

WITH ARMS STRETCHED OUT

May 1960 Editorial

*To those who understand the importance of prayer - to encourage them
To those who doubt it - to attempt to convince them*

I have just read again a page from the book *"The Face of my Brother"* by the Hindu writer D. G. Mukerji. This page strongly highlights the importance of prayer. Here is the essence of what it says:

Towards the end of his life, a holy man retired to a cave in the mountain in order to find God better. The neighbouring peasants never failed to bring him fruits and bread and, sometimes, they went up to see him. Young people protested at this generosity to a useless man. But the elderly people would silence these young rationalists: *"One must send offerings to a holy man, whether or not he is living for the good of someone else. Is not holiness the gem of existence?"*

Twenty years later, he was found lying dead at the entrance to his cave.

Six weeks later, a horrible crime was committed in the village. The people were overwhelmed with disgust and fear. The older ones went off to fast and pray. Suddenly, one of them cried out: *I have found the secret!*" and, in front of the assembled villagers, he explained: *"It is true that, throughout the time he lived in his cave, the holy man never lifted a finger to help us, nor went to the help of a down-and-out, nor nursed a sick man.. But virtue engendered virtue; life produced a better life. Everything went well with us. No one took a brother's life, as long as the saint was alive. Is it not a clear pointer? He never worked for us, but his lion-like presence kept away the wolf of misfortune from our doors"*.

This story makes one irresistibly think of a striking passage in the Bible, in Chapter 17 of Exodus: *"The Amalekites came and attacked Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Pick out men for yourself and, tomorrow morning, march out to engage Amalek. I, meanwhile, will stand on the hilltop, the staff of God in my hand'. Joshua did as Moses told him and marched out to engage Amalek, while Moses and Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. As long as Moses kept his arms raised (in prayer), Israel had the advantage; when he let his arms fall, the advantage went to Amalek. But Moses' arms grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him and on this he sat, Aaron and Hur supporting his arms, one on one side, one on the other; and his arms remained firm till sunset. With the edge of the sword, Joshua cut down Amalek and his people"*.

The soldiers of Amalek do not understand what force is resisting their impetuous attack. The army of the Hebrews, poorly trained and few in numbers, does not explain this resistance... They do not suspect that this man, barely visible up there at the top of the hill, even less armed than his troops, is the cause of their defeat. Because he is praying, God is present in him; and God's Almighty Power, emanating from him, gives new heart to his men and protects them like some invisible and impregnable rampart.

The two stories we have just read, only acquire their full meaning in the light of a certain passage in the Gospel. On another hill, a man stretches his arms also. Two nails support them. From Him, divine Power radiates over the world. Nothing in time or space is beyond its reach. It strengthens all who open themselves and surrender themselves to it, sustains them in their struggles, acts powerfully in them and through them and keeps the demons and their accomplices at bay.

If the prayers of Moses and of the holy man in India were themselves efficacious, it was because, from Calvary, a Power came to them upon which they called without knowing it. If the prayer of Christians is powerful, it is because it is 'plugged into' the inexhaustible source of divine Energy that is the Heart of the Crucified praying His great Filial prayer.

