

Andrew Murray:

'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest me. And I knew that Thou hearest me always.'—John xi. 41, 42.

'Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee.'—Ps. ii. 7, 8.

IN the New Testament we find a distinction made between faith and knowledge. 'To one is given, through the Spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit.' In a child or a simple-minded Christian there may be much faith with little knowledge. Childlike simplicity accepts the truth without difficulty, and often cares little to give itself or others any reason for its faith but this: God has said. But it is the will of God that we should love and serve Him, not only with all the heart but also with all the mind; that we should grow up into an insight into the Divine wisdom and beauty of all His ways and words and works. It is only thus that the believer will be able fully to approach and rightly to adore the glory of God's grace; and only thus that our heart can intelligently apprehend the treasures of wisdom and knowledge there are in redemption, and be prepared to enter fully into the highest note of the song that rises before the throne: 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!'

In our prayer life this truth has its full application. While prayer and faith are so simple that the new-born convert can pray with power, true Christian science finds in the doctrine of prayer some of its deepest problems. In how far is the power of prayer a reality? If so, how God can grant to prayer such mighty power? How can the action of prayer be harmonized with the will and the decrees of God? How can God's sovereignty and our will, God's liberty and ours, be reconciled?—these and other like questions are fit subjects for Christian meditation and inquiry. The more earnestly and reverently we approach such mysteries, the more shall we in adoring wonder fall down to praise Him who hath in prayer given such power to man.

One of the secret difficulties with regard to prayer,—one which, though not expressed, does often really hinder prayer,—is derived from the perfection of God, in His absolute independence of all that is outside of Himself. Is He not the Infinite Being, who owes what He is to Himself alone, who determines Himself, and whose wise and holy will has determined all that is to be? How can prayer influence Him, or He be moved by prayer to do what otherwise would not be done? Is not the promise of an answer to prayer simply a condescension to our weakness? Is what is said of the power—the much-availing power—of prayer anything more than an accommodation to our mode of thought, because the Deity never can be dependent on any action from without for its doings? And is not the blessing of prayer simply the influence it exercises upon ourselves?

In seeking an answer to such questions, we find the key in the very being of God, in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. If God was only one Person, shut up within Himself, there could be no thought of nearness to Him or influence on Him. But in God there are three Persons. In God we have Father and Son, who have in the Holy Spirit their living bond of unity and fellowship. When eternal Love begat the Son, and the Father gave the Son as the Second Person a place next Himself as His Equal and His Counsellor, there was a way opened for prayer and its influence in the very inmost life of Deity itself. Just as on earth, so in heaven the whole relation between Father and Son is that of giving and taking. And if that taking is to be as voluntary and self-determined as the giving, there must be on the part of the Son an asking and receiving. In the holy fellowship of the Divine Persons, this asking of the Son was one of the great operations of the Thrice Blessed Life of God. Hence we have it in Psalm ii.: 'This day I have begotten Thee: ask of me and I will give Thee.' The Father gave the Son the place and the power to act upon Him. The asking of the Son was no mere show or shadow, but one of those life-movements in which the love of the Father and the Son met and completed each other. The Father had determined that He should not be alone in His counsels: there was a Son on whose asking and accepting their fulfilment should depend. And so there was in the very Being and Life of God an asking of which prayer on earth was to be the reflection and the outflow. It was not without including this that Jesus said, 'I knew that Thou always hearest me.' Just as the Sonship of Jesus on earth may not be separated from His Sonship in heaven, even so with His prayer on earth, it is the continuation and the counterpart of His asking in heaven. The prayer of the man Christ Jesus is the link between the eternal asking of the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father and the prayer of men upon earth. Prayer has its rise and its deepest source in the very Being of God. In the bosom of Deity nothing is ever done without prayer—the asking of the Son and the giving of the Father.¹

This may help us somewhat to understand how the prayer of man, coming through the Son, can have effect upon God. The decrees of God are not decisions made by Him without reference to the Son, or His petition, or the petition to be sent up through Him. By no means. The Lord Jesus is the first-begotten, the Head and Heir of all things: all things were created through Him and unto Him, and all things consist in Him. In the counsels of the Father, the Son, as Representative of all creation, had always a voice; in the decrees of the eternal purpose there was always room left for the liberty of the Son as Mediator and Intercessor, and so for the petitions of all who draw nigh to the Father in the Son.

And if the thought come that this liberty and power of the Son to act upon the Father is at variance with the immutability of the Divine decrees, let us not forget that there is not with God as with man, a past by which He is irrevocably bound. God does not live in time with its past and future; the distinctions of time have no reference to Him who inhabits Eternity. And Eternity is an ever-present Now, in which the past is never past, and the future always present. To meet our human weakness, Scripture must speak of past decrees, and a coming future. In reality, the immutability of God's counsel is ever still in perfect harmony with His liberty to do whatsoever He will. Not so were the prayers of the Son and His people taken up into the eternal decrees that their effect should only be an apparent one; but so, that the Father-heart holds itself open and free to listen to every prayer that rises through the Son, and that God does indeed allow Himself to be decided by prayer to do what He otherwise would not have done.

This perfect harmony and union of Divine Sovereignty and human liberty is to us an unfathomable mystery, because God as THE ETERNAL ONE transcends all our thoughts. But let it be our comfort and strength to be assured that in the eternal fellowship of the Father and the Son, the power of prayer has its origin and certainty, and that through our union with the Son, our prayer is taken up and can have its influence in the inner life of the Blessed Trinity. God's decrees are no iron framework against which man's liberty would vainly seek to struggle. No. God Himself is the Living Love, who in His Son as man has entered into the tenderest relation with all that is human, who through the Holy Spirit takes up all that is human into the Divine life of love, and keeps Himself free to give every human prayer its place in His government of the world.

It is in the daybreak light of such thoughts that the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity no longer is an abstract speculation, but the living manifestation of the way in which it were possible for man to be taken up into the fellowship of God, and his prayer to become a real factor in God's rule of this earth. And we can, as in the distance, catch glimpses of the light that from the eternal world shines out on words such as these: 'THROUGH HIM we have access BY ONE SPIRIT unto THE FATHER.'

'LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY.'

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Everlasting God! the Three-One and Thrice Holy! in deep reverence would I with veiled face worship before the holy mystery of Thy Divine Being. And if it please Thee, O most glorious God, to unveil aught of that mystery, I would bow with fear and trembling, lest I sin against Thee, as I meditate on Thy glory.

Father! I thank Thee that Thou bearest this name not only as the Father of Thy children here on earth, but as having from eternity subsisted as the Father with Thine only-begotten Son. I thank Thee that as Father Thou canst hear our prayer, because Thou hast from eternity given a place in Thy counsels to the asking of Thy Son. I thank Thee that we have seen in Him on earth, what the blessed intercourse was He had with Thee in heaven; and how from eternity in all Thy counsels and decrees there had been room left for His prayer and their answers. And I thank Thee above all that through His true human nature on Thy throne above, and through Thy Holy Spirit in our human nature here below, a way has been opened up by which every human cry of need can be taken up into and touch the Life and the Love of God, and receive in answer whatsoever it shall ask.

Blessed Jesus! in whom as the Son the path of prayer has been opened up, and who givest us assurance of the answer, we beseech Thee, teach Thy people to pray. O let this each day be the sign of our sonship, that, like Thee, we know that the Father heareth us always. Amen.