

Christian except as a member of the Body. Even in the solitude, “in the chamber,” a Christian prays as a member of the redeemed community, of the Church. And it is in the Church that he learns his devotional practice. Thus, the two manners of prayer are more than complementary; they are organically bound together, as two inseparable aspects of the same devotional act. Each without the other may be even dangerous and disruptive: “solitary” prayer may degenerate into individualistic pietism, ecstatic and selfish, and when those without any previous personal training attempt to join with others the result may happen to be, not a true community prayer, but rather a crowd prayer – not the true corporate prayer of a community of persons, but of an impersonal multitude – or else, a mere formality and exhibition. Even “in the chamber,” a Christian must not pray only for himself: he is never alone on his knees before the Father, and the Father is not only his Father, but the Father of *all* and *everyone*. We, as Christians, are taught to call on “our Father,” our common Father, Who is also “the Father of Our Lord, Jesus Christ,” Who died for all and has saved all men.

Personal prayer must be “catholic” – that is, comprehensive and universal. The

praying heart must be large enough to embrace the needs and sorrows of the whole suffering and redeemed humanity. In this spirit can individuals truly meet each other as “brethren,” and precisely as “brethren in Christ,” and “agree” concerning things which are proper to be asked for. On all levels, private and corporate, Christian worship must be a *common* worship, a worship within the community. And on all levels, private and corporate, personal engagement or commitments are indispensable. Prayer “in common” is still personal engagement. Joint prayer is still prayer of persons. The very act of “joining” is a personal act.

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<http://ChurchMotherOfGod.org>
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http://nynjoca.org/about_orthodoxy.html

Community of Prayer

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The basic antinomy of Christian existence is conspicuously reflected in the realm of worship. Christianity stands by personal faith and commitment, and yet Christian existence is essentially *corporate*: to be Christian means to be *in the community*, in the Church. *Unus Christianus – nullus Christianus*.

On the other hand, personality should never be simply submerged in any, even Christian, collective. The Body of Christ consists of responsible persons. The first followers of Jesus, in the “days of His flesh,” were not isolated individuals engaged in their private quest for truth. They were Israelites – regular members of an established and instituted community, of the “Chosen People” of God. They were “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” Indeed, a “Church” already existed when Jesus began His ministry. It was Israel, the People of the Covenant. The preaching of

Jesus was first addressed precisely to the members of this “Church,” to “the lost sheep of the House of Israel.” Jesus never addressed individuals as individuals. The existing Covenant was the constant background of His preaching. The Sermon on the Mount was addressed not to an occasional crowd of accidental listeners, but rather to an “inner circle” of those who were already following Jesus with anticipation that He was the “One Who should come.” It was the pattern of the Kingdom. “The Little Flock,” that community, which Jesus had gathered around Himself, was, in fact, the faithful “Remnant” of Israel, a reconstituted People of God. It was reconstituted by the call of God, by the “Good News” of salvation.

But to this call each person had to respond individually, by an act of personal faith. This personal commitment of faith, however, incorporated the believer into the community. And this remained

forever the pattern of Christian existence: one should believe and confess, and then he is baptized into the Body. The “faith of the Church” must be personally appropriated. Moreover, only through this baptismal incorporation is the personal act of faith completed and fulfilled. Those baptized are born again. Accordingly, Christian worship is intrinsically a personal act and engagement, and yet it finds its fullness only within the community, in the context of common and corporate life. Personal devotion and community worship belong intimately together, and each of them is genuine and authentic, and truly Christian, only through the other.

There are, in the Gospel, two passages concerning prayer, and they seem to guide us in opposite directions. On the one hand, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ was teaching the multitudes to pray “**in secret.**” It had to be a solitary prayer – “**when thou hast shut thy door**”

– man alone with his Heavenly Father. Yet, on the other hand, on another occasion, Christ was stressing the strength of a joint and corporate prayer: “**If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask.**”

Now, is there any contradiction or conflict between these two different praying attitudes? Or, rather, do they belong together and are possible only together? Paradoxically, they simply presuppose each other. Indeed, one has to learn to pray “in secret,” alone, bringing all his infirmities and adoration before *his* Father, in an intimate and personal intercourse. And only those who are trained in the practice of this “solitary” prayer can meet each other spiritually and join together in what they are going to ask corporately from their *common* Father in heaven. Common prayer presupposes and requires personal training. Yet personal prayer itself is possible only in the context of the community, since no person is