

Prayer to God by Church Leaves Pontiff in Debt

Following are excerpts from the text of an address by Pope John Paul II on the efficacy of prayer.

"The mercies of the Lord because we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22).

These are the words of the People of God, who expresses to its Lord gratitude for salvation — and praises Divine Mercy for it.



Today I wish to repeat these words in front of you dear brothers and sisters. I want them to be almost the echo of that May 13 — and of that general audience which could not be held because of the attempt on the pope's life.

Herod had arrested Peter: "And when he had seized him, he put him in prison and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people. So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church."

"The very night Herod was about to bring him out, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with chains and sentries before the door were guarding the prison; and behold, an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell; and he struck Peter on the side and woke him saying, 'Get up quickly.' And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, 'Dress yourself and put on your sandals.' And he did so. And he said to him, 'Wrap your mantle around you and follow me.' And he went out and followed him; he did not know what was done was done by the angel was real but thought he was seeing a vision."

"When they had passed the first and the second

guard, they came to the iron gate leading into the city. It opened to them of its own accord, and they went out and passed on through the street; and immediately the angel left him. And Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I am sure that the Lord has sent His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting'" (Acts 12:3-11).

This episode, which took place in the early days of the Church in Jerusalem, often came to mind during my stay in the hospital. Even if the circumstances then and those of today seem so different, it was, however, difficult for the convalescent who is Peter's successor in his Roman episcopal see, not to meditate on these words of the apostle: "I am sure that the Lord has rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the... people were expecting."

I have quoted this passage from the Acts of the Apostles also because of the words which we find in it and which gave me so much support in that period. While "Peter was kept in prison... earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church."

I experienced, dear brothers and sisters, in a way similar to Peter, who was confined and destined for death, the efficacy of the prayers of the Church. I experienced it immediately: on the part of those who had gathered for the general audience which could not be held. I experienced the efficacy of this prayer on the same day, May 13, as news of the attack spread all over the world through the news media.

This news aroused reactions coming from various parts of the world, from different countries, from heads of state, from rulers of nations, from so many different men and environments.

Above all, however, that news unfitted men in prayer.

The Episcopal cathedrals and parish churches filled up. Our Orthodox and Protestant brothers and sisters prayed together with us. But they were not the only ones. Also the followers of Moses and Mohammed prayed. And still others.

It is difficult for me to think of all this without emotion, without deep gratitude to everyone, to all those who gathered in prayer on the day of May 13, and to all those who persevered in it for all this time. For this prayer I am grateful to men, my brothers and sisters. I am grateful to Christ the Lord and to the Holy Spirit who, through this event which took place in St. Peter's Square May 13 at 5:17 p.m., inspired so many hearts to common prayer. And thinking of this great prayer, I cannot forget the words of the Acts of the Apostles referring to Peter, "Earnest prayer was made to God by the Church."

I am become a debtor. It is so. I have become even more indebted to everyone. I am indebted to those who directly contributed to saving my life and who helped me to return to health: to the professors and doctors, the nursing Sisters and the lay personnel at Gemelli Hospital.

At the same time I am indebted to those who surrounded me with a wave of prayer, stretching all over the world. I am indebted.

Again I have become indebted to the Blessed Virgin and to all the Patron Saints. Could I forget that the event in St. Peter's Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ to the poor little peasants has been remembered for more than 60 years at Fatima in Portugal? For me, in everything that happened on that very day, I felt that extraordinary motherly protection and care, which turned out to be stronger than the deadly bullet.

Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Mumbo Jumbo?

Dear Father Hohman,

A lady in my neighborhood is a super-Catholic, but with a twist. She's a very nice person, but every now and then she gets rolling about this miracle and that miracle, appearances of our Blessed Mother here and there, and winds up with the end of the world not far off. She claims that if one doesn't believe in or much care about such things as Our Lady of Fatima and the Secret Message, then one isn't a real Catholic.

Our Blessed Mother seems to be at the bottom of a lot of her beliefs which include systems of numbers, predictions of the end of the world, special blessed foods and anti-communism, among them. The system runs from the sublime to the ridiculous; my question runs to the middle ground. How does the average Catholic figure out where the real stops and the goofy begins?

F.L.

Dear F.L.,

Perhaps you gave yourself a good starting point. Begin with the ridiculous which you perceive and throw it out. Common sense works pretty good in those cases. On the other end, embrace the sublime, which, if it truly is, must come from God.

Now for the middle ground: 1) The Church is very skeptical about this miracle and that. Stick with official pronouncements (there will be few if any). 2)

symbolic, are not worth the paper they're printed on.

As for the rest — "different strokes for different folks." Apparently some people need the unusual and the fascinating to bring some excitement into their otherwise dull lives. They might better do volunteer work somewhere, but it just isn't their bag. Who are we to criticize? If we really knew them, maybe we could look beyond their eccentricities.

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