

"Dialogue with the Father was the core of Jesus' existence"

On 16 June, Pope Francis closed his series of addresses on prayer by speaking about the central role of prayer in the life of Jesus.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

We have recalled several times in this series of catechesis that prayer is one of the most evident features of

the life of Jesus: Jesus prayed, and He prayed a lot. In the course of His mission, Jesus immersed Himself in it, because the dialogue with the Father was the incandescent core of all His existence.

The Gospels testify how Jesus' prayer became even more intense and dense at the hour of his passion and death. These culminating events of His life constitute the central core of Christian preaching: those last hours lived by Jesus in Jerusalem are the heart of the Gospel not only because the Evangelists reserve proportionally greater space to this narrative, but also because the event of His death and resurrection -- like a flash of lightning -- sheds light on the rest of Jesus' life. He was not a philanthropist who took care of human suffering and illness: He was and is much more. In Him there is not only goodness: there is something more, there is salvation,

and not an episodic salvation -- the type that might save me from an illness or a moment of despair -- but total salvation, messianic salvation, that gives hope in the definitive victory of life over death.

In the days of His last Passover, we therefore find Jesus fully immersed in prayer.

He prays dramatically in the garden of Gethsemane, as we heard, assailed by mortal anguish. And yet Jesus, precisely in that moment, addresses God as "*Abba*", father (cf. *Mk* 14:36). This word, in Aramaic, which was Jesus' language, expresses intimacy, it expresses trust. Just as He feels the darkness gather around Him, Jesus breaks through it with that little word: *Abba*, father.

Jesus also prays on the cross, obscurely shrouded in the silence of God. And yet once again the word "Father" emerges from His lips. It is

the most ardent prayer, because on the cross Jesus is the absolute intercessor: He prays for others, He prays for everyone, even for those who have condemned Him, even though no-one apart from a poor delinquent takes His side. Everyone was against Him or indifferent, only that criminal recognised the power. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Lk 23:34*). In the midst of the drama, in the excruciating pain of soul and body, Jesus prays with the words of the psalms; with the poor of the world, especially those forgotten by all, He pronounces the tragic words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (v. 2). He felt abandonment, and He prayed. The cross is the fulfilment of the gift of the Father, who offers love, that is, our salvation is fulfilled. And also, once, He calls Him “My God”, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”: that is, everything,

everything is prayer, in the three hours of the Cross.

Jesus therefore prays in the decisive hours of His passion and death. And with the resurrection, the Father will the prayer. The prayer of Jesus is intense, the prayer of Jesus is unique, and is also becomes the model for our prayer. Jesus prayed for everyone: He even prayed for me, for each one of you. Every one of you can say: “Jesus, on the cross, prayed for me”. He prayed. Jesus can say to every one of us: “I prayed for you at the Last Supper, and on the wood of the Cross”. Even in the most painful of our sufferings, we are never alone. The prayer of Jesus is with us. “And now, Father, here, we who are listening to this, does Jesus pray for us?” Yes, He continues to pray so that His word may help us keep going forward. But pray, and remember that He prays for us.

And this seems to me the most beautiful thing to remember. This is the final catechesis of this cycle on prayer: remember the grace that we do not only pray, but that, so to speak, we have been “prayed for”, we have already been received in Jesus’ dialogue with the Father, in communion with the Holy Spirit. Jesus prays for me: each one of us can take this to heart. We must not forget. Even in the worst moments. We are already welcomed into Jesus’ dialogue with the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit. We were willed by Christ Jesus, and even in the hour of His passion, death and resurrection, everything was offered for us. And so, with prayer and with life, there remains only to have courage and hope, and with this courage and hope, to feel the prayer of Jesus strongly and to keep on going: so that our life may be one of giving glory to God in the

knowledge that He prays for me to the Father, that Jesus prays for me.

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