**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MATTHEW-029. SOLITARY PRAYER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret."*

*Matthew 6:6*

An old heathen who had come to a certain extent under the influence of Christ, called prayer the flight of the solitary to the Solitary. There is a deep truth in that, though not all the truth.

Prayer is not only the most intensely individual act that a man can perform, but it is also the highest social act. Christ came not to carry solitary souls by a solitary pathway to heaven, but to set the solitary in families and to rear up a church. Of that church the highest function is united worship.

No one is likely to fall into the mistake of supposing that this passage before us condemns praying in the synagogues, or even, if need were, at the street corners. It does not, of course, interdict social public prayer, though it enjoins solitary secret communion with the solitary, secret God.

**I. What is the practice here enjoined?**

Since that they may be seen of men constitutes the evil, we may fairly say that Christ is not here prescribing the place where, but the spirit in which, we ought to pray; that what He condemns is not the fact of praying where we can be seen, but of picking out the place in order that we may be seen; that, in a word, the contrast here is between ostentation and sincerity. A man that has sidelong looks at the passers-by in his devotions has not much devotion.

But then, as a material help to this, we need solitude and secrecy; they are not indispensable, but almost so. And in that solitude what is to be our occupation? One word answers the question--Communion. We are to be alone that we may more fully and thrillingly feel that we are with God. That communion will have an intellectual element in which we try to rise to perception of the high truths as to God, or in meditation gaze on Him, and a petitionary element in which we ask for the communication of His grace according to our needs.

**II. What is the special worth of such a habit?**

**(a)** The truths that we profess to believe are in their nature such as can only be vividly realised by such an exercise. They are all matters of faith, not of sense. God is a spirit, and is felt near by none but still and waiting spirits. Our religion has to do with the Unseen, the Solemn, the Profound, the Remote. These are not to be fully felt hastily. They are like mountains that grow on us as we gaze, like a fair scene that we must be alone in, rightly to feel. They must be allowed to saturate the soul. The eye must be slowly accustomed to the light.

**(b)** The pressure of the world can only be resisted by such an exercise.

Our business as Christians is to keep ourselves free from it.

**(c)** The tone and balance of our own minds can only be preserved and restored thus. Solitude is the mother-country of the strong. I was left alone, and I saw this great vision. We get hot and fevered, interested and absorbed, and we need solitude as a counterpoise.

**(d)** What is the connection of this with other kinds of worship and with our life's work? It has a function of its own.

These cannot be substituted for it--public worship, reading Christian books, bring a different class of feelings altogether into play.

They are not to be excluded by it. They find their true foundation in it. A tree's branches stretch to the same circumference as its roots.

**(e)** What is the special need of this precept for this age?

It is neglected in our modern life. The evils of our modern Christianity, the low tone of religion, the small grasp of Christian truth, the irreligious cast of religious work.

The thought of being alone with God will be a joy--or a terror.