

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

Twenty Sixth Sunday of the Year - 29th September 2024

In our first reading in Mass today we find Moses, delighted that the gift of God's prophetic word flowing through him, wishing it would flow through a multitude of others, "If only the whole people of the Lord were prophets, and the Lord gave his Spirit to them all!" Moses is a forerunner of Christ, who wills that his Spirit should be in us all. Pope Francis, in today's catechesis, reflects on Jesus as our model and soul of all prayer. This catechesis was first given on Wednesday, 2 June 2021.

Jesus, model and soul of all prayer

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

The Gospels show us how prayer was fundamental in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. This can already be seen in the choice of those who would later become the Apostles. Luke places their election in a precise context of prayer, and he says: "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray; and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called his disciples, and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles" (6:12-13). Jesus chooses them after a night of prayer. It seems that there is no criterion in this choice other than prayer, the dialogue of Jesus with the Father. Judging from how those men were to behave, it would seem that the choice was not the best, as they all fled, they left him alone before the Passion; but it is precisely this, especially the presence of Judas, the future betrayer, that demonstrates that those names were inscribed in God's plan.

Prayer on behalf of his friends continually resurfaces in the life of Jesus. The Apostles sometimes become a cause of concern for him, but as he had received them from the Father, after prayer, Jesus carries them in his heart, even in their errors, even when they fall. In all this we discover how Jesus was both teacher and friend, always willing to wait patiently for the disciple's conversion. The highest point of this patient waiting is the "web" of love that Jesus weaves around Peter. At the Last Supper He says to him: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:31-32). It is impressive to know that at that moment, during the time of weakness, Jesus' love does not cease. "But father, if I am in mortal sin, does Jesus love me?" — "Yes" — "And does Jesus continue to love me?" — "Yes" — "But if I have done worse things, and committed many sins ... does Jesus continue to love me?" — "Yes". Jesus' love and prayer for each one of us does not cease, it does not cease, but rather becomes more intense, and we are at the centre of his prayer! We must always keep this in mind: Jesus prays for me, he is praying now before the Father and makes him see the wounds he carried with him, to show the Father the price of our salvation, it is the love that he holds for us. But in this moment, let each one of us, let us think: in this moment, is Jesus praying for me? Yes. This is a great certainty that we must have.

Jesus' prayer returns punctually at a crucial time of his journey, that of the verification of his disciples' faith. Let us listen again to the evangelist Luke: "As [Jesus] was praying alone, the disciples were with him; and he asked them, 'Who do the people say that I am?' And they answered, 'John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah, and others, that one of the old prophets has risen'. And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' And Peter answered, on behalf of them all, 'The Christ of God'. But he charged and commanded them tell this to no one" (9:18-21). The great turning points of Jesus' mission are always preceded by prayer, but not just in passing, but rather by intense, prolonged prayer. There is always prayer in those moments. This test of faith seems to be the goal, but instead it is a renewed starting point for the disciples, because from then on, it is as if Jesus took on a new tone in his mission, speaking openly to them of his passion, death and resurrection.

With this prospect, which gives rise instinctively to repulsion, both in the disciples and in we who read the Gospel, prayer is the only source of light and strength. It is necessary to pray more intensely, every time the road takes an uphill turn.

And indeed, after announcing to the disciples what awaits him in Jerusalem, the episode of the Transfiguration takes place. Jesus “took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as He was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem” (9:28-31), that is, the Passion. Therefore, this anticipated manifestation of the glory of Jesus took place in prayer, while the Son was immersed in communion with the Father and fully consented to his will of love, to his plan of salvation. And out of that prayer came a clear word for the three disciples involved: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him” (Lk 9:35). From prayer comes the invitation to listen to Jesus, always from prayer.

From this quick journey through the Gospel, we learn that Jesus not only wants us to pray as he prays, but assures us that, even if our attempts at prayer are completely vain and ineffective, we can always count on his prayer. We must be aware of this: Jesus prays for me. Once, a good bishop told me that in a very bad moment in his life, a great trial, a moment of darkness, he looked up in the Basilica and saw this phrase written: “I, Peter, will pray for you”. And this gave him strength and comfort. And this happens every time that each of us knows that Jesus prays for him or for her. Jesus prays for us. In this moment, in this very moment. Do this memory exercise, repeat this. When there is a difficulty, when you feel the orbital pull of distractions: Jesus is praying for me. But, father, is this true? It is true! He said it himself. Let us not forget that what sustains each of us in life is Jesus’ prayer for every one of us, with our first and last name, before the Father, showing him the wounds that are the price of our salvation.

Even if our prayers were only stuttering, if they were compromised by a wavering faith, we must never cease to trust in him: I do not know how to pray but he prays for me. Supported by Jesus’ prayer, our timid prayers rest on eagle wings and soar up to Heaven. Do not forget: Jesus is praying for me. Now? Now. In the moment of trial, in the moment of sin, even in that moment, Jesus is praying for me with so much love.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing catechesis on prayer, we now consider Jesus as the model of prayer for his disciples. The Gospels show us that the Lord chooses his apostles only after a night of intense prayer. Before every crucial moment in his ministry, Jesus withdraws to pray. Only after long prayer does Jesus question the disciples about their faith in him and then reveal to them his coming passion, death and resurrection. On the mount of the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John then see the Lord in prayer, revealed in his glory as the beloved Son of the Father. At the Last Supper he assures Peter that he has prayed for him, for his conversion and for his future mission. Like the apostles, we too can count on the Lord’s prayer to sustain us in our journey of faith and discipleship. The Catechism reminds us that the Risen Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, constantly intercedes before him on our behalf (cf. No. 2741). As we strive to persevere in prayer, may we be confident that our petitions will rise to heaven on eagles’ wings and, with and in Jesus, always find a hearing before the throne of the Father.