



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 2 January 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and also Happy New Year!

Let us continue our catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, illuminated by the [mystery of Christmas, which we have just celebrated](#).

The Gospel of Matthew places the text of the Lord's Prayer strategically at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 6:9-13).

Now, let us observe the scene: Jesus goes up the hill by the lake, and sits down; he has his most intimate disciples circled around him, and then a large crowd of anonymous faces. It is this heterogeneous assembly that receives the consignment of the 'Our Father' for the first time.

The location, as I said, is highly significant; because in this lengthy teaching, which falls under the title of 'Sermon on the Mount' (cf. Mt 5:1 - 7:27), Jesus summarizes the fundamental aspects of his message. The beginning is like an archway decorated for a celebration: the Beatitudes. Jesus crowns with happiness a series of categories of people who in his time — but also in ours! — were not highly regarded. Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, people humble of heart.... This is the revolution of the Gospel. Where the Gospel is, there is revolution. The Gospel does not leave us calm, it drives us: it is revolutionary.

All people capable of love, the peacemakers who until now ended up at the margins of history, are instead the builders of the Kingdom of God. It is as Jesus would say: go forth, you who bear in your heart the mystery of a God who has revealed his omnipotence in love and in forgiveness!

From this portal of entry, which overturns historical values, blooms the newness of the Gospel. The Law does not need to be abolished but needs a new interpretation that leads it back to its original meaning. If a person has a good heart, predisposed to love, then he understands that every word of God must be incarnated up to its ultimate results. Love has no boundaries: one can

love one's spouse, one's friend, and even one's enemy with a wholly new perspective. Jesus says: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt 5:44-45).

Here is the great secret underlying the whole Sermon on the Mount: be *children of your Father who is in heaven*. Apparently these chapters of the Gospel of Matthew seem to be a moral discourse; they seem to evoke an ethic so demanding as to appear unfeasible, and instead we discover that they are above all a theological discourse. A Christian is not one who is committed to being better than others: he knows he is a sinner like everyone. A Christian is simply a person who pauses before the new Burning Bush, at the revelation of a God who does not bear the enigma of an unspeakable name, but asks his children to invoke him with the name of 'Father', to allow themselves to be renewed by his power and to reflect a ray of his goodness for this world so thirsty for good, thus awaiting good news.

Thus, this is how Jesus introduces the teaching of the 'Our Father' prayer. He does so by distancing himself from two groups of his time. First and foremost, hypocrites: "you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men" (Mt 6:5). There are people who are able to compose atheistic prayers, without God, and they do so in order to be admired by people. And how often we see the scandal of those people who go to church and are there all day long, or go every day, and then live by hating others or speaking ill of people. This is a scandal! It is better not to go to church: living this way, as if they were atheists. But if you go to church, live as a child, as a brother or sister, and bear true witness, not a counter-witness. Christian prayer, however, has no other credible witness than one's own conscience, where one weaves a most intense dialogue with the Father: "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (6:6).

Then Jesus distances himself from the prayer of pagans: "do not heap up empty phrases ...; for they think that they will be heard for their many words" (6:7). Here perhaps Jesus is alluding to that *'captatio benevolentiae'* that was the necessary introduction to many ancient prayers: divinity had to be in some way adapted from a long series of praises, of prayers too. Let us consider that scene on Mount Carmel, when the Prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal. They shouted, danced, and asked for many things, that their god would listen to them. But Elijah instead remained silent and the Lord revealed himself to Elijah. Pagans think that one prays by speaking, speaking, speaking, speaking. I also think of many Christians who think that praying is — pardon me — "talking to God like parrots". No! One prays from the heart, from within. You instead — Jesus says — when you pray, address God as a child to his father, who knows the things that are needed before he even asks him for them (cf. Mt 6:8). The 'Our Father' could also be a silent prayer: it is essentially enough to place yourself under God's gaze, to remember his Fatherly love, and this is all it takes to be satisfied.

It is beautiful to think that our God does not need sacrifices in order to win his favour! Our God needs nothing: in prayer, he only asks that we keep a channel of communication open with him in order to always recognize that we are his most beloved children. He loves us very much.

Special Greetings

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those from Ireland, Australia, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. May you and your families cherish the joy of this Christmas season and draw near in prayer to the Saviour who has come to dwell among us. God bless you!

I offer a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims. I am pleased to welcome the Chapters of the Union "Saint Catherine of Siena" of School Missionaries and those participating in the Camp sponsored by Lions Club International.

I greet the parish groups, in particular those from Caserta; from Holy Cross in Torre del Greco and from Saint Michael in Aprilia; the altar servers from Saint Bonaventure in Cadoneghe — there are so many of you —; the friends and volunteers of 'Fraterna Domus' and in a special way I wish to greet and thank the Artists of the Circus of Cuba. With their show they bring beauty; a beauty that requires so much strength — we have seen it — so much training, so much striving ahead.... But beauty always elevates the heart; beauty makes us better, everyone; beauty leads us to goodness, even leads us to God. Thank you very much and may you continue in this way, offering beauty to the whole world. Thank you!

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

Next Sunday we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. Like the Magi, may we also lift our gaze toward heaven; only in this way will we be able to see the star that invites us to travel the paths of good. Happy New Year to all.
