

"Prayer is the most intimate mystery of our being"

In his 13 May General Audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer. He also highlighted the feast of Our Lady of Fatima and said he would offer a special Mass on 18 May for the 100th anniversary of Saint John Paul II's birth.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we take the second step on the course of the catechesis on prayer begun last week.

Prayer belongs to everyone: to men and women of every religion, and probably even to those who do not profess any religion. Prayer is born within the secrecy of our being, in that inner place that spiritual writers often call the “heart” (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2562-2563). To pray, therefore, is not something marginal in us; it is not some second place or insignificant faculty. It is, rather, the most intimate mystery of our being. Our emotions pray, but it cannot be said that prayer is solely about feelings. The intellect prays, but it is not solely an intellectual act. The body prays, but we can speak with God even in the most serious disability. It is, therefore, every part

of the human person who prays, if his or her “heart” prays.

Prayer is an impetus, an invocation that goes beyond ourselves: it is born within the intimacy of our being and reaches beyond because it senses a nostalgia for an encounter. That nostalgia is more than a need, more than a necessity: it is a way. Prayer is the voice of an “I” that gropes, that tentatively fumbles, in search of a “You.” The encounter between the “I” and the “You” cannot be done with calculators; it is a human encounter and very often one proceeds tentatively to find the “You” that my “I” is looking for.

The prayer of a Christian is born, instead, from a revelation: the “You” has not remained shrouded in mystery, but has entered into relationship with us. Christianity is the religion that continually celebrates the “manifestation” of

God, that is, His epiphany. The first liturgical feasts of the year are the celebrations of this God who does not remain hidden, but who offers His friendship to men and women. God reveals His glory in the poverty of Bethlehem, in the contemplation of the Magi, in the baptism in the Jordan, in the wonder of the wedding at Cana. In John's Gospel the great hymn, the Prologue, concludes with a synthetic affirmation: "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed Him" (1:18). It was Jesus Who showed us God.

The prayer of the Christian enters into relation with the God whose face is most tender, who does not want to instill any fear in men and women. This is the first characteristic of Christian prayer. If men and women had always been accustomed to approach God somewhat timidly, a bit frightened by the awe-inspiring

and tremendous mystery, if they had been accustomed to venerate Him with a servile attitude, similar to that of a subject who does not want to be lacking in respect to his lord, the Christian turns to Him daring to confidently call on Him with the name of “Father.” Rather, Jesus uses another word: “Papa.”

Christianity has banished from the connection with God any type of “feudal” relationship. In the patrimony of our faith, expressions such as “subjection,” “slavery,” or “vassalage” are not present; but words such as “covenant,” “friendship,” “communion” and “proximity” are. During the long farewell discourse to the disciples, Jesus says: “I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you

who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give you” (*Jn 15:15-16*). This is a blank cheque. “Whatever you ask the Father in my name, I grant you”!

God is the friend, the ally, the bridegroom. We can establish a relationship built on confidence with Him in prayer. This is so true that in the “Our Father,” Jesus teaches us to present a series of requests to Him. We can ask God for anything, everything; explain everything, tell Him everything. It does not matter if we feel lacking in our relationship with God: that we are not great friends, that we are not grateful children, that we are not faithful spouses. He continues loving us. This is what Jesus demonstrates definitively at the Last Supper, when He says: “This cup is the new

covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you” (*Lk 22:20*). In that gesture in the Upper Room, Jesus anticipates the mystery of the Cross. God is the faithful ally: if men and women cease to love, He, instead, continues to love, even if love leads Him to Calvary. God is always close to the door of our heart, and waits for us to open it to Him. And at times He knocks on the door of our heart but He is not intrusive: He waits. God’s patience with us is the patience of a father, of one who loves us greatly. I would say, it is the patience of a father and a mother together. Always close to our heart, and when He knocks, He does so with tenderness and with great love.

Let us all try to pray thus, entering into the mystery of the Covenant. Let us place ourselves in prayer between the merciful arms of God to feel embraced by that mystery of happiness which is the Trinitarian

life, to feel as those who are invited but have not merited such an honour. And let us repeat to God, in the awe of prayer: is it possible that You know love alone? He does not know hatred. He is hated, but He does not know hatred. He knows only love. This is the God to whom we pray. This is the glowing core of every Christian prayer. The God of love, our Father who awaits us and accompanies us.

Greeting in English

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. In this Easter season, I invoke upon you and your families the joy and strength that come from the Risen Christ. May God bless you!

Greeting in Arabic

I greet the Arabic-speaking faithful who are following this encounter through the social communications

media. Prayer is the way to communicate and to listen to God. With this spirit I have accepted the invitation of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity to dedicate tomorrow, 14 May, to prayer, fasting and works of charity. I invite and encourage all of you to join in this event. Let us unite as brothers and sisters to ask the Lord to save humanity from the pandemic, to enlighten scientists and to heal the sick. May the Lord bless you all and protect you always from every evil!

Greeting in Polish

I warmly greet all Polish people present. Today we celebrate the liturgical memorial of Our Lady of Fatima. Let us recall her apparitions and the message she conveyed to the world, as well as the attempt on the life of Saint John Paul II, who saw our Lady's hand in the saving of his life. In our prayer let us ask God,

through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for peace for the world, the end of the pandemic, the spirit of penance, and our conversion. Next Monday will be the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Saint John Paul II. I will celebrate Mass at 7am, before the altar of the tomb, and it will be transmitted by satellite to all. I thank God for giving us this bishop of Rome, this Holy Bishop, and I ask him to help us: may He help this Church of Rome to convert and to go forward. I bless you all from my heart.

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