



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 20 February

2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Today's Audience is taking place in two places. Earlier, I had a [meeting with the faithful from Benevento](#) who were in Saint Peter's, and now with you. And this is due to the kindness of the Prefecture of the Papal Household, who did not want you to catch cold: let us thank those who did this. Thank you.

Let us continue with the catecheses on the 'Our Father'. The first step of every Christian prayer is the entry into a mystery, that of the *fatherhood of God*. One cannot pray like parrots. Either you enter into the mystery, in the awareness that God is your Father, or you do not pray. If I want to pray to God my Father, I begin with the mystery. To understand to what measure God is father to us, let us consider the figures of our parents, but in some measure we must always 'refine them', purify them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also says so; it says: "The purification of our hearts has to do with paternal or maternal images, stemming from our personal and cultural history, and influencing our relationship with God" (n. 2779).

None of us has had perfect parents, no one; as we, in turn, will never be perfect parents or pastors. We all have shortcomings, everyone. We always experience our loving relationships according to our limitations and also our egotism; thus they are often tarnished by desires to possess or to manipulate others. For this reason, at times declarations of love are transformed into feelings of anger and hostility. But look, last week these two loved each other so much; today they hate each other to death: we see this every day! This is why we all have, within, bitter roots that are not good, and sometimes they come out and do harm.

For this reason, when we speak of God as 'father', as we consider the image of our parents, especially if they loved us, at the same time we must go further. Because God's love is that of the Father '*who art in Heaven*', according to the expression that Jesus invites us to use: he is the total love that we can savour only imperfectly in this life. Men and women are eternally begging for love,

— we are beggars of love, we need love — seeking a place where they may finally be loved, but do not find it. How many disappointing friendships and how many disappointing loves there are in our world; many!

In mythology, the Greek god of love is absolutely the most tragic: one does not understand whether it is an angelic being or a demon. Mythology says that he is the son of *Porus* and *Penia*, that is, of resourcefulness and poverty, destined to bear within himself some features of these parents. From here we can think about the ambivalent nature of human love: able to boldly flourish at one time of day, and immediately thereafter to wither and die; what he grasps always slips away (cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 203). There is an expression of the Prophet Hosea that mercilessly contextualizes the congenital weakness of our love: “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away” (6:4). This is what our love often is: a promise we struggle to keep, an attempt which soon dries up and evaporates, a little like when the sun comes out in the morning and takes away the night’s dew.

How many times have we men and women loved in such a weak and intermittent way. We have all experienced this: we have loved but then that love fell apart or weakened. Wishing for love, we then collided with our limitations, the meagerness of our strengths: unable to keep a promise which, in days of grace, seemed easy to fulfil. Indeed, the Apostle Peter was afraid and had to run away. The Apostle Peter was not faithful to Jesus’ love. There is always this weakness that makes us fall. We are beggars on a journey who run the risk of never entirely finding that treasure they seek from the first day of their life: love.

However, another type of love exists, that of the *Father “who art in Heaven”*. No one should doubt being the recipient of this love. He loves us. We can say: “He loves me”. Even had our father and mother not loved us — an historical hypothesis — , there is a God in heaven who loves us like no one else in this world ever has or ever can. God’s love is constant. The prophet Isaiah says: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands”, (Is 49:15-16). Tattoos are in fashion today: “I have graven you on the palms of my hands”. I have tattooed you on my hands. Thus, I am in God’s hands; it cannot be removed. God’s love is like a mother’s love that can never be forgotten. And if a mother forgets? “I will never forget”, says the Lord. This is God’s perfect love. This is how we are loved by him. Even if all our earthly loves were to crumble and we were left with nothing but dust in our hands; God’s unique and faithful love is always burning for all of us.

The hunger for love that we all feel is not a yearning for something nonexistent: it is instead an invitation to know God who is father. Saint Augustine’s conversion, for example, passed over this ridge: the young and brilliant orator was simply seeking among the creatures something that no creature could give him, until one day he had the courage to lift his gaze. And on that day, he knew God. God who loves.

The expression “in Heaven” is not intended to express a distance, but rather a radical difference of love, another dimension of love, a tireless love, a love that will always be there, that is always at hand. It is enough to say “Our Father who art in heaven”, and that love comes.

Therefore, have no fear. None of us is alone. If even by misfortune your earthly father were to forget you and you were resentful of him, you are not denied the fundamental experience of Christian faith: knowing that you are a *most deeply beloved son or daughter of God*, and that there is nothing in life that can extinguish his heartfelt love for you.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord’s blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I extend a special greeting to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. This Friday we will celebrate the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter the Apostle. Pray for me and for my ministry — and also for Pope Benedict — so that I may confirm brothers and sisters in the faith, always and everywhere.
