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General Audience

Catechesis of the Holy Father

Greetings in various languages

Appeal of the Holy Father

This morning's General Audience took place at 9.20 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 continued his catechesis on the "Lord's Prayer", focusing on the theme "Abba, Father!" (Bible passage: from the *Letter of Saint Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 8: 14-16).

After summarising his catechesis in several languages, the Holy Father addressed special greetings to the groups of faithful present. He then launched an appeal on the occasion of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, which begins this coming Friday, 18 January.

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!

Continuing the catechesis on the "Lord's Prayer", today we will start from the observation that, in the New Testament, the prayer seems to seek to arrive at the essential, to the point of being concentrated in a single

word: *Abba*, Father.

We have heard what Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, “Abba, Father” (8: 15). And to the Galatians, the Apostle says: “Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit Who calls out, “Abba”, Father (*Gal* 4: 6). Twice there returns the same invocation, in which all the newness of the Gospel is condensed. After having known Jesus and listened to His preaching, the Christian can no longer consider God as a tyrant to fear; he is no longer afraid but rather feels the trust in Him flourish in his heart: he can speak to the Creator, calling Him “Father”. The expression is so important for Christians that often it is conserved intact in its original form: “*Abba*”.

It is rare in the New Testament for the Aramaic expressions not to be translated into Greek. We must imagine that in these Aramaic words, the very voice of Jesus Himself remains as if “recorded”: they have respected Jesus’ language. In the first word of the Lord’s Prayer we immediately find the radical newness of Christian prayer.

It is not only about using a symbol – in this case, the figure of the father – to link to the mystery of God; it is instead about having, so to say, all Jesus’ world poured into our heart. If we carry out this operation, we can pray the Lord’s Prayer with truth. To say “*Abba*” is something much more intimate, and more moving than simply calling God “Father”. This is why some have proposed to translate this original Aramaic word “*Abba*” with “Papa”, or “Dad”. Instead of saying “Our Father”, saying “Papa, dad”. We continue to say “Our Father”, but with the heart we are invited to say “Papa”, to have a relationship with God like that of a child with his father, who says “Papa”, and says “Dad”. Indeed these expressions evoke affection, they evoke warmth, something that is projected to us in the context of childhood: the image of a child completely wrapped in the embrace of a father who feels infinite tenderness for him. And for this reason, dear brothers and sisters, to pray well, we must arrive at the point of having a child’s heart. Not a sufficient heart: in this way one cannot pray well. Like a child in the arms of his father, his daddy.

But certainly it is the Gospels that introduce us better to the meaning of this word. What does it mean for Jesus, this word? The “Lord’s Prayer” takes on meaning and colour if we learn to pray it after having read, for example, the parable of the merciful father, in the fifteenth chapter of Luke (cf. *Lk* 15: 11-32). Let us imagine this prayer pronounced by the prodigal son, after having experienced the embrace of his father who has long awaited him, a father who does not remember the offensive words that he has said to him, a father who now simply makes him understand how much he has missed him. Then we discover how those words take on life, take on strength. And we ask: how is it possible for You, or God, to know only love? Do you not know hatred? No, God would answer, I know only love. Where in You is the vendetta, the demand for justice, the anger for your wounded pride? And God would answer: I know only love.

The father of that parable has in his way of acting something that reminds many of the heart of a *mother*. It is above all mothers who excuse their children, who cover up for them, whose empathy towards them is uninterrupted, who continue to love them even when they no longer deserve anything.

It is enough to evoke this single expression – *Abba* – for a Christian prayer to develop. And Saint Paul, in his letters, follows this same road, and it could not be otherwise, as it is the road taught by Jesus in this invocation that is a force that attracts all the rest of the prayer.

God looks for you, even if you do not seek Him. God loves you, even if you have forgotten about Him. God perceives in you a beauty, even if you think you have squandered all your talents in vain. God is not only a father; He is like a mother who never ceases to love her creature. On the other hand, there is a “gestation” that lasts for ever, well beyond the nine months of the physical one; it is a gestation that generates an infinite circuit of love.

For a Christian, to pray is simply to say “*Abba*”, to say “Papa”, to say “Dad”, to say “Father” but with the trust of a child.

It may be also that we find ourselves walking on paths far from God, as happened to the prodigal son; or that we fall into a solitude that makes us feel we are abandoned in the world; or even to make a mistake and be paralysed by a sense of guilt. In those difficult moments, we can still find the strength to pray, starting from the word “Father”, but said with the tender meaning of a child: “*Abba*”, “Papa”. He will not conceal His face from us. Remember this well: perhaps someone has ugly things within themselves, things they do not know how to resolve, great bitterness for having done this or that... He will not conceal His face. He does not close up in silence. If you say “Father” to Him and He will answer you. You have a father. “Yes, but I am a delinquent...”. But you have a father Who loves you! Say “Father” to Him, start praying in this way, and in the silence He will tell you that He has never lost sight of you. “But, Father, I have done this...” – “I have never lost sight of you, I have seen everything. But I have always remained there, close to you, faithful to my love for you”. That will be the answer. Never forget to say “Father”. Thank you.

Greetings in various languages

French

I am pleased to welcome Francophone pilgrims, especially the young people of Bordeaux and Lyon. On the eve of the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I invite you to address our common Father, calling him *Abba*! God bless you!

English

I welcome the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s audience, especially the groups coming from Korea and the United States of America. In the context of the forthcoming Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, I offer a special greeting to the group from the Bossey Ecumenical Institute. My cordial greeting also goes to the priest alumni of the Pontifical North American College. Upon all of you I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

German

A warm welcome to German-speaking pilgrims. I greet in particular the delegation from Burgenland, accompanied by the bishop Msgr. Ägidius Zsifkovics, as well as the Festive Committee of the Cologne Carnival, together with Cardinal Rainer Woelki. God is our Father, and we can be completely sure of His faithful love for us. May the Holy Spirit make us true sons of God and guide us always.

Spanish

I cordially greet the Spanish-speaking pilgrims from Spain and Latin America. I encourage you to address God as a Father Who loves us and comes towards us. Do not tire of calling to Him; for He, as a good Father, comes to heal our wounds and to re-establish the joy of being His children. God bless you. Thank you.

Portuguese

Dear Portuguese-speaking pilgrims, especially those from Terrugem, welcome! The Octave of Prayer for Christian Unity begins tomorrow; in those days, let us intensify our supplications and penances, so that the hour when you find the fulfilment of Jesus will come: “*Abbá ... , ut unum sint* - so that all may be one!” May God’s blessing descend upon your steps, and upon our joint prayers for the reunification of the Church.

Arabic

I extend a cordial welcome to Arabic-speaking pilgrims, especially those from the Middle East! Dear brothers and sisters, always remember that God Who is Love tells us His desire to be called “Abba”, Father, with the total confidence of a child who abandons himself into the arms of those who gave him life. Let us start again from this word and we will experience the joy of being children loved by God. May the Lord bless you!

Polish

I cordially greet Polish pilgrims, especially the group from the Shrine of Saint Stanislaus, Patron of Poland, the bishop and martyr’s birthplace, who have come here to commemorate the anniversary of the visit Saint John Paul II made before his election to the See of Peter. Dear brothers and sisters, in communion with the saints, pray with filial trust: “Abba – Father”, asking His blessing for you, for your families and – in these days – for the young people I will soon meet in Panama. Please do not forget to pray for me. Praised be Jesus Christ!

Italian

I extend a cordial welcome to Italian-speaking pilgrims.

I am pleased to welcome the Pastoral Unit of Orbetello, the *San Paolo* Parish Oratory and the Schools of the district.

I greet the parish groups, in particular those of Montoro and Talsano; the Juppiter Association of Capranica and the De Rosa Institute of Sant’Anastasia.

I address a special thought to the young, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds, of whom there are many.

I hope that, for all of you, this meeting may revive communion with the universal ministry of the Successor of Peter and, at the same time, be an opportunity for renewal and spiritual graces. I invoke upon you all the joy and peace of the Lord Jesus!

Appeal of the Holy Father

Next Friday, with the celebration of Vespers in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins on the theme: “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue”. This year too we are called to pray, so that all Christians may again become one family, consistent with the divine will that wants “that all may be one” (*Jn 17: 21*). Ecumenism is not optional. The intention will be to develop a common and consistent witness in the affirmation of true justice and in the support of the weakest, through concrete, appropriate and effective responses.
