

15. The Prayer of a Priest on a Sunday night.

(Fr Michel Quoist, Prayers of Life). Circa 1960.

Tonight, Lord, I am alone.
Little by little the sounds died down in the church.
The people went away,
And I came home,
Alone.

I passed people who were returning from a walk.
I went by the cinema that was disgorging its crowd.
I skirted café terraces where tired strollers were trying
to prolong the pleasure of a Sunday holiday.
I bumped into youngsters playing on the footpath,
Youngsters, Lord,
Other people's youngsters who will never be my own.

Here I am, Lord,
Alone.
The silence troubles me,
The solitude oppresses me.
Lord, I'm 35 years old,
A body made like others,
ready for work,
A heart meant for love,
But I've given you all.
It's true of course, that you needed it.
I've given you all, but it is hard, Lord.
It's hard to give one's body; it would like to give itself to others.
It's hard to love everyone and to claim no one.
It's hard to shake a hand and not want to keep it.
It's hard to inspire affection, only to give it to you.
It's hard to be nothing to oneself in order to be everything to others.
It's hard to be like others, among others, and be an other to them.
It's hard always to give without trying to receive.
It's hard to seek out others and to be oneself unsought.
It's hard to be told secrets, and never be able to share them.
It's hard to carry others and never, even for a moment, be carried.
It's hard to sustain the feeble and never be able to lean on one who is strong.
It's hard to be alone,
Alone before everyone,
Alone before the world,
Alone before suffering,
death,
sin.

Son, you are not alone,
I am with you.
I am you.
For I needed another human vehicle to continue my Incarnation
and my Redemption.
Out of all eternity, I chose you.
I need you.

I need your hands to continue to bless,
I need your lips to continue to speak,
I need your body to continue to suffer,
I need your heart to continue to love,
I need you to continue to save,
Stay with me.

Here I am Lord,
Here is my body,
my heart,
my soul,
Grant that I may be big enough to reach the world,
Strong enough to carry it.
Pure enough to embrace it without wanting to keep it.

Grant that I may be a meeting-place, but a temporary one,
A road that does not end in itself, because everything to be gathered there,
everything human, must be led to you.

Lord, tonight, while all is still and I feel sharply the sting of solitude,
While people devour my soul and I feel incapable of satisfying their hunger,
While the world presses on my shoulders with all its weight
of misery and sin,
I repeat to you my "yes"—not in a burst of laughter, but slowly,
clearly, humbly,
Alone, Lord,
before you,
In the peace of the evening.