PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Please be seated for a moment, dear faithful. We are in the season of Lent. Today is the Saturday of the Lenten Ember Days, and what distinguishes the liturgy of the Ember Saturday, whether in Lent or at the other times. So we keep the Ember Days four times a year: in Lent, after the first Sunday of Lent; then in the octave of the feast of Pentecost; in September, after the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross; and in Advent, after the third Sunday of Advent. This liturgy of the Lenten Ember Saturday is very characteristic, because it has as many as five additional readings, as a rule from the Old Testament, as we have five additional readings today, which is extraordinary. In the Roman liturgy we are used to there being one reading, one lesson, and the Gospel. Yet this liturgy of the Ember Saturday is so expanded.

It is nothing other than a remnant of the vigils kept in the first centuries of Christianity, when Catholics for more than 300 years could not gather in churches, because churches simply did not exist. There were no buildings set apart for divine worship, because the Church was persecuted. For three centuries Catholics met either in houses or in the catacombs, and they met in such a way that they gathered at night, under cover of night, and remained in prayer until dawn. Hence those Masses in the first centuries were much longer than the ones we are used to today. It was not half an hour, it was not even an hour, it was a whole vigil. A remnant of this vigil, of this watching, is, for instance, the Easter Vigil of Holy Saturday, with the blessing of the light, with the twelve lessons, with the blessing of the water. So we can more or less imagine that the Sunday liturgies of the first three centuries looked exactly like this. They took place at night, and accompanying them were — besides the Holy Mass, or rather the Holy Mass itself was expanded — the Mass of the Catechumens was much longer, so more readings, more chants.

Why? Because in those first centuries the catechumenate, too, was very, very extensive. Today the catechumenate has almost disappeared. It will probably return soon, along with the rising wave of neo-paganism. Won't it? In the first centuries of Christianity, however, it was not the case that Catholics were born into Catholic families. There were not yet Catholic parents, there were not yet Catholic families, or there were very few. Consequently, the main source, so to speak, of the faithful for the Church was conversions from paganism. And the catechumens were prepared for a long time for the reception of the sacrament of holy Baptism, and an aid in this preparation were also these nocturnal vigils, so that they could become acquainted with the mysteries of the Catholic faith, so that they could prepare themselves as well as possible for the reception of holy Baptism. These vigils served that purpose too.

And so, my dear brethren, we see how deep a spirit of prayer accompanied the Church in the time of its persecutions in the first three centuries after Christ. This is exactly what Saint Paul writes about in today's lesson: "In your prayers do not cease, pray without ceasing." This spirit of prayer accompanied our fathers in the faith, who knew neither the day nor the hour, who had to be ready at every hour of their lives for death, usually a martyr's death. Those three centuries, the first centuries of the history of the Church, are steeped in the blood of the martyrs. Steeped in the blood of the martyrs.

And rightly does the holy Church preserve this practice of the Ember Days, the Ember Saturdays. Through the centuries it has not been abolished, even though as a rule we no longer need to gather, at least for the time being, under cover of night. Nevertheless, this liturgy of the Lenten Ember Days endures, through these 2000 years of the Church's existence, as a witness to what the Holy Mass looked like, what the vigils, the watching, looked like in the first centuries of Christianity. And it also has a certain symbolic dimension. Catholics gathered under cover of night, in darkness. They came from the world, from the darkness. They remained in prayer in the vigil, and when the Mass of the Faithful began, dawn was breaking. The rising sun, which is a symbol of the resurrection. Christ, who brings light into this world. This symbolism was lost owing to the change of circumstances. As I said, the Holy Mass no longer has to

be celebrated in the middle of the night, under cover of night. So we have somewhat forgotten our roots, and we have forgotten, what is worse, also that spirit of prayer of which Saint Paul writes: "In prayer do not cease."

WHAT PRAYER IS

What is characteristic, my dear brethren, of contemporary Catholics, and also of Catholics of tradition, is precisely that prayer is not continual prayer. You will ask at once: "But Your Excellency, how is that, am I to pray all the time? After all, I have my duties. I have to go to work, I have to look after the children." Indeed, absolutely. But prayer should permeate our whole life. In what way? Through ejaculatory prayers. As the definition says, *oratio est elevatio mentis ad Deum* — prayer is the raising of the mind to God. The raising of the mind to God. Prayer does not have to be vocal prayer. Vocal prayer is one kind of prayer. What constitutes the essence of prayer is the raising of the mind to God. That is, tearing the mind away, if only for a moment, from what is earthly, and lifting our thoughts to heavenly things.

And when we realise this, we shall realise that we really can weave prayer, as it were, through our whole life, our whole day, like a golden thread through fabric, because an ejaculatory prayer is literally a second, two or three, but repeated several or a dozen times in the course of the day, it makes us remain all the time in union with God. We remain all the time in the presence of God, and that is the goal of the Christian life. This prayer to which Saint Paul calls us, that it should not cease — "Do not cease, pray without ceasing" — this is precisely, my dear brethren, what we are called to. We are to sanctify our whole day with prayer. Not only prayer in the morning and in the evening, and, God forbid, said in some slapdash, hurried way, but that prayer which accompanies us throughout the day. Throughout the whole day.

Because, my dear brethren, if we want to get to heaven, we must show the Lord Jesus here on earth that we really want to spend eternity with Him. If for God you are not able to find those few minutes in the course of the day for ejaculatory prayers, it means that something is wrong with your spiritual life, your Christian life. If throughout the day you can get through 24 hours and not once raise your thought to heaven, it means that something is wrong with your Christian life.

FALSE PIETY, COLLECTING POINTS

What is more, my dear brethren, even if... because there are such souls in tradition, very many, very many, who have a whole package of prayers, an enormous package of prayers, an hour and a half, two hours they rattle off and it is dealt with, and until the next day they are free. I know, unfortunately, a whole mass of such souls, especially women. They take a whole mass upon their shoulders, and here they commit themselves to this, and there they commit themselves to that. They are basically not able to carry it in any way. So it is, my dear brethren, a bit like collecting points at an Orlen petrol station. Yes, every day just to get that hour over with. Yes, I am free, I now have a holiday from God until the next day. Well, that is not a Catholic attitude. And unfortunately, both among the pseudo-pious Novus Ordo [?] Catholics and among the pseudo-pious traditionalists, such an attitude is found. Such an attitude is found.

Prayer is not to cease, and therefore it is to accompany us the whole day. Even if you devote an hour or two to God and then for 24 hours you forget until the next day, that is not Catholic. That is pseudo-piety. That is false piety. That is giving God some scrap, any old how, any old where, any old thing, and a life that is really godless, because if you are a Catholic soul, then you desire as often as possible to raise your thought to God. It is no great effort to sigh in moments of toil, in moments when some problems appear: Jesus, save me. Lord Jesus, help me. Most Holy Mother, help. Let us call upon the saints when we need their help. After all, the holy Church shows us saints for various needs. Saint Anthony, for instance, when we lose something. Saint Anthony, show your glory in this way, that you will help me find what I have lost. And surely every Catholic has convinced himself more than once what a powerful intercessor Saint Anthony is, and we must return, my dear brethren, to this prayer without ceasing. We must return to this spirit of prayer, without which there is no

truly Catholic life. There is a pseudo-Catholic life, there is a pretended life, and it concerns, my dear brethren, both the laity and priests, because one can be a godless priest. One can be a priest who will rattle off exactly what he has to rattle off, and then he already has a holiday from God until the next day.

This is, my dear brethren, a great danger. The history of the Church shows how many souls have fallen into this satanic trap. The Catholic religion is not collecting points at Orlen. The Catholic religion is life in the presence of God. And if I am to live in the presence of God, then I ought to think of God as often as possible. And it does not cost you much effort. If once an hour, or every few minutes, you sigh in your heart to the Lord Jesus. Not: the Most Holy Name, the Name of Jesus, the Most Holy Name of the Mother of God as an interjection in some foolish discussions, but a sincere, childlike sigh in need. A sincere sigh, the stirring up of sorrow at the thought of the sins committed: O my Jesus, mercy. A petition for what you need. Thanksgiving for what you have received, and finally an act of adoration: Lord Jesus, I love You. Lord Jesus, I bow down before You.

SANCTIFYING ALL OUR ACTIONS

Let us return, my dear brethren, let us learn this spirit of prayer. This Saturday of the Lenten Ember Days is a great opportunity for each of us to make a firm resolution that we will work on our prayer life, and that this prayer in our life will indeed be without ceasing, that we will stop giving God some wretched scraps of our time and attention. Saint Teresa the Great used to say: "The Lord walks among the pots and pans." Expressing in this way precisely the thought of which I am speaking. We are to do everything that we do, offering it through the hands of the Most Holy Mother to the Lord Jesus. Everything whatsoever that you do in life can become prayer, done out of love for God, out of love for our neighbours, offered through the hands of Mary to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Let us learn to sanctify, to dedicate to God, all our activities. Wherever we are, wherever we travel, whatever we do.

How much time, my dear brethren, do we have of these various, in quotation marks, empty gaps, and what do we do with them then? What do Catholics do then? Either they think about nonsense, or they hold foolish, foolish discussions, or they sit somewhere on a smartphone and scroll goodness knows what. How much time wasted every day? If we were to look, my dear brethren, at how much time we have wasted even today, we would probably be seized with horror. How many opportunities did we have today to raise our thought to God, if only for that moment, and how many times did we fail to do so out of our own foolishness, out of laziness? It really does not cost much, and it completely changes the way of thinking, of looking at our earthly life: life in the presence of God, and so accustoming ourselves to life in heaven, because in heaven you will live united with the Most Holy Trinity. There will be no scrolling on a phone there, there will be no idiotic internet discussions. So if we want to spend eternity with our Lord Jesus Christ, let us learn to spend time with Him here on earth. Pray without ceasing. And let this be our firm resolution on this Saturday of the Lenten Ember Days, in the year of Our Lord 2026.

Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.