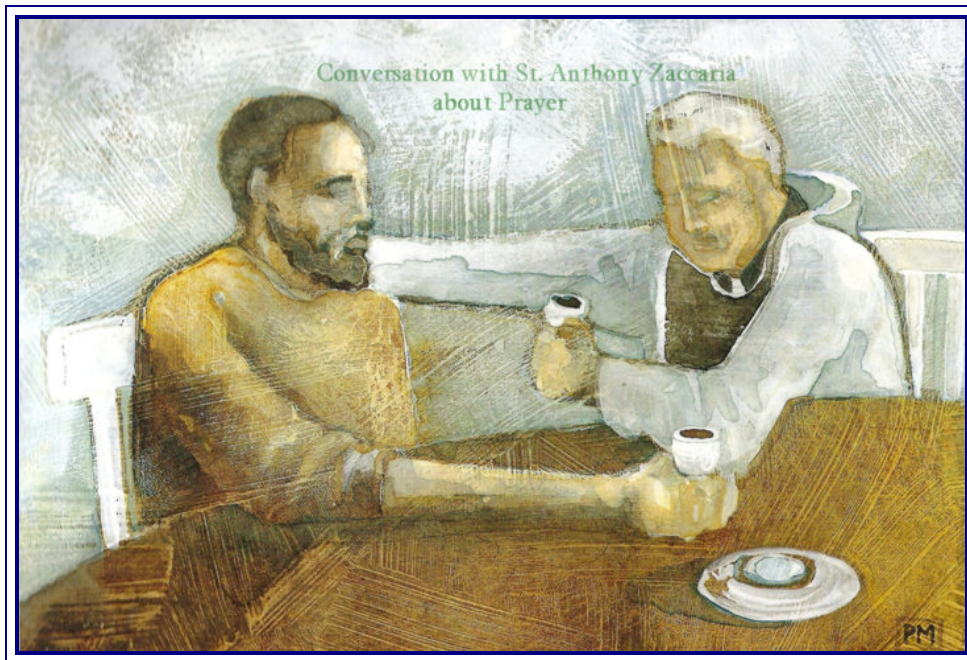


Conversation  
with  
St. Anthony Zaccaria  
about

***P R A Y E R***



## INTRODUCTION

This Conversation is based on the third letter of St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria addressed to the honorable Mr. Carlo Magni, a most upright attorney known to him. The letter was written in Milan, Italy on July 28, 1531.

Carlo Magni, the fortunate addressee of this letter of spiritual direction, was a highly respected attorney in Cremona, as this letter somehow indicates and other sources confirm.

Apparently, the successful attorney had become a lukewarm Christian. However, in the course of time he experienced a profound change of heart, as Anthony Mary seems to imply when he warns him, "if you act otherwise, you will be a decent person but not the Christian Christ wishes, and has called, you to be. This will be clear to you if you consider closely the way by which Christ has been trying to bind you to Himself." Whether or not he was a spiritual conquest of Anthony Mary, Carlo certainly became a member of the "Amicizia" (Friendship) Oratory established by Anthony Mary in Cremona. He was indeed one of its prominent members because Anthony Mary in this letter entrusts him with some tasks concerning activities of his "Amicizia" Oratory. Since 1527 Carlo was a member of Anthony

Mary's Third Family, the Laity of St. Paul.

This letter is an answer to Carlo Magni's request for guidance on how to live in union with God in the midst of a busy professional life. Like limpid water from a spring, the answer leaps out from the heart of a man of God who "was spirit through and through, and gifted with divine light for spiritual discernment." Anthony Mary teaches Carlo how to converse familiarly and incessantly with Jesus Crucified throughout the whole day. At the same time, he shows him how to utilize prayer as a source of self-knowledge for the elimination of his own shortcomings. To this purpose, Anthony Mary frankly names some of Carlo's moral flaws, and identifies pride as the principal one.

Two things stand out in this letter about Anthony Mary as spiritual director: the source and the style of his teaching. The source of his teaching is a lengthy prayerful time spent at the foot of Jesus Crucified, a practice common to other well-known spiritual masters, for instance, St. Thomas Aquinas. As for style, his teaching is characterized by an exceptionally warm personal concern for the spiritual welfare of his directees.

*Father Anthony, I came to seek your advice on some spiritual setbacks. I am certain that you will be able to enlighten me on this since I know that you are regarded by many as one who is wise in spiritual matters. I sincerely want to grow in perfect charity, in holiness, but I find it difficult to achieve. The demands of my work and my family obligations find me rush through the day, making it impossible for me to ever have time for my spiritual life, for prayer. Each passing day I lose little by little my relationship with the Lord. Now I've started to experience this indescribable feeling of emptiness, permeating in my soul a sense that God is no longer present in my life. Father, what should I do to feel God's closeness in my life again? How will I be able to pray despite my hectic schedule?*

My friend, it is my prayer that my words may be of great comfort to you, and may quiet down and console your anxious heart.

Indeed your professional activity is quite binding, taking much of your time and energy. It is necessary that you choose a fitting method of prayer. I suggest that you practice these three exercises.

*Father, I'm anxious to know. What are they?*

First, give yourself to prayer in the morning and at night, as well as at any other hour within a set schedule or not, at any time, that is, day or night; in any position, that is, in bed or out of it, kneeling or sitting or as you think best; and most of all before you start your professional work, usually without any set order, for a short or a long time, as God may grant it to you.

*I have to tell you Father Anthony I've prayed all my life, but my prayers were those which I learned from when I was a child. Now I realize that those prayers are not enough if I want to be holy.*

If you strive for holiness they are certainly not enough. With the Lord, you can be simple, without following any format of prayer. With Him, you may discuss freely everything that may be happening to you, your doubts and your difficulties, anything especially those you find the hardest. Present to Him your reasons, thoroughly but as briefly as possible. Then, only propose to Him the solution you think is the right one or, even better ask for His opinion; for He will not refuse it if you gently insist. I can assure you that He will let Himself be compelled to give it to you, if, again, you really want to

have it. Converse with Jesus Crucified as familiarly as you would with me; and discuss with Him all or just a few of your problems, according to the time at your disposal. Chat with Him and ask His advice on all your affairs, whatever they may be, whether spiritual or temporal, whether for yourself or for other people. If you practice this way of prayer, I can assure you that little by little you will derive from it both great spiritual profit and an ever-greater love relationship with Christ.

*If I understood it well, prayer is a dialogue with God. Father Anthony, do you say that praying in this way is worth more than taking explanations from books or from human wisdom for my uncertainties and doubts?*

I am indeed deeply convinced that we can learn more about human laws directly from the legislator than from anybody else, especially when that legislator is himself the rule and the pattern of all things, and knows how to explain and disentangle the deceptive reasoning of the devil. Indeed how much more thoroughly will he be able to unravel those of men? Needless to say, if one does not believe this truth, he believes still less that God takes such good care of us that He will not let a single hair of our heads be lost; and again, that He is so wise that He will show the wise of this world for what they are: fools

and know-nothings.

Well, then, if in favor of those who have recourse to Him God destroys all the crafty designs of modern men, who seem so intent in separating man from God, can you not imagine how He will disperse other less complicated plotting much more easily? And if, in a sense, one can unite himself to God, even in the midst of worldly distractions, how much more easily will he be able to unite himself to Him in circumstances more favorable to recollection?

*Now I see the value of learning from God about my concerns and life issues through prayer. Father, I do not mean to interrupt you, but you said there were three exercises to practice. You've already mentioned the first. What is the second?*

The second exercise, which will help you practice the first one and will obtain from God a greater abundance of grace, is the constant lifting up of the mind to God. You, my friend, cannot do without it; for the greater the danger and the more important the matter, a steadier application and sharper sight are required from you.

*Father Anthony, I have to say that I have difficulty concentrating during prayers. I often get distracted. What should I do to be able to keep my mind focused with God?*

By nature, man finds it difficult to be recollected and, much more so, to be united with God because his spirit is naturally driven in different directions and is unable to focus on one thing. This exercise of lifting up one's soul to God is, of course, more difficult for the person who has gotten into the bad habit of being dissipated. But the most difficult thing for anybody is to find oneself involved in activities that, by their very nature, (according to my judgment) are not conducive to union with God, and still not be distracted. Who would think it possible to stand in the rain and not get wet? This is true. But what seems to be impossible in itself becomes very easy with God's help if only we do not refuse Him our cooperation and that diligent practical commitment with which He has endowed us.

*How will I be able to unite myself with God even while at work?*

If you want to maintain your union with God and, at the same time, to go on working, talking, thinking, reading, and taking care of your affairs as usual, often lift up your mind to God for a long or a short period as, for example, someone would do while entertaining a friend. If he were unable to entertain him on account of pressing business as, for instance, keeping track of the goods which were to be shipped at that moment, he might tell him: "Will you

excuse me if I don't chat with you? I've this and that to do; but if you don't mind waiting, as soon as I'm finished, we'll talk at leisure." Then, interrupting his writing for a moment, he will occasionally turn his eyes and look at him; sometimes he will utter a word or two about what he is doing; at another time, while still writing, he will say: "In a short while, I'm almost finished." In these and similar ways, he will entertain his friend, though unable to talk at leisure with him. At the same time, he will not be distracted from his job by these gestures nor hindered in his work by such forms of entertainment.

You, too, my friend, should act in this way, and your studies and works would suffer almost no disadvantage.

*Father, I consider myself a conscientious person, that is why I always want to please God by doing my obligations the best I can. How else will I be able to unite myself with God even while I accomplish my duties?*

Before starting your activities, offer Jesus a few words of your choosing; then during your work often lift up your mind to God. You will benefit much and there will be no detriment to your job.

First and foremost, watch how anything concerning yourself or others is begun, whether foreseeable or not, whether at work or at play.

Direct it first to God with any short prayer with which He may inspire you, mentally or also in words that express your thoughts and wishes or in some other manner; then, while working, thinking, or planning, frequently lift up your mind to God. Should your activity continue, break it up, perhaps, for the time it takes to say a "Hail Mary," or as it may seem convenient to you, always, of course, following God's inspiration. Depending on the length of your activity, you can interrupt your work more than once.

If you follow this practice, you will get used to praying easily and without detriment to your work or to your health; you will be praying incessantly, even while drinking, eating, acting, talking, studying, writing, etc.; and the external actions will not hinder the interior ones and vice versa.

*It's now clear to me that there's really nothing that can hinder me from praying to God. I only have to dispose myself to Him at all times and in any circumstances.*

Indeed if you act otherwise, you will be a decent person but not the Christian Christ wishes, and has called, you to be. This will be clear to you if you consider closely the way by which Christ has been trying to bind you to Himself. I warn you and offer you the means to become such a Christian, if you really want to be

one, so that you may not change your mind. If this were to happen, it would cause me very great pain indeed.

My friend, if my words have any value in your eyes, I invite you, I entreat you, and I compel you in Christ and for Christ to open your eyes and consider well what I have said to you and try to practice it by deeds, not just by words. I can assure you that you will become a new person, such as you should be in view of the charge that God has placed and will continue to place on your shoulders in different ways. But, if you act otherwise, you will not fulfill your obligation toward God and your neighbor, and, far from being justified, you will be condemned as a transgressor.

Try hard, then, to understand what I have just said, and apply yourself to practicing it.

*Father, didn't you mention three exercises?*

Yes. Above all else, while observing the first exercise, keep the third one which I am about to tell you; otherwise all your works will be of little value and honor before Christ.

Now, here is the third exercise. In your meditation, prayers, and thoughts, strive to pinpoint your principal defects, most of all, the chief one, the Captain-General, as it were, which dominates all the others.

While concentrating on trying to kill that one, make every effort also to kill the other defects which may come under your attack, thus imitating the soldier who wants to kill the Commander-in-chief of the enemy who is in the middle of his army. Striving to reach him, the soldier keeps his eyes fixed on him as the target, but at the same time he fights his way toward him by killing the other enemies he may encounter. Do likewise with your defects.

*Father Anthony, I am so grateful for what you've just taught me. They are certainly wonderful insights on how I should pray. I will surely treasure them.*

If you truly treasure the counsels that I have just given you, you will fall in love with Jesus Crucified quite easily. Any other way will keep you away from Him, a sad thing that I hate to see in you, for I love you and feel impelled to love you and see you forever in Christ Crucified. †

*Dear Readers,  
If you find this pamphlet helpful – PLEASE help us  
to spread the news so that we may reach others.*

**THANK YOU**

**Clerics Regular of Saint Paul  
BARNABITES**



**Barnabite Spiritual Center  
4301 Hecktown Road  
Bethlehem, PA 18020 • USA**

 [BarnabiteSpiritualCenter@gmail.com](mailto:BarnabiteSpiritualCenter@gmail.com)

 [www.catholic-church.org/barnabites](http://www.catholic-church.org/barnabites)