

## Prayer for the Month • February 2016

Lord, I am in this world to show your mercy to others.  
Other people will glorify you  
by making visible the power of your grace  
by their fidelity and constancy to you.  
For my part I will glorify you  
by making known how good you are to sinners,  
that your mercy is boundless  
and that no sinner no matter how great his offences  
should have reason to despair of pardon.  
If I have grievously offended you, my Redeemer,  
let me not offend you even more  
by thinking that you are not kind enough to pardon me.



St. Claude de la Colombière

The author has really taken to heart the extent of God's mercy and forgiveness. He recognises that he can never be beyond redemption. There is a false modesty that weakens us, and prevents us from living fully in the mercy and forgiveness of God. If God wants to forgive, who I am to stand in his way, is the summary of this. The prayer goes on to say that he will live out this understanding in practice by telling others not to despair of God's forgiveness.

Claude de la Colombière was born on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1641, the third child of the notary Bertrand La Colombière and Margaret Coindat, at St. Symphorien d'Ozon south of Lyons, south-eastern France. The family soon moved to Vienne, and Claude began his early education there, and then went on to study rhetoric and philosophy in Lyon. At the age of 17 he entered the Jesuit Novitiate at Avignon. In 1666 he went to the College of Clermont in Paris to study theology.

Before ordination he spent several years teaching. Among his students were the sons of King Louis XIV's Minister of Finance, Jean Baptiste Colbert. When he returned to his studies and formation, he was troubled with spiritual temptations and problems — what he called his 'unruly emotions' and discouragement. He realized that everyone has the choice of trying on one's own to be as self-sufficient as possible, or turning to God in great trust and confidence. Claude chose the latter course: he not only trusted in God but cultivated under the inspiration of the Spirit absolute confidence in God. In fact, it became an outstanding virtue in his spirituality!

Returning to Lyon, he became noted for his solid and serious sermons, some of which have been published, and can still be read with benefit today. In 1674, during the customary month for undertaking the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, he took a vow to observe all the constitutions and rules of the Society of Jesus. In 1675 he was appointed Rector of the Jesuit College at Paray-le-Monial. It was here that he encountered Margaret Mary Alacoque, who was receiving extraordinary visions of the unfathomable riches of God's love. He assured her that he accepted their authenticity, and urged her to put in writing everything she experienced. He became convinced that

God wanted him to spread the devotion to his Sacred Heart as a symbol of God's love.

In 1676 he left for London, having been appointed preacher to Margaret of Modena, Duchess of York, (later Queen of England), and took up residence at St James' Palace. He continued to guide Margaret-Mary by letter. Suddenly, at the end of 1678, he was accused and arrested in connection with the Titus Oates 'papist plot', about an alleged plot by Jesuits to kill Charles II. Already suffering from ill health, due to overwork, he was remanded in custody in the severe King's Bench Prison for three weeks, where his health suffered further. He was expelled from England by royal decree. He returned to France, where he continued to suffer from ill health. He died at Paray on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1682. His principal works, including 'Pious Reflections', 'Meditations on the Passion', 'Retreat and Spiritual Letters', were published under the title, 'Oeuvres du R. P. Claude de la Colombière' (Avignon, 1832; Paris, 1864). He was beatified by Pope Pius XI on 16 June 1929, and canonized by Pope John Paul II on 31 May 1992. His feast day is 15 February.

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