



The Holy See

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Wednesday, 13 May 2020 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Catechesis on prayer - 2. *The prayer of a Christian*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning,*

Today we take our second step in the journey of catecheses on prayer that we began last week.

Prayer belongs to everyone: to men and women of every religion, and probably also to those who profess none. Prayer arises in our innermost self, in that interior place that spiritual authors call “heart” (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2562-2563). Therefore, it is not something peripheral that prays within us, it is not some secondary and marginal ability that we have, but rather it is our most intimate mystery. It is this mystery that prays. Feelings pray, but one cannot say that prayer is only feeling. Intelligence prays, but praying is not simply an intellectual act. The body prays, but one can speak with God even having the most serious disability. Thus the entire man prays if he prays with his “heart”.

Prayer is an impulse; it is an invocation that goes beyond ourselves: something that is born in the intimacy of our person and extends, because it senses the nostalgia of an encounter. That nostalgia which is more than a need, more than a necessity: it is a path. Prayer is the voice of an “I” that fumbles, that proceeds unsteadily in search of a “You”. The encounter between the “I” and the “You” cannot occur via calculators: it is a human encounter and we often proceed unsteadily in order to find the “You” that my “I” is seeking.

Instead, the prayer of a Christian arises from a revelation: the “You” did not remain shrouded in mystery, but rather entered into a relationship with us. Christianity is the religion that continually celebrates God’s “manifestation”, that is, his epiphany. The first feasts of the liturgical year are the celebration of this God who does not remain hidden, but rather offers his friendship to mankind. God reveals his glory in the poverty of Bethlehem, in the contemplation of the Magi, in the baptism

in the River Jordan, in the miracle of the wedding at Cana. The Gospel of John concludes the great hymn of the Prologue with a concise affirmation,: “No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (1:18). It was Jesus who revealed God to us.

The prayer of a Christian enters into a relationship with the God of the most tender face, who does not wish to instill any fear in men and women. This is the first characteristic of Christian prayer. While men and women had always been accustomed to drawing near to God somewhat intimidated, somewhat fearful of this fascinating and tremendous mystery, while they had been accustomed to worshiping him with a servile attitude, similar to that of a vassal who does not wish to disrespect his lord, Christians instead address him by daring to call him intimately with the name, “Father”. Indeed, Jesus uses the other word: “Dad”.

Christianity has banned all “feudal” relationships from the bond with God. In the heritage of our faith there are no expressions such as “subjection”, “slavery” or “servitude”; but rather, words like “covenant”, “friendship”, “promise”, “communion”, “closeness”. In his long farewell discourse to his disciples, Jesus says this: “No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you” (*Jn* 15:15-16). But this is a blank cheque: “whatever you ask the Father in my name, I will give to you”!

God is a friend, an ally, a spouse. In prayer one can establish an intimate relationship with him, so much so that in the “Our Father” Jesus taught us to address to him a series of questions. We can ask God everything, everything; explain everything, recount everything. It does not matter if we feel flawed in our relationship with God: we are not good friends, we are not grateful children, we are not faithful spouses. He continues to love us. It is what Jesus shows definitively at the Last Supper when he says: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (*Lk* 22:20).

With that gesture in the Upper Room, Jesus foreshadows the mystery of the Cross. God is a faithful ally: if men and women cease to love him, he nevertheless continues to love, even if love leads him to Calvary. God is always close to our heart’s door and he waits for us to open it to him. And sometimes he knocks on the heart, but he is not intrusive: he waits. God’s patience with us is the patience of a father, of one who loves us dearly. I would say it is the combined patience of a father and a mother. Always close to our heart, and when he knocks he does so with tenderness and with much love.

Let us all try to pray this way, by entering the mystery of the Covenant. To place ourselves through prayer into the merciful arms of God, to feel enveloped by that mystery of happiness

which is Trinitarian life, to feel like guests who were not worthy of so much honour. And to repeat to God in the wonder of prayer: how can you know only love? He does not know hatred. He is hated but he does not know hatred. He knows only love. This is the God to whom we pray. This is the incandescent core of all Christian prayer. The God of love, our Father who waits for us and accompanies us.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. In this Easter season, I invoke upon you and your families the joy and strength that come from the Risen Christ. May God bless you!

I offer a special greeting to young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds. Constantly turn to the help of Our Lady; in her we find an attentive and tender mother, a certain refuge in adversity. I extend my blessing to all of you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters: In our continuing catechesis on *prayer*, we now consider its essential characteristics. Prayer involves our entire being yearning for some “other” beyond ourselves. Specifically Christian prayer is born from the realization that the “other” we are seeking has been revealed in the tender face of Jesus, who teaches us to call God “Father”, and wants personally to enter into relationship with us. In his farewell discourse at the Last Supper, Jesus no longer calls his disciples servants but *friends*. When we commune with God in prayer, we need not be fearful, for he is a friend, a trusted ally. Whatever our situation, or however poorly we may think of ourselves, God is always faithful, and willing to embrace us in mercy. We see this unconditional love on Calvary, for the Lord never stops loving, even to the end. Let us seek to pray by entering into this mystery of God’s unending Covenant with us. This is the burning heart of every Christian prayer: entrusting ourselves to the loving and merciful arms of our heavenly Father.
