May 1994

When One Is Too Sick To Pray

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Recommended Citation
"Son, do your praying when you are well because when you are sick you cannot pray."

This advice was given to me by Msgr. J. V. Plauche, a priest who had much physical suffering. I had just been released from the United States Army Medical Corps after almost five years of service in World War II and my wife and I were planning to start a medical practice in Shreveport LA. My wife, also a physician, was under treatment for tuberculosis. At that time we had two children, a daughter two years of age and a son of six months.

I did not grasp the meaning of his words. Throughout the years I saw my patients fingering their rosaries when they were ill and others reading the scriptures or other spiritual material. With four children, we had our share of illnesses and hospitalizations. Daily Mass, the Rosary, family prayer, retreats and Scripture readings became a part of our lives and I was certain that I would be able to pray under any conditions.

Some forty-seven years later, however, the truth of the Monsignor's statement was revealed to me. I was critically ill, and semi-conscious for three weeks. I could hear voices but I could not see well and was too weak to move. I could not read nor could I even hold the Bible in my hands. In this semi-conscious state my only contact with reality was the rosary that I held in my hand. I could not remember the prayers which I had said thousands of times. The Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Act of Contrition, the Mysteries of the Rosary, The Way of the Cross were all forgotten. The only words that I could think of were: JESUS, LORD JESUS CHRIST. And so it was for days and nights upon end. I could feel the rosary beads and think; JESUS, LORD JESUS CHRIST. This situation continued for three weeks.

Finally, some consciousness returned. I soon began to have terrible dreams when I would try to sleep. Whether these dreams were secondary to the medications that were prescribed I cannot be certain. The dreams were horrible. I was always underground and the walls were covered with grotesque masks, similar to the gargoyles of the old buildings. There were no sounds or words spoken. Only the
horrible figures of faces would be present. This continued night after night to the point that I dreaded sleep at any time.

Soon I became conscious enough that I was able to feel the rosary in my hand but I was unable to remember the prayers or the Mysteries of the life of Christ. So I improvised a new rosary that I could handle. Each bead represented an event in the life of Jesus Christ. In this way I could meditate a long time on just one event at a time. I never came to the end of the rosary. It just went on and on — one event, one bead after another.

I would imagine myself as one of the followers of Christ (not one of the disciples). I was just one person in the crowd that accompanied Jesus. I was present at each event that Christ encountered.

The miracles and cures performed by Jesus were truly amazing. I witnessed dozens of His Cures and saw Him feed thousands of His followers. I saw Him do nothing but good to those who needed it and to those who believed in Him.

I meditated on those passages where Jesus was being criticized and where He was being falsely accused. Invariably, I would not rise to defend Him. Rather I would try to remove myself from the scene. As an example, I was present in the Synagogue when He said:

"Today, this scripture is fulfilled within your hearing"

He was promptly accused of blasphemy. What was my response? . . . I hid myself as best I could and gradually moved toward the exit. Inasmuch as I could have told them of all the good that He has done and defended Him, he became afraid and left the synagogue.

Shortly they were taking Him out to the cliff to throw Him over because He claimed to be the Son Of God. Did I get out in front of the crowd and try to stop them? No, I was again afraid . . . I hid behind the nearest building as they passed, hoping that He would not see me. I hid my face so that no one would recognize me. I joined the crowd and could hear them threatening Him and accusing Him. I never responded with any word in His defense.

When we reached the cliff Jesus was at the head of the crowd and everyone was pushing Him. I was way in the back of the crowd hiding behind a bush. As I waited I could hear a lot of shouting and noise. I blocked out the noise by holding my hands over my ears.

Suddenly the shouting stopped and all was quiet. I then could see Christ walking quietly and slowly through the crowd away from the cliff and toward the village. No one laid a hand on Him.

As He came by the bush, where I was hiding, I edged to the other side so that He would not notice me. As He passed by, I could hear Him breathe.

I ran to the cliff and found a deserted place and cried and cried. Here, I had a chance to defend Him and I did not respond. I failed my best friend as I recalled the many other times that I have failed Him. I continued to cry and cry.

As darkness fell, I was not hungry. Rather I was very angry at myself for once more failing Him. What was I to do? After all that He has done do I leave Him? Somehow I felt that there was something very special about Jesus. He claimed to be the Son of God. Contemplating on all that He has done He certainly must be
the Son of God. However I did not defend Him and I was very despondent.

I believed that the only thing that I could do was to go to Him and ask for His forgiveness. I knew He was staying that night in a place just outside the village under some trees. I prepared my Confession and started to walk slowly to the place where He was resting. As I got closer to Him I began to run.

He was seated on a log when He noticed me. I was ready to stammer out my guilt when He extended His arms and took me to His bosom. I did not say anything, nor did He. The forgiveness was so apparent in His large brown eyes and the expression on His face. I fell asleep in his arms and slept soundly.

So it was that every night and often during the day a new experience would occur. When the horrible dreams disappeared I could just think of the events in the life of Christ with my Rosary. As always, I would deny Him or run away without defending Him. After each of these events I would always be forgiven and fall asleep in His arms.

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