



The Holy See

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Catechesis on prayer - 5. *The prayer of Abraham*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning,

There is a voice that suddenly resonates in Abraham's life. A voice that invites him to undertake a journey that he knows is absurd: a voice that spurs him to uproot himself from his homeland, from his family roots, in order to move toward a new, different future. And it is all based on a promise, in which he needs only to have trust. And to have trust in a promise is not easy. It takes courage. And Abraham had trust.

The Bible is silent on the steps of the first patriarch. The logic of things leaves us to presume that he had worshipped other divinities; perhaps he was a wise man, accustomed to observing the heavens and the stars. The Lord, in fact, promised him that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars that speckle the sky.

And Abraham sets out. He listens to the voice of God and trusts in His word. This is important: he trusts the Word of God. And with this departure of his, a new way of understanding the relationship with God arose. It is for this reason that the patriarch Abraham is present in the great Jewish, Christian and Islamic spiritual traditions as the perfect man of God, capable of being submissive to Him, even when His will proves arduous, if not completely incomprehensible.

Abraham is thus the *man of the Word*. When God speaks, man becomes the receptor of that Word and his life the place in which it seeks to become flesh. This is a great novelty in man's religious journey: the life of a believer begins to be understood as a vocation, thus as a calling, as the place where a promise is fulfilled; and he moves in the world not so much under the weight of an enigma, but with the power of that promise, which one day will be fulfilled. And Abraham believed

God's promise. He believed and he set out without knowing where he was going — thus says the Letter to the Hebrews (cf. 11:8). But he had trust.

In reading the Book of Genesis, we discover that Abraham experienced prayer in constant faithfulness to that Word, which periodically appeared along his path. In short, we could say that in Abraham's life *faith becomes history*. Faith becomes history. Indeed Abraham, with his life, with his example teaches us this path, this path in which faith becomes history. God is no longer seen only in cosmic phenomena, as a distant God, who can instill fear. The God of Abraham becomes "my God", the God of my personal history, who guides my steps, who does not abandon me; the God of my days, companion in my adventures; the God Providence. I ask myself and I ask you: do we have this experience with God? "My God", the God who accompanies me, the God of my personal history, the God who guides my steps, who does not abandon me, the God of my days? Do we have this experience? Let us think about this a bit.

Abraham's experience is also attested to in one of the most original texts of the history of spirituality: the *Memorial* of Blaise Pascal. It begins like this: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants. Certitude, certitude; feeling, joy, peace. God of Jesus Christ". This memorial, written on a small parchment and found after his death, sewn inside the philosopher's clothing, expresses not an intellectual reflection that a wise man like him can conceive of God, but the living, experienced sense of His presence. Pascal even noted the precise instant in which he felt that reality, having finally encountered it: the evening of 23 November 1654. It is not the abstract God or the cosmic God, no. He is the God of a person, of a calling, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, the God who is certainty, who is feeling, who is joy.

"Abraham's prayer is expressed first by deeds: a man of silence, he constructs an altar to the Lord at each stage of his journey" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2570). Abraham does not build a temple, but scatters the path of stones that recall God's passage. A surprising God, as when He pays a visit in the form of three guests, whom Abraham and Sarah welcomed with care, and the three announce the birth of their son Isaac (cf. *Gen* 18:1-15). Abraham was 100 years old and his wife was more or less 90. And they believed, they trusted God. And Sarah, his wife, conceived. At that age! This is the God of Abraham, our God who accompanies us.

Thus, Abraham becomes familiar with God, even able to argue with Him, but ever faithful. He speaks with God and argues. Up to the supreme test, when God asks him to sacrifice his very son Isaac, the son of his elder years, his sole heir. Here Abraham lives faith as a tragedy, as a groping walk in the night, under a sky that, this time, is starless. And many times this also happens to us, to walk in the dark but with faith. God himself will halt Abraham's hand, already prepared to strike, because He saw his willingness truly complete (cf. *Gen* 22:1-19).

Brothers and sisters, let us learn from Abraham; let us learn how to pray with faith: to listen to the Lord, to walk, to dialogue, up to arguing. Let us not be afraid to argue with God! I will even say

something that may seem like heresy. Many times I have heard people say to me: “You know, this happened to me and I became very angry with God” — “You had the courage to be angry at God?” — “Yes, I got angry” — “But this is a form of prayer”. Because only a son or daughter is capable of being angry at their dad and then encounter him again. Let us learn from Abraham to pray with faith, to dialogue and to argue, but always willing to accept the Word of God and to put it into practice. With God, let us learn to speak like a child with his dad: to listen to him, to reply, to argue. But transparent like a child with his dad. This is how Abraham teaches us to pray. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. Dear brothers and sisters in the United States, I have witnessed with great concern the disturbing social unrest in your nation in these past days, following the tragic death of Mr George Floyd. My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time, we have to recognize that “the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost”. Today I join the Church in Saint Paul and Minneapolis, and in the entire United States, in praying for the repose of the soul of George Floyd and of all those others who have lost their lives as a result of the sin of racism. Let us pray for the consolation of their grieving families and friends and let us implore the national reconciliation and peace for which we yearn. May Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of America, intercede for all those who work for peace and justice in your land and throughout the world.

May God bless all of you and your families.

I greet the Italian-speaking faithful. The upcoming Feast of the Most Holy Trinity leads us back to the mystery of the intimate life of the Triune God, centre of the Christian faith, and it inspires us to find in God’s love our comfort and our inner peace.

I address my thoughts to *the elderly*, to *young people*, to the *sick* and to *newlyweds*. Entrust yourselves to the Holy Spirit, ‘who is Lord and giver of life’, and be open to his love so that you will be able to transform your life, your families and your communities. My blessing to all!

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our continuing catechesis on *prayer*, we now consider the *prayer of Abraham*. In the life of our “father in faith”, we see a new way of relating to God. Abraham hears the voice of God and trusts in his word and promises. In obedience to the divine word, he leaves

his former life behind to journey wherever God leads him, even to the ultimate test of being asked to sacrifice his own son, Isaac. Through such fidelity, he becomes a member of God's family, capable even of arguing with him, but always faithful. Abraham's obedience to the word marks a radically new step in the religious development of man. From now on, the life of believers is seen in terms of *vocation*, a personal call to live one's life in fulfilment of God's promises. The God of Abraham, then, becomes "my God", the Lord of my own history who guides my steps and never abandons me. May we learn from Abraham's example how to pray with faith: to listen, to journey, to converse and even argue with God, but always prepared to welcome the word and put it into practice.