

Year of Prayer Pope Francis' Catechesis on Prayer

Second Sunday of Easter - Divine Mercy Sunday – 7th April 2024

Today's catechesis comes from a talk of Pope Francis in the midst of the Covid pandemic, from Wednesday, 4 November 2020. It is about Jesus as teacher of prayer. In this season we see the risen Jesus with his friends before his Ascension. It is a good season to consider how, "Jesus' prayer is the place where we perceive that everything comes from God and returns to him." Which is one of the topics Pope Francis teaches on in this talk. Jesus, Teacher of prayer Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning! Unfortunately, we have had to return to holding this audience in the library, to protect ourselves against contagion by Covid. This also teaches us that we must be very attentive to the prescriptions of the authorities, both the political authorities and health authorities, in order to protect ourselves against this pandemic. Let us offer to the Lord this distance between us, for the good of all, and let us think, let us think a lot about the sick, about those who are already marginalized when they enter the hospitals; let us think about the doctors, the nurses, the volunteers, the many people who work with the sick at this time: they risk their life but they do so out of love for their neighbour, as a vocation. Let us pray for them. During his public life, Jesus constantly availed himself of the power of prayer. The Gospels show this to us when he retired to secluded places to pray. These are sober and discreet observations that allow us only to imagine those prayerful dialogues. They clearly demonstrate, however, that even at times of greater dedication to the poor and the sick, Jesus never neglected his intimate dialogue with the Father. The more he was immersed in the needs of the people, the more he felt the need to repose in the Trinitarian Communion, to return to the Father and the Spirit. In Jesus' life there is therefore a secret, hidden from human eyes, which is the fulcrum of everything. Jesus' prayer is a mysterious reality, of which we grasp only something, but which allows us to interpret his entire mission from the right perspective. In those solitary hours — before dawn or at night — Jesus immerses himself in his intimacy with the Father, that is, in the Love that every soul thirsts for. This is what emerges from the very first days of his public ministry. One Sabbath, for example, the town of Capernaum was transformed into a "field hospital": after sunset they brought all the sick to Jesus, and he healed them. Before dawn, however, Jesus disappeared: he withdrew to a solitary place and prayed. Simon and the others looked for him and when they found him they said: "Everyone is searching for you!" How does Jesus reply? "Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out" (cf. Mk 1:35-38). Jesus always goes a bit further, further in prayer with the Father, and beyond, to other villages, other horizons, to go and preach, other peoples. Prayer is the rudder that guides Jesus' course. The stages of his mission were not dictated by success, nor by consensus, or the seductive phrase "everyone is searching for you". Jesus' path was charted by the least comfortable one, which obeyed the Father's inspiration, which Jesus heard and welcomed in his solitary prayer. The Catechism states that "when Jesus prays he is already teaching us how to pray" (no. 2607). Therefore, from Jesus' example we can derive some characteristics of Christian prayer. First and foremost, it possesses primacy: it is the first desire of the day, something that is practised at dawn, before the world awakens. It restores a soul to what otherwise would be without breath. A day lived without prayer risks being transformed into a bothersome or tedious experience: everything that happens to us could turn into a badly endured and blind fate for us. Jesus instead teaches an obedience to reality and,

therefore, to listening. Prayer is primarily listening and encountering God. The problems of everyday life, then, do not become obstacles, but appeals from God himself to listen to and encounter those who are in front of us. The trials of life thus change into opportunities to grow in faith and charity. The daily journey, including hardships, acquires the perspective of a “vocation”. Prayer has the power to transform into good what in life would otherwise be a sentence; prayer has the power to open the mind to a great horizon and to broaden the heart. Secondly, prayer is an art to be practised insistently. Jesus himself says to us: knock, knock, knock. We are all capable of sporadic prayers, which arise from a momentary emotion; but Jesus educates us in another type of prayer: the one that knows a discipline, an exercise, and is assumed within a rule of life. Consistent prayer produces progressive transformation, makes us strong in times of tribulation, gives us the grace to be supported by the One who loves us and always protects us. Another characteristic of Jesus’ prayer is solitude. Those who pray do not escape from the world, but prefer deserted places. There, in silence, many voices can emerge that we hide in our innermost selves: the most repressed desires, the truths that we insist on suffocating, and so on. And, above all, in silence God speaks. Every person needs a space for him or herself, somewhere to cultivate their interior life, where actions find meaning again. Without an interior life we become superficial, agitated, and anxious — how anxiety harms us! This is why we must turn to prayer; without an interior life we flee from reality, and we also flee from ourselves, we are men and women always on the run. Lastly, Jesus’ prayer is the place where we perceive that everything comes from God and returns to him. Sometimes we human beings believe that we are the masters of everything, or on the contrary, we lose all self-esteem, we go from one side to the other. Prayer helps us to find the right dimension in our relationship with God, our Father, and with all creation. And Jesus’ prayer, in the end, means delivering oneself into the hands of the Father, like Jesus in the olive grove, in that anguish: “Father, if it is possible ... but may your will be done”. Delivering oneself into the hands of the Father. It is beautiful, when we are agitated, a bit worried, and the Holy Spirit transforms us from within and leads us to this surrendering into the hands of the Father: “Father, let your will be done”. Dear brothers and sisters, let us rediscover Jesus Christ as a teacher of prayer in the Gospel and place ourselves in his school. I assure you that we will find joy and peace. Summary of the Holy Father's words: Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing catechesis on prayer, we now consider how Jesus himself prayed, for this reveals key aspects of how we also are to pray. Even when immersed in caring for the people, Christ never neglected his dialogue with the Father, which guided all that he did and taught. In solitary prayer he nurtured a loving intimacy with his Father, an intimacy for which we too yearn. From our Lord’s example, we see that prayer first means listening, and encountering God: the primary desire of each day. Second, we need to pray with perseverance, so that it can become a rule of life, gradually transforming us and, by God’s grace, strengthening and sustaining us in times of tribulation. Third, solitude and silence are essential for prayer, not in order to escape from the world but, on the contrary, to help us open ourselves more effectively to the needs of others. Finally, prayer reminds us that everything depends on God. This leads us to recover the proper sense of our relationship with him and with the whole of creation. Let us, then, learn from Jesus, the master of prayer – who alone can grant us true joy and peace.