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“Prayer is a cry arising from the hearts of those who trust in God”

In his 6 May General Audience, Pope Francis began a new series of catechetical addresses on the topic of prayer.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we begin a new cycle of catechesis on the theme of *prayer*.

Prayer is the breath of faith. It is faith's most proper expression. It is like *a cry* that comes forth from the heart of the believer and is entrusted to God.

Let us think of the story of Bartimeus, a figure from the Gospel (cf *Mk* 10:46-52 and parallels) and, I confess to you, the one who appeals to me most of all. He was blind and sat begging on the side of the road on the outskirts of his city, Jericho. He is not an anonymous character. He has a face, a name: Bartimeus, which means, "son of Timeus". One day he hears that Jesus would be passing that way. Indeed, Jericho was a crossroads for people. Pilgrims and merchants continually passed through. So, Bartimeus was on the lookout: he would have done everything possible to meet Jesus. Many people did the same: remember Zacchaeus, who climbed

the tree. Many people wanted to see Jesus, and he did too.

Thus, this man enters the Gospels like a voice screaming at the top of his lungs. He does not see. He does not know if Jesus is near or far, but he hears, he understands it because of the crowd that at a certain point grew larger and drew nearer... But he is all alone and no one bothers about him. So, what does Bartimeus do? He yells. He yells, and continues to yell. He uses the only weapon at his disposal: his voice. He begins to cry out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47). And so he continues, yelling.

His repeated cries are annoying, they seem rude, and many reproach him, tell him to be quiet: “Be polite, don’t do that!” But Bartimeus does not keep silent. Instead, he yells even louder: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (v. 47). That beautiful

stubbornness of those who seek grace and knock, knock on the door of the heart of God. He yells, he knocks. That expression – “Son of David” – is very important. It means “the Messiah”- he confesses the Messiah. It is a profession of faith that flows from the mouth of this man regarded with disdain by everyone.

And Jesus hears his cry. Bartimeus’ prayer touches His heart, God’s heart, and the gates of salvation are opened for him. Jesus has him called. He jumps to his feet and those who previously had told him to be quiet are now leading him to the Master. Jesus speaks to him, asks him to express what he desires – this is important – and then his outcry becomes a request: “That I might see again!” (v. 51).

Jesus tells him: “Go, *your faith has saved you*” (v. 52). He recognises in

this poor, helpless, despised man, the power of his faith in its entirety which attracts God's mercy and power. Faith is having two raised hands, a voice that cries out to implore the gift of salvation. The Catechism affirms that: "humility is the foundation of prayer" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2559). Prayer finds its origin in the earth, from the *humus* – from which the word "humble", "humility" derives. It comes from our precarious state, from our continual thirst for God (cf *ibid.*, 2560-2561).

Faith, we have seen in Bartimeus, is a cry; disbelief suffocates that cry. That attitude the people had, in silencing him: they were not people of faith, whereas he was. Suffocating that cry is a type of "*omertà*". Faith is a protest against a painful condition for which we do not understand the reason. To disbelieve is to limit oneself to endure a situation to

which we have adapted. Faith is the hope of being saved; disbelief is to become accustomed to the evil that oppresses us, and to continue in this way.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us begin this series of catechesis on Bartimeus's cry so that, perhaps in a figure such as this, everything is already written. Bartimeus is a persevering man. Surrounding him were people who were explaining to him that crying out was useless, that it would be a cry unanswered, that it was noisy and disturbing, nothing more, that he should please stop shouting. But he did not remain silent. And in the end he obtained what he desired.

There is a voice in the depths of mankind that prays which is stronger than any argument to the contrary. We all have this voice within. It is a voice that flows forth spontaneously

without anyone commanding it. It is a voice that questions the meaning of our journey here below, above all when we find ourselves in darkness: “Jesus, have mercy on me! Jesus, have mercy on me!” This is a beautiful prayer.

But, perhaps these words, are they not inscribed on all of creation? Everything prays and begs so that the mystery of mercy might find its ultimate fulfilment. It is not only Christians who pray. They share this cry of prayer with every single man and woman. But the horizon can still be broadened: Paul affirms that all of creation “groans and suffers the pains of childbirth” (*Rm* 8:22). It is artists who often interpret this silent cry of creation which weighs on every creature and is expressed above all in the heart of men and women, for “man is a beggar before God” (cf CCC, 2559). This is a

beautiful definition of man: “beggar before God”. Thank you.

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