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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.30 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 began a new cycle of catechesis on "Our Father", focusing on the theme "Teach us to pray" (Bible passage: *From the Gospel according to Luke, 11: 1*).

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!

Today we begin a cycle of catechesis on the Lord's Prayer.

The Gospels have provided us with very vivid portraits of Jesus as a *man of prayer*: Jesus prayed. Despite the urgency of His mission and the persistence of the people who claim His attention, Jesus feels the need to seclude Himself in solitude and to pray. The Gospel of Mark tells us this detail from the first page of Jesus' public

ministry (cf. 1: 35). Jesus' inaugural day in Capernaum ended triumphantly. As the sun set, multitudes of sick people arrived at the door of Jesus' dwelling: the Messiah preached and healed. In this way the ancient prophecies and the expectations of many people who suffered were fulfilled: Jesus is the God Who is close, the God Who frees us. But that crowd is still small compared to the many other crowds that gathered around the prophet of Nazareth; in certain moments they were oceanic assemblies, and Jesus is at the centre of it all, expected by the people, the outcome of the hope of Israel.

And yet He disengages Himself; He does not end up hostage to the expectations of those who have not elected Him as a leader. Which is a danger of leaders: to attach themselves too much to the people, not to allow some distance. Jesus realizes this and does not end up hostage to the people. From the first night of Capernaum, He shows that He is an original Messiah. In the last part of the night, as dawn begins to announce itself, the disciples are still looking for Him, but they are unable to find Him. Where is He? Until Peter finally tracks Him down in an isolated place, completely absorbed in prayer. And he says to Him, "Everyone is looking for you!" (Mk 1: 37). The exclamation appears to be a clause attached to a unanimous success, the proof of the good result outcome of a mission.

But Jesus says to His followers that He has to go elsewhere; that it is not for the people to seek Him, but first and foremost for Him to seek the others. Therefore He must not lay down roots, but remain continually a pilgrim on the roads of Galilee (vv. 38-39). And He is also a pilgrim towards the Father, that is: praying. On the journey of prayer. Jesus prays.

And everything happens in a night of prayer.

In some pages of the Scripture it seems to be most of all Jesus' prayer, His intimacy with the Father, that governs everything. It is, for example, especially in the night in Gethsemane. The last phase of Jesus' journey (the most difficult of all among those He has completed so far) seems to find its meaning in Jesus' continuous listening to the Father. A prayer that is surely not easy, rather, a genuine "agony", in the sense of that of athletes, and a prayer capable of sustaining the journey of the cross.

Here is the essential point: there, *Jesus prayed*.

Jesus prayed with intensity in public moments, sharing the liturgy of His people, yet He also chose secluded places, apart from the whirlwind of the world, places that allowed Him to descend into the secret of His soul: He is the prophet Who knows the stones of the desert and rises up on the mountains. Jesus' last words, before expiring on the cross, are words of Psalms, that is, of prayer, of the prayer of the Jews: He prayed with the prayers that His mother had taught Him.

Jesus prayed like every man of the world prays. And yet, in His way of praying, a mystery was also enclosed, something that certainly did not escape the eyes of His disciples, if in the Gospels we find that plea, so simple and immediate: "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Lk 11: 1). They saw Jesus pray and they wanted to learn to pray: "Lord, teach us to pray". And Jesus did not refuse, He is not jealous about His intimacy with the Father, but came precisely to introduce us to this relationship with the Father. And in this way He becomes a teacher of prayer for His disciples, as certainly He wants to be for all of us. We too should say, "Lord, teach me to pray. Teach me".

Even if perhaps we have prayed for many years, we must always learn! Man's prayer, that yearning that arises so naturally from his soul, is perhaps one of the deepest mysteries of the universe. And yet we do not even know if the prayers we address to God are effectively what He wants to hear addressed to Him. The Bible also gives us testimonies of inopportune prayers, that in the end are rejected by God: it is sufficient to recall that parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Only this latter, the publican, returns home from the temple justified, because the Pharisee was proud and liked the people to see him praying, and pretended to pray: his heart was cold. And Jesus says: this is not justified, "for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Lk 18: 14). The first step for praying is to be humble, to go to the Father and to say, "Look at me, I am a sinner, I am weak, I am bad", each person knows what to say. But one begins always with humility, and the Lord listens. Humble prayer is listened to by the Lord.

Therefore, beginning this cycle of catechesis on Jesus' prayer, the most beautiful and just thing we must all do is to repeat the disciples' invocation: "Lord, teach us to pray". We can all go a little further, and pray better; but ask the Lord, "Lord, teach me to pray". Let us do this, in this time of Advent, and He surely will not let our invocation fall to nothing.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am pleased to greet pilgrims from France and the various Francophone countries, especially the young people of the Vertou College. In this time of Advent, let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us repeat the invocation of the disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!". In this way we will be sure that He will not let our demands fall on deaf ears. God bless you!

English

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's audience, especially those from Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America. My greeting also goes to the many groups of students and teachers present. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord's blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

German

I address a greeting and a wish for a good Advent journey to German-speaking pilgrims. We are approaching Christmas. God became man; in Jesus He came to share our life. Through prayer we wish to keep this relationship with Him alive. May the Lord give you His Holy Spirit.

Spanish

I cordially greet the Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you to ask God as the disciples did: "Lord, teach us to pray", so that our prayer is neither routine nor selfish, but incarnated in our lives and pleasing to our Father in heaven.

God bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

Dear pilgrims from Brazil, Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking countries, welcome! From the many things, so often difficult, of life, learn to raise your heart to the Father in Heaven, resting in the bosom of His infinite goodness, and you will see that the pains and afflictions of life will do you less harm. Nothing can prevent you from living this friendship with God and bearing witness to all His mercy! May His Blessing descend generously upon you and your families.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, let us educate ourselves in a relationship with God, in constant prayer, full of trust, capable of illuminating our life, as Jesus teaches us. And let us ask Him to be able to communicate to the people we meet on our path, the joy of the encounter with the Lord, light for our existence. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I welcome Polish pilgrims. I greet in particular the editors of the Polish Section of Vatican Radio, which in these days celebrates the 80th anniversary of its foundation. I thank you for your service to the Pope and to the Church. The 19th Day of Prayer and Help for the Eastern Church will be celebrated next Sunday in Poland. With gratitude I think of all those who with prayer and concrete works support the ecclesial communities of neighbouring countries. I wish everyone a serene Advent time, full of grace. I bless you from the heart.

Croatian

I joyfully greet and bless Croatian pilgrims, especially married couples from the diocese of Dubrovnik, accompanied by their Pastor, Msgr. Mate Uzinić. Dear spouses, yesterday you renewed your marriage vows in Saint Peter's Basilica, confessing that the Lord has assisted you in the happy and sad events of life. I encourage you to live conjugal love as a sign of love between Christ and the Church, furthering daily your mutual self-giving in small gestures. In this time of Advent, may the Blessed Virgin Mary be for you an example of how to welcome the Lord and entrust yourself to him. May Jesus and Mary be praised!

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and the parish groups, in particular those of Sant'Elia a Pianisi, of Rome and of Pescara.

I greet the Nice Cavalry Regiment of Bellinzago Novarese; groups of elderly pensioners from the province of Trento, and the group of people in their 70s from Paterno di Lucania.

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

Next Saturday we will celebrate the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let us entrust ourselves to Our Lady! May she, as a model of faith and obedience to the Lord, help us prepare our hearts to welcome the Child Jesus at his Nativity. Thank you.
