

"Prayer of petition arises from accepting our nature as creatures"

Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer in his 9 December general audience, speaking about the prayer of petition.

12/09/2020

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Let us continue our reflections on prayer. Christian prayer is fully human -- we pray as humans, as what we are -- it includes praise and supplication. Indeed, when Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He did so with the “Our Father”, so that we might place ourselves in a relationship of filial trust with God, and ask Him all *our questions*. We implore God for the highest gifts: the sanctification of His name among men, the advent of His lordship, the realisation of His will for good in relation to the world. The *Catechism* recalls that: “There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the Kingdom, then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming” (no. 2632). But in the “Our Father” we also pray for the simplest gifts, for the most of everyday gifts, such as “daily bread” -- which also means health, home, work, everyday things; and it also means for the Eucharist, necessary for life in Christ;

and we also pray for the forgiveness of sins -- which is a daily matter; we are always in need of forgiveness -- and therefore peace in our relationships; and finally, that He may help us face temptation and free us from evil.

To ask, to supplicate. This is very human. Let us listen to the *Catechism* again: “By prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end. We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to Him” (no. 2629).

If one feels bad because he has done bad things - he is a sinner - when he prays the “Our Father” he is already approaching the Lord. At times we can believe we do not need anything,

that we are enough for ourselves, and we live in total self-sufficiency. This happens at times! But sooner or later this illusion vanishes. The human being is an invocation, that at times becomes a cry, often withheld. The soul resembles a dry, parched land, as the Psalm says (see *Psalm 63:2*). We all experience, at some time or another in our existence, the time of melancholy, of solitude. The Bible is not ashamed of showing our human condition, marked by disease, injustice, the betrayals of friends, or the threat of enemies. At times it seems that everything collapses, that the life lived so far has been in vain. And in these situations, when it seems that everything is falling apart, there is only one way out: the cry, the prayer “Lord, help me!”. Prayer can open up a sliver of light in the densest darkness. “Lord, help me!”. This opens: it opens up the road, it opens up the path.

We human beings share this invocation of help with the rest of creation. We are not the only ones “praying” in this boundless universe: every fragment of creation bears the desire for God. And Saint Paul himself expressed it in this way. He says: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly” (*Rom 8:22-24*). This is good. There resounds in us the multiform cry of creatures: of trees, of rocks, of animals. Everything yearns for fulfilment. Tertullian wrote: “Every creature prays; cattle and wild beasts pray and bend their knees; and when they issue from the layers and lairs, they look up heavenward with no idle mouth, making their breath vibrate after their own manner. Nay, the birds too, rising out of the nest, upraise themselves heavenward, and instead

of hands, expand the cross of their wings, and somewhat to seem like prayer” (*De oratione*, XXIX). This is a poetic expression commenting on what Saint Paul says: “*the whole creation has been groaning*”. But we are the only ones to pray consciously, knowing that we are addressing the Father, and entering into dialogue with the Father.

Therefore, we should not be shocked if we feel the need to pray, we should not be ashamed. And, especially when we are in need, to ask. Jesus, speaking of a dishonest man, who had to settle the accounts with his landlord, says this: “Ask, I am ashamed”. And many of us have this feeling: we are ashamed to ask, to ask for help, too ask something of someone who can help us, to reach our purpose, and we are also ashamed to ask God. “No, this can’t be done”. Do not be ashamed to pray. “Lord, I need this”, “Lord, I am in

difficulty”, “Help me!”: the cry, the cry of the heart to God who is the Father. And also to do so in happy moments, not only in bad times, but also in happy ones, to thank God for everything that is given to us, and not to take anything for granted or as if it were owed to us: everything is grace. We must learn this. The Lord always gives to us, always, and everything is grace, everything. The grace of God. However, we must not suffocate the supplication that rises up in us spontaneously. Prayer of petition goes in step with acceptance of our limit and our nature as creatures. One may even not reach the point of belief in God, but it is difficult not to believe in prayer: it simply exists, it presents itself to us as a cry; and we all know this inner voice that may remain silent for a long time, but one day awakens and cries out.

And, brothers and sisters, we know that God will respond. There is no prayer in the Book of Psalms that raises a lament that remains unheard. God always answers: maybe today, tomorrow, but he always answers, in one way or another. He always answers. The Bible repeats it countless times: God listens to the cry of those who invoke Him. Even our reluctant questions, those that remain in the depths of our heart, that we are ashamed to express: the Father listens to them and wishes to give us the Holy Spirit, which inspires every prayer and transforms everything. Brothers and sisters, in prayer there is always a question of patience, always, of supporting the wait. Now we are in the time of Advent, a time that is typically of expectation; of expectation of Christmas. We are in waiting. This is clear to see. But all our life is also *in waiting*. And prayer is always in expectation, because we know that

the Lord will answer. Even death trembles when a Christian prays, because it knows that everyone who prays has an ally stronger than it has: the Risen Lord. Death has already been defeated in Christ, and the day will come when everything will be final, and it will no longer scorn our life and our happiness.

Let us learn to stay in waiting; in expectation of the Lord. The Lord comes to visit us, not only in these great feasts - Christmas, Easter - but rather the Lord visits us every day, in the intimacy of our heart if we are in waiting. And very often we do not realise that the Lord is nearby, that He knocks on our door, and we let Him pass on by. "I am afraid of God when He passes", Saint Augustine used to say. "I am afraid He will pass and I will not realise". And the Lord passes, the Lord comes, the Lord knocks. But if your ears are filled

with other noise, you will not hear the call of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, staying in waiting: this is prayer. Thank you.

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