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PASTORAL LETTER

OF THE

Right Rev. E. A. LeBLANC, D.D.

Bishop of St. John

TO THE

Clergy, Religious Orders and
Laity of his Diocese



SAINT JOHN, N. B.

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Edward,
By the Grace of God and Favor of
The Apostolic See,
Bishop of Saint John,
To the Clergy, Religious Orders and Laity
of the Diocese:
Health and Benediction in the Lord.

DEAR BRETHREN:

It has seemed good to us at the beginning of the holy season of Lent to stir up your faith and devotion by reminding you of a very sacred and indispensable duty which you all owe to God and to yourselves — the duty of prayer. No man, be he saint or sinner, can ever divest himself of the obligation to pray, for prayer is an essential element of divine worship, a vital necessity of the soul.

The first motive on which the obligation of prayer is founded is the relation that exists between the Creator and creature, by virtue of which man is bound, according to the first principles of the law of nature, to turn himself, as soon as he is capable, to that supreme Being to whom he owes his existence. Even though we could not obtain any new gifts or favors from God, we should still be bound to adore and bless His holy name, to praise His goodness, and to return Him thanks for benefits already bestowed. But because God has established prayer as the ordinary means of obtaining all the graces we need, we have an additional motive for complying with this essential christian duty.

It is of Catholic faith that the grace of God is indispensably necessary to salvation, that our nature still languishes under the wounds inflicted by the first sin, that our intellects have become clouded and our wills weakened, that, of ourselves, we have no power to resist temptation or merit heaven. These are truths lamentable in themselves, but concerning which our holy religion does not allow us to entertain the smallest doubt. The very first desire of doing good which arises in the human heart must be awakened by Him who is the sole Author of whatever good we possess. "For we are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."—*2 Cor., III., 5.* And impossible it must be for us to gain heaven unaided by God's grace, since we cannot approach Him who is our only hope unless we are drawn by the Father.—*John VI., 44.* St. Paul goes so far as to assert that we cannot pronounce the sacred name of Jesus in an acceptable manner except by the Holy Ghost.—*1 Cor. XII., 3.* Now, in this state of absolute dependency and utter weakness to which fallen nature has reduced us, what chance of salvation remains if God does not come to our assistance and if we do not implore His help by prayer?

Moreover, in the human heart are implanted and engendered the baneful seeds of every wickedness which will naturally grow up and develop unless repressed and controlled by the influences of grace. Our enemies are strong, powerful, malicious. On one side is the world with all its fascinating influences, stretching out before us its deceptive allurements, unfolding to our bewildered senses the phantom of happiness and hurrying our poor souls daily to ruin; on the other is the devil going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, ready to take advantage of our unguarded moments by entrapping us into sin. And that nothing may be wanting to render our condition miserable in the extreme, there is our corrupt nature in league with both. In the deplorable state in which we are placed, encompassed by dangers at every turn, assailed by numerous and formidable enemies who aim, with all their

malignity, at our eternal ruin, what hope of heaven remains if God, from His throne of glory, does not look down on us with compassion; if he arm us not, and, in the midst of the deadly conflict, strengthen us to obtain the victory? The very moment He would withdraw His all protecting hand, fatal experience would prove to everyone of us the truth of that divine assertion: "Without me you can do nothing." — *John XV.*, 5.

A moment's reflection will convince us that, in the ordinary dispensation of Divine Providence, God's grace, so indispensably necessary, will not be given unless through prayer. St. James in his epistle says: "You have not because you ask not." — *IV.* 2. And our Lord Himself declares: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." — *Luke XI.*, 10 — which not only shows that prayer is necessary, but leaves the inference that if we do not ask and seek and knock, we shall not receive. The same will also appear from all those other texts where our Lord commands us to pray. "And He spoke to them a parable that we ought always to pray and not to faint." — *Luke XVIII.*, 1. And He enforces this as the one great means of overcoming the temptations to which we are daily subject: "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." — *Luke XXII.*, 40. His apostles always inculcated the practice of this holy exercise on all who embraced the faith. "Pray without ceasing in all things," writes St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "for this is the will of God concerning you." — *I.* 17.

We may, therefore, safely conclude that the whole question of man's sanctification and salvation depends upon the constant and proper use of the means of prayer. "As God in the natural order," says St. Alphonsus, "ordained that man should be born helpless and in want of the many necessaries of life, and as, at the same time, He has given him hands and understanding to provide for all his wants, so also in the supernatural order, man is born incapable of remaining good and obtaining salvation by his own strength; but God, in His infinite goodness, grants

to everyone the grace of prayer, and obliges all men to make a constant use of this grace in order thereby to obtain all other necessary graces." "We firmly believe," says St. Augustine, "that nobody can work out his salvation without the invitation of God; that nobody, after he has been invited, can be saved without the help of God, and, finally, that nobody receives this help unless he asks for it in prayer."

To animate us in the practice of this holy exercise, our Blessed Lord vouchsafed to enforce its precepts by the winning influence of His own example. We know that He, the Immaculate Lamb of God, "the Figure of His Father's substance and the splendor of His Glory" (*Heb. I., 3.*) did not need to have recourse to prayer. We know it was not necessary for Him to seek a place where, after spending the entire day doing good, He could retire secluded from the busy turmoils of the city, and, under the shade of the dark olive grove, pour forth His soul in prayer to His heavenly Father. No; His soul was at all times united to the divinity. No temptation, no solicitude, no distraction could for a moment break in upon or interrupt His enjoyment of the Beatific Vision; for, though invisible to human eye, there was not an instant of His sacred life in which the bright halo of uncreated glory did not sparkle around Him; and, yet, to show us how important, how essential is the great duty of prayer, He stoops to the level of our infirmity and teaches us by His own blessed example. See how He instructs us to consecrate the first moments of each day to God: "And rising up very early in the morning," says St. Mark, "going out He went into a desert place and prayed." — *I. 35.* Behold our Model when the distracting cares of the world intrude upon our spirit: "He dismissed the whole multitude," says St. Matthew, "and went up the mountain alone to pray." — *XIV. 23.* See how He would have us act when our souls are in distress, when we are oppressed with sorrow and affliction: "And being in agony," says St. Luke, "He prayed the longer." — *XXII. 43.* And lest we might be tempted to allege our numerous other duties as an excuse for neglecting prayer, the

Gospel gives us to understand that after our Lord had spent the day in instructing the people, He retired to a hillside and passed the whole night in prayer.— *Luke VI.*, 12.

At all times when we require any help from God, prayer, dear brethren, becomes our paramount duty. It is safe to say that the lack of prayer has been the origin of every sin from the beginning. No man has ever fallen without first being tempted, and no man's temptation has ever been so great that he could not have overcome it by prayer. No matter what the nature of the temptation may have been, no matter how long it may have endured, had the soul only kept up the practice of prayer, it would have obtained the victory. Every soul that is now suffering the torments of hell will be forced to acknowledge on the day of judgment that it fell into sin because it did not implore God's help in time of temptation. And every soul that is now enjoying the delights of heaven shall also confess that it was enabled to overcome the enemies of its salvation and to persevere in God's grace because it prayed.

Brethren, this Lent shall not be passed in vain if we take the resolution and adhere to it that henceforward we will be people of prayer, that we will cultivate a fondness for this holy exercise, and that we will never let a day go by without adoring, praising or thanking God or having recourse to Him in all our necessities. St. Bernard was wont to say: "If I see a man who is not very fond of prayer, I say to myself: that man cannot be virtuous." And St. Francis of Assisi says: "Never expect anything good from a soul that is not addicted to prayer." In fact, the Saints, one and all, were convinced that "of all the means Jesus Christ has left for our salvation, prayer is the most important," and that it was the duty of every Christian to learn how to pray well.

Whenever we go on our knees to address Almighty God, let us learn to put our whole hearts into what we say and not allow our minds to be carried away by wilful distraction. Assuredly

that lip service in which we deliberately permit our minds to wander, and in which we think neither of God or of what we say is far from pleasing to Him. We must endeavor to keep recollected in the presence of the great God with whom we converse, and, then, if to our prayer be joined humility and contrition of heart, confidence in His goodness, resignation to His will, and if, persevering in prayer, we present our petitions before God in the name of His adorable Son, Jesus Christ, our prayers will infallibly be heard, provided what we ask be conducive to our salvation. "Amen, amen, I say to you, if you ask the Father anything in my name, He will give it you." — *John XVI.*, 23.

Let us never weary in prayer, but continue to implore the Almighty to hear us even though weeks and months should elapse without our receiving any apparent answer. Oftentimes He is pleased to refuse us what in itself is good and holy because it may be unsuited to our present condition, and, in answer to our prayer, He imparts to us another and more necessary grace, the grace, for example, to withstand some particular temptation. It may also happen that, what we demand, may not be really conducive to our salvation, although we may think it is, and God, on this account, mercifully withholds His favors. In such circumstances, let us be patient and resigned. He only intends our greater good. His infinite wisdom knows how to promote it better than we do. Subject as we are to weakness of mind and will, to ignorance of the future and proneness to err, we are safest when we place ourselves in God's hands with perfect trust in His wisdom and love. "True prayer," says a spiritual writer, "is based on the condition, implied or expressed, that God's will be done, that our request be for His glory and our own good, and such prayer is always heard. But when supplication is merely selfish and touched with human passion, no one should be disappointed at its want of success."

God is our Father; let us go to Him with the confidence of little children. Day and night, at all times and in all places, His ear is attentive to the voice of our supplications. As our

wants during life will always continue, prayer must never cease but with life itself. The grace of persevering in prayer is the surest pledge of all other graces. God grant it to us, dear brethren, and with it, the grace to continue faithful in His holy love.

We cannot conclude this letter without adverting to the present troubled condition of the world. The spectacle of Europe "red with carnage, dark with dismantled homes and agonized hearts" is indeed a sad reflection on modern civilization, but, as long as the world will last, nations will have recourse to arms whenever principles are to be defended on pain of dishonor. At present it is British freedom against Prussian tyranny; it is a struggle for right and civilization against brutal force and despotism. Realizing the justice of our cause, it is our duty to assist the Empire by every means in our power. There is no use minimizing the danger to which we are exposed. The outlook is very serious. It is to be regretted that people do not take the matter more earnestly to heart. Men who are physically fit are still wanted in the army; in the matter of enlisting there should be no delay. Certain consequences of the war are already being felt; it is well that we should prepare ourselves for what may follow. All people, rich and poor, should economize in dress, amusements, food, and especially in liquor. We should live more simple lives, be satisfied with necessaries, and refrain from luxuries. This is advisable at all times, but, during the war, it is a patriotic duty. Prices of commodities are now high and may go higher. When peace comes there will be dislocation of trade and industry, and much unemployment; there will also be high taxes to meet the war's expenses, so, it is wise to prepare against the evil day.

We must not forget that it is also our duty to beseech Almighty God that the leaders of the Empire may have the divine guidance in the conduct of the war, and that a speedy victory may be given our arms with an honorable peace.

By a decree of the Holy Father, permission is given to the Ordinary to have the invocation: *Queen of Peace, Pray for us*, inserted in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin immediately following the invocation: *Queen of the Most Holy Rosary*. We strongly recommend the use of this invocation.

The regulations for Lent will be the same as usual.

The Reverend Clergy will read this letter to their congregations on the first Sunday after its reception.

Given from our residence in Saint John on the feast of the Apparition of Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 1917.

† E. A. LEBLANC,
Bishop of St. John.

WM. M. DUKE,
Chancellor.