be absurd to take it as an explanation that God will be King in the world when all submit to his will.

Here it is not a question of his secret will, by which he controls all things and directs them to their end. <sup>F575</sup> For even though Satan and men violently inveigh against him, he knows that by his incomprehensible plan he not only turns aside their attacks but so orders it that he may do through them what he has decreed.

But here God's other will is to be noted—namely, that to which voluntary obedience corresponds—and for that reason, heaven is by name compared to earth, for the angels, as is said in the psalm, willingly obey God, and are intent upon carrying out his commands [<sup><19A320></sup>Psalm 103:20]. We are therefore bidden to desire that, just as in heaven nothing is done apart from God's good pleasure, and the angels dwell together in all peace and uprightness, the earth be in like manner subject to such a rule, with all arrogance and wickedness brought to an end.

And in asking this we renounce the desires of our flesh; for whoever does not resign and submit his feelings to God opposes as much as he can God's will, since only what is corrupt comes forth from us. And again by this prayer we are formed to self-denial so God may rule us according to his decision. And not this alone but also so he may create new minds and hearts in us [cf. <sup><195102></sup>Psalm 51:20], ours having been reduced to nothing in order for us to feel in ourselves no prompting of desire but pure agreement with his will. In sum, so we may wish nothing from ourselves but his Spirit may govern our hearts; and while the Spirit is inwardly teaching us we may learn to love the things that please him and to hate those which displease him. In consequence, our wish is that he may render futile and of no account whatever feelings are incompatible with his will.

Conclusion of the first part Here, then, are the first three sections of the prayer. In making these requests we are to keep God's glory alone before our eyes, while leaving ourselves out of consideration and not looking to any advantage for ourselves; for such advantage, even though it amply accrues from such a prayer, must not be sought by us here. But even though all these things must nonetheless come to pass in their time, without any thought or desire or petition of ours, still we ought to desire and request them. And it is of no slight value for us to do this. Thus, we may testify and profess ourselves servants and children of God, zealously, truly, and deeply committed, to the best of our ability, to his honor. This we owe our Lord and Father. Therefore, men who do not, with this desire and zeal to further God's glory, pray that "God's name be hallowed," that "his Kingdom come," that "his will be done," should not be reckoned among God's children and servants; and inasmuch as all these things will come to pass even against such men's consent, the result will be their confusion and destruction.

*(Exposition of the last three petitions, 44-47)*

#### 44. THE FOURTH PETITION

The second part of the prayer follows, in which we descend to our own affairs. We do not, indeed, bid farewell to God's glory, which as Paul testifies is to be seen even in food and drink [<sup><461031></sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31], and ask only what is expedient for us. But we have pointed out <sup>F576</sup> that there is this difference: God specifically claims the first three petitions and draws us wholly to himself to prove our piety in this way. Then he allows us to look after our own interests, yet under this limitation: that we seek nothing for ourselves without the intention that whatever benefits he confers upon us may show forth his glory, for nothing is more fitting than that we live and die to him [<sup><451407></sup> Romans 14:7-9].

But by this petition we ask of God all things in general that our bodies have need to use under the elements of this world [<sup><480403></sup> Galatians 4:3], not only for food and clothing but also for everything God perceives to be beneficial to us, that we may eat our daily bread in peace. Briefly, by this we give ourselves over to his care, and entrust ourselves to his providence, that he may feed, nourish, and preserve us. For our most gracious Father

does not disdain to take even our bodies under his safekeeping and guardianship in order to exercise our faith in these small matters, while we expect everything from him, even to a crumb of bread and a drop of water. For since it has come about in some way or other through our wickedness that we are affected and tormented with greater concern for body than for soul, many who venture to entrust the soul to God are still troubled about the flesh, still worry about what they shall eat, what they shall wear, and unless they have on hand abundance of wine, grain, and oil, tremble with apprehension. So much more does the shadow of this fleeting life mean to us than that everlasting immortality. Those who, relying upon God, have once for all cast out that anxiety about the care of the flesh, immediately expect from him greater things, even salvation and eternal life. It is, then, no light exercise of faith for us to hope for those things from God which otherwise cause us such anxiety. And we benefit greatly when we put off this faithlessness, which clings to the very bones of almost all men.

What certain writers say in philosophizing about “supersubstantial bread”<sup>F577</sup> [<sup><400611></sup> Matthew 6:11, Vg.] seems to me to agree very little with Christ’s meaning; indeed, if we did not even in this fleeting life accord to God the office of nourisher, this would be an imperfect prayer [<sup><400611></sup> Matthew 6:11]. The reason they give is too profane: that it is not fitting that children of God, who ought to be spiritual, not only give their attention to earthly cares but also involve God in these with themselves.<sup>F578</sup> As if his blessing and fatherly favor are not shown even in food, or it were written to no purpose that “godliness holds promise not only for the life to come but also for the present life” [<sup><540408></sup> 1 Timothy 4:8 p.]! Now even though forgiveness of sins is far more important than bodily nourishment, Christ placed the inferior thing first that he might bring us gradually to the two remaining petitions, which properly belong to the heavenly life. In this he has taken account of our slowness.

But we are bidden to ask our daily bread that we may be content with the measure that our Heavenly Father has deigned to distribute to us, and not get gain by unlawful devices. Meanwhile, we must hold that it is made ours by title of gift; for, as is said in Moses, neither effort nor toil, nor our hands, acquire anything for us by themselves but by God’s blessing [<sup><032620></sup> Leviticus 26:20; cf. <sup><050817></sup> Deuteronomy 8:17-18]. Indeed, not even an abundance of bread would benefit us in the slightest unless it were

divinely turned into nourishment. Accordingly, this generosity of God is necessary no less for the rich than for the poor; for with full cellars and storehouses, men would faint with thirst and hunger unless they enjoyed their bread through his grace.<sup>F579</sup> The word “today,” or “day by day,” as it is in the other Evangelist, as well as the adjective “daily,” bridle the uncontrolled desire for fleeting things, with which we commonly burn without measure, and to which other evils are added. For if a greater abundance is at hand, we vainly pour it out upon pleasure, delights, ostentation, and other sorts of excess. Therefore we are bidden to ask only as much as is sufficient for our need from day to day, with this assurance: that as our Heavenly Father nourishes us today, he will not fail us tomorrow. Thus, however abundantly goods may flow to us, even when our storehouses are stuffed and our cellars full, we ought always to ask for our daily bread, for we must surely count all possessions nothing except in so far as the Lord, having poured out his blessing, makes it fruitful with continuing increase. Also, what is in our hand is not even ours except in so far as he bestows each little portion upon us hour by hour, and allows us to use it. Because the pride of man only most grudgingly allows itself to be persuaded, the Lord declares that he provided a singular proof for every age when he fed his people in the desert with manna in order to impress upon us that man does not live by bread alone but rather by the word that proceeds out of his mouth [<sup><050803></sup>Deuteronomy 8:3; <sup><400404></sup>Matthew 4:4]. By this he shows it is by his power alone that life and strength are sustained, even though he administers it to us by physical means. So he commonly teaches us by the opposite example when he breaks, as often as he pleases, the strength of bread (and as he himself says, the staff) that those who eat may waste away with hunger [<sup><032626></sup>Leviticus 26:26] and those who drink may be parched with thirst [cf. <sup><260416></sup>Ezekiel 4:16-17; 14:13].

Yet those who, not content with daily bread but panting after countless things with unbridled desire, or sated with their abundance, or carefree in their piled-up riches, supplicate God with this prayer are but mocking him. For the first ones ask him what they do not wish to receive, indeed, what they utterly abominate—namely, mere daily bread—and as much as possible cover up before God their propensity to greed, while true prayer ought to pour out before him the whole mind itself and whatever lies



hidden within. But others ask of him what they least expect, that is, what they think they have within themselves.

In calling the bread “ours,” God’s generosity, as we have said, stands forth the more, for it makes ours what is by no right owed to us [cf.

<050818> Deuteronomy 8:18]. Yet the point I also have touched upon must not be rejected: that what has been obtained by just and harmless toil is so designated, not what is got by frauds or robberies; for all that we acquire through harming another belongs to another.

The fact that we ask that it be given us signifies that it is a simple and free gift of God, however it may come to us, even when it would seem to have been obtained from our own skill and diligence, and supplied by our own hands. For it is by his blessing alone that our labors truly prosper.

#### 45. THE FIFTH PETITION

Next follows: “Forgive us our debts” [<sup><400612></sup> Matthew 6:12]. With this and the following petition, Christ briefly embraces all that makes for the heavenly life, as the spiritual covenant that God has made for the salvation of his church rests on these two members alone: “I shall write my laws upon their hearts,” and, “I shall be merciful toward their iniquity” [<sup><243133></sup> Jeremiah 31:33 p.; cf. ch. 33:8]. Here Christ begins with forgiveness of sins, then presently adds the second grace: that God protect us by the power of his Spirit and sustain us by his aid so we may stand unvanquished against all temptations.

He calls sins “debts” because we owe penalty for them, and we could in no way satisfy it unless we were released by this forgiveness. This pardon comes of his free mercy, by which he himself generously wipes out these debts, exacting no payment from us but making satisfaction to himself by his own mercy in Christ, who once for all gave himself as a ransom [cf. <sup><450324></sup> Romans 3:24]. Therefore those who trust that God is satisfied with their own or others’ merits, and that by such satisfaction forgiveness of sins is paid for and purchased, <sup>F580</sup> share not at all in this free gift. And while they call upon God according to this form, they do nothing but subscribe to their own accusation, and even seal their condemnation by their own testimony. For they confess they are debtors unless they are released by the benefit of forgiveness, which they still do not accept but

rather spurn, while they thrust their merits and satisfactions upon God. For thus they do not entreat his mercy but call his judgment.

Let those who imagine such perfection for themselves as would make it unnecessary to seek pardon <sup>F581</sup> have disciples whose itching ears mislead them into errors, provided it be understood that all the disciples they acquire have been snatched away from Christ, seeing that in instructing all to confess their guilt, he admits none but sinners; not that he would foster sins by flattery, but because he knew that believers are never divested of the vices of their flesh without always remaining liable to God's judgment. We must, indeed, wish and also zealously labor that, having discharged every detail of our duty, we may truly congratulate ourselves before God as being pure from every stain. But because it pleases God gradually to restore his image in us, in such a manner that some taint always remains in our flesh, it was most necessary to provide a remedy. But if Christ, according to the authority given him by his Father, commands us throughout life to resort to prayer for the pardon of our guilt, who will tolerate these new doctors, who try to dazzle the eyes of the simple-minded with the specter of perfect innocence so as to assure them that they can rid themselves of all blame? This, according to John, is nothing else than to make God a liar [<sup><620110></sup> 1 John 1:10]!

Also, with the same effort these rascals, by canceling one section of it, tear apart God's covenant, in which we see our salvation contained, and topple it from its foundation. Not only are they guilty of sacrilege in separating things till now joined, but also they are impious and cruel in overwhelming miserable souls with despair. Indeed, they are faithless to themselves and those like them because they induce a state of indolence diametrically opposed to God's mercy. But their objection, that in longing for the coming of God's Kingdom we at the same time seek the abolition of sin, is very childish. For in the first section of the prayer, the highest perfection is set before us, but in the latter, our weakness. Thus these two admirably accord with each other, so that, in aspiring toward the goal, we may not neglect the remedies that our necessity requires.

## “AS WE FORGIVE...”

Finally, we petition that forgiveness come to us, “as we forgive our debtors” [<sup><400612></sup>Matthew 6:12]: namely, as we spare and pardon all who have in any way injured us, either treating us unjustly in deed or insulting us in word. Not that it is ours to forgive the guilt of transgression or offense, for this belongs to God alone [cf. <sup><234325></sup>Isaiah 43:25]! This, rather, is our forgiveness: willingly to cast from the mind wrath, hatred, desire for revenge, and willingly to banish to oblivion the remembrance of injustice. For this reason, we ought not to seek forgiveness of sins from God unless we ourselves also forgive the offenses against us of all those who do or have done us ill. If we retain feelings of hatred in our hearts, if we plot revenge and ponder any occasion to cause harm, and even if we do not try to get back into our enemies’ good graces, by every sort of good office deserve well of them, and commend ourselves to them, by this prayer we entreat God not to forgive our sins. For we ask that he do to us as we do to others [cf. <sup><400712></sup>Matthew 7:12]. This, indeed, is to petition him not to do it to us unless we ourselves do it. What do people of this sort gain from their petition but a heavier judgment?

Finally, we must note that this condition—that he “forgive us as we forgive our debtors” [<sup><400612></sup>Matthew 6:12]—is not added because by the forgiveness we grant to others we deserve his forgiveness, as if this indicated the cause of it. Rather, by this word the Lord intended partly to comfort the weakness of our faith. For he has added this as a sign to assure us he has granted forgiveness of sins to us just as surely as we are aware of having forgiven others, provided our hearts have been emptied and purged of all hatred, envy, and vengeance. Also, it is partly by this mark that the Lord excludes from the number of his children those persons who, being eager for revenge and slow to forgive, practice persistent enmity and foment against others the very indignation that they pray to be averted from themselves. This the Lord does that such men dare not call upon him as Father. This is also eloquently expressed in Luke, in Christ’s words [<sup><421104></sup>Luke 11:4].

## 46. THE SIXTH PETITION

The sixth petition [<sup><400613></sup>Matthew 6:13], as we have said, corresponds to the promise that the law is to be engraved upon our hearts [<sup><200303></sup>Proverbs 3:3; <sup><470303></sup>2 Corinthians 3:3], but because we obey God not without continual warfare and hard and trying struggles, here we seek to be equipped with such armor and defended with such protection that we may be able to win the victory. By this we are instructed that we need not only the grace of the Spirit, to soften our hearts within and to bend and direct them to obey God, but also his aid, to render us invincible against both all the stratagems and all the violent assaults of Satan. Now the forms of temptations are indeed many and varied. For wicked conceptions of the mind, provoking us to transgress the law, which either our own inordinate desire suggests to us or the devil prompts, are temptations, as are things not evil of their own nature yet which become temptations through the devil's devices, when they are so thrust before our eyes that by their appearance we are drawn away or turn aside from God [<sup><590102></sup>James 1:2,14; cf. <sup><400401></sup>Matthew 4:1,3; <sup><520305></sup>1 Thessalonians 3:5]. And these temptations are either from the right or from the left. From the right are, for example, riches, power, honors, which often dull men's keenness of sight by the glitter and seeming goodness they display, and allure with their blandishments, so that, captivated by such tricks and drunk with such sweetness, men forget their God. From the left are, for example, poverty, disgrace, contempt, afflictions, and the like. Thwarted by the hardship and difficulty of these, they become despondent in mind, cast away assurance and hope, and are at last completely estranged from God.

We pray God, our Father, not to let us yield to the two sorts of temptations which, either aroused in us by our inordinate desire or proposed to us by the devil's guile, war against us. We pray, rather, that he sustain and encourage us by his hand so that, strengthened by his power, we may stand firm against all the assaults of our malign enemy, whatever thoughts he may introduce into our minds. Then we pray that whatever is presented to us tending either way we may turn to good—namely, that we may not be puffed up in prosperity or yet cast down in adversity.

Nevertheless, we do not here ask that we feel no temptations at all, for we need, rather, to be aroused, pricked, and urged by them, lest, with too much inactivity, we grow sluggish. For it is not beside the point that David wished to be tempted [cf. <sup><192602></sup>Psalm 26:2], and it is not without cause that the Lord daily tests his elect [<sup><012201></sup>Genesis 22:1; <sup><050802></sup>Deuteronomy 8:2; 13:3, Vg.], chastising them by disgrace, poverty, tribulation, and other sorts of affliction. But God tries in one way, Satan in another. Satan tempts that he may destroy, condemn, confound, cast down, but God, that by proving his own children he may make trial of their sincerity, and establish their strength by exercising it; that he may mortify, purify, and cauterize their flesh, which unless it were forced under this restraint would play the wanton and vaunt itself beyond measure. Besides, Satan attacks those who are unarmed and unprepared that he may crush them unaware. God, along with the temptation, makes a way of escape, that his own may be able patiently to bear all that he imposes upon them [<sup><461013></sup>1 Corinthians 10:13; <sup><610209></sup>2 Peter 2:9].

It makes very little difference whether we understand by the word “evil” the devil or sin. Indeed, Satan himself is the enemy who lies in wait for our life [<sup><600508></sup>1 Peter 5:8]; moreover, he is armed with sin to destroy us. This, then, is our plea: that we may not be vanquished or overwhelmed by any temptations but may stand fast by the Lord’s power against all hostile powers that attack us. This is not to succumb to temptations that, received into his care and safekeeping and secure in his protection, we may victoriously endure sin, death, the gates of hell [<sup><401628></sup>Matthew 16:28], and the devil’s whole kingdom. This is to be freed from evil.

Here we must carefully note that it is not in our power to engage that great warrior the devil in combat, or to bear his force and onslaught. Otherwise it would be pointless or a mockery to ask of God what we already have in ourselves. Obviously those who prepare for such a combat with self-assurance do not sufficiently understand with what a ferocious and well-equipped enemy they have to deal. <sup>F582</sup> Now we seek to be freed from his power, as from the jaws of a mad and raging lion [<sup><600508></sup>1 Peter 5:8]; if the Lord did not snatch us from the midst of death, we could not help being immediately torn to pieces by his fangs and claws, and swallowed down his throat. Yet we know that if the Lord be with us, and fight for us while we keep still, “in his might we shall do mightily” [<sup><196012></sup>Psalm

60:12; cf. <sup><19A714></sup>Psalm 107:14 and Comm.]. Let others trust as they will in their own capacities and powers of free choice, which they seem to themselves to possess. For us let it be enough that we stand and are strong in God's power alone.

But this prayer involves more than at first sight it presents. For if God's Spirit is our power to battle with Satan, we shall never be able to win victory until, filled with the Spirit, we cast off all weakness of our flesh. While we petition, then, to be freed from Satan and sin, we anticipate that new increases of God's grace will continually be showered upon us, until, completely filled therewith, we triumph over all evil.

To some it seems rough and harsh to ask God not to lead us into temptation, seeing that to tempt us is against his nature, as James so testifies [<sup><590113></sup>James 1:13]. But the question has already been partly solved, because our lust is properly the cause of all temptations that vanquish us [<sup><590114></sup>James 1:14], and therefore bears the blame. And James means only that it is futile and unjust to transfer to God those vices which we are compelled to impute to ourselves because we know ourselves to be guilty of them. But this does not prevent God, when it seems good to him, from turning us over to Satan, from casting us into a reprobate mind and foul desires, and from leading us into temptations, by a just but often secret judgment. For the cause has often been hidden from men, while it is certain with him. From this we gather it is not an improper expression, if we are convinced that with good reason he threatens so many times to give sure proofs of his vengeance, when he strikes the reprobate with blindness and hardness of heart.

## 47. THE CONCLUSION

These three petitions, in which we especially commend to God ourselves and all our possessions, clearly show what we have previously said: <sup>F583</sup> that the prayers of Christians ought to be public, and to look to the public edification of the church and the advancement of the believers' fellowship. For each man does not pray that something be given to him privately, but all of us in common ask our bread, forgiveness of sins, not to be led into temptation, and to be freed from evil.

Moreover, there is added the reason why we should be so bold to ask and so confident of receiving. Even though this is not extant in the Latin versions, <sup>F584</sup> it is so appropriate to this place that it ought not to be omitted—namely, that his “is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever” [<sup><400613></sup>Matthew 6:13, marg.]. This is firm and tranquil repose for our faith. For if our prayers were to be commended to God by our worth, who would dare even mutter in his presence? Now, however miserable we may be, though unworthiest of all, however devoid of all commendation, we will yet never lack a reason to pray, never be shorn of assurance, since his Kingdom, power, and glory can never be snatched away from our Father.

At the end is added, “Amen” [<sup><400613></sup>Matthew 6:13, marg.]. By it is expressed the warmth of desire to obtain what we have asked of God. And our hope is strengthened that all things of this sort have already been brought to pass, and will surely be granted to us, since they have been promised by God, who cannot deceive. <sup>F585</sup> And this agrees with the form of prayer we previously set forth: “Do, O Lord, for thy name’s sake, not on account of us or our righteousness” [cf. <sup><270918></sup>Daniel 9:18-19]. <sup>F586</sup> By this the saints not only express the end of their prayers but confess themselves unworthy to obtain it unless God seeks the reason from himself, and that their confidence of being heard stems solely from God’s nature.

*(Concluding considerations: adequacy of the Lord’s Prayer, with freedom to use other words, 48-49)*

#### **48. THE LORD’S PRAYER AS A BINDING RULE**

We have everything we ought, or are at all able, to seek of God, set forth in this form and, as it were, rule for prayer handed down by our best Master, Christ, whom the Father has appointed our teacher and to whom alone he would have us hearken [<sup><401705></sup>Matthew 17:5]. For he both has always been the eternal Wisdom of God [<sup><231102></sup>Isaiah 11:2] and, made man, has been given to men, the angel of great counsel [<sup><230906></sup>Isaiah 9:6, conflated with chapter 28:29 and <sup><243219></sup>Jeremiah 32:19].

And this prayer is in all respects so perfect that any extraneous or alien thing added to it, which cannot be related to it, is impious and unworthy

to be approved by God. <sup>F587</sup> For in this summary he has set forth what is worthy of him, acceptable to him, necessary for us—in effect, what he would willingly grant.

For this reason, those who dare go farther and ask anything from God beyond this: first, wish to add to God’s wisdom from their own, which cannot happen without insane blasphemy; secondly, do not confine themselves within God’s will but, holding it in contempt, stray away farther in their uncontrolled desire; lastly, they will never obtain anything, since they pray without faith. But doubtless all such prayers are made apart from faith, for here the word of God is absent, upon which faith, if it is to stand at all, must always rely. But those who, neglecting the Master’s rule, give themselves over to their own desires not only lack God’s word but contend against it with all their strength. Therefore Tertullian has both truly and elegantly called it “the lawful prayer,” <sup>F588</sup> tacitly indicating that all other prayers lie outside the law and are forbidden.

#### **49. THE LORD’S PRAYER DOES NOT BIND US TO ITS FORM OF WORDS BUT TO ITS CONTENT**

We would not have it understood that we are so bound by this form of prayer that we are not allowed to change it in either word or syllable. For here and there in Scripture one reads many prayers, far different from it in words, yet composed by the same Spirit, the use of which is very profitable to us. Many prayers are repeatedly suggested to believers by the same Spirit, which bear little similarity in wording. In so teaching, we mean only this: that no man should ask for, expect, or demand, anything at all except what is included, by way of summary, in this prayer; and though the words may be utterly different, yet the sense ought not to vary. Thus all prayers contained in Scripture, and those which come forth from godly breasts, are certainly to be referred to it. Truly, no other can ever be found that equals this in perfection, much less surpasses it. Here nothing is left out that ought to be thought of in the praises of God, nothing that ought to come into man’s mind for his own welfare. And, indeed, it is so precisely framed that hope of attempting anything better is rightly taken away from all men. To sum up, let us remember that this is



the teaching of Divine Wisdom, teaching what it willed and willing what was needful.

*(Special times of prayer and undiscouraged perseverance in it, 50-52)*

## 50. PRAYER AT REGULAR TIMES

But, although it has already been stated above <sup>F589</sup> that, lifting up our hearts, we should ever aspire to God and pray without ceasing, still, since our weakness is such that it has to be supported by many aids, and our sluggishness such that it needs to be goaded, it is fitting each one of us should set apart certain hours for this exercise. Those hours should not pass without prayer, and during them all the devotion of the heart should be completely engaged in it. These are: when we arise in the morning, before we begin daily work, when we sit down to a meal, when by God's blessing we have eaten, when we are getting ready to retire.

But this must not be any superstitious observance of hours, whereby, as if paying our debt to God, we imagine ourselves paid up for the remaining hours. Rather, it must be a tutelage for our weakness, which should be thus exercised and repeatedly stimulated. We must take particular care that, whenever we either are pressed or see others pressed by any adversity, we hasten back to God, not with swift feet but with eager hearts. Also, that we should not let our prosperity or that of others go unnoticed, failing to testify, by praise and thanksgiving, that we recognize God's hand therein.

Lastly, in all prayer we ought carefully to observe that our intention is not to bind God to particular circumstances, or to prescribe at what time, in what place, or in what way he is to do anything. Accordingly, in this prayer we are taught not to make any law for him, or impose any condition upon him, but to leave to his decision to do what he is to do, in what way, at what time, and in what place it seems good to him.

<sup>F590</sup> Therefore, before we make any prayer for ourselves, we pray that his will be done [<sup><400610></sup> Matthew 6:10]. By these words we subject our will to his in order that, restrained as by a bridle, it may not presume to control God but may make him the arbiter and director of all its entreaties.

## 51. PATIENT PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER

If, with minds composed to this obedience, we allow ourselves to be ruled by the laws of divine providence, we shall easily learn to persevere in prayer and, with desires suspended, patiently to wait for the Lord. Then we shall be sure that, even though he does not appear, he is always present to us, and will in his own time declare how he has never had ears deaf to the prayers that in men's eyes he seems to have neglected. This, then, will be an ever-present consolation: that, if God should not respond to our first requests, we may not faint or fall into despair. Such is the wont of those who, carried away with their own ardor, so call upon God that unless he attends upon their first act of prayer and brings them help at once, they immediately fancy him angry and hostile toward them and, abandoning all hope of being heard, cease to call upon him. Rather, by deferring our hope with a well-tempered evenness of mind, let us follow hard upon that perseverance which Scripture strongly commends to us. For in The Psalms we can often see that David and other believers, when they are almost worn out with praying and seem to have beaten the air with their prayers as if pouring forth words to a deaf God, still do not cease to pray [<sup><192202></sup> Psalm 22:2]. For, unless the faith placed in it is superior to all events, the authority of God's Word does not prevail.

Also, let us not tempt God and, wearying him with our depravity, provoke him against ourselves. This is usual with many who covenant with God only under certain conditions, and, as if he were the servant of their own appetites, bind him to laws of their own stipulation. If he does not obey them at once, they become indignant, grumble, protest, murmur, and rage at him. To such, therefore, he often grants in wrath and fury what in mercy he denies to others to whom he is favorable. The children of Israel supply proof of this, for whom it would have been much better not to be heard by the Lord than to swallow his wrath with their meat [<sup><041118></sup> Numbers 11:18,33].

## 52. UNHEARD PRAYERS?

But if finally even after long waiting our senses cannot learn the benefit received from prayer, or perceive any fruit from it, still our faith will make us sure of what cannot be perceived by sense, that we have obtained what

was expedient. For the Lord so often and so certainly promises to care for us in our troubles, when they have once been laid upon his bosom. And so he will cause us to possess abundance in poverty, and comfort in affliction. For though all things fail us, yet God will never forsake us, who cannot disappoint the expectation and patience of his people. He alone will be for us in place of all things, since all good things are contained in him and he will reveal them to us on the Day of Judgment, when his Kingdom will be plainly manifested.

Besides, even if God grants our prayer, he does not always respond to the exact form of our request but, seeming to hold us in suspense, he yet, in a marvelous manner, shows us our prayers have not been vain. This is what John's words mean: "If we know that he hears us whenever we ask anything of him, we know that we have obtained the requests we asked of him" [<sup><620515></sup> 1 John 5:15 p.]. This seems a diffuse superfluity of words, but the declaration is especially useful because God, even when he does not comply with our wishes, is still attentive and kindly to our prayers, so that hope relying upon his word will never disappoint us. But believers need to be sustained by this patience, since they would not long stand unless they relied upon it. For the Lord proves his people by no light trials, and does not softly exercise them, but often drives them to extremity, and allows them, so driven, to lie a long time in the mire before he gives them any taste of his sweetness. And, as Hannah says, "He kills and brings to life; he brings down to hell and brings back" [<sup><090206></sup> 1 Samuel 2:6 p.]. What could they do here but be discouraged and rush into despair if they were not, when afflicted, desolate, and already half dead, revived by the thought that God has regard for them and will bring an end to their present misfortunes? Nevertheless, however they stand upon the assurance of that hope, they do not meanwhile cease to pray, for unless there be in prayer a constancy to persevere, we pray in vain.