

5th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Mark 1:29-39

One of the most common difficulties for us is how difficult we can find it to pray. We may not know how to pray, or say we do not have enough time to pray, or that we forget to pray.

In *A.D.* 1975, at the fall of South Vietnam to the Communist regime, Francis Cardinal Van Thuan was arrested and for the next thirteen years was imprisoned and for nine of those years was left in solitary confinement. He spent his days and nights in a cell the roof of which was so low that he could never stand up straight and a cell the length of which was too narrow for him to ever lay down straight. His cell had no windows, the only ventilation being a rusty and centipede-infested drain in the floor to which he had to put his face if he were to get any air. In these inhuman conditions, amidst the physical torment and the psychological angst it would be understandable if he had lost his faith let alone his sanity. But in those long years he not only maintained his faith but found a way to write and distribute three books, converted his prison guards, and became a beacon of hope for millions of Catholics in Vietnam. How did he do this? He did this because he was a man of prayer. His prayer was simple. He simply repeated short phrases from the Bible; phrases like: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," and "I am the servant of the Lord," and "Lord, what do you want me to do," and "Lord, you know everything, you that I love you."

Prayer is no more than our response to our desire for God. It has been the practice of every race, of every culture, of every nation, of every age throughout human history because it is an expression of humanity's longing for the divine—"our thirst for the infinite, a yearning for eternity, a search for beauty, a desire for love, a need for light and truth, which impel us toward the Absolute" (Pope

Benedict XVI, General Audience, May 11, A.D. 2011). Pope Benedict XVI said of prayer: "The image of the Creator is engraved on human beings, who feel the need to find a light to answer the questions regarding the profound meaning of reality; an answer that we cannot find in ourselves, in progress, or in empirical science... We know that we cannot respond alone to our basic need to understand. For however much we think we are self-sufficient, we experience that we do not suffice. We need to open ourselves to something else, something or someone, that can give us what is missing. We must go out of ourselves and go toward the One who is capable of satisfying the width and breadth of our desire... In prayer... human beings experience themselves as creatures in need of help, incapable of attaining the fulfillment of their existence or their hopes alone... In the experience of prayer we orient our very souls to that Mystery from which we look for the fulfillment of our deepest desires and help to overcome the poverty of our lives. In looking to the Other, in directing ourselves 'beyond', is found the essence of prayer, the experience of a reality that goes beyond the apparent and the contingent" (General Audience, May 11, A.D. 2011).

In Jesus Christ, God made Man, we have the greatest man of prayer because it is the prayer of God Himself. Even though the creature forgets the Creator, the Creator never forsakes His creature, but came to redeem and sanctify us and through the Church we inherit the great prayer of Christ Himself which is the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. In that sacrifice in which the Son is offered to the Father for our sins He is made truly present, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Blessed Sacrament. In adoring that most holy Sacrament, in praying in the words our Lord gave us in the Our Father, in praying in the same words that our Lord prayed Himself which are the Psalms, we are led to the depth of our existence to the fount of life and the source of salvation so that we might overcome the limit of our lives and open ourselves to the measure of God.

So pray every day and pray even when you do not feel like praying and pray as though you mean it because if it means something to you then it will mean something to God.