



The Holy See

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Catechesis on prayer - 8. *The prayer of David*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

On our itinerary of catecheses on prayer, today we meet King David. Favoured by God even from his youth, he is chosen for a unique mission that plays a central role in the history of the People of God and of our own faith. In the Gospels, Jesus is called “son of David” a number of times; in fact, like him, He was born in Bethlehem. According to the promises, the Messiah would come from the descendants of David: a King completely after God’s heart, in perfect obedience to the Father, whose action faithfully realizes His plan of salvation (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2579).

David’s story begins on the hills surrounding Bethlehem, where he grazes the flock of his father, Jesse. He is still a boy, the last of many brothers. So much so that when the prophet Samuel, by God’s order, goes in search of the new king, it seems almost as if his father has forgotten about his youngest son (cf. *1 Sam* 16:1-13). He worked in the open air: we can think of him as a friend of the wind, of the sounds of nature, of the rays of the sun. He has only one companion to comfort his soul: his harp; and during those long days spent in solitude, he loves to play and to sing to his God. He also played with the slingshot.

Therefore David is, first and foremost, *a shepherd*: a man who takes care of animals, who defends them from oncoming danger, who provides for their sustenance. When, by God’s will, David will have to care for his people, the actions he will take will not be very different from these. This is why the image of the shepherd frequently occurs in the Bible. Even Jesus defines himself as “the good shepherd”, whose behaviour is different than that of the mercenary; he offers his life on behalf of the sheep; he guides them; he knows each of them by name (cf. *Jn* 10:11-18).

David learned a lot from his previous job. So, when the prophet Nathan reproaches him for his very serious sin (cf. *2 Sam* 12:1-15), David understands right away that he has been a bad

shepherd, that he has despoiled another man of his only sheep which he loved, that he is no longer a humble servant, but a man crazy for power, a poacher who loots and preys on others.

A second characteristic trait present in David's vocation is his *poet's soul*. From this small observation, we can deduce that David was not a vulgar man, as is often the case with individuals who are forced to live for long periods isolated from society. He is, instead, a sensitive person who loves music and song. His harp would accompany him always: sometimes to raise a hymn of joy to God (cf. 2 Sam 6:16), other times to express a lament, or to confess his own sin (cf. Ps 51:3).

The world that presents itself before his eyes is not a silent scene: as things unraveled before his gaze he observed a greater mystery. That is exactly where prayer arises: from the conviction that life is not something that takes us by surprise, but an astonishing mystery that inspires poetry, music, gratitude, praise, even lament and supplication in us. When a person lacks that poetic dimension, let's say, when he lacks poetry, his or her soul limps. Thus, tradition casts David as the great artist behind the composition of the Psalms. Many of them, at the beginning, often bear an explicit reference to the king of Israel, and to some of the more or less noble events of his life.

David, therefore, has a dream: that of being a good shepherd. Sometimes he will live up to this task, other times less so; what is important, however, in the context of the history of salvation, is that he is a prophecy of another King, whom he merely announces and prefigures.

Let us look at David; let us think about David. Holy and sinful, persecuted and persecutor, victim and manslayer, which is a contradiction. David was all of this, together. And we too have recorded events in our lives that are often opposed to each other; in the drama of life, all people often sin by inconsistency. There is a single golden thread running through David's life, that gives unity to everything that happens: his prayer. That is the voice that is never extinguished. David the saint prays; David the sinner prays; David the persecuted prays; David the persecutor prays. Even David the manslayer prays. This is the golden thread that runs through his life. A man of prayer. That is the voice that is never silenced: whether it assumes tones of jubilation or those of lament, it is always the same prayer; only the melody changes. In so doing, David teaches us to let everything enter into dialogue with God: joy as well as guilt, love as well as suffering, friendship as much as sickness. Everything can become a word spoken to the "You" who always listens to us.

David, who knew solitude, was in reality never alone! In the end, this is the power of prayer in all those who make room for it in their lives. Prayer gives you nobility, and David is noble because he prays. But he is a manslayer who prays; he repents and his nobility returns thanks to prayer. Prayer gives us nobility. It is capable of securing our relationship with God who is the true Companion on the journey of every man and woman, amid life's thousand adversities, good or bad: but always prayer. Thank you, Lord. I am afraid, Lord. Help me, Lord. Forgive me, Lord. David's trust is so great that, when he was persecuted and had to flee, he did not let anyone defend him: "If my God humiliates me thus, he knows what he is doing", because the nobility of

prayer leaves us in God's hands. Those hands wounded by love: the only sure hands we have.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking faithful joining us through the media. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!

I hope that the summer season may be a time of serenity and a good occasion to contemplate God in the masterpiece of his creation.

I address my thoughts to *the elderly*, to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today is the Feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist. Let us learn, from the one who was the precursor to Jesus, the capacity to bear witness to the Gospel with courage, beyond our own differences, preserving the harmony and friendship that are the foundations of credibility of any proclamation of faith.

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 David. Called by God to become King of Israel, David was deeply formed by his early experiences as a shepherd, which he would draw upon in leading his people. The young David was also a lover of music and poetry, and it was from his lyrical appreciation for the wonder of God's creation that his prayer was born. We see this reflected in the many psalms traditionally attributed to his authorship. David – as pastor and king – prefigures Jesus the Good Shepherd and universal King, whose prayerful relationship with his heavenly Father sustained his whole life. David, for his part, was both saint and sinner, full of contradictions, yet in his vocation of leadership he was constant in prayerful dialogue with God. Our lives too are often marked by contradictory forces and incoherent impulses, but if, like David, we persevere in prayer – whatever our own vocation and the difficulties we may face – we will come to know the closeness of the Lord and be able to share this joy with others.
