

2023 -2024 Year of Prayer

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

Fourth Sunday of Easter -21st April 2024

In Pope Francis' catechesis which we are using this week, he reflects on prayer in daily life. During this Easter season our first readings for the Mass are from the Acts of the Apostles. Acts tells us of the daily life of the first Christians. How do our lives compare with theirs? Pope Francis gave this teaching on 10th Feb 2021.

Prayer in daily life

Good morning,

In the preceding catechesis we saw how Christian prayer is “anchored” in the Liturgy. Today, we will shed light on how it always returns into daily life from the Liturgy: on the streets, in offices, on public transportation... And there it continues the dialogue with God: one who prays is like someone in love who always carries the beloved person in his or her heart wherever they go.

Essentially, everything becomes a part of this dialogue with God: every joy becomes a reason for praise, every trial is an opportunity to ask for help. Prayer is always alive in our lives, like embers, even when the mouth does not speak, but the heart speaks. Every thought, even apparently “profane” ones, can be permeated by prayer. There is even a prayerful aspect in human intelligence; it is, in fact, a window peering into the mystery: it illuminates the few steps in front of us and then opens up to the entire reality, this reality that precedes it and surpasses it. This mystery does not have a disquieting or anxious face, no. Knowledge of Christ makes us confident that whatever our eyes and our minds' eyes cannot see, rather than nothing being there, there is someone who is waiting for us; there is infinite grace. And thus, Christian prayer instils an invincible hope in the human heart: whatever experience may touch us on our journey, God's love can turn it into good.

In this regard, the *Catechism* reads: “We learn to pray at certain moments by hearing the Word of the Lord and sharing in his Paschal Mystery, but his Spirit is offered us at all times, in the events of *each day*, to make prayer spring up from us... time is in the Father's hands; it is in the present that we encounter him, not yesterday nor tomorrow, but today” (n. 2659). Today I meet God, today is always the day of the encounter.

There is no day more wonderful day than the one we are living. Those who live always thinking about the future: “But the future will be better...”, but do not take each day as it comes are people who live in their fantasy, they do not know how to deal with concrete reality. And today is real, today is concrete. And prayer takes place today. Jesus comes to meet us today, the day we are living. And it is prayer that transforms this day into grace, or better, that transforms us: it quells anger, sustains love, multiplies joy, instils the strength to forgive. Sometimes it will seem that it is no longer we who are living, but that grace lives and works in us through prayer. And when an angry, an unhappy thought comes to us, that moves us toward bitterness, let us stop ourselves and say to the Lord: “Where are you? And where am I going?” And the Lord is there, the Lord will give us the right word, the advice to go ahead without that bitter taste of negativity. For prayer is always — to use a profane word — positive. Always. It will carry you forward. Each day that begins, if welcomed in prayer, is accompanied by courage, so that the problems we have to face no longer seem to be obstacles to our happiness, but rather appeals from God, opportunities for our encounter with him. And when one is accompanied by the Lord, he or she feels more courageous, freer, and even happier.

Thus, let us always pray for everything and for everyone, even for our enemies. Jesus counselled us to do this: “Pray for your enemies”. Let us pray for our dear ones, but also for those we do not know. Let us pray even for our enemies, as I said, as the Scriptures often invite us to do. Prayer inclines us toward a superabundant love. Let us pray above all for unhappy people, for those who weep in solitude and give up

hope that there might still be someone who loves them. Prayer works miracles; and so the poor understand, by God's grace that, even in their precarious situation, the prayer of a Christian makes Christ's compassion present. Indeed, he looked with great tenderness on the weary and lost crowd who were like sheep without a shepherd (cf *Mk* 6:34). The Lord is — let us not forget — the Lord of compassion, of nearness, of tenderness: three words never to be forgotten. Because this is the Lord's style: compassion, nearness, tenderness.

Prayer helps us love others, despite their mistakes and their sins. The person is always more important than his or her actions, and Jesus did not judge the world, but saved it. The life of people who always judge others, who are always condemning, judging, is a horrible one... It is a horrible, unhappy life. Jesus came to save us. Open your heart, forgive, give others the benefit of the doubt, understand, you, too, be close to others, be compassionate, be tender, like Jesus. We have to love each and every one, remembering in prayer that we are all sinners and at the same time loved individually by God. Loving the world in this way, loving it with tenderness, we will discover that each day and everything bears within it a fragment of God's mystery.

Again, the *Catechism* reads: "Prayer in the events of each day and each moment is one of the secrets of the Kingdom revealed to 'little children,' to the servants of Christ, to the poor of the beatitudes. It is right and good to pray so that the coming of the kingdom of justice and peace may influence the march of history, but it is just as important to bring the help of prayer into humble, everyday situations; all forms of prayer can be the leaven to which the Lord compares the kingdom" (n. 2660).

Mankind — the human person, men and women, all of us — is like a breath, like a blade of grass (cf *Ps* 144:4; 103:15). The philosopher Pascal once wrote: "There is no need for the whole universe to take up arms to crush him: a vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him". [*Thoughts*, 186] We are fragile beings, but we know how to pray: this is our greatest dignity and it is also our strength. Have courage. Pray in every moment, in every situation because the Lord is near us. And when a prayer is said according to Jesus' heart, it obtains miracles.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing catechesis on prayer, we now consider how our prayerful dialogue with God is meant to embrace the events of each day, in our homes, daily chores or work. All our thoughts and activities should be a part of our daily conversation with the Lord. The Catechism teaches that "it is in the present that we encounter God, not yesterday or tomorrow, but today" (No. 2659). There is no aspect of our everyday lives, however mundane, that cannot be offered in prayer to God and become an occasion of deeper union with him. As we come to know Christ more intimately in prayer, our hearts are expanded to embrace in love and solidarity all those around us, above all the poor, the unhappy and those in need. Blaise Pascal once observed that human beings are so frail that even a drop of water can destroy us (cf. *Thoughts*, No. 347). Yet in our fragility, prayer is a mark of our supreme grandeur, for prayer can work miracles in our world, transform lives and history, and serve the coming of God's kingdom of justice and peace.