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"Deliver us from evil"

Continuing his catechesis on the Lord's prayer, in his May 15 general audience Pope Francis spoke about the mystery of evil in the world.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Here we have finally arrived at the seventh question of the Lord's Prayer: "But deliver us from evil" (*Mt* 6: 13b).

With this expression, those who pray not only ask not to be abandoned at the time of temptation, but also beg to be freed from evil. The original Greek verb was very strong: it evokes the presence of the evil one who tends to grab us and bite us (cf. *1 Pt* 5: 8), and from which one asks God for liberation. The apostle Peter says also that the evil one, the devil, circles around us like a furious lion, to devour us, and we ask God to free us.

With this dual plea, “do not abandon us” and “free us”, an essential characteristic of Christian prayer emerges. Jesus teaches His friends to place the invocation of the Father before all, also and especially at moments in which the evil one makes his menacing presence felt. Indeed, Christian prayer does not close its eyes to life. It is a filial prayer, and not an infantile prayer. It is not so infatuated with the

paternity of God that it forgets that the path of man is mined with difficulties. If the final verses of the Lord's Prayer were not present, how could sinners, the persecuted, the desperate and the dying pray? The final plea is indeed our petition when we have reached the limit, always.

There is an evil in our life, which is an indisputable presence. The history books are a desolate catalogue of how our existence in this world has often been a failed adventure. There is a mysterious evil, that surely is not the work of God but which penetrates silently through the folds of history. Silent, like the snake that carries its venom silently. In some moments it seems to take the upper hand: in certain days its presence seems even clearer than that of God's mercy.

He who prays is not blind, and sees clearly before the eyes this evil that

is so cumbersome and so at odds with the very mystery of God. He sees it in nature, in history, even in his own heart. Because there is no one among us who can say he is without evil, or not at least tempted by it. We all know what evil is; we all know what temptation is; we have all experienced temptation, of any sin, in our own flesh. But it is the tempter who moves us and drives us to evil, saying to us: “do this, think this, take that road”.

The last cry of the Lord's Prayer is hurled against this “wide-ranging” evil that encompasses the most diverse experiences: the bereavement of man, innocent suffering, slavery, the exploitation of the other, the cry of innocent children. All these events protest in the heart of man and find a voice in the final word of Jesus' prayer.

It is precisely in the accounts of the Passion that some expressions of the Lord's Prayer find their most impressive echo. Jesus says, "Abba! Father! Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (*Mk* 14: 36). Jesus experiences fully the piercing of evil. Not only death, but death on the cross. Not only loneliness, but also contempt, humiliation. Not only malice, but also cruelty, ruthlessness against Him. This is what man is: a being devoted to life, who dreams of love and goodness, but who then continually exposes himself and his peers to evil, to the point that we are tempted to despair of man.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this way the Lord's Prayer resembles a symphony that asks to be fulfilled in each one of us. The Christian knows how overwhelming the power of evil is, and at the same time he

experiences how Jesus, Who never succumbed to its flattery, is on our side and comes to our aid.

In this way Jesus' prayer leaves us the most precious of legacies: the presence of the Son of God Who has freed us from evil, fighting to convert it. At the time of the final combat, He intimates to Peter to put the sword back in its sheath, He assures paradise to the repentant thief, and to all the men who were around, unaware of the tragedy taking place, He offers a word of peace: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (*Lk 23: 34*).

From Jesus' forgiveness on the cross, springs peace, the true peace comes from the cross. It is the gift of the Risen One, a gift Jesus gives us. Think that the Risen Jesus' first greeting is "peace be with you", peace to your souls, to your hearts, to your lives. The Lord gives us peace, He gives us

forgiveness but we must ask, “deliver us from evil”, so as not to fall into evil. This is our hope, the strength given to us by the Risen Jesus, Who is here, in our midst: He is here. He is here with that force that He gives us to go ahead, and He promises to deliver us from evil.

After his address, the Holy Father added the following remarks:

“The day before yesterday we celebrated the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Fatima. May 13 is the day that recalls her first apparition, which coincides with that of the attempt on the life of Saint John Paul II. Let us remember his affirmation: ‘In all that happened, I saw the special maternal protection of Mary’. Let us also remember the words of the Madonna: ‘I have come to warn

the faithful to amend their lives and ask for pardon for their sins. They must not offend Our Lord any more, for He is already too grievously offended by the sins of men. People must say the Rosary and repent of their sins'. Let us listen to this recommendation, asking Mary for her maternal protection, the gift of conversion, the spirit of penance and peace for all the world. Immaculate Heart of Mary, pray for us. I bless you from my heart”.

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