



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

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General Audience

This morning's general audience took place in the San Damaso Courtyard of the Vatican Apostolic Palace.

In his address in Italian the Pope continued his cycle of catechesis on prayer, focusing on the theme: "The certainty of being heard" (Bible reading: *Mk 5: 22-24, 35-36*).

After summarizing his catechesis in various languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the faithful.

The general audience concluded with the recitation of the *Pater Noster* and the Apostolic Blessing.

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

There is a radical objection to prayer, which derives from an observation that we all make: we pray, we ask, and yet sometimes our prayers seem to go unheard: what we have asked for - for ourselves or for others - is not fulfilled. We have this experience, very often... If the reason for which we prayed was noble (such as intercession for the health of a sick person, or for the end of a war, for instance), the non-fulfilment seems scandalous. For example, for wars: we are praying for wars to end, these wars in so many parts of the world. Think of Yemen, think of Syria, countries that have been at war for years, for years, ravaged by wars, and we pray, but they do not come to an end. But how can this be? "Some even stop praying because they think their petition is not heard" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2734). But if God is Father, why does He not listen to us? He who has assured us that He gives good things to the children who ask Him for them (cf. *Mt 7: 10*), why does He not respond to our requests? We all have experience of this: we have prayed, prayed, for the illness of a friend, of a father, of a mother, and so it went. But God did not grant our request! It is an experience we have all had.

The *Catechism* offers us a good summary of the matter. It puts us on guard against the risk of not living an authentic experience of faith, but of transforming the relationship with God into something magical. Prayer is not a magic wand: it is a dialogue with the Lord. Indeed, when we pray we can give in to the risk of not being the ones to serve God, but of expecting Him to serve us (cf. 2735). This is, then, a prayer that is always demanding, that wants to direct events according to our own design, that admits no plans other than our own desires. Jesus, on the other hand, had great wisdom in teaching us the *Lord's Prayer*. It is a prayer of questions only, as we know, but the first ones we utter are all on God's side. They ask for the fulfilment not of our plan, but of His will for the world. Better to leave it to Him: "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done" (*Mt 6:9-10*).

And the Apostle Paul reminds us that we do not even know what it is appropriate to ask for (cf. *Rm 8: 26*). We ask for necessities, our needs, things that we want: "But is this more convenient or not?" Paul tells us, we do not even know what it is right to ask. When we pray, we need to be humble: this is the first attitude for going to pray. Just like the attitude in many places for going to pray in church: women who wear a veil or take holy water to begin to pray, in this way we must tell ourselves, before praying, that it is the right way; that God will give me what it is right to give. He knows. When we pray we must be humble, so that our words are actually prayers and not just idle talk that God rejects. We can also pray for the wrong reasons: such as, to defeat the enemy in war, without asking ourselves what God thinks of such a war. It is easy to write "God is with us" on a banner; many are keen to ensure that God is with them, but few bother to check whether they are actually with God. In prayer, it is God Who must convert us, not we who must convert God. It is humility. I go to pray but You, Lord, convert my heart so that it asks for what is convenient, for what will be best for my spiritual health.

However, the scandal remains: when people pray with a sincere heart, when they ask for things that correspond to the Kingdom of God, when a mother prays for her sick child, why does it sometimes seem that God does not listen to them? To answer this question, we need to meditate calmly on the Gospels. The accounts of Jesus' life are full of prayers: many people wounded in body and in spirit ask Him to be healed; there are those who pray for a friend who can no longer walk; there are fathers and mothers who bring sick sons and daughters... They are all prayers imbued with suffering. It is an immense choir that invokes: "Have mercy on us!"

We see that at times Jesus' response is immediate, whereas in some other cases it is delayed: it seems that God does not answer. Think of the Canaanite woman who begs Jesus for her daughter: this woman has to insist for a long time to be heard (cf. *Mt 15: 21-28*). She even has the humility to hear a word from Jesus that seems a little offensive towards her: we must not throw bread to the dogs, to mere dogs. But this humiliation does not matter to the woman: her daughter's health is what matters. And she goes on: "Yes, but even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters", and Jesus likes this. Courage in prayer. Or think of the paralytic brought by his four friends: Jesus initially forgives his sins and only later heals his body (cf. *Mk 2:1-12*). On some occasions, therefore, the solution to the problem is not immediate. In our life too, each one of us has this experience. Let us look back a little: how many times have we asked for a grace, a miracle, let's say, and nothing has happened. Then, over time, things have worked out but in God's way, the divine way, not according to what we wanted in that moment. God's time is not our time.

From this point of view, the healing of Jairus' daughter is worthy of particular attention (cf. *Mk 5: 21-33*). There is a father who is in a hurry: his daughter is ill and for this reason he asks for Jesus' help. The Master immediately accepts, but on their way home another healing occurs, and then the news comes that the girl has died. It seems to be the end, but instead Jesus says to the father: "Do not fear, only believe" (*Mk 5:36*). "Continue to have faith": because it is faith that sustains prayer. And indeed, Jesus will awaken that child from the sleep of death. But for a time, Jairus had to walk in the dark, with only the flame of faith. Lord, give me faith! May my faith grow! Ask for this grace, to have faith. Jesus, in the Gospel, says that faith moves mountains. But, having real faith. Jesus, before the faith of His poor, of His people, is won over; He feels special tenderness, before that faith. And He listens.

The prayer that Jesus addresses to the Father in Gethsemane also seems to go unheard. "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me". It seems that the Father does not listen to Him. The Son must drink fully from the chalice of the passion. But Holy Saturday is not the final chapter, because on the third day, Sunday, is the Resurrection. Evil is lord of the penultimate day: remember this well. Evil is never the lord of the last day, no: the penultimate, the moment when the night is darkest, just before the dawn. Then, on the penultimate day,

there is temptation, when the devil makes us think he has won: "Have you seen? I have won!". The evil one is the lord of the penultimate day: on the last is the Resurrection. But the evil one is never lord of the last day: God is the Lord of the last day. Because that belongs to God alone, and it is the day when all human longings for salvation will be fulfilled. Let us learn this humble patience, to await the Lord's grace, to await the final day. Very often, the penultimate is very hard, because human sufferings are hard. But the Lord is there. And on the last day, He solves everything. Thank you.

Greeting in English

I cordially greet the English-speaking faithful. United in this month of May with Our Blessed Lady, may we grow in the certainty that our heavenly Father always hears our prayers. Upon you and your families I invoke the joy and peace of the Lord. May God bless you!
