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"We are at the center of Jesus' prayer"

In his 2 June general audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer, speaking about the unceasing prayer of Jesus.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Gospels show us how prayer was fundamental in the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. This already appears in the choice of who

would then become the Apostles. Luke places their election in a precise context of prayer, and he says: “In these days He went out to the mountain *to pray*; and all night He continued *in prayer to God*. And when it was day, He called His disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom He named apostles” (6:12-13). Jesus chooses the apostles after a night of prayer. It seems that there is no criterion in this choice other than prayer, the dialogue of Jesus with the Father. Judging from how those men were to behave, it would seem that the choice was not the best, as they all fled, they left Him alone before the Passion; but it is precisely this, especially the presence of Judas, the future betrayer, that demonstrates that those names were inscribed in God’s plan.

Prayer on behalf of His friends continually reappears in the life of

Jesus. The Apostles sometimes become a cause of concern for Him, but Jesus, as He received them from the Father, after prayer, thus He carries them in His heart, even in their errors, even when they fall. In all this we discover how Jesus was both teacher and friend, always willing to wait patiently for the conversion of the disciple. The highest point of this patient waiting is the “web” of love that Jesus weaves around Peter. At the Last Supper he says to him: “Simon, Simon, behold” -- the word we heard at the beginning of the audience -- “Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but *I have prayed* for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren”. (*Lk* 22:31-32). It is impressive to know that at that moment, during the time of weakness, Jesus’ love does not cease. “But father, if I am in mortal sin, does Jesus love me?” - “Yes” -

“And does Jesus continue to pray for me?” - “Yes” - “But if I have done the worst things, and more, committed so many sins ... does Jesus continue [to pray]?” - “Yes”. Jesus’ love, Jesus’ prayer for each one of us does not cease, it does not cease, but rather becomes more intense, and we are at the centre of his prayer! We must always keep this in mind: Jesus prays for me, He is praying now before the Father and makes Him see the wounds He carried with Him, to show the Father the price of our salvation, it is the love that He holds for us. But in this moment, each one of us, let us think: in this moment, is Jesus praying for me? Yes. This is a great certainty that we must have.

Jesus’ prayer returns punctually in a crucial moment on His journey, that of the verification of the faith of His disciples. Let us listen again to the evangelist Luke: “As [Jesus] was *praying* alone, the disciples were

with Him; and He asked them, 'Who do the people say that I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the old prophets has risen'. And He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered, on behalf of them all, 'The Christ of God'. But he charged and commanded them tell this to no one" (9:18-21). That is, the great turning points of Jesus' mission are always preceded by prayer, but not just in passing, by intense, prolonged prayer. There is always prayer in those moments. This test of faith seems to be a goal, but it is instead a renewed starting point for the disciples, because from then on, it is as if Jesus took on a new tone in His mission, speaking openly to them of His passion, death and resurrection.

With this prospect, that gives rise instinctively to repulsion, both in the disciples and in we who read the

Gospel, prayer is the only source of light and strength. It is necessary to pray more intensely, every time the road takes an uphill turn.

And indeed, after announcing to the disciples what awaits Him in Jerusalem, the episode of the Transfiguration takes place. Jesus “took with Him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain *to pray. And as He was praying*, the appearance of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with Him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His departure, which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (9:28-31), that is, the Passion. Therefore, this anticipated manifestation of the glory of Jesus took place in prayer, while the Son was immersed in communion with the Father and fully consented to His will of love, to His plan of salvation. And out of that

prayer came a clear word for the three disciples involved: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to Him” (*Lk* 9:35). From prayer comes the invitation to listen to Jesus, always from prayer.

From this quick journey through the Gospel, we learn that Jesus not only wants us to pray as He prays, but assures us that, even if our attempts at prayer are completely vain and ineffective, we can always count on His prayer. We must be aware of this: Jesus prays for me. Once, a good bishop told me that in a very bad moment in his life, a very, very, very great trial, in which all was in darkness, he looked up in the Basilica and saw this phrase written: “I, Peter, will pray for you”. And this gave him strength and consolation. And this happens every time that any each of us knows that Jesus is praying for him or for her. Jesus prays for us. In this moment, in this

very moment. Do this memory exercise, repeat this. When there is a difficulty, when you feel the orbital pull of distractions: Jesus is praying for me. But father, is this true? It is true! He said it Himself. Let us not forget that what sustains each of us in life is Jesus' prayer for every one of us, with our name and surname, before the Father, showing Him the wounds that are the price of our salvation.

Even if our prayers were only stuttering, if they were compromised by a wavering faith, we must never cease to trust in Him: I do not know how to pray but He prays for me. Supported by Jesus' prayer, our timid prayers rest on eagle wings and soar up to Heaven. Do not forget: Jesus is praying for me. Now? Now. In the moment of trial, in the moment of sin, even in that sin, Jesus is praying for me with so much love. Thank you.

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