



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

Space and atmosphere

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“Father” is the word that can never be lacking in prayer, because it is “the cornerstone” which “gives us our Christian identity”. If we also add the word “our”, this allows us to feel that we are all part of “a family”. In this way we also avoid “wasting words” or seeking “magic words”, and we fully live the prayer that Jesus himself taught us — the Our Father — especially when he invites us to forgive others. In his homily on Thursday morning during Mass at Santa Marta, Pope Francis recommended making “an examination of conscience” based on the Our Father.

Pope Francis’ reflection was inspired by the Gospel of Matthew (6:7-15), proposed in the liturgy of the day. “The disciples had asked Jesus a few times: ‘Master, teach us to pray’”. In fact, they “did not know how to pray, and they saw that John’s disciples prayed, so they asked Jesus”. For his part, the Lord “is clear and simple in his teaching: ‘First’, he says ‘when praying, in prayer, do not waste words as the pagans do: they believe that they are heard because of their many words’”.

“Perhaps Jesus had in mind the prophets of Baal”, the Pope said, who, “on Mt Carmel, cried out in prayer to their idol, to their god”. The priests of Baal “prayed, jumping from side to side, and carved engravings: no, this is a waste, a waste of words; no, this is not prayer”. The pagans, Jesus says, “think that they will be heard for their many words”, as if they were “magic words”.

This is why Jesus advises: “Do not be like them, God does not need words”, because “your Father knows what you need even before you ask him”.

Pope Francis noted that “Jesus sets aside this prayer of words, of only words”, and says: “Pray then like this”. Thus, in a word: “Father”, Jesus tells us precisely the space of prayer. Indeed, God “knows what we need before we ask; this Father who listens to us in secret, in secret, like Him, Jesus recommends that we pray in secret”. The Father, the Pope continued, “gives us precisely the identity of children”. Therefore, “when I say ‘Father’ I am going to the roots of my identity: my Christian identity is being a child and this is a grace of the Spirit”. In fact, “no one can say ‘Father’ without the grace of the Spirit”.

“Father”, the Pope said, “is the word that Jesus used in the most significant moments: when he was full of joy and emotion: ‘Father, I praise you because you reveal these things to children’”. Or when “he is weeping at the tomb of his friend Lazarus: ‘Father, I thank you because you have heard me’”. And again, in anguish, “in the final moments of his life: ‘Father, if it is possible that this cup pass away from me, let it pass’”. Then, “when everything is finished”, he says, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit”. In short, Pope Francis said, “in the most significant moments, Jesus says: ‘Father’; this is the word that he uses most”. And “he speaks with the Father: this is the way of prayer and this, I would say, is the space of prayer”.

The Pope explained that “without feeling that we are children, without feeling that you are his child, without saying ‘Father’, our prayer is pagan, a prayer of words”. It is certainly good to “pray to Our Lady”, the Pope said, “because she is a very beloved daughter of the Father”. The same applies to the saints who are “all beloved by the Father” and who intercede for us. This is also true of the angels. “But ‘Father’ is the cornerstone of prayer”, the Pontiff said, advising that we first say “Father” and then pray. “If you are not able to begin the prayer by saying the word ‘Father’ with your heart and your voice, the prayer will not do”.

This means to “feel the Father’s gaze upon me”, the Pope explained, “to feel that the word ‘Father’ is not a waste like the words of the prayers of pagans, but that it is a call to the One who gave me the identity of a son”. This is precisely “the space of Christian prayer — ‘Father’ — and in this way we all pray, with all the saints and angels, also making processions and pilgrimages”. It is “all good”, the Pope added, “but always beginning with ‘Father’ and with the awareness that we are children and that we have a Father who loves us and knows all of our needs: this is the space”.

However, the Pope warned, “there is a curious aspect; Jesus recites the ‘Our Father’, the prayer that we all know, and teaches us to pray in this way: ‘Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’”. He “quickly” adds: “If you forgive others for their offences, your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your offences”. It almost seems, the Pope explained, “that Jesus had forgotten to emphasize what was in the prayer that he said — ‘and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass

against us' — and continues with 'lead us not', and then, 'but no, I have to emphasize this!'"

Therefore, Pope Francis said, "if the space of prayer is to say 'Father', the atmosphere of prayer is to say 'our': we are brothers, we are family". If, however, we are "angry with each other, if we are at war, if we hate each other, then we are obstructing the Father's love". And "this is the atmosphere, it is the family; we are all children of the same Father: How can I hate my Father's son? Cain did that! I would become Cain!"

To say "Our Father", in short, is to say: "You who give me my identity and you who give me a family". This is why "it is so important to be able to forgive", the Pope said, "to forget offences, this is a healthy habit: 'we let it go... so that the Lord handles it', and we do not harbour bitterness, resentment, or the desire for revenge". Therefore, "if you go to pray and say only 'Father', thinking of the One who gave you life, who gives you your identity and loves you, and you say 'our', forgiving everyone, forgetting offences: this is the best prayer that you can make". In this context, he reiterated, "yes, all saints pray and Our Lady prays, but the cornerstone of prayer is 'Our Father'"

In conclusion, Pope Francis suggested that we also make "an examination of conscience about this" a few times, and proposed questions that we ought to ask ourselves: "Do I see God as Father, do I feel that He is my Father? And if I do not feel that He is, do I ask the Holy Spirit to teach me to know this? Am I capable of forgetting offences, of forgiving, of letting things go and asking the Father: 'they are also your children, and they treated me badly, please help me to forgive?'. This is the "examination of conscience" we must make: "it will do us good, good, good". Let us always keep in mind that the words "Father" and "our" give us "the identity of children" and give us "a family, so as to walk together in life".