SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE
BOLLETTINO

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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place at 9.15 in the Library of the Vatican Apostolic Palace. In his address in Italian the Pope resumed his cycle of catechesis on prayer, focusing on the theme: "The Church, school of prayer" (Bible reading: *Acts* 4: 23-24, 29-31). After summarising his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful.

The general audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

The Church is a great school of prayer. Many of us learned how to whisper our first prayers on our parents' or grandparents' laps. We might, perhaps, cherish the memory of our mommy and daddy who taught us to say our prayers before going to bed. These moments of recollection are often those in which parents listen to some intimate secret and can give their advice inspired by the Gospel. Then, as they grow up, there are other encounters, with other witnesses and teachers of prayer (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2686-2687). This is good to remember.

The life of a parish and every Christian community is marked by liturgical moments and moments of community prayer. We become aware that the gift we received with simplicity in infancy is a great heritage, a rich inheritance and that the experience of prayer is worth deepening more and more (see *ibid*., 2688). The garment of faith is not starched, but develops with us; it is not rigid, it grows, even through moments of crisis and resurrection. Actually, there is no growth without moments of crisis because crises make you grow. Experiencing crisis is a necessary way to grow. And the breath of faith is prayer: we grow in faith inasmuch as we learn to pray. After certain passages in life, we become aware that without faith we could not have made it and that our strength was prayer – not only personal prayer, but also that of our brothers and sisters, and of the community that accompanied and supported us, of the people who know us, of the people we ask to pray for us.

For this reason, too, communities and groups dedicated to prayer flourish in the Church. Some Christians even feel the call to make prayer the primary action of their day. There are monasteries, convents, hermitages in the Church where persons consecrated to God live. They often become centres of spiritual light. They are centres of community prayer that radiate spirituality. They are small oases in which intense prayer is shared and fraternal communion is constructed day by day. They are cells that are vital not only for the ecclesial fabric, but that of society itself. Let us think, for example, of the role that monasticism played in the birth and growth of European civilization, and other cultures as well. Praying and working in community keeps the world going. It is a motor!

Everything in the Church originates in prayer and everything grows thanks to prayer. When the Enemy, the Evil One, wants to combat the Church, he does so first by trying to drain her fonts, hindering them from praying. For example, we see this in certain groups who agree about moving ecclesial reform forward, changes in the life of the Church and all the organizations, it is the media that informs everyone… But prayer is not evident, there is no prayer. We need to change this; we need to make this decision that is a bit tough… But the proposal is interesting. It is interesting! Only with discussion, only through the media. But where is prayer? And prayer is what opens the door to the Holy Spirit, who inspires progress. Changes in the Church without prayer are not changes made by the Church. They are changes made by groups. And when the Enemy – as I said – wants to combat the Church, he does it first of all by draining her fonts, inhibiting prayer and making these other proposals. If prayer ceases, for a little while it seems that everything can go ahead like always – by inertia, no? – but after a short time, the Church becomes aware that it has become like an empty shell, that it has lost its bearings, that it no longer possesses its source of warmth and love.

Holy women and men do not have easier lives than other people. Even they actually have their own problems to address, and, what is more, they are often the objects of opposition. But their strength is prayer. They always draw from the inexhaustible “well” of Mother Church. Through prayer they nourish the flame of their faith, as oil used to do for lamps. And thus, they move ahead walking in faith and hope. The saints, who often count for little in the eyes of the world, are in reality the ones who sustain it, not with the weapons of money and power, of the communications media – and so forth – but with the weapon of prayer.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus poses a dramatic question that always makes us reflect: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (*Lk* 18:8), or will he find only organizations, like groups of entrepreneurs of the faith, everything organized well, who do charitable works, many things, or will he find faith? “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” This question comes at the end of a parable that demonstrates the need to pray with perseverance without getting tired (see vv. 1-8). Therefore, we can conclude that the lamp of faith will always be lit on earth as long as there is the oil of prayer. It is this leads faith forward and leads our lives – weak, sinners – forward, but prayer leads it securely forward. The question that we Christians need to ask ourselves is: Do I pray? Do we pray? How do I pray? Like parrots or do I pray with my heart? How do I pray? Do I pray, certain that I am in the Church and that I pray with the Church? Or do I pray a bit according to my ideas and then make my ideas become prayer? This is a pagan prayer, not Christian. I repeat: We can conclude that the lamp of faith will always be lit on earth as long as there is the oil of prayer.

And this is the Church’s essential task: to pray and to teach how to pray. To transmit the lamp of faith and the oil of prayer from generation to generation. The lamp of faith that illuminates fixes things as they truly are, but it can only go forward with the oil of faith. Otherwise, it is extinguished. Without the light of this lamp, we would not be able to see the path of evangelization, or rather, we would not be able to see the path in order to believe well; we would not be able to see the faces of our brothers and sisters to draw near and serve; we would not be able to illuminate the room where we meet in community. Without faith everything collapses; and without prayer faith is extinguished. Faith and prayer together. There is no other alternative. For this reason, the Church, as the house and school of communion, is the house and school of faith and prayer.

Greeting in English

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. In the joy of the Risen Christ, I invoke upon you and your families

the loving mercy of God our Father. May the Lord bless you all!