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# Power versus God's Power

### **Prayer**

*Let nothing disturb you, nothing alarm you:  
while all things fade away  
God is unchanging.  
Be patient  
and you will gain everything:  
for with God in your heart  
nothing is lacking,  
God meets your every need.  
(Theresa of Avila)*

### **1) God's power, wealth, suffering and spiritual growth**

In the Hebrew tradition, God's love and protection for his people were synonymous with wealth and well-being. Wealth and good health were and are still often perceived as signs of God's support. The contrary is also true: affliction and illnesses are understood as diverse forms of punishment by God.

With the book of Job, there appears a new insight into the meaning of God's power. This power is not in our service. God's love does not mean that God does what we want or what we wish, even if God promises to answer our petitions. His is the all-embracing knowledge, ours is so very partial. We know this, yet it is amazing how deeply this way of perceiving our well-being as God's blessing is engraved in our religious feeling. For us, it seems clear that God should not go against our desires. He should give us health and wealth, success and power. We do not understand how misery and suffering can exist on earth, if God really exists and is acting. We are shocked by the suffering of innocent people and by the apparent indifference of God about their suffering: why does God not protect them? This is a mystery. In what consists the power of God if it does not create harmony, or more exactly the kind of harmony we are hoping for? Is our understanding of what is so far off the mark?

Too often, we are confusing spiritual growth with the satisfaction of our own wishes. We think that we should be successful in our intentions and actions. We want harmony not to mean necessarily our adaptation to God's plan, but on the contrary the world conforming to our desires and representations. We believe that God should serve our purposes! But God is Love; and as a good Father does, he is caring for what is important for us, despite what we are hooked on! Our spiritual growth can in fact take shape only if we accept to be transformed. Generally, we accept to do so only when we come to a hopeless situation, that is to say when we are forced to abandon our false representations and to fundamentally review our position. Our continuous refusal to adapt to God's law of love generates suffering for ourselves and for others, and we rarely see how much this suffering is not the will of God, but mainly the consequence of our stubbornness. We have to discover and accept that God's order pre-exists our plans.

Let's look at diverse texts from the Old Testament, showing clearly that though God's Word is eternal, it is constantly reinterpreted as mankind evolves and new understandings are added.

***Genesis 22:15-17***

*15 And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven,*

*16 and said, (...)*

*17 I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies,*

***2 Samuel 7:9***

*8 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel;*

*9 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.*

*10 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly,*

*11 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house.*

***1 Kings 10:14-15+21-27***

*14 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold,*

*15 besides that which came from the traders and from the traffic of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and from the governors of the land.*

*(..)*

*21 All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver, it was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon.*

*22 For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.*

*23 Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.*

24 *And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind.*

25 *Every one of them brought his present, articles of silver and gold, garments, myrrh, spices, horses, and mules, so much year by year.*

26 *And Solomon gathered together chariots and horsemen; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem.*

27 *And the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah.*

### **Isaiah 53:2-7**

2 *For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.*

3 *He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

4 *Surely he has borne our grieves and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

5 *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.*

6 *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

7 *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.*

The contrast between the text which describes King Solomon's wealth and the prophesy of the suffering servant shows clearly the huge gap between our representations of worldly happiness and the real requirement of a path of truth. God is Love but he is not always "nice" to us, especially when we oppose our destiny which consists in becoming divine. God seems to be ready to let us pay the necessary price for our spiritual growth, and this price is certainly much higher if we resist him. Yet, if suffering is often unavoidable, it is never something we should look for, even if suffering generally forces us to grow spiritually.

### **Personal reflection**

If our true vocation as Christians is to live as children of God, has the search for success, health, wealth, well-being, been a help or hindrance? What about the suffering in my life: has it brought unexpected areas of freedom into my life, or has it been an obstacle to finding and trusting God?

### **Sharing**

### **Prayer**

*Source of Life, As we pause to remember your fidelity to us throughout the good and bad times in our life, we hold up to you our yearning to know you ever more deeply and truly.*

## **2) God's power as a healing force of Love / Life**

The power of God is the force of love and the energy of life. It acts directly in the whole universe and it acts also through each of us. Power can be understood as the force which controls, submits and imposes, or it can be understood as the might to give life, to make love the main energy of life. We will concentrate here on two aspects of this power: the power as a force of healing and the power as a force for building the true community of the Church.

### ***Matthew 8:23-27+9:18-19+23-26+32-34***

*23 And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.*

*24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep.*

*25 And they went and woke him, saying, "Save, Lord; we are perishing."*

*26 And he said to them, "Why are you afraid, O men of little faith?" Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

*27 And the men marvelled, saying, "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey him?"*

*(...)*

*18 While he was thus speaking to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live."*

*19 And Jesus rose and followed him, with his disciples.*

*(...)*

*23 And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd making a tumult,*

*24 he said, "Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.*

*25 But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose.*

*26 And the report of this went through all that district.*

*(...)*

*32 As they were going away, behold, a dumb demoniac was brought to him.*

*33 And when the demon had been cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the crowds marvelled, saying, "Never was anything like this seen in Israel."*

*34 But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."*

### ***Matthew 17:14-20***

*14 And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and kneeling before him said,*

*15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water.*

*16 And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him."*

*17 And Jesus answered, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me."*

*18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly.*

*19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?"*

*20 He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."*

## **The power of healing**

The Gospel describes many miracles. The English word *miracle* means astonishment; it translates one<sup>1</sup> of the many different Greek words which are used for describing miracles but which do not all have this meaning of astonishment. It is a shame that English translations do not express these nuances. There is the word<sup>2</sup> which means *great thing, wonderful act* or the word<sup>3</sup> which means *prodigy, portent, wonder*. These meanings evoke admiration and reverence rather than surprise. The main words which are used is the word<sup>4</sup> which means *acts of might* and the one<sup>5</sup> which means *sign, mark, proof, evidence*. While Matthew, Mark and Luke tend to use the first one with the meaning of *act of power*, John the Evangelist uses the latter, with the meaning of a *sign*, because for him miracles are not supernatural acts but simple expressions of God's nature and power. They are just normal signs of the hidden Reality. They are proofs or evidences of what is.

Healing is a natural power. Jesus tells us that it is natural for us to practice this form of power. Of course it must be used for the coming of God's Kingdom and not for our own self-promotion. How are we meant to practice these acts of might? Why are we most of the time incapable of being the transmitters of this healing energy as it seems God wants us to be. Jesus rebukes his disciples many times for not having the necessary faith or attitude to be the healers they are meant to be.

What are the ways of healing? Certainly we need to transcend our ego. We are only channels for God's power which is the real healing force. Probably we must also be penetrated by love, as love seems to be the harmonising force of healing. Compassion means "suffering with"; it is the way of taking part in the suffering of the other through becoming the bearer of this suffering as Christ took on himself the load of our sinfulness. This would certainly be the true attitude which can heal, not because it is a morbid attitude but because it is the generous gift of our life, a total offering. In giving ourselves completely in order to save the other, we become testimony for the love of God which rules the universe. We become the support and channel for this energy to be actualised in this material world. As we need to let go of the ego, so we need to let go of wanting control in order to offer everything into God's hands. We need to give up any form of control and to trust God to do what is right. One could say, healing is a form of petition, but it is an open form of petition. It is also a form of listening to God's will and to the harmony of God's love. Nevertheless, our intercession is necessary because it is a call for God to act. He has offered his love in the most radical way there can be: on a cross by giving his own life. God waits for us to ask for his help. This is why our faith, or our lack of faith, plays a central role. We need only a very tiny bit of faith, as a grain of mustard. It is enough. Nothing impossible is required from us.

### **Personal reflection**

Let's have a time of silent meditation about the theme of healing, and ask for guidance in order to become a channel for healing in this suffering world. (5 min)

### **Sharing**

### **Prayer**

Let's pray for the healing of people we know.

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<sup>1</sup> Thaumasia

<sup>2</sup> Megaleia

<sup>3</sup> Teras

<sup>4</sup> Dynamis

<sup>5</sup> Semeion

### **3) God's power as a uniting force which builds the Church**

**Ac 20:32**

*32 And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to edify and to give the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

**Eph 3:1-6+4:1-6+11-13+15-16**

*1 For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles,  
2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,*

*3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.*

*4 When you read this you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,*

*5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;*

*6 that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*

*(...)*

*1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,*

*2 with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love,*

*3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

*4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call,*

*5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*

*6 one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

*(...)*

*11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,*

*12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

*13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;*

*(...)*

*15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

*16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love.*

#### **The power of God as force for building our Church as the Body of Christ**

God's power invites each of us to believe in God. But it is not only a personal process; it is also a collective one where, under the influence and with the energy of the Spirit, we build the real Church, the Body of Christ. Each of us, as valuable as we all are, is only a part of the whole. As persons, we are fully individual expressions of God; yet we need the others to give shape to the wider expression of the Body of Christ in its diversity and complementarity. The power of God is the energy which unites us, which makes us one body and creates the whole. The Church is not the simple addition of the individual parts; it is the real body of our belonging; it is the mysterious dimension of the action of God's power, as it reveals itself in Christ, who makes us the body of his presence on earth. As individuals, we are incomplete; our bodies delimit us from others apparently,

but in reality on a spiritual level we are all linked in order to build a wider body. Just as our bodies are made of diverse organs and members, in the same way we are members of a wider invisible body which takes shape as the Church. Only the sharing in the community of saints gives us access to the mysterious dimension of the Body of Christ as Church. The personal and the collective dimensions are complementary. They cannot replace each other and they are both necessary.

This dimension of true sharing as a community and as one body is today very much neglected in our parishes. Our parishes are called to become the signs of the love we have for one another. They are the place for celebration but they are also the place for the sharing of a true common prayer life. Prayer is the act which links the members of the community and leads to true sharing. We are too shy to dare to share in this way. Yet we are longing to be able to support each other in our search for God in our daily life. Only this true, regular and deep sharing can make us brothers and sisters in Christ.

Healing, as it has been reflected upon before, is an important dimension of our sharing as a community, as the Body of Christ. Through prayer, when it is shared within the spiritual community, we can heal each other. We can also find the support for accepting the difficult situations we experience in our lives. Together, we can bear more easily our individual loads of suffering. We can find a form of support which is much more than human solidarity because it is rooted in our common faith in God. It sees the wider perspective of God's love as his power which is generating life. The mystical dimension of the Church becomes active in our lives and transforms us. In this case too, we have to abandon our ego in order to be true in our sharing, in order to be prepared to show also our vulnerable and weak sides. It is the only way to share our suffering and also to open to and to make God's power active in our lives, because this power acts principally through the collective dimension of the wider body of Christ as Church. "Where one or two are gathered together in my Name, there I am among them." Prayer is completely different when it is shared in this way because it actualises a dimension which is more absent in our personal contemplation. Contemplation and collective prayer are complementary and both necessary. Yet love is interaction between the members of human community and it is the energy through which God acts.

### **Personal reflection**

How do I experience my belonging to the Body of Christ? Why are we so shy in our sharing?

### **Sharing**

### **Prayer**

Let's pray for unity, sharing and belonging.

## **4) The power of the Trinity**

### **John 6:44-47**

44 *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

45 *It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.*

46 *Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father.*

47 *Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.*

### **John 10:18**

17 *For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.*

18 *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.*

### **1 Cor 12:4-11**

4 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;*

5 *and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;*

6 *and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.*

7 *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

8 *To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,*

9 *to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,*

10 *to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.*

11 *All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.*

The Trinity is One, yet Three persons who have the same will.

The Father is the Source of love and of life. He is not visible. We cannot see him but we can recognise his presence and action just as we can notice the action of the wind in the movements of the trees. We see only the signs of his presence. His power is the invisible yet only true origin of everything.

Although the Father is invisible, the Son has made him recognisable to us. Jesus, the humanity of Jesus, is a sacrament of God. It is a sign of God's grace, God's love, God's salvation. Since his revelation we can recognise the Father in everything. Christ is the Word and the Incarnation of God. The community of the Church is Christ's body as expression of God's presence in the world. His power is his proximity, his tender love and accessibility at each moment in our life. He is the tender and tangible proximity of the invisible Father.

The Spirit is the energy of love which links us. He unites us as a community, yet makes us all different by developing in us different gifts. His force of love is the power of God in action which teaches us how to recognise God. His power is like the force of gravity which attracts us to each other in order to give a tangible shape to the invisible body of Christ.



We are held in being by the communion of love which is the Holy Trinity where we come forth **from** the Father **in** the Son, and we **return to** the Father **in** the Spirit. The Spirit is the power of the Godhead, the breath, that flows from the Father into the Word and overflows in creation. It is by the Spirit that the ideas in the Word are given form and substance and creation comes into being

Our challenge is to trust in this power of the Trinity and to rely only on it. Especially when we suffer, it is difficult to believe in this real proximity of God. God seems often so far away. He seems to us indifferent to our pains and struggles. How can we make His Presence more real? Once we have recognised him, His Reality becomes more tangible and we perceive life according to a more complete pattern. Our work consists in coming back again and again to this fundamental awareness of His immediate presence here and now. For this to grow, we need to practice silence, stillness and simplicity. Then, even in times of suffering, or in periods when we feel numb and dry, peace and joy can slowly come back.

### **Personal reflection**

What is my main handicap nowadays for finding God? For giving up my life into his hands?

### **Sharing**

### **Final Prayer:**

*Holy God, you continue to bless us with your gifts of creation.*

*May we give thanks and take delight in the gifts we share to bring about the fullness of your life in this our world. We pray this of you, Most Blessed Trinity, living in us and among us through all generations. Amen*