

Now the person who does not lead an inner life of prayer is practically totally dependent on the help of priest and sacraments, while he who knows how to pray well can for a time do without them and survive a period of emergency or persecution. He knows his way to God; he can keep in constant touch with Him and draw on Him for help. But where will people get help if they know not how to pray and if there are no priests and sacraments at their disposal? In such cases, as experience unfortunately shows, that is the end of religious practice as far as they are concerned, whereas we need not be too anxious about those who can pray properly. Important and necessary as is a training for reception of the sacraments, a training in prayer is still more important. Here too there is question of doing the one and not omitting the other. It is essential that a proper training in prayer be combined - with instruction on the sacraments, not only because prayer can substitute for the sacraments in case of necessity, but also because the sacraments, like the spiritual life as a whole, can properly develop only when based on a solid foundation of prayer.

Perhaps it is that the priest's role is unduly emphasized, and, as a result, his responsibilities and his personal activity loom excessively large. He is minister and dispenser of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4); he distributes sacramental grace to the faithful under his care; he instructs and teaches them; he places his services at their disposal; he mediates for them. That is his task. But it is the essential task of the faithful to exploit and make full use of the graces thus distributed. Basically, each one is the custodian of his own soul. The priest, the minister of Christ, can only reach to a person's mind and understanding. But the deciding factor in the spiritual life is not the *mind* but the *heart*. Whether or not the heart is touched and inflamed depends on the Holy Ghost and the individual soul in the first place, and not on the priest. Priests have as a rule a good deal of work, hard work, to face; but in many cases their efforts are unavailing, the reason being that the impression prevails that they have to do all the work and that success depends on themselves. In fact, however, the priest is only the "friend of the Bridegroom" (John 3, 29); he can but introduce souls to the Bridegroom; the final decision rests with those so introduced, and depends above all else on their prayer. Hence pastors of souls must take pains in the matter of a proper training in prayer. If only the faithful knew how to pray then the priest's labour in planting and watering would not fail in the desired increase. (1 Cor. 3, 7). □

Editorial Note:

The constant and enduring work of the priest must be to inspire the penitent and explain how to live **in the spirit of the law** and not to be all bound up by the dictates of the **letter of the law**.