

2023 -2024 Year of Prayer

Pope Francis' Catechesis on Prayer, arranged for each liturgical week

Third Week of Advent – Sunday 17th December 2023

This Sunday's readings start with a passage from the prophet Isaiah. Here the prophet says, "The spirit of the Lord has been given to me", and he goes on to show how this spirit has brought purpose and direction to his life in a way which builds up God's kingdom. As we prepare for Christ's coming it is a good time to look at how the Holy Spirit moves our own lives. Pope Francis talks about the Holy Spirit in prayer in a catechesis he gave on the 17th of March 2021.

Prayer and the Trinity. 2

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!*

Today we will complete the catechesis on prayer as a relationship with the Holy Trinity, in particular with the Holy Spirit.

The first gift of every Christian existence is the Holy Spirit. It is not one of many gifts, but rather the fundamental *Gift*. The Spirit is the gift that Jesus had promised to send us. Without the Spirit there is no relationship with Christ and with the Father, because the Spirit opens our heart to God's presence and draws it into that "vortex" of love that is the very heart of God. We are not merely guests and pilgrims journeying on this earth; we are also guests and pilgrims in the mystery of the Trinity. We are like Abraham, who, one day, welcoming three wayfarers in his own tent, encountered God. If we can truly invoke God, calling him "Abba — Dad", it is because the Holy Spirit dwells in us; he is the One who transforms us deep within and makes us experience the soul-stirring joy of being loved by God as his true children. All the spiritual work within us towards God is performed by the Holy Spirit, this gift. He works within us to carry Christian life forward towards the Father, with Jesus.

The Catechism, in this respect, says: "Every time we begin to pray to Jesus it is the Holy Spirit who draws us on the way of prayer by his prevenient grace. Since he teaches us to pray by recalling Christ, how could we not pray to the Spirit too? That is why the Church invites us to call upon the Holy Spirit every day, especially at the beginning and the end of every important action" (n. 2670). This is the work of the Spirit in us. He "reminds" us of Jesus and makes him present to us — we might say that he is our Trinitarian memory, he is the memory of God in us — and he makes it present to Jesus, so that he is not reduced to a character from the past: that is, the Spirit brings Jesus to the present in our consciousness. If Christ were only far away in time, we would be alone and lost in the world. Yes, we will remember Jesus, there, far away, but it is the Spirit that brings him today, now, at this moment, in our heart. But in the Spirit everything is brought to life: the possibility of encountering Christ is open to Christians of every time and place. The possibility of encountering Christ, not only as a historical figure, is open. No: he attracts Christ to our hearts; it is the Spirit who makes us encounter Jesus. He is not distant, the Spirit is with us: Jesus still teaches his disciples by transforming their hearts, as he did with Peter, with Paul, with Mary Magdalene, with all the apostles. But why is Jesus present? Because it is the Spirit who brings him to us.

This is the experience of so many people who pray: men and women whom the Holy Spirit has formed according to the "measure" of Christ, in mercy, in service, in prayer, in catechesis.... It is a grace to be able to meet people like this: you realize that a different life pulsates in them, their gaze sees "beyond". Let us not think only of monks and hermits; they are also found among ordinary people, people who have woven a long history of dialogue with God, sometimes of inner struggle,

which purifies faith. These humble witnesses have sought God in the Gospel, in the Eucharist received and adored, in the face of a brother or sister in difficulty, and they safeguard his presence like a secret flame.

The first task of Christians is precisely to keep alive this flame that Jesus brought to the earth (cf. Lk 12:49); and what is this flame? It is love, the Love of God, the Holy Spirit. Without the fire of the Spirit, the prophecies are extinguished, sorrow supplants joy, routine substitutes love, service turns into slavery. The image of the lighted lamp next to the Tabernacle, where the Eucharist is reserved, comes to mind. Even when the church empties and evening falls, even when the church is closed, that lamp remains lit, and continues to burn; no one sees it, yet it burns before the Lord. This is how the Spirit, in our heart, is always present like that lamp.

Again we read in the Catechism: “The Holy Spirit, whose anointing permeates our whole being, is the interior Master of Christian prayer. He is the artisan of the living tradition of prayer. To be sure, there are as many paths of prayer as there are persons who pray, but it is the same Spirit acting in all and with all. It is in the communion of the Holy Spirit that Christian prayer is prayer in the Church” (n. 2672). Very often it happens that we do not pray, we don’t feel like praying, or many times we pray like parrots, with the mouth, but our heart is not in it. This is the moment to say to the Spirit: “Come, come Holy Spirit, warm my heart. Come and teach me to pray, teach me to look to the Father, to look to the Son. Teach what the path of faith is like. Teach me how to love and, above all, teach me to have an attitude of hope”. It means calling on the Spirit continually, so he may be present in our lives.

It is therefore the Spirit who writes the history of the Church and of the world. We are open books, willing to receive his handwriting. And in each of us the Spirit composes original works, because there is never a Christian who is completely identical to another. In the infinite field of holiness, the one God, the Trinity of Love, makes the variety of witnesses flourish: all are equal in dignity, but also unique in the beauty that the Spirit has willed to emanate in each of those whom God’s mercy has made his children. Let us not forget, the Spirit is present; he is present in us. Let us listen to the Spirit, let us call to the Spirit — he is the gift, the gift that God has given us — and let us say to him: “Holy Spirit, I do not know your face — we do not know it — but I know that you are the strength, that you are the light, that you are able to make me go forth and to teach me how to pray. Come, Holy Spirit”. This is a beautiful prayer: “Come, Holy Spirit”.

Wednesday, 17 March 2021