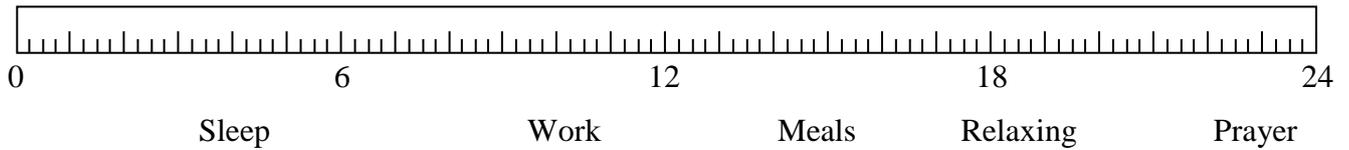


1/96th

November 1952 editorial



Look at this time-scale. It has 96 divisions: the 96 quarters of an hour that make up a day. Count from the left the number of hours that you reserve for sleeping and draw a vertical line. Then count the number of hours you spend working at home or at work and draw another vertical line. Then count the hours for meal-time, then the hours travelling, reading the paper, etc... Finally, starting from the right, count the time you spend praying... And compare!

You tell me that: "Nothing is more misleading than this kind of calculations. You relate to each other's realities that cannot be related. Prayer is not a matter of time, anymore than is love. It is not because I spend ten hours a day working and very little time talking to my wife and children that I don't love them, that I love them less than my work. Love is not a matter of time".

How often the love between husband and wife and between parents and children is in jeopardy precisely because one neglects to keep it alive and deepen it. Human love requires contacts, exchanges and heart-to-heart moments. It is vital.

The same applies to love of God. It declines in the soul of Christians who do not set time aside for meeting with their Lord, moments of exchanges, of intimacy, that is to say of prayer. It is no less vital.

Some might retort: "But how do you expect me to find time for prayer?" This leaves me wondering... Either they have not understood the vital role of prayer in supporting their religious life, or they suffer from a kind of alienation as in the case of a mother with a large family, suffering from serious anaemia, who says to her doctor: "How do you expect me to find time for eating with my eight children and all that this entails of bottle-feeding, nappy-washing, giving the little ones their bath, helping the older ones with their homework...?"

It is all a question of knowing whether eating is vital. It is all a question of knowing whether praying is vital.

After all, it is perhaps all the fault of us priests if Christians do not believe in the value of prayer. Do we warn them sufficiently that spiritual anaemia threatens them? When they come to confess sins of cowardice, pride, impurity... instead of urging them to try not to do it again, do we draw their attention to the cause: their state of minimal resistance that makes them terribly vulnerable? Do we recommend to them that which alone will allow them to acquire spiritual vitality and therefore to resist the threats from within and without: namely prayer?

Would not people say to me, rather, that the great remedy is the Eucharist? No doubt, but the Eucharist in a soul that does not pray, is like casting seeds in a field that has not been ploughed: it cannot bear fruits. After twenty years of priestly ministry, I think I can say with confidence that Christians who do not devote every day ten minutes to a quarter of an hour (the 1/96th part of their day) to this type of prayer that we call contemplative prayer or meditation, will always remain in spiritual infancy or, rather, will decline. They will experience some grave crises from which they will not emerge with glory, from which perhaps they will not emerge for a long time.

Rather than dwelling on the negative aspect of the question, I prefer to end by calling to mind so many men and women that I know well, who are no less laden than others with family cares, no less absorbed than others in their work at home or elsewhere and yet whose Christian life is deepening, blossoming, radiating, because contemplative prayer is their daily food. They have understood that it is vital. They live by it.

Henri Caffarel