

## Prayer of Personal Reminiscence:

Sharing One's Memories With Christ

David J. Hassel, S.J.

Father Hassel has been involved for the last six years in the Tertianship program for the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus. He is also Associate Professor of Philosophy at Loyola University of Chicago. He resides at: 6525 North Sheridan Road; Chicago, IL 60626.

To describe the prayer of personal reminiscence<sup>1</sup> to you, I must tell the story of how I chanced upon it. While working on a doctoral dissertation concerning the conversion-method of St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*, I had to do some intensive reading of his *Confessions*. In this latter work, I was puzzled by Augustine's sudden prayerful outbursts to God until I discovered that the whole of the *Confessions* is a single prolonged prayer during which Augustine occasionally becomes overwhelmed with gratitude or with the need to praise God. The resultant prayerful outbursts arise out of a quiet, underlying prayer which I would call "prayer of personal reminiscence." The latter perdures through every sentence of the *Confessions*.

By means of his memory, Augustine is recalling his whole life and reviewing it from the standpoint of a mature man in his mid-forties, twelve or so years a convert to Christianity, and presently the Bishop of Hippo. A recent biographer of Augustine, Peter Brown, would even hint that Augustine is writing out his autobiography under the guidance of his therapist, Christ. In this way, the Lord leads him to surface and to heal his resentments, to

<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Fr. Paul Clifford, S.J., Director of Tertians for the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus, and to Fr. John Schuett, S.J., Associate Tertian Director, for their helpful suggestions in the writing of this article. I am also grateful to all those retreatants whose candid accounts of their prayer experiences enabled me to check out the validity of this type of prayer.



develop more realistic hopes, to evaluate his love experiences, and to accept more fully sins long forgiven. Apparently Augustine the bishop needed to accept the continued presence of his basic drives of lust, ambition, greed, and intolerance at a time when contemporary Christian convert-literature was extolling legendary heroes whose conversion to the faith enabled them to rise forever above these drives.

Having discovered for myself Augustine's prayer of personal reminiscence, I began to use it in the so-called "First Week" of the Ignatian *Exercises* whenever I made my own annual private retreat. I found the prayer healing me after it exposed my resentments at evil done to me or by me. It was not only liberating when it revealed to me many reasons to be grateful to friends and to God, but also confidence-building when it uncovered patterns of positive personal growth. Naturally, when I began to give directed retreats, I suggested the use of this prayer to my retreatants and found that in not a few instances it gradually took them out of a merely conceptual prayer and put them into a simpler, deeper, warmer prayer of the feelings. Some retreatants found this prayer of personal reminiscence a relief from their steady diet of cogitative prayer. Others found it a means for discovering new aspects of themselves and of their life-history. The discovery of these aspects, in turn, gradually changed the course of their lives.

Before attempting to describe prayer of personal reminiscence, it is important to appreciate Augustine's understanding of how the human memory works lest initial mistaken impressions pervert the prayer of reminiscence. For Augustine, human memories are the most powerful dynamisms in one's life precisely because they are not merely frozen snapshots of the past pasted in some willing picture album. Rather, they are the dynamic and present recall of past events. Nor are they merely accurate recall of specific details but they are also an evaluation of past events as the rememberer sees them in the present moment. In other words, Augustine's memory is not a set of dusty photographs at the back of a person's head but is an evaluative act of recall pulsing at the front of his consciousness, filled with colorful detail from the past, and interpreted in terms of the timely confronting situations.

Given this description, one sees that Augustine's reminiscence establishes a person's attitude towards people, events, and things since an attitude is a strong value embedded in one's memory of an event. These attitudes, in turn, can act as powerful influences on all of a person's decisions. If a memory, unrecalled for twenty-five years, is nevertheless found to be vivid, bright, and bursting with emotion, then one can be sure that it has been implicitly operative as a value in many of one's decisions during the past twenty-five years.

Evidently prayer of personal reminiscence operates at the center of the arena where the human person struggles with his most vital decisions. For example, a woman in her mid-thirties could not understand a secret an-

there had been a deep irritant in their relationship, one that made them uneasy with each other. During prayer of personal reminiscence she discovered that she had resented deeply her mother's inability to find time to play with her as the other children's mothers seemed to do. Later in the prayer, she realized that her mother worked evenings in order to be able to send her to a private Catholic school and to keep up payments on their small home. Bringing the buried resentment to the surface and allowing the Lord to reveal its cause, the prayer helped to release her from this long-time irritant and to enable her to meet her mother with new gratitude and affection. A powerful memory, unconsciously operative, was now consciously appropriated, re-evaluated and rendered more affectionate.

If this healing process happens to a significant number of memories, the personality of the person praying becomes more capable of gratitude and affection. For the memories, as they accumulate, not only shape the human personality but also become part of that personality. It is common experience and not solely a discovery of Freud that the more explicitly aware a person is of his memories and, therefore, of his inmost self, the better he sees and feels himself as constituted by these life-gifts poured into him by all who have revered and loved him. The more self-aware a person is in this way, the better able he is to direct his values and to compensate for his "hang ups" when he is making decisions. At the spiritual level of one's being, the more self-aware one is, the better one understands precisely what he is giving the Lord when he offers himself to God. Clearly, then, prayer of reminiscence could be important to a person's human development and to his gifting of himself to the Lord. In the following pages, therefore, an attempt will be made to define more fully what prayer of personal reminiscence is, and is not, how it may be done, what are its stages and procedures, what are the vital signs of its presence, and what is its scriptural basis.

### What Is the Prayer of Personal Reminiscence?

To put it briefly, prayer of personal reminiscence is a reliving of one's memories with Christ present so that the praying person can repossess his or her life in a more maturely Christian way. In other words, a person sees, e.g., his failure in college very differently at twenty-five years of age, at forty-five, and at sixty-five because much new experience has occurred between these life-stages and because, hopefully, the experience has given him a better estimate or interpretation of the remembered college failure. In addition, this person looks on his failure now with the eyes of Christ who may well have seen the failure as necessary in order to arouse a dormant sense of responsibility in the then collegian or to produce a truer estimate in him of his abilities.

In thus sharing his memories, the praying person unites himself more deeply with Christ much in the way that a young couple during the engage-



their private values, attitudes, hopes, past sufferings, joys, and laughs. This type of sharing can bring Christ's presence more palpably into one's daily activities and decisions whereby one's personality is given further content, shape and direction. This is, of course, a "dangerous" procedure since the person praying by reminiscences admits Christ into those areas of his life where he is most vulnerable, most weak, most in need of trust. Here, because of his concern, his respect, and his truthfulness, Christ can heal resentments and hurts, can strengthen weaknesses, can give vision to ignorance, and can offer flexibility to fearfully rigid, personal routines.

Meanwhile, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, the prayer of personal reminiscence is quietly writing on the heart of the praying person his autobiography. That is to say, the person is gradually appropriating his past self; he is becoming more self-aware. Since this prayer, begun in passive openness to the Spirit of Christ, is under the latter's direction, he guides the recovery, the interpretation, and the evaluation of these memories. Consequently the praying person slowly begins to see himself and his past as Christ sees him, that is, with more realism and more affection.

#### What Prayer of Personal Reminiscence Is Not

The above description of prayer of personal reminiscence is readily open to misinterpretation because late twentieth-century people have been so heavily "psychologized" in their prayer. Let it be said at once that prayer of personal reminiscence is not a psychoanalytic technique. Although psychological dynamics such as free association will naturally occur, they are far from the center of attention. Further, neither the person praying nor a spiritual director is attempting to use psychoanalytic techniques for interpreting and evaluating memories. Rather than self alone, God and one's fellow man are equally the center of focus; and Christ, the healer of memories, is the interpreter and evaluator of those memories trustingly presented to him by the praying person.

On the other hand, prayer of personal reminiscence is not a mere rifling through one's memories such as when a person pages hurriedly through a picture-book or leafs nostalgically through a book of family photographs with sighs at good-times forever lost or with patronizing compassion for past human foibles and styles. Instead, it is a re-living with Christ of past events now dynamically influencing one's present decisions into the future. Thus, prayer of personal reminiscence is not mere revery. It is done under the direction of the Holy Spirit in communion with Christ for the very definite purposes of self-appropriation and of deeper union with the Father. Neither is it a mere phantasmizing since it works with factual memories (even though admittedly memories are seen differently at various stages of one's life) and not with wild flights of the imagination.

Another possible misinterpretation of prayer of personal reminiscence

causally its strengths, weaknesses, prejudices, mental blocks, defenses, routines, and motivations. Prayer of personal reminiscence is not meant for seeking "the motive behind all other motives," the personality mechanism controlling all other dynamics of the psyche. The praying person is simply reviewing his life in the presence of Christ so that he, if he wishes, can liberate him from these prejudices, defenses, blockages, and so on. Amateur psychoanalysis is not the aim of this prayer.

Lastly, prayer of personal reminiscence is not a complicated way to pray. In fact, the ease and quickness with which people learn to experience it lead some to question whether or not it is prayer. "If I don't find it boring or mind-cracking, then it can't possibly be prayer." Indeed, in this type of prayer, so-called distractions can often be made part of the prayer content. The main danger here is superficiality, where a person quickly runs through many memory-events without allowing them to develop, to possess one's consciousness fully, and to arouse rich emotions.

#### How to Do Prayer of Personal Reminiscence

Any preparations suggested for a prayer experience are simply the conditions for prayer; they cannot force God to come into the experience of the person who desires to pray. God does the praying within us as he pleases; and we simply receive his coming with open hearts and minds. Hopefully, however, suggested preparations can add a bit to this openness which is the praying person's main contribution.

With these cautions in mind, one can consider remote and proximate preparations for this type of prayer. Remotely, one can begin to write his autobiography in a notebook. This is done either essay-style in complete sentences, containing, of their very nature, judgments and evaluations, or in a grocery-list style, with only a concrete noun, vigorous verb, colorful adjective such as will readily recall the event at a later re-reading—perhaps on five pages symbolizing five periods of one's life. Of course, such remote preparation is not necessary, merely helpful and possibly prayerful.

Proximate preparation occurs at the outset of the prayer in the act of presence. Here one asks the Holy Spirit to lift into consciousness any memory which he considers important at the moment; then one asks Christ to guide the understanding of this memory; finally one asks the Father to help one to use this memory in future service of him and his people—a service more human, full, and helpful. In other words, it is important to let the Lord raise the memory to consciousness instead of managing it oneself.

After this prayer of presence, it is important to be quietly open to the Lord, and sharply alert, waiting some minutes for the Holy Spirit to lift a memory into your consciousness. If, after this wait, nothing happens, then one might use one of the following measures (developed by the author's retreatants) to jog his memory along:



the front door, walk through the living room with all its old furniture, through the dining room ready for supper, through the kitchen warm with cooking smells and up the stairs to the cooler second floor; or

- 2) Take the short-cut through the alley, across the yard, past the candy-store, over the fence, to your elementary school of yester-year; or
- 3) Walk through the classrooms, gym, cafeteria, extracurricular rooms, ball field, of the elementary or high school or college; or
- 4) Walk leisurely through a day or a week or a year of the first job which you ever held; or
- 5) Recall the place where you first met certain of your closest friends and remember the best and the worst times; or
- 6) Recall the greatest joy of your life—person, event, job; or
- 7) Leaf reflectively through an old family picture album if available, a school yearbook, class list, a diary, a telephone or mailing list.

When a memory arises, let it develop fully; don't hurry through it. For example, you are fourteen years old. You are buttering toast at the breakfast table. Your mother is at the stove stirring oatmeal and frying bacon. From upstairs comes the sleepy arguing and impatient slamming of drawers as your younger brothers and sisters get dressed. Hear the bacon grease crackle, smell the toasting bread, see the worn spots in the yellow linoleum, taste the brown sugar in the hot cereal, notice your mother's hairstyle, feel her hugging you as you show concern for her tiredness. Notice the look of gratitude in her eyes and feel the warm surge of affection as you protect your mother for the first time.

Try to stay with a simple and strong memory for ten to fifteen minutes, i.e., as long as it develops strongly within you. Let it percolate steadily within you. Only when you feel satisfied should you move on to a second memory. It is possible to manage one's memories by decreeing: "First, I'll explore my childhood, then my adolescence, next my college years, after that my various jobs, then my marriage, finally my children." This is a good procedure if one wishes to be methodical. But it could be better, perhaps, if the Holy Spirit were allowed to do the selection and if one thereby risked having his memory jump all around as though in free association. For maybe the Spirit could in this way dialogue, through these memories, with the person praying. This is how freshness of approach and surprises occur.

One of the better ways to kill prayer of personal reminiscence is to fill it with explicit moralizing: "I should be more patient like my Uncle Charles . . . more poor like my fellow religious . . . more generous like my mother. . . ." Such pious conclusions only clutter up the prayer needlessly. If the event remembered is vivid enough and is allowed to disclose its emotional riches, then it carries its own power to modify our lives far more deeply than solemn pronouncements about self. Other procedures lethal for this prayer are tears over what-might-have-been, quiet self-glorifica-

which are self-defeating in their self-centeredness—though simple sorrow and joy arising out of the event itself is quite helpful to the prayer.

Some people seem to feel the need to call God's attention to the remembered events as though he were not already intimately sharing them as he lifts them to one's consciousness, enjoys them with the person praying, perhaps newly interprets or evaluates them. However, like Augustine, the one praying may, after the sharing of such a memory, feel an upsurge of gratitude to God for his generous ways or he may experience a strong desire to praise God for his concerned love. Naturally he should let this upsurge or desire give expression to itself in words or tears or laughter. But no one should feel any obligation to do this "in order to be really praying." After all, there is nothing so discouraging to the gift-giver, human or divine, as obligated praise or dutiful gratitude. But after this outburst, one should, like Augustine, return to the prayer of personal reminiscence out of which the surge of praise or gratitude arose. Then towards the end of the prayer-time, one can complete the prayer in some definite way, e.g., by a favorite vocal prayer, by a simple "Thank you, Lord," by a slow sign of the cross, and so on, in order to conclude the prayer with special reverence and attention to our Lord.

### Stages and Procedures in Prayer of Personal Reminiscence

In doing this prayer, it has been found advisable (for reasons to be given later) to proceed according to the following four stages which, though they overlap, are nevertheless distinct within the single stream of life-events: *First Stage* When first doing the prayer of reminiscence, consider *only* those memories in which people do good for and to you. File away for later use the memories containing either the evil done to you or the evil done by you. Consequently, in this first stage, negative memories are the only possible distractions. There are a number of reasons for this procedure. First of all, one must be filled with a sense of one's own goodness before he can truly look objectively at the evil done to him or by him. Unless one is convinced of the goodness poured into him by all those people who have loved him into existence and sustained him during his life, one normally avoids looking directly at the evil in himself lest discouragement paralyze him or despair strangle him. It takes the confidence of felt personal goodness to be realistic about the evil in one's life. Second, many persons are faced with depressing self-images. They are so fascinated by the fancied or real evil in themselves that they fail to notice the concomitant goodness where awareness of this goodness is their basic cure. Third, if God has gifted us with ourselves and our friends, then very likely he would prefer to have us rejoice in these great goods before we point out all their defects to him. Perhaps he wants us to accept him as Lover before we acknowledge him as Lord. After all, to receive good things from another is to receive life from him; it would then seem proper to consider the life in me before I dwell on



the death in me, namely the evil. Finally, during retreats, directors will come to know the retreatants more accurately and fully if the latter first recall prayerfully their memories of goodness. If scrupulous or half-defeated personalities give close scrutiny to the evil in their lives before allowing the sense of their own goodness to arise, they can become harried and paralyzed in the first days of the retreat.

*Second Stage* After the one doing the prayer of reminiscence becomes convinced of the large amount of goodness within himself and has seen this goodness as the gift of those who have loved him, then he is ready to consider those memories in which he has poured good into the lives of others and thus expanded their existence. Fear of vanity can retard a person at this second stage if he has not realized that he is doing for others simply what has previously been done for him, and that to give good to others is to experience the creativity shared with God, to feel the joy of God's presence in the act of giving life to another.

There are a number of reasons why this second stage of prayer of personal reminiscence is harder to do than the first stage. First, the good given to others occurs outside the giver; whereas the good received occurs, as it were, within the skin of the receiver for immediate experience. In other words, the giver of a good has to be able to read those signs in the receiver that indicate the reception of the good, e.g., a smile, gladness in the eye, a compliment, a kiss, the silence of deep gratitude. Such signs not only have to be read but also accepted by the reader. Yet some people are embarrassed by signs of gratitude or refuse them. Many people have been schooled to forget any good done for another lest vanity poison them; and most people have not been previously busy listing the good things they have done for others.

*Third Stage* Once a solid conviction and deep enjoyment is felt of the good received from others and given to others, then it is time to take note of the evils caused in oneself by others. The word *evil* is used here lest the word *sin* implicitly induce judgments upon the persons who have caused evil in me or lest, at the other extreme, one deny the existence of the evil caused in him on the score that "the agent of the sin was totally ignorant of the effects of his deed" or "he was simply moved by uncontrollable passion" and so on. In fully excusing the agent of sin, one might unwittingly deny or deprecate or obscure the actual evil caused in himself. This lack of realism is just as destructive as denying the actual good in oneself. At any rate, *de facto* evil does include sin in its meaning.

The major difficulty faced in this third stage of prayer of personal reminiscence is to admit the deep scars in one's heart and mind which were caused by those who love us most fully and whom we in turn value highly, only those for whom we feel deep affection can successfully scar us deeply. Because of this, a person frequently suppresses the remembrance of those

these memories ineffective. Rather, they remain active but now are more or less uncontrollable because they have been submerged into the unconscious. This is hardly an ideal situation and leads to deeply seated resentments whose impetus within man's decisions cannot be well controlled. Because these resentments, often involving those dearest to a person, need to be surfaced in order to be healed by Christ, the person doing the prayer of personal reminiscence must be very trustful of the Holy Spirit and of Christ, must never forget the goodness that he has just witnessed in himself and in others, and must be ready to accept spiritual direction and counseling if these be necessary after the resentments surface.

An important caution must be introduced here. The person praying and the spiritual director should avoid introspective probing and amateur psychologizing. Neither one is normally equipped to do this. Nor is it the proper function of either within the prayer of personal reminiscence or within a retreat. They should simply let the healer, Christ, do the probing and the healing. Thus there is no need in this prayer for the person praying to dig into the deeper causes of resentment. If Christ wants this deeper resentment to rise to consciousness, he will do it in his own time when the praying person is able to bear the sight. Far from psychologizing, the spiritual director's job is to reassure the praying person about the good in his life, about the love of Christ for him, and about the need to forgive even though the forgetting of the caused evil is impossible—unless one suppresses memory of the evil and causes himself worse damage.

*Fourth Stage* Once a person knows more clearly and admits more fully the evil done to him and now present within him, then he is more ready to recognize and to accept the historical fact that he has passed on this evil intentionally (sin) or non-intentionally. Only Christ has absorbed the evils of life into himself without passing them on to others.

Here, again, the phenomenon of suppression may be occurring. For the deepest evils that a person has done are often to those dearest to him. Such evils are hard to look at; or, if one does look at them, they are hard to evaluate accurately. Further, if a person has not previously been convinced, in a realistic manner, of the goodness now within him and its potential for much more goodness, then one tends to diminish or, if scrupulous, to exaggerate the evil which he has done to others. Those who diminish the evil tend to become hardened and insensitive to others. Those who exaggerate it either paradoxically use this recognized exaggeration to deny the reality of any guilt (e.g., "there was no freedom") or paralyze themselves with the despair of ever doing any good for anybody. This last group endures the deepest of all sufferings, the doubt of their ever being able to love anyone fully.

Despite this danger of people disguising sin, it would seem preferable, nevertheless, to employ the term *evil* in this fourth stage rather than *sin*. This is not an attempt to deny either personal sin or man's freedom of



choice. Instead the desire is to affirm that, besides sin (conscious free inflection of evil on another when one could avoid it), there is also evil caused by accident or by ignorance or by an uncontrollable play of events which trap the agent into a harmful action. In using the term *evil* instead of *sin*, false guilt is avoided, the full reality of evil is appreciated, and the fullness of God's providence can be recognized. For the Lord permits no evil (sinful or otherwise) to happen unless he intends to draw a greater good out of it—a good greater than the evil done.

In this perspective of a God who is always expanding the goodness of the universe, who is present to the evil event as well as to the good one, and who clearly distinguishes degrees of responsibility for evil, the praying person can discover many reasons for gratitude to God even in the midst of evil. The thoughtfulness of God towards him lights up his thoughtlessness towards God and others. Thus, such a positive view of God's providential development of good in the universe lights up those gray sins of omission so easily lost in the darkness of committed sins. Indeed, the conviction of one's own goodness and its potential for causing good to happen in others—the results of the first and second stages of the prayer of personal reminiscence—add their light for a new awareness of sins of omission. Thus, for the so-called "sinless person" of retiring and dispassionate life sometimes met in retreats or in the sacrament of reconciliation, these sins of omission may be his serious sins of irresponsible laziness or of careful cowardice or of sensuality accepted as a way of life or of proud, self-sufficient aloofness to the sufferings of others.

Thus, when a person admits not only evil deeds against others but also terrible failures to care enough to do any good at all for another person, he becomes aware of his potential for evil, his sinfulness. This terrible insight opens out into additional insights of devastating impact yet beautiful result: "Why didn't I do worse sins than those I actually did? Why didn't I continue to act the coward or sensualist? Why did I escape this sin when many others around me, perhaps my betters, fell into these sins? Given my strong fear or passion, how did I escape sinning on this occasion?"

When a person blends this deep sense of sinfulness with gratitude for how carefully, delicately, and lovingly the Lord has protected him from sin, he soon experiences Christian sorrow. For gratitude is the beginning of deep respect for God and his people; while recognition of sinfulness carries hidden within it a warm sense of being loved by God far beyond one's deserts. Strangely, the person doing prayer of reminiscence and undergoing this Christian sorrow experiences a strong solidarity with sinners as well as a renewed sense of being a favorite member of the Father's family. Because the prayer has ended in the gritty magnificence of Christian sorrow, sense of realism pervades the person praying these reminiscences. He has faced all the stages of his life, all the facets of his personality, the sweet

throughout his body, mind and heart. He knows the joy of Magdalen or of Peter in all its warm richness.

It should be noted here (1) that this is precisely the "grace of the First Week" of the Ignatian Exercises; (2) that this First Week, when miniaturized, becomes a powerful way to prepare for the sacrament of reconciliation; (3) that this preparation for confession, when further miniaturized, becomes a lively way to make the daily examen of consciousness. In other words, if one were to do prayer of reminiscence throughout the First Week of the Ignatian Exercises, he would find himself very much in tune with its central spirit. Further, if he should review the good events of his life since his last confession, he might nevertheless find himself deeply aware of all his sinful actions, committed and omitted. For the grateful recall of God's many gifts would naturally include their use or misuse. But this would be done in the bright atmosphere of the Lord's warmly gracious generosity, not against the black background of solely evil and in the judicial atmosphere of long lists of possible offenses against a glowering, accusing God. Of course, the examen of consciousness made in the spirit of the prayer of personal reminiscence becomes more the exchange of old friends affectionately summing up the day for each other than the fearful expiation of the medieval penitent scourging himself bloody before the Lord of the Manor. Prayer of personal reminiscence, then, can lend itself well to Christian sorrow for sins. But this is only one of its multiple results as can be seen from the following survey of the signs of its presence.

### Vital Signs That the Prayer of Personal Reminiscence Is Happening

Perhaps the two major functions of a spiritual director are to encourage, and to guard against delusion. Since there is no litmus paper test for genuineness, the director must use the converging evidence of multiple signs of genuineness. For he knows full well that no single sign in itself is sufficient evidence for encouraging the person praying. Consequently, the following signs of genuineness are offered in the hope that they may be useful as evidence that prayer of personal reminiscence is happening. In addition, the analysis of these signs offers some phenomenological description of the prayer itself.

#### 1. *A Quieting Reflectiveness, a Deep Listening*

(*versus a dry restlessness*) in all of one's various ways of praying because in praying his reminiscences, the person is remembering these events in a leisurely manner with the depth of the more experienced person and is allowing the Holy Spirit to lift memories for him and to pray them within him—instead of trying to manage the praying all by himself and thus rendering it tensely artificial. He has finally stopped trying to climb the sheer glass mountain by his fingernails. Growing within his prayer is a creative passivity towards Christ and toward others as he learns to listen to him and to others deep within himself.



2. *An Aliveness*, because emotions have been allowed to surge into the prayer, because the conceptual element is not allowed to usurp all the attention, and because radical values are being permitted to rise within the prayer for honest challenge or acceptance or denial.
3. *Fuller Self-appropriation*, because a new-found joy in one's family, friends, and job arises not only from the newly recognized goodness in the person praying but also from that Christian sorrow for past sins which unites one more closely to all his fellow sinners. There is, then, a new self-respect and dignity felt within the praying person. This, in turn alerts him to the worth of others.
4. *Surprising Insights*, because blinding childish resentments and fears are diminished, because the routine patterns of one's behavior, now seen more explicitly, reveal novelty in a more startling way. Thus the obvious becomes less obvious; the taken-for-granted is seen to be a bit mysterious; a new freshness is found in one's day somewhat like that discovered by young couples in deep love.
5. *An Ability to Smile in a More Relaxed Way* at one's own foibles, at life's inconveniences, at the strange ways of people, because the praying person is beginning to see his whole life as a personal salvation-history in which God the Father, through his thoughtful providence, is letting him know how dear and special he is to all three Persons of the Trinity.
6. *A Re-awakened Tolerance for Old Routines* (e.g., the small talk necessarily preliminary to social occasions or to deep sharing) because the growing self-possession discovered in prayer of personal reminiscence makes one more sensitive to the needs of others and because fresh meaning is being discovered in ordinary events as reminiscence reveals their traditional roots and their providential import.
7. *A Stronger Continuity Between Prayer and Action*, i.e., new growth in contemplation in action, because the prayer of reminiscence is concerned with life-events insofar as they influence decisions and are accompanied and interpreted by Christ.
8. *A Growth in Hope* for mankind in general as well as for one's blood-family, parish community, and self, because the providential direction of one's own life is now more clearly seen and more deeply appreciated so that new meaning, new reason for sacrifice, is apparent. This spirit of hope and sacrifice naturally transfers to the lives of others so that even leadership qualities can develop.
9. *A Less Conceptual, More Feeling Awareness of Christ* occurs in the praying person when he confronts himself, others, and his daily affairs, for Christ is possessing all his deeply felt, major memories. In this way Christ "companions" the person as a close friend. Of course, this is a mutual possession, one that invites others into the union.
10. *A Deeper Confidence Within the Person Praying*, because he feels lovable and capable of returning love—the finest gift of the Holy Spirit.

Out of this root, new creative insights and disciplined works stem and blossom. Nothing quite succeeds like love. Now that the healing presence of the Holy Spirit is recognized, the praying person sees future defeats as quite possible but not so fearsome as before. For there is a rock-bottom conviction in the praying person that God draws greater good out of the evil defeat, a good greater than the evil and greater than the good which the person had in mind. This is a rather ultimate faith.

To sum up all these vital signs of the presence of the prayer of personal reminiscence in a person, it could be said that this type of prayer tends to make the person more human, more ready to accept the Trinity's actions within him, that is to say, more Christ-like.

### Some Scriptural Bases for Prayer of Personal Reminiscence

Perhaps it is not enough to offer St. Augustine as the source of this prayer of reminiscence and to hint that this prayer has been central in the Church's life—as often as Augustine has been taken seriously by the Church. The ultimate basis for this prayer may well occur in St. John's Last Supper where Christ comforts the apostles in their sense of impending doom and in their frightening insecurity by saying: "The paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and remind you of all that I told you" (Jn 14:26). This actually happened as John notes in his reflection upon the cleaning of the temple: "Only after Jesus had been raised from the dead did his disciples recall that he had said this, and come to believe the Scripture and the word he had spoken" (Jn 2:22). As this passage indicates, the very catechesis of the Church is a prayerful recall of the *magnalia Dei*, God's mighty deeds for man. In fact, what are the gospels if not the instruments of this recall in the Church?

In thus using prayerful recall, the early Church would seem to be simply continuing a basic tradition of the Jewish Church and the Old Testament. To recognize the prayer of personal reminiscence one has only to read Psalm 105: "Give thanks to the Lord, invoke his name; make known among the nations his deeds . . . Recall the wondrous deeds that he has wrought . . . He remembers forever his covenant," and then to note the history of God's deeds for his people which are recounted in that psalm. Ominously, Psalm 106 recalls how many times the people of God have betrayed him because "soon they forgot his works . . . they forgot the God who had saved them, who had done great deeds in Egypt, wondrous deeds in the Land of Ham, terrible things at the Red Sea." Psalm 78 continues this refrain of how Israel's forgetfulness of God's deeds for them ends in their betrayal of him. The prayer of personal reminiscence which renders man's heart grateful at the Lord's many mercies (Ps 136) can save man from such betrayal.

In the Old Testament, this recitation of God's deeds for his people appears to serve as a creed which describes who Yahweh is. When Moses



wishes to give his final instruction to the people, he outlines how God has dealt with them time after time and then says: "Be earnestly on your guard not to forget the things which your eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children." Moses' song turns out to be a history of God's deeds for his children. Knowing their waywardness, he tells them: "Write out this song, then for yourselves. Teach it to the Israelites and have them recite it . . . Then, when many evils and troubles befall them, this song, which their descendants will not have forgotten to recite, will bear witness against them" (Dt 31:19-21). Moses' song is not unlike the *Confessions* of Augustine in its sudden bursts of praise and petition to God which arise out of a recall of the past history of Israel.

Joshua, as one would expect, imitates Moses' solemn recitation of Israel's historical dealings with Yahweh and then tries to make the recitation unforgettable by dedicating the Rock of Remembrance under the oak (Jos 24:25-27). Samuel, too, when he wishes to solemnize Israel's marriage to the kingship of Saul and its implied rejection of Yahweh as their king, shouts out to the Jews: "Now, therefore, take your stand, and I shall arraign you before the Lord, and shall recount for you all the acts of mercy the Lord has done for you and your fathers" (I S 12:7). Then he reminds them: "You must fear the Lord and worship him faithfully with your whole heart; keep in mind the great things he has done among you. If instead you continue to do evil, both you and your king shall perish" (I S 12:24). Forgetfulness of God's deeds for his people seems inevitably to bring on ingratitude and sin. It is no wonder, then, that the Mosaic liturgy of yearly feasts commemorates God's historical dealings with his people so emphasized by Moses and that Ezra and Nehemiah, when rebuilding the Jewish faith after the exile, are so careful to restore this liturgy and its temple as fully as possible in every detail.

Here, then, is the beginning of a scriptural basis for prayer of personal reminiscence. But truly the most effective proof of its worthwhileness is the experience of this prayer and the discovery of its vital signs in one's daily life.