

Persevering Prayer

Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer in his 11 November general audience. "Let us not forget that the Holy Spirit prays in us; it is He who leads us to pray, who leads us to Jesus."

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Dear Brothers and sisters, good morning!

We continue the catechesis on prayer. Someone said to me: "You talk too much about prayer. It is not

necessary". Yes, it is necessary. Because if we do not pray, we will not have the strength to go forward in life. Prayer is like the oxygen of life. Prayer draws down on us the Holy Spirit's presence who always leads us forward. For this reason, I speak a lot about prayer.

Jesus has given an example of continual prayer, practiced *perseveringly*. Constant dialogue with His Father, in silence and in recollection, was the fulcrum of His entire mission. The Gospels also report His exhortations to the disciples, so that they might pray insistently, without getting tired. The *Catechism* recalls three parables contained in the Gospel of Luke that underline this characteristic of Jesus's prayer (see *CCC*, 2613).

First of all, prayer must be *tenacious*: like the person in the parable who, having to welcome a guest who

arrived unexpectedly in the middle of the night, goes to knock on the door of a friend and asks him for some bread. The friend responds, “No!”, because he is already in bed – but he insists and insists until he constrains his friend to get up and give him some bread (see *Lk 11:5-8*). A tenacious request. But God is more patient with us, and the person who knocks with faith and perseverance on the door of His heart will not be disappointed. God always responds. Always. Our Father knows well what we need; insistence is necessary not to inform Him or to convince Him, but is necessary to nurture the desire and expectation in us.

The second parable is that of the widow who goes to the judge for his help in obtaining justice. This judge is corrupt, he is a man without scruples, but in the end, exasperated by the insistence of the widow, decides to please her (see *Lk 18:1-8*)...

He thought: “But, it is better to resolve this problem and get her off my back so she will not continue coming to me to complain”. This parable makes us understand that faith is not a momentary choice, but a courageous disposition to call on God, even to “argue” with Him, without resigning oneself to evil and injustice.

The third parable presents a pharisee and a publican who go to the Temple to pray. The first turns to God boasting of his merits; the other feels unworthy even to enter the sanctuary. While God does not listen to the prayer of the first, that is of those who are proud, He does grant the prayer of the humble (see *Lk 18:9-14*). There is no true prayer without a spirit of humility. It is specifically humility that leads us to ask in prayer.

The teaching of the Gospel is clear: we need to pray always, even when everything seems in vain, when God appears to be deaf and mute and it seems we are wasting time. Even if heaven is overshadowed, the Christian does not stop praying. A Christian's prayer keeps stride with his or her faith. There are many days of our life when faith seems to be an illusion, a sterile exertion. There are moments of darkness in our life, and in those moments, faith may seem to be an illusion. But the practice of prayer means accepting even this exertion. "Father, I pray and do not feel anything ... It feels like my heart is dry, that my heart is arid". But we must continue exerting ourselves in the tough moments, the moments in which we feel nothing. Many saints experienced the night of faith and God's silence – when we know and God does not respond – and these saints were persevering.

During those nights of faith, the one who prays is never alone. Jesus, in fact, is not only a witness and teacher of prayer; He is more. He welcomes us *in His prayer* so that we might pray in Him and through Him. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Gospel invites us to pray to the Father in Jesus's name. Saint John provides these words of the Lord: "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (14:13). And the *Catechism* explains that "the certitude that our petitions will be heard is founded on the prayer of Jesus" (n. 2614). It gives the wings that the human person's prayer has always desired to possess.

How can we fail to recall here the words of Psalm 91, laden with trust, springing from a heart that hopes for everything from God: "he will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his

faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday" (vv. 4-6). It is in Christ that this stupendous prayer is fulfilled, and in Him that it finds its complete truth. Without Jesus, our prayer risks being reduced to human effort, destined most of the time to failure. But He has taken on Himself every cry, every groan, every jubilation, every supplication...every human prayer. And let us not forget that the Holy Spirit prays in us; it is He who leads us to pray, who leads us to Jesus. He is the gift that the Father and the Son gave us to foster an encounter with God. And when we pray, it is the Holy Spirit who prays in our hearts.

Christ is everything for us, even in our prayer life. Saint Augustine said this with an enlightening expression

that we also find in the *Catechism*: Jesus “prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God.

Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us” (n. 2616). This is why the Christian who prays fears nothing, he or she trusts in the Holy Spirit who was given to us as a gift and who prays in us, eliciting prayer. May the Holy Spirit, Teacher of prayer, teach us the path of prayer.

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