



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Piazza della Libertà, Castel Gandolfo

Wednesday, 1st August 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

St Alphonsus Mary Liguori

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Liturgical Memorial of St Alphonsus Mary Liguori, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer — the Redemptorists — and patron saint of moral theology scholars and confessors. St Alphonsus is one of the most popular saints of the 18th century because of his simple, immediate style and his teaching on the sacrament of Penance. In a period of great rigorism, a product of the Jansenist influence, he recommended that confessors administer this sacrament expressing the joyful embrace of God the Father, who in his infinite mercy never tires of welcoming the repentant son.

Today's Memorial offers us the opportunity to reflect on St Alphonsus' teaching on prayer which is particularly valuable and full of spiritual inspiration. His Treatise on *The Great Means of Prayer*, which he considered the most useful of all his writings, dates back to the year 1759. Indeed, he describes prayer as "a necessary and certain means of obtaining salvation, and all the graces that we require for that object" (*Introduction*). This sentence sums up the way St Alphonsus understood prayer.

First of all, by saying that it is a means, he reminds us of the goal to be reached. God created us out of love in order to be able to give us life in its fullness; but this goal, this life in fullness, has as

it were become distant because of sin — we all know it — and only God’s grace can make it accessible. To explain this basic truth and to make people understand with immediacy how real the risk of “being lost” is for human beings, St Alphonsus coined a famous, very elementary maxim which says: “Those who pray will be saved and those who do not will be damned!”. Commenting on this lapidary sentence, he added, “In conclusion, to save one’s soul without prayer is most difficult, and even (as we have seen) impossible... But by praying our salvation is made secure, and very easy” (II, Conclusion). And he says further: “if we do not pray, we have no excuse, because the grace of prayer is given to everyone... if we are not saved, the whole fault will be ours; and we shall have our own failure to answer for, because we did not pray” (*ibid.*).

By saying, then, that prayer is a necessary means, St Alphonsus wanted us to understand that in no situation of life can we do without prayer, especially in times of trial and difficulty. We must always knock at the door of the Lord confidently, knowing that he cares for all his children, for us. For this reason we are asked not to be afraid to turn to him and to present our requests to him with trust, in the certainty of receiving what we need.

Dear friends, this is the main question: what is really necessary in my life? I answer with St Alphonsus: “Health and all the graces that we need” (*ibid.*). He means of course not only the health of the body, but first of all that of the soul, which Jesus gives us. More than anything else we need his liberating presence which makes us truly fully human and hence fills our existence with joy. And it is only through prayer that we can receive him and his grace, which, by enlightening us in every situation, helps us to discern true good and by strengthening us also makes our will effective, that is, renders it capable of doing what we know is good. We often recognize what is good but are unable to do it. With prayer we succeed in doing it. The disciple of the Lord knows he is always exposed to temptation and does not fail to ask God’s help in prayer in order to resist it.

St Alphonsus very interestingly cites the example of St Philip Neri who “the very moment when he awoke in the morning, said to God: ‘Lord, keep Thy hands over Philip this day; for if not, Philip will betray Thee’” (III, 3). What a great realist! He asks God to keep his hands upon him. We too, aware of our weakness, must humbly seek God’s help, relying on his boundless mercy. St Alphonsus says in another passage: “We are so poor that we have nothing; but if we pray we are no longer poor. If we are poor, God is rich” (II, 4). And, following in St Augustine’s wake, he invites all Christians not to be afraid to obtain from God, through prayer, the power they do not possess that is necessary in order to do good, in the certainty that the Lord will not refuse his help to whoever prays to him with humility (cf. III, 3).

Dear friends, St Alphonsus reminds us that the relationship with God is essential in our life. Without the relationship with God, the fundamental relationship is absent. The relationship with God is brought into being in conversation with God, in daily personal prayer and with participation in the sacraments. This relationship is thus able to grow within us, as can the divine presence that

directs us on our way, illuminates it and makes it safe and peaceful even amidst difficulties and perils. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims, especially those from England and the United States. Today the Church celebrates the Feast of St Alphonsus Liguori, the Founder of the Redemptorists, a great moral theologian and a master of prayer. St Alphonsus teaches us the beauty of daily prayer, in which we open our minds and hearts to the Lord's presence and receive the grace to live wisely and well. By his example and intercession, may you and your families come to know God's saving love and experience his abundant blessings!

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. I urge you all to bear a joyful Gospel witness everywhere.

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