

THE IMMACULATA



'A Mother and her Prayer Life'

Prayer is the foundation of all we do. St John Chrysostom makes the profound observation that 'the one who prays well, lives well'. On the contrary, if we don't pray well, we don't live well. It is very important to have a prayer life. Time for prayer is limited by your duty of state and what you are able to do. As a mother and wife, you must have a stable and consistent prayer life.

Each day have a habit of some set prayers as your standard. Pray your own personal prayers each day and get in to the habit of speaking to God during the day, of seeing God as a friend, that way you learn to see prayer not as a burden or a Cross. The greatest prayer is the Mass however you must accept that you will not always be able to hear Mass. If you can get to Mass, get to Mass but not at the expense of your duty of state. Offer the Mass that you go to, for the intentions of your husband and children that they may grow in grace and holiness.

As a mother you have so many things on your plate, prayer is your strength to be gracious in the middle of so many demands on your time and energies. The strength to be kind, loving, caring and a good mother is going to come from your prayer life.

Prayer is our Pillar of Strength amidst the storm that surrounds you, amidst trials and difficulties. It allows you to supernaturalise your vision and to be strong amidst temptation. It allows you to see what is most important. As a mother you cook and clean and do many beautiful things but at the same time you are not here on earth for these things, these are part of what you do but this is not what your life is about. Your prayer life gives you the ability to see through that.

St Monica supernaturalised things when she spoke to her son, Augustine. Her only desire was to raise a good Catholic Family and get her children to Heaven.

'After a conversation in which this mother and son were lifted beyond the things of earth even to the enjoyment of the things of heaven, St. Monica told her son, "Son, for myself, I have no longer any pleasure in anything in this life. What I want here further, and why I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are satisfied. There was indeed one thing for which I wished to tarry a little in this life, and that was that I might see you a Catholic Christian before I

died. My God has exceeded this abundantly, so that I see you despising all earthly felicity, made His servant—what do I here?" (Confessions IX, 10)

As woman you have needs on a natural level but sometimes while you are not worldly, you are not supernatural either. In order to save our own souls and our children's souls we have to be supernatural in our outlook. When we have a problem we must not only look at what we can do but what we can do with God, we must turn to Our Lord and Our Lady, we must be vigilant in our prayers and sacrifices. Prayer gives us the ability to transcend the problem and see it in its proper perspective.

As priests we rely on you, parents, to pray the Rosary with your children and teach your children how to pray. It often struck me to see my fellow seminarians getting on their knees first thing in the morning to say their morning prayers. This is a habit that is learned from parents, it may be tedious but you are trying to form good habits so that ultimately the children make the Faith their own.

If you want to prevent your children from losing the Faith the only thing that you can do is to help them make the Faith their own. Our prayer life in the Church is a structured and hierarchical thing. We have the Priest, the Mass and ceremonies etc. Sometimes that can be a hindrance because we can see and do all these things but it never touches our hearts, Jesus doesn't become their friend. Praying the Rosary, going to Mass should be something we do because we love God. The formal prayers are important but also get your children to speak to Our Lord as a friend.

Pray for your spouses and children, not that they have no temptation but that they are faithful in their temptations, because they are going to be tempted. Pray that they are strong and don't give in to the temptation.

Many people today suffer from a form of mental instability, because of the modern world and many other things which combine to attack our mental health. Our mental health is only going to be stabilised and strengthened by prayer.

Blessed Alexandrina da Costa (1904-1955)

A story from the life of *Alexandrina da Costa*, beatified on 25 April 2004, reveals the transforming power and visible effects of the sacrifice made by a sick and forgotten girl. In 1941, Alexandrina wrote to her spiritual director, Fr. Mariano Pinho, telling him that Jesus told her, "My daughter, a priest living in Lisbon is close to being lost forever; he offends me terribly. Call your spiritual director and ask his permission that I may have you suffer in a special way for this soul."

Once Alexandrina had received permission from her spiritual director, she suffered greatly. She felt the severity of the priest's errors, how he wanted to know nothing about God and was close to self-damnation. She even heard the priest's full name. Poor Alexandrina experienced the hellish state of this priest's soul and prayed urgently, "Not to hell, no! I offer myself as a sacrifice for him, as long as you want." Fr. Pinho inquired of the Cardinal of Lisbon whether one of the priests of his diocese was of particular concern. The Cardinal openly confirmed that he was, in fact, very worried about one of his priests, and when he mentioned the name of the priest, it was the same one that Jesus had spoken to Alexandrina.

Some months later, a friend of Fr. Pinho, Fr. David Novais, recounted to him an unusual incident. Fr. David had just held a retreat in Fatima where attended a modest gentleman whose exemplary behaviour made him pleasantly attractive to all the participants. On the last night of the retreat, this man suddenly had a heart attack. He asked to see a priest, to whom he confessed and received Holy Communion. Shortly thereafter he died, fully reconciled with God. It turned out that this man was actually a priest—the very priest for whom Alexandrina had suffered so greatly.



The Beautiful Hands of a Priest

*We need them in life's early morning,
we need them again at its close;
We feel their warm clasp of true friendship,
we seek them when tasting life's woes.
When we come to this world we are sinful,
the greatest as well as the least.
And the hand that makes us pure as angels
is the beautiful hand of a priest.
At the altar each day we behold them,
and the hands of a king on his throne
Are not equal to them in their greatness,
their dignity stands all alone;
For there in the stillness of morning,
ere the sun has emerged from the East,
There God rests between the pure fingers
of the beautiful hands of a priest.
And when we are tempted and
wander to pathways of shame and of sin,*

*'Tis the hand of a priest will absolve us—not once,
but again and again;
And when we are taking life's partner,
other hands may prepare us a feast,
But the hand that will bless and unite us
is the beautiful hand of a priest.
God bless them and keep them all holy
for the Host which their fingers caress;
What can a poor sinner do better than ask Him,
He Who chose thee to bless?
When the death-dews on our eyelids are falling,
may our courage and strength be increased,
By seeing raised o'er us in blessing,
the beautiful hands of a priest!*

Lord, grant us priests.
Lord, grant us holy priests.
Lord, grant us many holy priests.

How to be Contented by E. Dunne C.S.s.R.

Many women are discontented, and for a variety of reasons. Some entered marriage without realising what the future held. They never dreamed that having children could be so painful, uncomfortable and exhausting. Other women married very young and still hanker after the pleasures and freedom of youth which they must now forego. Not a few are burdened with continual sickness in their families. Others are married to men who are struggling financially and they have to make do each week with barely enough. This is made all the harder if they happen to see a one-time school friend with a more beautiful home, nicer clothes, more attentive husband. They compare their own living conditions with those of their friend, and the comparison hurts. The misfortunes cut deep. Brooding creates discontent, even unhappiness.

If you have been feeling discontented, you have to face up to the following: Contentment can be achieved only through two things.

1. Having the right attitude.
2. Making acts of the will.

Having the right attitude

Realise that happiness for a human being cannot consist in having material things. Money is always a help, but nothing more. Contentment does not flow from television, refrigerators, carpets or cars. Nicely spaced children might even be a cause of bitter remorse. A woman can have a dream home, and be tempted to commit suicide in it. Another woman might live in a shed with six children, and, although she hopes for something better, she can be contented, for the time being at least. It is the attitude of mind that makes the difference. Contentment arises from knowing that:

You are here and now doing the Will of God;
You are fulfilling your vocation in life;
You are every moment creating or achieving something.

Without the right attitude, it is impossible to be contented, whether you are fabulously rich or miserably poor.

Making acts of the will

You must count your blessings, not your miseries. You have to make an effort to do this, an act of the will. Refuse to concentrate on your misfortunes. Thank God for your children. Remember, children are definitely not "For Sale." All the gold in jewellers' shops could not buy them. They are gifts of God. Thank God for the security of a husband, the warmth of a home. Thank God for the true Faith. Without it your discontent would be the thin end of despair.

Make an act of the will and refuse to compare yourself with others. God does not compare people with one an-

other. Since wealth does not create happiness, to envy others only aggravates one's discontent. If you must compare, think of the millions who are poorer than you, the millions who face starvation. Frequently unite yourself to the Will of God. In sickness, debt, misfortune, fatigue, worry, say: "Blessed be the Will of God." Get into the habit of saying as you go about your apparently never-ending tasks: "My Jesus, I believe in Your love for me." St. Gerard wrote out a little card, and fixed it on the door of his room: "Here is done the Will of God, as God wills it, for as long as God wills." Put a similar card in your kitchen, so your eyes can see it, and its message can go to your heart. Lastly, if you have been guilty of mismanagement, lack of planning, if you spend carelessly and imprudently, if your children turn out badly because you have not trained them, you cannot blame your misfortunes on the Will of God. But if you have done your best and you are still unfortunate, afflicted or unlucky, then face your troubles squarely and conform to the Divine Will.

After many trials and much unhappiness, Francis Thompson finally wrote of God:

*"Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?"*

Taken from Catholic Family November 1992



Little Nellie of Holy God (1903-1908) was an Irish child particularly devoted to the Eucharist. The story of her life inspired Pope Pius X to lower the age children could receive Holy Communion from 12 to around 7.

Little Nellie of Holy God

This is a story of a little girl called Nellie, such a little girl that she was not much more than a baby when her beautiful Guardian Angel took her soul up to Heaven. Yet this little baby had learnt to love "Holy God" more than many children who were much older than she. When Nellie was only three years old her dear mamma died, and there was no one to take care of the home and the children, for Nellie's father was a soldier and had to live with the other soldiers. So little Nellie and her sister were sent to live in a convent school kept by the kind Good Shepherd Sisters. When the two little girls arrived at the convent it was found that Nellie had the whooping cough, so she was taken right away to the hospital for some weeks. After she was better she came back to the convent and lived with the other little children. All the others were much bigger than Nellie, and they were very pleased to have a dear little baby girl to play with. They made a great pet of her, and did all they could to make her happy.

Yet, in spite of all their kindness, Nellie was often found crying. She cried so often, for nothing as people thought, that they said she must be a very bad-tempered little girl. But this was not really so.

After a few weeks Nellie became very ill, and they found that every time she had cried she had been suffering great pain, but was too tiny to explain what was the matter with her. Now she was ill, too ill to stay with the other children, so ill indeed that they thought she was going to die. So she was carried to a dear little cottage at the end of the convent garden, where sick children were nursed. One of the big girls used to take care of her when the Sister was busy. Nearly every day this big girl used to get up early to go to Mass and Holy Communion in the convent chapel, but sometimes when she was not very well she was told to stay in bed instead.

The first morning this happened, when she got up and came into Nellie's room, Nellie looked up from her cot and said: "You haven't had Holy God in your heart to-day." "How do you know that, Nellie?" asked the big girl. "Oh, I know," said Nellie, "and I shall tell Mother." The children call the Sisters "Mother" in that convent.

Every time that the big girl stayed in bed Nellie knew, although she was not sleeping in the same room. Each time that she came in Nellie would look at her sadly and say: "You have not had Holy God today." The Sister who looked after Nellie used to teach her all about Almighty God, and His Dear Mother, and how to say her little prayers. Nellie loved to hear about Holy God, as she said, and about Holy God's Mother and the Angels.

One day during Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Sister carried Nellie into the chapel and told her all about Holy God living there. After this Nellie seemed to think of nothing else. She understood all about Holy Communion too, and would ask the Sister who nursed her to come straight up to her bed after she had received Our Lord, while Holy God was still in her heart.

The Bishop, when he heard about little Nellie and her great love for Holy God, said he would come to the convent and give her the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation. So one day the Bishop came, and Sister carried little Nellie into the chapel, for she was too weak to walk, and there, as she lay in the Sister's arms, the good Bishop confirmed her. After this Nellie longed to make her First Holy Communion. "When will Holy God come into my heart?" she would ask. "Oh, I am longing for Holy God."

About this time there was a good priest staying in the convent. He often used to visit little Nellie, and when he found how ardently she longed for Holy God, and how well she understood about Holy Communion, he said she should be allowed to make her First Communion. The Bishop's permission was asked and given. Then little Nellie was told that soon indeed Holy God was to come into her heart. How happy she was as she lay in her tiny cot watching the preparations.

Near her cot they had made a little altar to the Infant Jesus, and Nellie would lie for hours looking at it and talking to Holy God. They made her a little white frock, a white veil and wreath, and lent her little white shoes and socks to wear. Nellie took a great interest in these clothes. "Everything must be very nice for Holy God," she said, "and you must put them on me again when He takes me up to Heaven."

The morning came, and Nellie was dressed and carried into chapel, and there they laid her on a cushion on one of the benches. All the Sisters were there and all the children too. The children sang very sweetly during the Mass, but Nellie clasped her tiny hands and said her baby prayers. When at last the priest brought her Holy Communion, how happy she was. Dear little baby, sitting there so quietly, talking to Holy God! After her thanksgiving she was carried out of the chapel back to her cot. Such a happy, contented little baby had never been known before.

Her next Holy Communion was during the Christmas Midnight Mass. After that she grew worse and worse. The priest used to bring Holy God to her in bed. Such a brave little girl she was, although she suffered most terrible pain. She would say: "Look at Holy God on the Cross. He suffered more than this for me. Oh, I am longing to go to Holy God." But her time was growing very short on earth now. Each day she grew weaker and weaker, until one Sunday a beautiful Angel flew down from Heaven for Nellie's soul and took it up with him to Holy God. The Sisters and children were very sorry to lose their baby playmate, and all were present when Nellie's poor little body was put into a tiny grave in the convent grounds. Afterward they often went to pray where Nellie was buried, and from her place in Heaven little Nellie helped them by her prayers. The memory of her great love for Holy God made them try to love Him too as she did, and to take great pains to prepare their hearts to receive Him in Holy Communion.