

## **PALANCA**

*Source: National Cursillo Center Mailing – February 2008*

### **Why Do We Pray?**

In an article entitled, “Praying Always” in *Magnificat*, November 17, 2007, Fr. Simon Tugwell, O.P., wrote: “Prayer”, according to one ancient definition, “is keeping company with God.” Keeping company with God is an adventure, the adventure of true prayer. Any relationship, except the most superficial, affects and changes us; it challenges us to respect the freedom, the mystery, the otherness of the other, and, perhaps even more disturbing, it will sooner or later bring to light our own freedom, the mystery of ourselves, the unknownness and unpredictability of ourselves. How we respond to such a challenge, to such a bringing up to light, will in very large measure decide whether we grow and mature in life, or whether we shrivel up (Fr. Simon Tugwell, O.P. “Prayer: Living with God” – *Magnificat* Nov. 2007). We, Cursillistas, are encouraged to strive to securely maintain the three encounters with God, with ourselves and with others, the relationships we have established during our Three-Day Cursillo Weekend.

In our December 2007 National Mailing, our National Spiritual Advisor, Fr. Einer Ochoa emphasized the importance of prayer: “Prayer from the heart is the soul of the Christian person. It is the best tool for holiness and the best weapon against the power of evil. Prayer from the heart is the backbone of growing into being Christian. It is the main component of Piety. A direct and intimate experience of God is the basis of prayer from the heart. Prayer becomes exciting when we discover the Lord in our everyday personal events. Jesus is our model of prayer. He prayed before major decisions, spending time in intimate communion with the Father. The Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the desert to pray for forty days before his public ministry. This is the source tradition for the devotion of the 40-hour adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Before choosing the Twelve, He prayed. Before He made the long way to Calvary, He prayed. Prayer was for Jesus communion with the Father. Communion means “working with”. Prayer aims at nourishing us and launching us to action. It does that by helping us to know, love and serve God.”

Our Catholic Church designates the Advent Season (Lat., “adventus” = presence or coming & Greek “parousia” = presence or arrival) in her Liturgical Year and Calendar to help us, Christians, to prepare for Jesus Christ’s second coming. Origen of Alexandria (c.185-254), one of the most important and brilliant scripture scholars and theologians in Early Christianity, reminds us that in Advent we prepare a way for Jesus in our hearts. We read these words in the Book of Isaiah 40:3 “A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” The Lord wishes to find a way to enter your hearts and walk therein (*Living with Christ*, December 2007). The Church encourages us to pray, to fast and to give alms, not only during the Advent Season, but in our daily lives. The basic types of prayer are: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, intercession and petition, commonly known as the acronym ACTIP.

Prayer rises up quickly to the ears of God when lifted up by the recommendation of alms giving and fasting. In other words, prayer needs sacrifices, which are Palanca, useful tools to lift up our praying hearts to God. St. Leo the Great advised us, “Give what you receive, sow what you reap, scatter what you collect. Your property increases by being well spent. Long for the lawful reward of mercy, and pursue the business of the eternal profit. “Give and it will be given to you.” You must embrace the condition of this promise and show your gratitude.” (Magnificat, Nov. 20, 2007). It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

### **Why Do We Have “Dry Time” in Prayer and How Should We Overcome It?**

In the article “Teach Us to Pray”, Joe Difato, Publisher of the Word Among Us, October 2007, wrote: We believe that Jesus is real. We believe he is present in the Eucharist. We believe that everyone who is baptized is a “temple of God”, and the Spirit of God lives in us (1 Cor. 3:16). We believe that prayer is vital to our Christian lives. So why do we find it so difficult to pray? Then Mr. Difato suggested the following reasons:

First, possibly we did not seriously take Jesus’ warning to the believers in Ephesus. They were active members in their church, and yet they had lost sight of what was meant to be at the heart of their faith: love for Jesus (Revelation 2:2-4). How easy it can be to slip into a functional and duty-driven approach to our faith! How easy it is to let the passion we once knew for Jesus fade away!

Second, maybe our priorities are out of order. This old proverb remains true: Time is a statement of our priorities. The invited guests to a banquet in Jesus’ parable related by Luke (14:16-24) allowed their self-centered interests – even good and necessary – to obscure the greatness of the invitation they had received. Jesus wants to spend quality time with us every day. When we consider ourselves too busy for him, we are really saying that our relationship with him is not a top priority.

Third, like the Israelites, we can tell Jesus, “I try to avoid sin, I try to do good. I’ve been faithful to you. But you still don’t answer me.” Jesus wants us to come to him with a pure and humble heart. He wants us to tell him, “Jesus, I want what you want; I will do what you say. I do not want my ways over your ways.” Besides, maybe God is asking us to trust him more deeply, and possibly he may test to see if we will give up on him. Sarah, Abraham’s wife, Zechariah and Thomas doubted the Lord. Jesus taught us: “All that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours.” (Mark 11:24) Jesus wants us to know that he will answer our prayer because he wants to guide us in every way. The time it takes does not matter because we believe Jesus will answer us. His own life gives proof of this truth” (The Word Among Us, Oct. 2007, Vol. 26, # 10).

How do we get through a “dry time” in our prayer? In a special section of Our Sunday Visitor Newspaper, Dec. 9, 2007, entitled “In Focus: Prayer”, Father Ray Ryland remarked, “Sometimes what we call dryness is rooted in moral or spiritual conflict in our lives, and he advised that frequent confession (every two weeks or so) is necessary for

proper preparation for prayer.” Father Ryland also encouraged us to examine the quality of our personal relationship with Our Lord when prayer is difficult or seems meaningless to us; and most importantly, we must persevere. He cited St. Anthony the Hermit as an example of perseverance, who “once came through a period of temptation and spiritual distress.”

### **Palanca: An Expression of Brotherly Love in Our Cursillo Movement**

Every Cursillista, after returning from their Weekend, knows what Palanca means. It is a Spanish word, literally meaning “a lever”. It is a tool that we use to lift up or move something bulky. In the Eucharistic Prayer of the Holy Mass, the celebrant says to the congregation, “Lift up your hearts!” and everyone responds, “We lift them up to the Lord”. How do we lift up our hearts to the Lord, if not through prayer? Cursillo Literature states that the Cursillo Movement used the term “Palanca”, a lever, to convey the essential meaning of the Paschal Mystery of Christ in which we are all called to participate in our own lives. The lever is seen as what we might in our own culture refer to as a “seesaw”, where a group of individuals gather at one end to lift up another individual or group higher than themselves. The visual idea of individuals getting on one end of the seesaw so that their weight carries them down to the ground to lift others up is the way to express that Paschal Mystery all Christians are called to experience in their spiritual lives. It should be made apparent that it is normal for Christians to pray and sacrifice for others, known as an ecclesial community or brotherly love in prayer. Father Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M. Cap., the Preacher to the Papal Household, said of the importance of brotherly love, especially in our Communal Palanca. He wrote, “We cannot insist enough on the importance of an atmosphere of brotherly love surrounding those who are going to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is also closely connected with the outpouring of the Spirit in the New Testament. Concerning Jesus’ baptism, Luke writes, ‘While he was in prayer, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him.’ (Luke 3:21) It was Jesus’ prayer, we could say, that made the heavens open and Holy Spirit descend upon Him”. (Sober Intoxication of the Spirit Filled with the Fullness of God)

The Cursillo Movement assures us that prayer has always been the strength of all the functions of the Movement. The “Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement” (FICM) strongly recognizes grace as principle and foundation of our Movement and considers Palanca as one of the basic elements of the Cursillo Strategy, known as the Mystery of the Palanca. “Whenever we speak of working for conversion, for the Christian betterment of individuals, or for the Christianization of environments, it is indispensable – as the first and the most basic step underlying all other human efforts – to count on the help of grace from God, which has to be begged for with the all-powerful strength of prayer that is humble, confident, and unceasing. Today, perhaps more than ever before, it is absolutely urgent to remember that without Him we are nothing, we are worth nothing, we can do nothing. We must, before anything else, reaffirm the primacy that the Cursillo strategy has always given, as its most important characteristic, to Palanca (prayer, sacrifice, and works of mercy). Dependence on this has to be real, sincere and permanent, individual and communal, to guarantee the efficacy of any other steps one

takes. The truth is founded on the promise of Christ: ‘Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.’ (Mt 7:7)” (FICM # 180) “Profound communion with God, acquired by way of prayer, sacrifice, reception of the sacraments, and reflection on the Word, will mark every moment of the Cursillo.” (FICM # 237) “Prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the Cursillo, which Cursillo terminology calls “intendencias” or “palanca”, are crucial to its spiritual success.” (FICM # 333) We can summarize the necessity of Palanca in our Movement with this popular saying in Cursillo circles, “Talk to God about the person before you talk to the person about God.”

### **Authentic Palanca**

In our Cursillo Movement, prayer or “Palanca” should be a tool to assist its every phase: Precursillo, Cursillo, Postcursillo, Ultreya, Group Reunion, and Cursillistas in every Cursillo function. Palanca should be a tool to support the entire Movement, and hence our Catholic Church. Chapter 12 of the Leader’s Manual of our US Cursillo Movement asserts: “In dealing with the work of conversion and Christian renewal of persons and the evangelization of human groups, it is necessary, first and foremost, that all the other human efforts be built upon the grace of God, which should be sought with the omnipotent zeal of trusting, constant and humble prayer.” Therefore, prayer without sacrifice is not Palanca. Following are Cursillo Prayer Traditions recommended as Palanca to lift up our petitions to God for the success of our Cursillo activities: Holy Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, Holy Communion, praying the Rosary, reading the Scriptures, Stations of the Cross, Liturgy of the Hours, Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, fasting, almsgiving and any acts of self-denial offered with a prayer. Jesus taught about Almsgiving, Prayer and Fasting for his disciples in Mt. 6:1-18. The Acts of the Apostles related that the early Christians gathered to pray, to listen to the Apostles’ teaching and to share with one another everything they had, and their money was distributed to each one according to his need. (Acts 4: 32-35)

It is important to understand that Palanca offerings should not be limited to any particular Cursillo function, the Three-Day Weekend, in particular. The Leader’s Manual also affirms that sacrifice is part and parcel of the Christian life. If the Movement quit emphasizing the importance of sacrifice, it would not be Christ-centered. The best way to maintain our spirituality is to live the spirit of Palanca each day. A few examples of “simple ways” of Palanca or means of personal sacrifice are given in the Leader’s Manual: to love expecting nothing in return; to be patient where there is impatience in misunderstandings, ... The Leader’s Manual of our Cursillo Movement gives this advice, “Within the Movement, we must be vigilant that the term Palanca not be misunderstood and abused, so that incidentals do not overshadow its inner calling and meaning. Colorful posters and banners (in themselves) are not Palanca; neither are flowers, edibles, friendship letters or good wishes. This is false Palanca under the guise of “pleasant things”.

Prayer and sacrifice are not “pleasant things”, but they are effective in securing God’s grace. It must be understood that letters are not Palanca. Letters are merely the means of communicating the Palanca currently being done. Keeping this in mind, we must realize

that Palanca can be done for a particular purpose, without having to write a letter about it. For instance, Palanca can be done by the efforts of Cursillistas who are trying to utilize the Cursillo Method. We all need a Palanca of this type, but it would be impractical to write letters to thousands of Cursillistas” (Leader’s Manual, Ch. 12). St. Paul, the Patron Saint of our Cursillo Movement, reminds us in Romans 12:1, “Offer yourselves as a living and holy sacrifice which is pleasing unto Him”. This should be our real offering.

In his earlier-mentioned book, Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa quoted from Tertullian, saying “There is nothing which leaves the minds of men so amazed as the simplicity of the divine actions which they see performed and the magnificence of the effects that follow .... Simplicity and power are the prerogatives of God.” Fr. Cantalamessa continued, “If simplicity is the mark of divine action, we need to preserve it in our prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit. Simplicity should shine forth in prayers, in gestures, in everything. There should be nothing theatrical, no excited movements or excessive words”. He cited the following example in the Old Testament to prove his point: “The Bible records the glaring contrast between the actions of the priests of Baal and the prayer of Elijah during the sacrifice on Mount Carmel. The former cried out, limped around the altar and cut themselves until they bled. Elijah simply prayed, “O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, ... answer me, so that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back!” (Kings 18:36-37) The fire of the Lord fell on the sacrifice prepared by Elijah but not on the one prepared by the priests of Baal. (see Kings 18:25-38) Elijah later experienced that God was not in the great wind, or in the earthquake, or in the fire but in the still, small voice, (see Kings 19:12-13)”

## **Conclusion**

The following comment quoted from Our Holy Father Benedict XVI, then Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, in his 1996 Interview with Peter Seewald, once again strongly affirms the foundation indispensable for union with God in our Cursillo Movement. “Dealing with God every day is a necessity for me. For just as we have to breathe every day, just as we need light every day and have to eat every day, just as we also need friendship every day and truly need certain people every day, dealing with God is one of the absolutely fundamental elements of life. If God suddenly disappeared, my soul wouldn’t be able to breathe properly. In that sense there is no boredom here. It can occur when it comes to certain pious practices, in relation to certain devotional readings, but not in relation to God as such.” (Salt of the Earth, 2007 Ignatius Press, San Francisco).