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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.20 a.m. in the Paul VI Hall, where the Holy Father Francis met with groups of pilgrims and faithful from Italy and all over the world.

In his address in Italian, the Pope continued his catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, focusing on the theme "At the centre of the Sermon on the Mount" (cf. Bible passage: from the *Gospel according to Matthew*, 6: 5-6).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present.

The General Audience concluded with the recital of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning, and happy New Year too!

Let us continue our catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, enlightened by the mystery of Christmas we have just celebrated.

The Gospel of Matthew places the text of the "Our Father" at a strategic point, at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 6: 9-13). First of all, let us observe the scene: Jesus goes up the hill near the lake, and sits down;

around Him there is the circle of His closest disciples, and then a great crowd of anonymous faces. It is this heterogeneous assembly that first receives the “Our Father”.

The position, as I have said, is very significant: because in this long teaching, which goes under the name of the “Sermon on the Mount” (cf. *Mt* 5: 1-7, 27), Jesus condenses the fundamental aspects of His message. The debut is like an archway decorated for a celebration: the Beatitudes. Jesus crowns with happiness a series of categories of people that in His time – but also in ours! – were not considered much. Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, those humble at heart... This is the revolution of the Gospel. Where there is the Gospel, there is revolution. The Gospel does not leave one quiet, it pushes us: it is revolutionary. All the people capable of love, workers of peace that until then had remained on the margins of history, are instead the builders of the Kingdom of God. It is like Jesus said: go ahead you who carry in your heart the mystery of a God Who has revealed His omnipotence in love and in forgiveness!

From this entrance, which overturns the values of history, there emerges the newness of the Gospel. The Law must not be abolished but needs a new interpretation, which leads it back to its original meaning. If a person has a good heart, predisposed to love, then he understands that every word of God must be made flesh unto its ultimate consequences. Love has no limits: one can love one’s spouse, one’s friend and even one’s enemy with an entirely new perspective. Jesus says: “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (*Mt* 5: 44-45).

Here is the great secret that is at the basis of all the Sermon on the Mount: *be sons of your Father Who is in heaven*. Apparently these chapters of the Gospel of Matthew seem to be a moral discourse, they seem to evoke an ethic that is so demanding as to seem impracticable, and yet instead we discover that it is above all a theological discourse. The Christian is not one who makes an effort to be better than the others: he knows he is a sinner like the rest. The Christian is simply the man who pauses before the new Burning Bush, before the revelation of a God Who does not bear the enigma of an unpronounceable name, but Who asks His children to invoke Him with the name of “Father”, of letting themselves be renewed by His power and of reflecting a ray of His goodness for this world that thirsts so greatly for goodness and that awaits good news.

This, then, is how Jesus introduces the teaching of the Lord’s Prayer. He does so distancing Himself from two groups of His time. First of all the hypocrites: “You must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others” (*Mt* 6: 5). There are those who are capable of composing atheist prayers, without God, and they do so to be admired by men. And how often do we see the scandal of those people who go to Church and stay there all day, or go every day and then live detesting others or speaking badly of people. This is a scandal! It is better not to go to Church: live like that, as if you were atheist. But if you go to Church, live like a son, a brother, and bear true witness, not a counter-witness. Christian prayer, instead, has no credible witness other than one’s own conscience, where a continuous and very intense dialogue is woven with the Father: “When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father Who is in secret” *Mt* 6: 6).

Then Jesus distances Himself from the prayer of the pagans: “Do not heap up empty phrases... for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (*Mt* 6: 7). Here, perhaps Jesus alludes to that “*captatio benevolentiae*” that was the necessary premise to many ancient prayers: the divinity had to be somehow tamed by a long series of praises, as well as prayers. Let us think of that scene on Mount Carmel when the prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal. They shouted, danced, and asked for so many things for their god to listen to them. And instead Elijah was silent and the Lord revealed Himself to Elijah. The pagans think that by talking, talking, talking, one prays. And I think also of many Christians who believe that praying is – pardon me – “speaking to God like a parrot”. No! Prayer takes place in the heart, within. You instead – Jesus says – when you pray, address God like a son to his father, who already knows what he needs before he asks (cf. *Mt* 6: 8). It could even be a silent prayer, the Lord’s Prayer: in the end it is enough to place oneself before God, remembering His love as a Father, and this is enough for it to be fulfilled.

It is good to think that our God does not need sacrifices to win His favour! He does not need anything, our God:

in prayer He asks only that we keep open a channel of communication with His, to discover always that we are His beloved children. And He loves us so much.

Greetings in various languages

French

I cordially greet the French-speaking pilgrims and wish each of you and your loved ones a happy new year. Under the guidance of the Mother of God, whom we celebrated yesterday, may each one of you grow in intimacy with the Father and in love and in the service of your neighbour. God bless you!

English

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from Ireland, Australia, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. May you and your families cherish the joy of this Christmas season and draw near in prayer to the Saviour who has come to dwell among us. God bless you!

German

A cordial greeting to German-speaking pilgrims! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit we have inaugurated this new year. Let us entrust ourselves to His goodness and His love, and we will be certain that He will complete the good that we begin in His name. God bless you and protect you! Happy New Year to all of you!

Spanish

I cordially greet Spanish-speaking pilgrims, particularly the groups from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you always to keep that channel of communication open with God, for He loves you, waits for you and wants nothing more than to give you His love. I wish you and your families a new year filled with God's closeness and tenderness. Thank you.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, I cordially greet all of you, wishing that the light of the Saviour, Who reveals to us the tender and merciful face of the heavenly Father, may always shine on every one of you, in your hearts and on your families and communities. Let us hold the Child Jesus in our arms and place ourselves at His service: He is a source of love and serenity. May He bless you for a peaceful and happy New Year!

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to the Arab-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, our prayer may also be a silent prayer; it is enough to place ourselves under the gaze of God, to remember his Father's love, and this is enough for it to be fulfilled. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims. Dear brothers and sisters, at the beginning of the year I entrust you and your families to the protection of Mary, Mother of God, and – through her intercession – I ask our Lord Jesus Christ to grant you all the graces necessary for a peaceful and holy life, full of peace, fruit of the love of God and

neighbour. May His blessing accompany you always!

Italian

I address a warm welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Capitulars of the Union of Saint Catherine of Siena of the Missionaries of the School, and the participants in the Camp promoted by the Lions Club International Association.

I greet the parish groups, in particular those of Caserta, Santa Croce di Torre del Greco and San Michele di Aprilia, altar servers of San Bonaventura di Cadoneghe, the friends and volunteers of the Fraterna Domus, and circus artists from Cuba.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick, and newlyweds.

Next Sunday we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. Like the Magi, let us too raise our gaze towards heaven; only in this way will we succeed in seeing the star that invites us to take the path of good. Happy new year to you all.
