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The Prayer of Abandon of Charles de Foucauld

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The Prayer of Abandon has been used in many contexts. To understand it from Charles' perspective you have to know that his prayer style was very Jesus-centered, the fruit of a deep personal relationship with Jesus. There was nothing abstract about his prayer. He often dialogued with Jesus and wrote many of these conversations down as a way of helping him to focus his prayer, especially in times of dryness.

The Prayer of Abandon was not written as a spiritual testament at the end of Charles' life. In fact, he wrote it in the early years as a Trappist. The well-known text is actually taken from a longer meditation, a prayer that Charles puts onto the lips of a dying, crucified Jesus. That is important to know.

And as with most of our prayers and meditations, it reveals more about Charles' own relationship with God than that of Jesus. As it was never meant to be read by others, it paints a very intimate portrait.

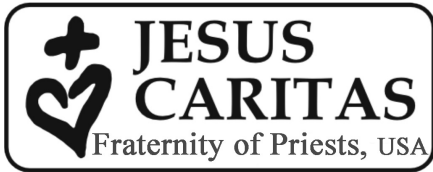
I am using the text as it is more popularly known rather than the complete text. The difference mainly lies in the removal of repetitions.

Charles introduces the meditation with these words:

It is the last prayer of our Master, of our Beloved. may it be ours. May it not only be the prayer of our last moment but that of all our moments.

Father,
I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me
and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul.
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands
without reserve and with boundless confidence,
For you are my Father.

Possibly one of the biggest obstacles to our praying of this prayer along with Charles and Jesus is our wounded trust. We might want to take a few moments to consider how we trust.



We might want to give thanks for those moments when we were able to trust in the face of difficulties and for the peace and sense of inner freedom that was born of that trust. We might also want to consider the things that are obstacles to our trust. Charles himself had to learn to trust, having not only been orphaned, but then seeing so many other significant people in his young life taken away in one way or another. We can only speculate as to the role all of this played in the loss of his faith.

Trust an essential element for communion whether with God, others or even our own selves. Without trust we are unable to build that community of disciples of the One who showed us the way to love.

So, let us now turn to the text.

For Charles, Jesus is praying to the One whom he calls "Abba, Father." It is not a prayer of resignation but a prayer of love. It is the abandon of a love that is capable of throwing itself into the arms of the beloved. It trusts the beloved to be there.

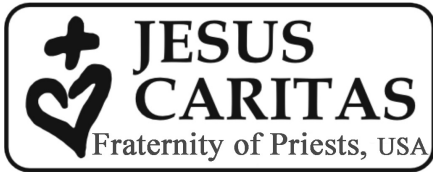
It is a very "eucharistic" prayer. It is Jesus' act of self-offering "with all the love of my heart". And it is a very active self-giving of the one who said, "No one takes my life, it is I who give it." It is eucharistic in that it is a prayer of thanksgiving. "I thank you for all, I am ready for all, I accept all." In the original text this thanksgiving is repeated three times and is linked not only with the desire to be one who does the Will of God but as one who receives the Will of God into his life and prays for its fulfillment in all of creation. Jesus', and Charles', one desire is to do the Will of God, to be obedient.

The Prayer of Abandon is the prayer of the Cross. Jesus is no longer praying for the cup to pass nor even for the strength to drink this cup. That was yesterday and so many things have happened in between. Jesus is dying now and there is no escape.

The only choice that is left at this hour is that of how Jesus will live his death. What will be his attitude? He can revolt in the face of the injustice of it, for it is unjust. He can be embittered by the jeers and mocking. He can turn to hardened resignation. But Jesus chooses to live this moment with a love that is really hard for us to grasp or imagine.

This prayer is a declaration of a love that defies the power of death. It proclaims a love capable of trust, a trust in the power of love even in the face of annihilation. Jesus believes that love will have the last word.

Charles shows us a Jesus who seems to be alone. It is no longer the moment of the "our Father". There is a tremendous intimacy in the way Jesus calls God "my Father". Jesus is facing the deepest solitude of which we are not only capable, but must all ultimately face. Jesus' great solidarity with us is precisely expressed in his aloneness at this moment. It is the threshold where we are each alone. Jesus is literally at the point of losing himself and he chooses to entrust himself into the arms of the Father. "For you are my Father". It is the



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abandon of love.

Charles de Foucauld made a conscience effort in his daily life to grow into the likeness of Jesus, his "beloved brother and Lord." Imitation of Jesus was a powerful theme throughout his life. He had to struggle with himself just as we do with ourselves. Charles does not refer explicitly to the Prayer of Abandon throughout his life. But from his other writings and what we know of his life it seems to have expressed his basic attitude towards God, one that saw him through the ups and downs and struggles and, ultimately, in the face of his own violent death.

It was a school of life as well as of death.

We will pray this prayer very differently according to our own experiences of love and trust. The brokenness of our world deeply affects our desire and our ability to trust. If the most fortunate among us can think of so many reasons to be cautious, what of those who have been deeply wounded? Who of us has not been betrayed at one time or another?

But, in the last analysis, is it not the deepest yearning our heart to let go and to abandon ourselves to love?

Charles introduced this meditation saying, "May it not only be the prayer of our last moment but that of all our moments."

May this prayer be a help for each of us along our way.

(I have drawn heavily, with his permission, on the work of Br. Antoine Chatelard of the Little Brothers in writing this article. His work has not been published in English.)