



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

St Peter's Square

Wednesday, 12 December 2018

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue on the path of catecheses on the Lord's Prayer, which we began last week. Jesus places on the lips of his disciples a short, audacious prayer, made up of seven requests — a number that, in the Bible, is not random, but indicates fullness. I say audacious because, had Christ not suggested it, probably none of us — indeed, none of the most well-known theologians — would dare pray to God in this way.

In fact Jesus invites his disciples to approach God and to confidently address several requests to him: first in regard to him and then in regard to us. There is no preamble to the 'Our Father'. Jesus does not teach formulas for one to 'ingratiate oneself' to the Lord, but instead invites us to pray to Him by knocking down the barriers of awe and fear. He does not tell us we should address God by calling him 'Almighty', 'Most High', [by saying,] 'You, who are so distant from us, I am a wretched man': no, he does not say this, but simply 'Father', with total simplicity, as children address their father. And this word, "Father", expresses confidence and filial trust.

The 'Our Father' prayer sinks its roots in the concrete reality of mankind. For example, it has us ask for bread, daily bread: a simple but essential request, which indicates that faith is not a matter of an 'adornment', detached from life, which arises when all other needs have been satisfied. If anything, prayer begins with life itself. Prayer, Jesus teaches us, does not begin in human life after the stomach is full: rather, it settles in wherever a person is, anyone who is hungry, who weeps, who struggles, who suffers and who wonders 'why?'. Our first prayer, in a certain sense, was the wail that accompanied the first breath. In that newborn's cry the fate of our whole life was announced: our constant hunger, our constant thirst, our search for happiness.

In prayer, Jesus does not seek to extinguish the person; he does not seek to anaesthetize him or her. He does not want us to tone down the demands and requests, learning to bear all things. Instead, he wants all suffering, all distress to soar heavenward and become dialogue.

Having faith, someone said, is a habit of crying out.

We all need to be like Bartimaeus in the Gospel (cf. Mk 10:46-52) — let us recall that passage of the Gospel: Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus — that blind man who was begging at the gates of Jericho. He had so many good people around him telling him to keep quiet: ‘Be quiet! The Lord is passing by. Be quiet. Do not disturb. The Master has much to do; do not disturb him. You are annoying with your cries. Do not disturb’. But he did not heed those suggestions: with blessed persistence, he insisted that his wretched condition might finally encounter Jesus. And he cried louder! And the polite people said: ‘No, he is the Master, please! You are making a bad impression!’. And he cried out because he wanted to see; he wanted to be healed. “Jesus, have mercy on me!” (cf. v. 47). Jesus heals his sight and says: “your faith has made you well” (v. 52), as if to explain that the decisive element of his healing was that prayer, that *invocation shouted out* with faith, stronger than the ‘common sense’ of many people who wanted him to keep quiet. Prayer not only precedes salvation, but in some way already contains it, because it frees one from the despair of those who do not believe in a way out of many unbearable situations.

Of course, then, believers also feel the need to praise God. The Gospels offer us the jubilant exclamation that gushes forth from Jesus’ heart, full of wonder, grateful to the Father (cf. Mt 11:25-27). The first Christians even felt the need to add a doxology to the text of the Lord’s Prayer (cf. Mt 11:25-27): “for thine is the power and the glory for ever” (*Didache*, 8:2).

But none of us is obliged to embrace the theory that someone advanced in the past, namely, that the prayer of supplication may be a weak form of faith, while the more authentic prayer would be pure praise, that which seeks God without the burden of any request. No, this is not true. The prayer of supplication is authentic; it is spontaneous; it is an act of faith in God who is Father, who is good, who is almighty. It is an act of faith in me, who am small, sinful, needy. And for this reason prayer, in order to ask for something, is quite noble. God is the Father who has immense compassion for us, and wants his children to speak to him without fear, directly calling him ‘Father’; or amid difficulties saying: ‘Lord, what have you done to me?’. For this reason we can tell him everything, even the things that are distorted and incomprehensible in our life. And he promised us that he would be with us for ever, until the last day we shall spend on this earth. Let us pray the ‘Our Father’, beginning this way, simply: ‘Father’, or ‘Dad’. And he understands us and loves us very much.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I address a particular thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*.

Today in celebrating the liturgical memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, let us ask Our Lady to accompany us to Christmas and rekindle in us the desire to welcome with joy the light of her Son Jesus, to make it shine ever more brightly in the world's darkness.