



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 3 October 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In last week's Catechesis I began talking about one of the special sources of Christian prayer: the sacred liturgy which, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, is "a participation in Christ's own prayer addressed to the Father in the Holy Spirit. In the liturgy, all Christian prayer finds its source and goal" (n. 1073). Today I would like us to ask ourselves: in my life, do I leave enough room for prayer and, above all, what place in my relationship with God does liturgical prayer, especially Holy Mass occupy, as participation in the common prayer of the Body of Christ which is the Church?

In answering this question we must remember first of all that prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his Son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit (cf. *ibid.*, 2565). Therefore the life of prayer consists in being habitually in God's presence and being aware of it, in living in a relationship with God as we live our customary relationships in life, with our dearest relatives, with true friends; indeed the relationship with the Lord is the relationship that gives light to all our other relationships. This communion of life with the Triune God is possible because through Baptism we have been incorporated into Christ, we have begun to be one with him (cf. Rom 6:5).

In fact, only through Christ can we converse with God the Father as children, otherwise it is not possible, but in communion with the Son we can also say, as he did, "Abba". In communion with

Christ we can know God as our true Father (cf. Mt 11:27). For this reason Christian prayer consists in looking constantly at Christ and in an ever new way, speaking to him, being with him in silence, listening to him, acting and suffering with him. The Christian rediscovers his true identity in Christ, “the first-born of all creation” in whom “all things hold together” (cf. Col 1,15ff.). In identifying with him, in being one with him, I rediscover my personal identity as a true son or daughter who looks to God as to a Father full of love.

But let us not forget: it is in the Church that we discover Christ, that we know him as a living Person. She is “his Body”. This corporeity can be understood on the basis of the biblical words about man and about woman: the two will be one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24; Eph 5:30ff.; 1 Cor 6:16f.). The indissoluble bond between Christ and the Church, through the unifying power of love, does not cancel the “you” and the “I” but on the contrary raises them to their highest unity. Finding one’s identity in Christ means reaching communion with him, that does not wipe me out but raises me to the loftiest dignity, that of a child of God in Christ: “The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide” (Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 17). Praying means raising oneself to God’s heights, through a necessary, gradual transformation of our being.

Thus, by participating in the liturgy we make our own the language of Mother Church, we learn to speak in her and for her. Of course, as I have already said, this happens gradually, little by little. I must immerse myself ever more deeply in the words of the Church with my prayer, with my life, with my suffering, with my joy, and with my thought. It is a process that transforms us.

I therefore think that these reflections enable us to answer the question we asked ourselves at the outset: how do I learn to pray, how do I develop in my prayer? Looking at the example which Jesus taught us, the *Pater Noster* [*Our Father*], we see that the first word [in Latin] is “Father” and the second is “our”. Thus the answer is clear, I learn to pray, I nourish my prayer by addressing God as Father and praying-with-others, praying with the Church, accepting the gift of his words which gradually become familiar to me and full of meaning. The dialogue that God establishes with each one of us, and we with him in prayer, always includes a “with”; it is impossible to pray to God in an individualistic manner. In liturgical prayer, especially the Eucharist and — formed by the liturgy — in every prayer, we do not only speak as individuals but on the contrary enter into the “we” of the Church that prays. And we must transform our “I”, entering into this “we”.

I would like to recall another important aspect. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we read: “In the *liturgy of the New Covenant* every liturgical action, especially the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments, is an encounter between Christ and the Church” (n. 1097). Therefore it is the “total Christ”, the whole Community, the Body of Christ united with her Head, that is celebrating. Thus the liturgy is not a sort of “self-manifestation” of a community; it means instead coming out of merely “being ourselves”, being closed in on ourselves, and having access to the great banquet, entering into the great living community in which God himself nourishes us.

The liturgy implies universality and this universal character must enter ever anew into the awareness of all. The Christian liturgy is the worship of the universal temple which is the Risen Christ, whose arms are outstretched on the Cross to draw everyone into the embrace of God's eternal love. It is the worship of a wide open heaven. It is never solely the event of a single community with its place in time and space. It is important that every Christian feel and be truly integrated into this universal "we" which provides the "I", the basis and refuge of the "I", in the Body of Christ which is the Church.

In this we must bear in mind and accept the logic of God's Incarnation: he made himself close, present, entering into history and into human nature, making himself one of us. And this presence continues in the Church, his Body. So, the Liturgy is not the memory of past events, but is the living presence of the Paschal Mystery of Christ who transcends and unites times and places. If in the celebration the centrality of Christ did not emerge, we would not have Christian liturgy, totally dependent on the Lord and sustained by his creative presence. God acts through Christ and we can act only through and in him. The conviction must grow within us every day that the liturgy is not our or my "doing" but rather is an action of God in us and with us.

It is not, therefore, the individual — priest or member of the faithful — or the group celebrating the liturgy, but the liturgy is primarily God's action through the Church which has her own history, her rich tradition and her creativity. This universality and fundamental openness, which is proper to the whole of the liturgy, is one of the reasons why it cannot be conceived of or modified by the individual community or by experts, but must be faithful to the forms of the universal Church.

The entire Church is always present even in the liturgy of the smallest community. For this reason there are no "strangers" in the liturgical community. In every liturgical celebration the whole Church takes part, heaven and earth, God and men. The Christian liturgy, even if it is celebrated in a place and in a concrete space and expresses the "yes" of a specific community, is by its nature catholic, it comes from all and leads to all, in unity with the Pope, with the Bishops and with believers of all epochs and all places. The more a celebration is enlivened by awareness of this, the more fruitfully will the authentic meaning of the liturgy be made present.

Dear friends, the Church becomes visible in many ways: in charitable action, in mission projects, in the personal apostolate that every Christian must carry out in his own walk of life. However the place in which she is fully experienced as Church is in the liturgy; it is the act in which we believe that God enters our reality and we can encounter him, we can touch him. It is the act in which we come into contact with God: he comes to us and we are illuminated by him. For this reason, when in reflections on the liturgy we focus our attention exclusively on how to make it attractive, interesting and beautiful, we risk forgetting the essential: the liturgy is celebrated for God and not for ourselves; it is his work; he is the subject; and we must open ourselves to him and let ourselves be guided by him and by his Body which is the Church.

Let us ask the Lord to learn every day to live the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharistic Celebration, praying in the “we” of the Church, which directs her gaze not upon herself, but to God, and feeling part of the living Church of all places and of all epochs. Thank you.

To special groups:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present, including the St Hallvard Boys' Choir from Oslo. I also welcome students from the Pontifical North American College, who are to be ordained deacon tomorrow. Dear Ordinands, always be faithful heralds of the Gospel and generous witnesses to the love of Christ! Upon you and your loved ones, and indeed upon all present, I invoke God's abundant blessings. Thank you!

I am glad to welcome the priests and seminarians from various nations, students at the Pontifical Colleges of San Paolo Apostolo and Maria Mater Ecclesiae. In addressing to you my good wishes for your commitment to study, I assure you my special remembrance in prayer.

Lastly, my greetings go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear *young people*, listen to Christ, the word of truth, and accept promptly his plan for your life. Dear *sick people*, may you feel Jesus beside you and witness with your hope to the life-giving power of his Cross. Dear *newlyweds*, with the grace of the sacrament, invigorate your love day by day and walk on the path of holiness.

Tomorrow I shall be going to the Shrine of Loreto on the 50th anniversary of the famous pilgrimage of Blessed [Pope John XXIII](#) to that Marian region, which he made a week before opening the [Second Vatican Council](#).

I ask you to join in my prayers, commending to the Mother of God the principal ecclesial events for which we are preparing: the [Year of Faith](#) and the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization. May the Blessed Virgin accompany the Church on her mission to proclaim the Gospel to the men and women of our time.