

CATECHESSES  
ON THE  
LORD'S PRAYER

(5 December – 22 May 2019)

POPE FRANCIS

## Table of Contents

CHAPTER I	
A Man of Prayer .....	4
CHAPTER II	
Seven Requests.....	9
CHAPTER III	
Be Children of Your Father Who Is in Heaven.....	13
CHAPTER IV	
Prayer Transforms Reality .....	18
CHAPTER V	
Abba! Father!.....	23
CHAPTER VI	
The Prayer of a Community of Brothers and Sisters	28
CHAPTER VII	
Our Father, Who Art in Heaven .....	33
CHAPTER VIII	
Hallowed Be Thy Name .....	38
CHAPTER IX	42
Thy Kingdom Come .....	42
CHAPTER X	
Thy Will Be Done.....	47
CHAPTER XI	
Give Us Our Daily Bread.....	51
CHAPTER XII	
Forgive Us Our Debts .....	55
CHAPTER XIII	

Jesus Prays to the Father.....	60
CHAPTER XIV	
As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors .....	64
CHAPTER XV	
Lead Us Not into Temptation .....	69
CHAPTER XVI	
Deliver Us from Evil .....	74
CHAPTER XVII	
Conclusion .....	78

## — CHAPTER I —

### A Man of Prayer

*St Peter's Square*

*Wednesday, 5 December 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today we begin a series of catecheses on the Lord's Prayer.

The Gospels have consigned to us very lively portrayals of Jesus as a *man of prayer*. Jesus prayed. Despite the urgency of his mission and the pressure from the many people making demands on him, Jesus feels the need to withdraw in solitude and pray. Mark's Gospel recounts this detail to us from the very first passage about Jesus' public ministry (cf. 1:35). Jesus' inaugural day in Capernaum has ended in a triumphant way. Once the sun has set, multitudes of sick people have reached the door where Jesus is staying: the Messiah preaches and heals. The ancient prophecies and expectations of so many suffering people are fulfilled: Jesus is the God-with-us, the God who frees us. But that crowd is still small when compared to the many other crowds that will gather around the prophet of Nazareth; at certain times the gatherings are oceanic, and Jesus is at the centre of it all, the

expectation of the peoples, the fulfilment of the hope of Israel.

Yet he slips away; he does not end up being a hostage to the expectations of those, who by then, had declared him a *leader*, which is a danger for leaders: to be too attached to people, not to keep their distance. Jesus realizes this and does not end up being a hostage to the people. From the very first night at Capernaum, he shows he is an original Messiah. At the end of the night, when dawn is already breaking, the disciples are still seeking him, but are unable to find him. Where is he? Until Peter at last tracks him down in an isolated place, completely absorbed in prayer. And Peter tells him: “Every one is searching for you”! (Mk 1:37). The exclamation seems to be the appropriate phrase for an overwhelming success, proof of the successful outcome of a mission.

But Jesus says to his own that he must go elsewhere; that it is not the people who seek him, rather it is above all he who seeks others. He must therefore not put down roots but remain a constant pilgrim on the roads of Galilee (vv. 38-39); as well as a pilgrim towards the Father, that is: praying. On a journey of prayer. Jesus prays.

And it all happens during a night of prayer.

In some passages of Scripture it seems to be first and foremost Jesus' prayer, his intimacy with the Father, that governs everything. It is so, for example, especially on the night at Gethsemane. The final stretch of Jesus' journey (by far the most difficult of those he has undertaken thus far) seems to find its meaning in Jesus' continuous listening to the Father. Certainly not an easy prayer, indeed a truly 'agonizing struggle' in the sense of the athletic spirit, yet a prayer that is able to sustain the way of the Cross.

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

Jesus prayed with intensity in public moments, sharing the liturgy of his people, but also seeking withdrawn places, away from the turbulence of the world, places that allowed him to dwell in the privacy of his soul: he is the prophet who knows the stones of the desert and goes up high into the mountains. Jesus' last words before dying on the Cross are words from the psalms, that is, of prayer, the prayer of the Jews: he prayed with the prayers that his mother had taught him.

Jesus prayed like all men and women in the world pray. Yet his way of praying also contained a mystery, something that certainly did not escape the eyes of his disciples, since the Gospels contain that plea that was so simple and immediate: "*Lord, teach us to pray*" (Lk 11:1). They see Jesus praying and they want to learn

how to pray: “Lord, teach us to pray”. And Jesus does not refuse, he is not possessive of his intimacy with the Father, but rather, he came precisely to introduce us to this relationship with the Father. And thus, he becomes the teacher of prayer to his disciples, as he undoubtedly wants to be so for all of us. We too should say: “Lord, teach me to pray. Teach me”.

Even if we may have been praying for many years, we still have to learn! Man’s prayer, this yearning which arises so naturally from his soul, is perhaps one of the deepest mysteries of the universe. And we do not even know whether the prayers that we address to God are effectively those that he wants to have addressed to him. The Bible also gives us testimonies of inappropriate prayers, which in the end are rejected by God: It is sufficient to recall the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Only the latter, the publican, goes home from the Temple justified, because the Pharisee was proud and he liked people to see him praying and he feigned prayer: the heart was cold. And Jesus says: this is not justified, “for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14). The first step to prayer 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 one knows what to say.

But one always begins with humility, and the Lord listens. The Lord listens to humble prayer.

Therefore, on beginning this series of catecheses on the prayer of Jesus, the most beautiful and just thing that we all must do is to repeat the disciples' appeal: "Teacher, teach us to pray!". It would be beautiful during this Season of Advent to repeat: "Lord, teach me to pray". We can all go somewhat beyond this and pray better; but asking the Lord: "Lord, teach me to pray". Let us do this during this Season of Advent and he will certainly not allow our invocation to go unheard.

## — CHAPTER II —

### Seven Requests

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 12 December 2018*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue on the path of catecheses on the Lord's Prayer, which we began last week. Jesus places on the lips of his disciples a short, audacious prayer, made up of seven requests a number that, in the Bible, is not random, but indicates fullness. I say audacious because, had Christ not suggested it, probably none of us indeed, none of the most well-known theologians would dare pray to God in this way.

In fact Jesus invites his disciples to approach God and to confidently address several requests to him: first in regard to him and then in regard to us. There is no preamble to the 'Our Father'. Jesus does not teach formulas for one to 'ingratiate oneself' to the Lord, but instead invites us to pray to Him by knocking down the barriers of awe and fear. He does not tell us we should address God by calling him 'Almighty', 'Most High', [by saying,] 'You, who are so distant from us, I am a wretched man': no, he does not say this, but simply 'Father', with total simplicity, as children address their father. And this

word, “Father”, expresses confidence and filial trust.

The ‘Our Father’ prayer sinks its roots in the concrete reality of mankind. For example, it has us ask for bread, daily bread: a simple but essential request, which indicates that faith is not a matter of an ‘adornment’, detached from life, which arises when all other needs have been satisfied. If anything, prayer begins with life itself. Prayer, Jesus teaches us, does not begin in human life after the stomach is full: rather, it settles in wherever a person is, anyone who is hungry, who weeps, who struggles, who suffers and who wonders ‘why?’. Our first prayer, in a certain sense, was the wail that accompanied the first breath. In that newborn’s cry the fate of our whole life was announced: our constant hunger, our constant thirst, our search for happiness.

In prayer, Jesus does not seek to extinguish the person; he does not seek to anaesthetize him or her. He does not want us to tone down the demands and requests, learning to bear all things. Instead, he wants all suffering, all distress to soar heavenward and become dialogue.

Having faith, someone said, is a habit of crying out.

We all need to be like Bartimaeus in the Gospel (cf. Mk 10:46-52) let us recall that passage of the

Gospel: Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus that blind man who was begging at the gates of Jericho. He had so many good people around him telling him to keep quiet: ‘Be quiet! The Lord is passing by. Be quiet. Do not disturb. The Master has much to do; do not disturb him. You are annoying with your cries. Do not disturb’. But he did not heed those suggestions: with blessed persistence, he insisted that his wretched condition might finally encounter Jesus. And he cried louder! And the polite people said: ‘No, he is the Master, please! You are making a bad impression!’. And he cried out because he wanted to see; he wanted to be healed. “Jesus, have mercy on me!” (cf. v. 47). Jesus heals his sight and says: “your faith has made you well” (v. 52), as if to explain that the decisive element of his healing was that prayer, that *invocation shouted out* with faith, stronger than the ‘common sense’ of many people who wanted him to keep quiet. Prayer not only precedes salvation, but in some way already contains it, because it frees one from the despair of those who do not believe in a way out of many unbearable situations.

Of course, then, believers also feel the need to praise God. The Gospels offer us the jubilant exclamation that gushes forth from Jesus’ heart, full of wonder, grateful to the Father (cf. Mt 11:25-27). The first Christians even felt the need to add a doxology to the text of the Lord’s Prayer

(cf. Mt 11:25-27): “for thine is the power and the glory for ever” (*Didache*, 8:2).

But none of us is obliged to embrace the theory that someone advanced in the past, namely, that the prayer of supplication may be a weak form of faith, while the more authentic prayer would be pure praise, that which seeks God without the burden of any request. No, this is not true. The prayer of supplication is authentic; it is spontaneous; it is an act of faith in God who is Father, who is good, who is almighty. It is an act of faith in me, who am small, sinful, needy. And for this reason prayer, in order to ask for something, is quite noble. God is the Father who has immense compassion for us, and wants his children to speak to him without fear, directly calling him ‘Father’; or amid difficulties saying: ‘Lord, what have you done to me?’. For this reason we can tell him everything, even the things that are distorted and incomprehensible in our life. And he promised us that he would be with us for ever, until the last day we shall spend on this earth. Let us pray the ‘Our Father’, beginning this way, simply: ‘Father’, or ‘Dad’. And he understands us and loves us very much.

— CHAPTER III —

**Be Children of Your Father Who Is in  
Heaven**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 2 January 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning and  
also Happy New Year!*

Let us continue our catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, illuminated by the mystery of Christmas, which we have just celebrated.

The Gospel of Matthew places the text of the Lord's Prayer strategically at the centre of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 6:9-13).

Now, let us observe the scene: Jesus goes up the hill by the lake, and sits down; he has his most intimate disciples circled around him, and then a large crowd of anonymous faces. It is this heterogeneous assembly that receives the consignment of the 'Our Father' for the first time.

The location, as I said, is highly significant; because in this lengthy teaching, which falls under the title of 'Sermon on the Mount' (cf. Mt 5:1 - 7:27), Jesus summarizes the fundamental aspects of his message. The beginning is like an

archway decorated for a celebration: the Beatitudes. Jesus crowns with happiness a series of categories of people who in his time but also in ours! were not highly regarded. Blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful, people humble of heart.... This is the revolution of the Gospel. Where the Gospel is, there is revolution. The Gospel does not leave us calm, it drives us: it is revolutionary.

All people capable of love, the peacemakers who until now ended up at the margins of history, are instead the builders of the Kingdom of God. It is as Jesus would say: go forth, you who bear in your heart the mystery of a God who has revealed his omnipotence in love and in forgiveness!

From this portal of entry, which overturns historical values, blooms the newness of the Gospel. The Law does not need to be abolished but needs a new interpretation that leads it back to its original meaning. If a person has a good heart, predisposed to love, then he understands that every word of God must be incarnated up to its ultimate results. Love has no boundaries: one can love one's spouse, one's friend, and even one's enemy with a wholly new perspective. Jesus says: "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and

on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mt 5:44-45).

Here is the great secret underlying the whole Sermon on the Mount: be *children of your Father who is in heaven*. Apparently these — CHAPTERs of the Gospel of Matthew seem to be a moral discourse; they seem to evoke an ethic so demanding as to appear unfeasible, and instead we discover that they are above all a theological discourse. A Christian is not one who is committed to being better than others: he knows he is a sinner like everyone. A Christian is simply a person who pauses before the new Burning Bush, at the revelation of a God who does not bear the enigma of an unspeakable name, but asks his children to invoke him with the name of ‘Father’, to allow themselves to be renewed by his power and to reflect a ray of his goodness for this world so thirsty for good, thus awaiting good news.

Thus, this is how Jesus introduces the teaching of the ‘Our Father’ prayer. He does so by distancing himself from two groups of his time. First and foremost, hypocrites: “you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men” (Mt 6:5). There are people who are able to compose atheistic prayers, without God, and they do so in order to

be admired by people. And how often we see the scandal of those people who go to church and are there all day long, or go every day, and then live by hating others or speaking ill of people. This is a scandal! It is better not to go to church: living this way, as if they were atheists. But if you go to church, live as a child, as a brother or sister, and bear true witness, not a counter-witness. Christian prayer, however, has no other credible witness than one's own conscience, where one weaves a most intense dialogue with the Father: "when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret" (6:6).

Then Jesus distances himself from the prayer of pagans: "do not heap up empty phrases ...; for they think that they will be heard for their many words" (6:7). Here perhaps Jesus is alluding to that '*captatio benevolentiae*' that was the necessary introduction to many ancient prayers: divinity had to be in some way adapted from a long series of praises, of prayers too. Let us consider that scene on Mount Carmel, when the Prophet Elijah challenged the priests of Baal. They shouted, danced, and asked for many things, that their god would listen to them. But Elijah instead remained silent and the Lord revealed himself to Elijah. Pagans think that one prays by speaking, speaking, speaking, speaking. I also think of many Christians who think that praying is pardon me "talking to God like

parrots”. No! One prays from the heart, from within. You instead Jesus says when you pray, address God as a child to his father, who knows the things that are needed before he even asks him for them (cf. Mt 6:8). The ‘Our Father’ could also be a silent prayer: it is essentially enough to place yourself under God’s gaze, to remember his Fatherly love, and this is all it takes to be satisfied.

It is beautiful to think that our God does not need sacrifices in order to win his favour! Our God needs nothing: in prayer, he only asks that we keep a channel of communication open with him in order to always recognize that we are his most beloved children. He loves us very much.

— CHAPTER IV —

**Prayer Transforms Reality**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 9 January 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today's catechesis refers to the Gospel of Luke. In fact, it is especially this Gospel, beginning with the Childhood narratives, which describe the figure of Christ in an atmosphere dense with prayer. In it are the contents of three hymns which each day articulate the Church's prayer: the *Benedictus*, the *Magnificat* and the *Nunc Dimittis*.

And we are moving forward in this catechesis on the '*Our Father*'; we see Jesus as a *prayerful* man. Jesus prays. In Luke's narrative, for example, the episode of the Transfiguration springs from a moment of prayer. It says this: "And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white" (9:29). But each step in Jesus' life is as if gently propelled by the breath of the Holy Spirit who guides him in every action. Jesus prays in the baptism on the Jordan; he dialogues with the Father before taking the most important decisions; he often withdraws in solitude to pray; he intercedes for Peter who will

soon deny him. He says: “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” (22:31-32). This is comforting: to know that Jesus prays for us, prays for me, for each one of us so that our faith will not fail. And this is true. ‘But Father, does he still do so?’ He still does so before the Father. Jesus prays for me. Each one of us can say so. And we can also say to Jesus: ‘You are praying for me; continue to pray because I am in need of it’. In this way: courageous.

Even the Messiah’s death is immersed in a climate of prayer, such that the hours of the Passion seem characterized by a surprising calm: Jesus consoles the women, prays for his crucifiers, promises heaven to the good thief and he breathes his last breath, saying: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (23:46). Jesus’ prayer seems to allay the most violent emotions, the desire for vendetta and revenge; it reconciles man with his fierce enemy, reconciles man with this enemy, which is death.

It is also in the Gospel of Luke that we find the request, expressed by one of the disciples, to be able to be taught to pray by Jesus himself: And it says this: “Lord, teach us to pray” (11:1). They saw him praying. ‘Teach us we too can say to

the Lord Lord, you are praying for me, I know, but teach me how to pray so that I too can pray’.

This request, “Lord, teach us to pray” generates a rather lengthy lesson, through which Jesus explains to his followers with which words and which sentiments they must address God.

The first part of this lesson is precisely the *Our Father*. Pray thus: ‘Father, Who art in Heaven’. ‘Father’: that word which is so beautiful to say. We can always remain in prayer with that word alone: ‘Father’. And to feel that we have a father: not a master nor a step-father. No: a father. A Christian addresses God first of all by calling Him “Father”.

In this teaching that Jesus gives his disciples, it is interesting to pause on a few instructions that crown the text of the prayer. To give us confidence, Jesus explains several things. These focus on the *attitudes* of the believer who prays. For example, there is the parable of the importunate friend, who goes to disturb an entire family that is sleeping, because a person suddenly arrived from a journey and he has no bread to offer him. What does Jesus say to this man who knocks on the door and wakes his friend?: “I tell you” Jesus explains “though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him whatever he needs” (11:8). With this,

he wants to teach us to pray and to persevere in prayer. And immediately afterwards he gives the example of a father who has a hungry son. All of you, fathers and grandfathers who are here: when a son or grandson asks for something, is hungry, and asks and asks, then cries, shouts that he's hungry: "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent...?" (v. 11). And all of you have experienced this: when the son asks, you give him what he wants to eat for his own good.

With these words Jesus makes it understood that God always responds, that no prayer will remain unheard; why? Because He is Father, and does not forget his suffering children.

Of course, these affirmations disconcert us, because many of our prayers seem not to obtain any results. How often have we asked and not received we have all experienced this how many times have we knocked and found a closed door? Jesus advises us, in those moments, to *persist and to not give up*. Prayer always transforms reality, always. If things around us do not change, at least we change; our heart changes. Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to each man and to each woman who prays.

We can be certain that God will respond. The only uncertainty is due to time, but let us not doubt that he will respond. Perhaps we will have

to persist for our whole life, but he will respond. He promised us this: he is not like a father who gives a serpent instead of a fish. There is nothing more certain: the desire for happiness which we all carry in our heart will one day be fulfilled. Jesus asks: “will God not vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night?” (Lk 18:7). Yes, he will mete out justice; he will hear us. What a day of glory and resurrection that day will be! Henceforth, praying is victory over solitude and desperation. Praying. Prayer transforms reality; let us not forget this. It either changes things or changes our heart, but it always transforms. Henceforth, praying is victory over solitude and desperation. It is like seeing every fragment of creation teeming amid the listlessness of a history whose meaning we sometimes fail to grasp. But it is in motion, it is on a journey, and at the end of every road, what is there at the end of our road? At the end of prayer, at the end of the time in which we are praying, at life’s end: what is there? There is a Father who awaits everything and everyone with arms wide open. Let us look to this Father.

— CHAPTER V —

**Abba! Father!**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 16 January 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Continuing the catecheses on the ‘Lord’s Prayer’, today we shall begin with the observation that in the New Testament, the prayer seems to arrive at the essential, actually focusing on a single word: *Abba*, Father.

We have heard what Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: “you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘*Abba*, Father!’” (8:15). And the Apostle says to the Galatians: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘*Abba*! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). The same invocation, in which all the novelty of the Gospel is condensed, recurs twice. After meeting Jesus and hearing his preaching, a Christian no longer considers God as a tyrant to be feared; he is no longer afraid but feels trust in Him expand in his heart: he can speak with the Creator by calling him ‘Father’. The expression is so important for Christians that it is often preserved intact, in its original form: ‘*Abba*’.

In the New Testament it is rare for Aramaic expressions to be translated into Greek. We have to imagine that the voice of Jesus himself has remained in these Aramaic words as if ‘recorded’: they have respected Jesus’ idiom. In the first words of the ‘Our Father’ we immediately find the radical newness of Christian prayer.

It does not simply use a symbol in this case, the father figure to connect to the mystery of God; it is instead about having, so to speak, Jesus’ entire world poured into one’s heart. If we do this, we can truly pray the ‘Our Father’. Saying ‘*Abba*’ is something much more intimate, more moving than simply calling God ‘Father’. This is why someone has proposed translating this original Aramaic word ‘*Abba*’ with ‘Dad’ or ‘Papa’. Instead of saying ‘our Father’, saying ‘Dad, Papa’. We shall continue to say ‘our Father’ but with the heart we are invited to say ‘Dad’, to have a relationship with God like that of a child with his dad, who says ‘dad’ and says ‘papa’. Indeed, these expressions evoke affection, they evoke warmth, something that casts us into the context of childhood: the image of a child completely enveloped in the embrace of a father who feels infinite tenderness for him. And for this reason, dear brothers and sisters, in order to pray properly, one must come to have a child’s heart. Not a self-sufficient heart: one cannot pray properly this way. Like a child in the arms of his father, of his dad, of his papa.

But of course the Gospels better explain the meaning of this word. What does this word mean to Jesus? The 'Our Father' takes on meaning and colour if we learn to pray it after having read, for example, the Parable of the Merciful Father, in — CHAPTER 15 of Luke (cf. Lk 15:11-32). Let us imagine this prayer recited by the prodigal son, after having experienced the embrace of his father who had long awaited him, a father who does not remember the offensive words the son had said to him, a father who now simply makes him understand how much he has been missed. Thus we discover how those words become vibrant, receive strength. And let us ask ourselves: is it possible that You, O God, really know only love? Do you not know hatred? No God would respond I know only love.

Where in You is vengeance, the demand for justice, anger at your wounded honour? And God would respond: I know only love.

In that parable the father's manner of conduct somehow recalls the spirit of a *mother*. It is especially mothers who excuse their children, who protect them, who do not suspend empathy for them, who continue to love them, even when they would no longer deserve anything.

It is enough to evoke this single expression *Abba* for Christian prayer to develop. And in his Letters, Saint Paul follows this same path, because

it is the path taught by Jesus: in this invocation there is a force that draws all the rest of the prayer.

God seeks you, even if you do not seek him. God loves you, even if you have forgotten about him. God glimpses beauty in you, 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 stops loving her little child. On the other hand, there is a 'gestation' that lasts forever, well beyond the nine months of the physical one; it is a gestation that engenders an infinite cycle of love.

For a Christian, praying is simply saying '*Abba*'; it is saying 'Dad', saying 'Papa', saying 'Father' but with a child's trust.

It may be that we too happen to walk on paths far from God, as happened to the prodigal son; or to sink into a loneliness that makes us feel abandoned in the world; or, even to make mistakes and be paralyzed by a sense of guilt. In those difficult moments, we can still find the strength to pray, to begin again with the word '*Abba*', but said with the tender feeling of a child: '*Abba*', 'Dad'. He does not hide his face from us. Remember well: perhaps one has bad things within, things he does not know how to resolve, much bitterness for having done this and that.... He does not hide His face. He does

not close himself off in silence. 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 to pray in this way, and in the silence he will tell us that he has never lost sight of us. 'But Father, I have done this...'. 'I have never lost sight of you; I have seen everything. But I have always been there, close to you, faithful to my love for you'. That will be his answer. Never forget to say 'Father'. Thank you.

— CHAPTER VI —

**The Prayer of a Community  
of Brothers and Sisters**

*Paul VI Audience Hall  
Wednesday, 13 February 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue our journey to learn ever better to pray as Jesus taught us. We must pray as he taught us to pray.

He said: when you pray, go quietly into your room, withdraw from the world, and turn to God by calling him ‘Father!’. Jesus does not want his disciples to be like the hypocrites who pray while standing in the squares to be admired by the people (cf. Mt 6:5). Jesus does not want hypocrisy. True prayer is that done in the secret of the conscience, of the heart: inscrutable, visible only to God. God and I. It shuns falsehood: with God it is impossible to pretend. It is impossible; there are no tricks that have any power before God. God knows us like this, naked in one’s conscience, and there can be no pretense. At the root of the dialogue with God, there is a silent dialogue. Like the glance between two people in love: man’s gaze meets God’s, and this is prayer. Looking at God and allowing yourself to be looked upon by God: this is prayer. “But, Father,

I do not say any words...”. Look at God and let yourself be looked upon by him: it is a prayer, a beautiful prayer!

Yet, although the disciple’s prayer may be completely confidential, it is never lacking in intimacy. In the secret of the conscience, a Christian does not leave the world outside the door of his room, but carries people and situations, the problems, many things in his heart; I bring them all to prayer.

There is a striking absence in the text of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’. Were I to ask you what the striking absence in the text of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ is, it would not be easy to answer. A word is missing. Everyone thinks: what is missing from the ‘Lord’s Prayer’? Think, what is missing? One word. One word which in our times perhaps always everyone holds in great consideration. What is the missing word in the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ that we pray every day? To save time, I will tell you: the word ‘I’ is missing. ‘I’ is never said. Jesus teaches us to pray with ‘*You*’ on our lips, because Christian prayer is a dialogue: ‘blessed be *your* name, *your* kingdom come, *your* will be done’. Not *my* name, *my* kingdom, *my* will. Not *I*, it is no good. And then it moves on to ‘*we*’. The entire second part of the ‘Our Father’ uses the first person plural: ‘*give us our* daily bread, forgive *us our* sins, lead *us* not

into temptation, deliver *us* from evil'. Even the most basic of man's requests such as that of having food to satisfy hunger are all in the plural. In Christian prayer, no one asks for bread for themselves: *give me* bread today no, *give us*, it is asked for all, for all the world's poor. We must not forget this. The word 'I' is missing. We pray by using 'you' and 'we'. It is a good lesson from Jesus. Do not forget this.

Why? Why is there no room for individualism in the dialogue with God. There is no display of our own problems as if we were the only ones suffering in the world. There is no prayer raised to God that is not the prayer of a *community of brothers and sisters*. 'We': we are a community; we are brothers and sisters; we are a people who pray: 'we'. Once, a prison chaplain asked me a question: "Tell me Father, what is the opposite of 'I'?" And naively, I said 'you'. "This is the start of war. The opposite of 'I' is 'us', where there is peace, all are together". I received a beautiful lesson from that priest.

In prayer, a Christian bears all the difficulties of the people who live beside him: when night falls, he tells God about the suffering he has come across that day; he sets before Him many faces, friends and even those who are hostile; he does not shoo them away as dangerous distractions. If you do not realize that there are many people suffering around you, if you are not moved by

the tears of the poor, if you are accustomed to everything, then it means your heart ... what is it like? Withered? No, worse: it is made of stone. In this case it is good to implore the Lord to touch us with his Spirit and soften our heart: 'Soften my heart, Lord'. It is a beautiful prayer: 'Lord, soften my heart, so that I may understand and take on all the problems and all the suffering of others'. Christ did not pass unscathed beside the miseries of the world: each time he perceived loneliness, physical or spiritual pain, he felt a strong sense of compassion, like a mother's womb. This 'feeling compassion' let us not forget this word that is so Christian: 'feeling compassion' is one of the key words of the Gospel: it is what inspires the Good Samaritan to approach the wounded man by the roadside, unlike others who are hard of heart.

We can ask ourselves: when I pray, am I open to the cries of many people near and far? Or do I think of prayer as a type of anaesthesia, in order to be more at peace? I am just tossing the question out there, each of you can answer to yourself. In such case I would be the victim of a terrible misunderstanding. Of course mine would no longer be a Christian prayer. Because that 'we' that Jesus taught us prevents me from being at peace by myself, and makes me feel responsible for my brothers and sisters.

There are people who seemingly do not seek God, but Jesus asks us to pray for them too, because God seeks these people more than anyone else. Jesus did not come for the healthy, but for the sick, for sinners (cf. Lk 5:31) that is, for everyone, because whoever thinks he is healthy, in reality is not. If we work for justice, we do not feel we are better than others: the Father makes the sun rise on the good and on the evil (cf. Mt 5:45). The Father loves everyone! Let us learn from God who is always good to everyone, opposite to us, who are able to be good only to certain people, with someone I like.

Brothers and sisters, saints and sinners, we are all brothers and sisters loved by the same Father. And, in the evening of life, we will be judged on love, on how we have loved. Not merely sentimental love, but compassionate and tangible love, according to the Gospel rule do not forget it! —: “as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40). So says the Lord. Thank you.

— CHAPTER VII —

**Our Father, Who Art in Heaven**

*Paul VI Audience Hall*

*Wednesday, 20 February 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue with the catecheses on the ‘Our Father’. The first step of every Christian prayer is the entry into a mystery, that of the *fatherhood of God*. One cannot pray like parrots. Either you enter into the mystery, in the awareness that God is your Father, or you do not pray. If I want to pray to God my Father, I begin with the mystery. To understand to what measure God is father to us, let us consider the figures of our parents, but in some measure we must always ‘refine them’, purify them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church also says so; it says: “The purification of our hearts has to do with paternal or maternal images, stemming from our personal and cultural history, and influencing our relationship with God” (n. 2779).

None of us has had perfect parents, no one; as we, in turn, will never be perfect parents or pastors. We all have shortcomings, everyone. We always experience our loving relationships according to our limitations and also our egotism;

thus they are often tarnished by desires to possess or to manipulate others. For this reason, at times declarations of love are transformed into feelings of anger and hostility. But look, last week these two loved each other so much; today they hate each other to death: we see this every day! This is why we all have, within, bitter roots that are not good, and sometimes they come out and do harm.

For this reason, when we speak of God as ‘father’, as we consider the image of our parents, especially if they loved us, at the same time we must go further. Because God’s love is that of the Father ‘*who art in Heaven*’, according to the expression that Jesus invites us to use: he is the total love that we can savour only imperfectly in this life. Men and women are eternally begging for love, we are beggars of love, we need love seeking a place where they may finally be loved, but do not find it. How many disappointing friendships and how many disappointing loves there are in our world; many!

In mythology, the Greek god of love is absolutely the most tragic: one does not understand whether it is an angelic being or a demon. Mythology says that he is the son of *Porus* and *Penia*, that is, of resourcefulness and poverty, destined to bear within himself some features of these parents. From here we can think about the ambivalent nature of human love: able to boldly

flourish at one time of day, and immediately thereafter to wither and die; what he grasps always slips away (cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 203). There is an expression of the Prophet Hosea that mercilessly contextualizes the congenital weakness of our love: “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away” (6:4). This is what our love often is: a promise we struggle to keep, an attempt which soon dries up and evaporates, a little like when the sun comes out in the morning and takes away the night’s dew.

How many times have we men and women loved in such a weak and intermittent way. We have all experienced this: we have loved but then that love fell apart or weakened. Wishing for love, we then collided with our limitations, the meagerness of our strengths: unable to keep a promise which, in days of grace, seemed easy to fulfil. Indeed, the Apostle Peter was afraid and had to run away. The Apostle Peter was not faithful to Jesus’ love. There is always this weakness that makes us fall. We are beggars on a journey who run the risk of never entirely finding that treasure they seek from the first day of their life: love.

However, another type of love exists, that of the *Father* “*who art in Heaven*”. No one should doubt being the recipient of this love. He loves

us. We can say: “He loves me”. Even had our father and mother not loved us an historical hypothesis, there is a God in heaven who loves us like no one else in this world ever has or ever can. God’s love is constant. The prophet Isaiah says: “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands”, (Is 49:15-16). Tattoos are in fashion today: “I have graven you on the palms of my hands”. I have tattooed you on my hands. Thus, I am in God’s hands; it cannot be removed. God’s love is like a mother’s love that can never be forgotten. And if a mother forgets? “I will never forget”, says the Lord. This is God’s perfect love. This is how we are loved by him. Even if all our earthly loves were to crumble and we were left with nothing but dust in our hands; God’s unique and faithful love is always burning for all of us.

The hunger for love that we all feel is not a yearning for something nonexistent: it is instead an invitation to know God who is father. Saint Augustine’s conversion, for example, passed over this ridge: the young and brilliant orator was simply seeking among the creatures something that no creature could give him, until one day he had the courage to lift his gaze. And on that day, he knew God. God who loves.

The expression “in Heaven” is not intended to express a distance, but rather a radical difference of love, another dimension of love, a tireless love, a love that will always be there, that is always at hand. It is enough to say “Our Father who art in heaven”, and that love comes.

Therefore, have no fear. None of us is alone. If even by misfortune your earthly father were to forget you and you were resentful of him, you are not denied the fundamental experience of Christian faith: knowing that you are a *most deeply beloved son or daughter of God*, and that there is nothing in life that can extinguish his heartfelt love for you.

— CHAPTER VIII —

**Hallowed Be Thy Name**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 27 February 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

In our journey of rediscovering the “Our Father”, today we shall delve deeper into the first of his seven invocations, namely, “hallowed be thy name”.

There are seven requests in the “Our Father”, easily divisible into two subgroups. The first three have at the centre ‘Thou/You’ addressed to God the Father; the other four have at the centre ‘us’ and our human needs. In the first part Jesus lets us enter his wishes, everyone turning to the Father: “hallowed by *thy* name, *thy* kingdom come, *thy* will be done”; in the second it is He who enters us and becomes the interpreter of *our* needs: daily bread, forgiveness of sins, help in temptation and liberation from evil.

Herein lies the matrix of every Christian prayer I would say of every human prayer which is always done, on the one hand, as a *contemplation* of God, of his mystery, of his beauty and goodness, and on the other, as a sincere and courageous *request* for what we need for life, and to live properly. Thus, in its simplicity and

in its essentiality, the “Our Father” teaches those who pray it not to multiply empty words, because as Jesus himself says “your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (Mt 6:8).

When we speak with God, we do not do so in order to reveal what we have in our heart: he knows it much better than we do! Although God is a mystery for us, we are not an enigma in his eyes (cf. Ps 139[138]: 1-4). God is like those mothers for whom one look suffices to thoroughly understand her children: whether they are happy or sad, whether they are sincere or are hiding something....

Thus, the first step in Christian prayer is consigning ourselves to God, to his providence. It is as if to say: ‘Lord, you know everything; I do not even have to tell you about my pain; I ask only that you be here beside me: You are my hope’. It is interesting to note that, in the Sermon on the Mount, immediately after teaching the words of the “Our Father”, Jesus exhorts us not to be worried or troubled about things. It seems like a contradiction: first he teaches us to ask for daily bread and then he tells us: “Do not be anxious, asking ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” (Mt 6:31). But the contradiction is only apparent: a Christian’s request expresses trust in the Father; and

it is precisely this trust that enables us to ask for what we need without worry or agitation.

This is why we pray by saying: “*Hallowed be thy name!*”. In this request the first one! “*Hallowed be thy name!* one feels all Jesus’ admiration for the beauty and greatness of the Father, and the wish that everyone recognize and love him for what he truly is. And at the same time there is the supplication that his name be sanctified in us, in our family, in our community, in the entire world. It is God who sanctifies, who transforms us with his love, but at the same time we too, with our witness, manifest God’s holiness in the world, making his name present. God is holy, but if we, if our life is not holy, there is great inconsistency! God’s holiness must be reflected in our actions, in our life. ‘I am Christian; God is holy, but I do many bad things’: no, this is of no use. This also does harm; this scandalizes and does not help.

God’s holiness is an expanding force, and we ask that the barriers in our world be quickly broken down. When Jesus begins to preach, the first to pay the consequences is precisely the evil that afflicts the world. The evil spirits curse: “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk 1:24). Such holiness had never been seen before: not concerned with itself but radiating outward. A holiness that of Jesus

that expands in concentric circles, as when one throws a stone into a pond. The evil one's days are numbered evil is not eternal; evil can no longer harm us: the strong man has arrived to take possession of his house (cf. Mk 3:23-27). And this strong man is Jesus, who gives us, too, the strength to take possession of our inner house.

Prayer drives away all fears. The Father loves us; the Son lifts up his arms to support ours; the Spirit works secretly for the redemption of the world. And we? We do not waver in uncertainty; for we have one great certainty: God loves me; Jesus gave his life for me! The Spirit is within me. This is the great certainty. And the evil one? He is afraid. And this is good.

— CHAPTER IX —

**Thy Kingdom Come**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 6 March 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

When we pray the “Our Father”, the second request we address to God is “Thy kingdom come” (Mt 6:10). After praying for the sanctification of his name, the believer expresses the desire that His Kingdom may come soon. This desire poured forth, so to speak, from the very heart of Christ who began preaching in Galilee by proclaiming: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel”, (Mk 1:15). These words are in no way a threat. On the contrary, they are a blessed proclamation, a joyful message. Jesus does not want to press people to convert by sowing fear of God’s imminent judgment or a sense of guilt for the wrongdoing committed. Jesus does not proselytize: he simply proclaims. Rather, what he brings is the Good News of salvation, and, starting from this, he calls us to convert. Each of us is invited to believe in the “Gospel”: God’s authority is brought close to his children. This is the Gospel: the authority of God drawn near to his children. And Jesus announces this marvelous thing, this grace: God, the Father, loves us,

is close to us and teaches us to walk on the path of holiness.

The signs of the coming of this Kingdom are multiple, all of them positive. Jesus begins his ministry by caring for the sick, both in body and in spirit, for those who were socially excluded lepers, for example and sinners who were looked upon with scorn by everyone, even by those who were greater sinners than them but who pretended to be just. And what does Jesus call them? “Hypocrites”. Jesus himself indicates these signs, the signs of the Kingdom of God: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Mt 11:5).

“Thy kingdom come”, Christians persistently repeat when they pray the “Our Father”. Jesus has come; but the world is still marked by sin, inhabited by many people who suffer, by people who do not want to reconcile and do not forgive, by war and many forms of exploitation. Let us think about child trafficking, for example. All these facts are proof that Christ’s victory has not yet been completely attained. Many men and women still live with closed hearts. It is above all in these situations that the second request of the “Our Father” emerges on the lips of Christians: “Thy kingdom come!”, which is like

saying: “We need you, Father! We need you, Jesus. We need you, Lord, to be everywhere and for ever, in our midst!”. “Thy kingdom come, may you be in our midst”.

We sometimes ask ourselves: why is this Kingdom so slow to come about? Jesus likes to speak of his victory in terms of parables. For example, he says that the Kingdom of God is similar to a field where weeds and good wheat grow together: the biggest mistake would be to immediately intervene, by uprooting from the world what appear to us to be invasive weeds. God is not like us. God is patient. It is not through violence that the Kingdom is established in the world: meekness is its means of propagation (cf. Mt 13:24-30).

The Kingdom of God is certainly a great strength, the greatest one there is, but not according to worldly criteria. This is why it never appears to have the absolute majority. It is like leaven that is kneaded with flour: it apparently disappears and yet, it is what makes the dough rise (cf. Mt 13:33). Or it is like a mustard seed, so small, almost invisible, which, however, carries within it nature’s most explosive force, and once fully grown, it becomes the largest tree in the garden (cf. Mt 13:31-32).

In this “destiny” of the Kingdom of God, we can sense the tenor of Jesus’ life. He too was a frail

sign to his contemporaries, an almost unknown event to the official historians of the time. He described himself as a “grain of wheat” that dies in the earth, but only in this way can it bear “much fruit” (cf. Jn 12:24). The symbol of the seed is eloquent. One day a farmer plants it in the earth (a gesture which resembles a burial), and then, if he “should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how” (Mk 4:27). A seed that sprouts is more the work of God than of the man who planted it (cf. Mk 4:27). God always precedes us. God always surprises. Thanks to him, the night of Good Friday is followed by the dawn of the Resurrection, able to illuminate the entire world with hope.

“Thy kingdom come!”. Let us sow this word in the midst of our sins and our shortcomings. Let us give it to the people defeated and bent by life, to those who have tasted hatred more than love, those who have lived aimless days without ever understanding why. Let us give it to those who have fought for justice, to all the martyrs in history, to those who have come to the conclusion that they have fought for nothing and that in this world evil always dominates. We will then feel the prayer of the “Our Father” respond. It will repeat those words of hope for the umpteenth time, the same words with which the Spirit

sealed all the Sacred Scriptures: “Yes, I am coming soon”: this is the Lord’s reply: “I am coming soon”. Amen. And the Lord’s Church responds: “Come, Lord, Jesus” (cf. Acts 2:20). “Thy kingdom come” is like saying “Come Lord Jesus”. And Jesus says: “I am coming soon”. And Jesus comes, in his way, but every day. We have trust in this. And when we pray the “Our Father”, we always say: “Thy kingdom come”, in order to feel him say in our heart: “yes, yes, I am coming and I am coming soon”. Thank you!

— CHAPTER X —

**Thy Will Be Done**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 20 March 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,*

Continuing our catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, today we will pause on the third invocation: "thy will be done". It should be read together with the first two "hallowed be thy name" and "thy Kingdom come" so that they jointly form a triptych: "hallowed be thy name", "thy Kingdom come", "thy will be done". Today we will speak about the third.

Before man's care for the world, there is the tireless care God employs for man and for the world. The whole Gospel reflects this inversion of perspective. The sinner Zacchaeus climbs up a tree because he wants to see Jesus but he does not know that, much earlier, God had sought him. When Jesus arrives, He says to him: "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today". And at the end He states: "the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:5-10). This is *God's will*, what we pray to be done. What is God's will, incarnated in Jesus?. To seek and to save the one who is lost. And in prayer, we ask that God's seeking

may be successful, that his universal plan of salvation may be accomplished, firstly in each of us, and then in the entire world. Have you thought about what it means that God seeks me? Each one of us can say: ‘But does God seek me?’ ‘Yes! he seeks you! He seeks me’: he seeks each one of us, personally. But God is great! How much love there is behind all this.

God is not ambiguous. He never conceals himself behind enigmas. He did not plan the world’s future in an incomprehensible way. No. He is clear. If we do not understand this, then we also risk not understanding the meaning of the third expression of the “Our Father”. Indeed, the Bible is filled with expressions that tell us about God’s positive will for the world. And in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, we find a collection of quotes that bear witness to this faithful and patient divine will (cf. nn. 2821-2827). And in his First Letter to Timothy, Saint Paul writes: God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2:4). This, without a shadow of a doubt, is God’s will: the salvation of man, of mankind, of each of us. God knocks upon the door of our heart with his love. Why? To attract us, to attract us to him and to carry us forward on the path of salvation. God is close to each of us, with his love, to lead us by the hand to salvation. How much love there is behind this! Therefore, by praying “thy will be done”, we are not called to subserviently bow our head as if we

were slaves. No! God wants us to be free; his love frees us. Indeed, the “Our Father” is the prayer of children, not of slaves; but of children who know their father’s heart and are certain of his loving plan. Woe to us if, in uttering these words, we should shrug our shoulders as a sign of surrender to a destiny we find repellent and that we are unable to change. On the contrary, it is a prayer that is filled with ardent trust in God who wants good, life and salvation for us. A courageous, even militant prayer, because there are many, too many realities in the world that are not in accordance with God’s plan. We all know them. Paraphrasing the prophet Isaiah, we could say: “Here, Father, there is war, abuse of power, exploitation; but we know that you want our good. You want our good, therefore we implore you: thy will be done! Lord, overturn the world’s plans, transform swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks: so that no one may learn the art of war any more” (cf. 2:4). God wants peace.

The “Our Father” is a prayer which kindles in us the same love as Jesus’ love for the Father’s will, a flame that spurs us to transform the world with love. The Christian does not believe in an inescapable “fate”. There is nothing unplanned in Christian faith. Rather, there is a salvation waiting to manifest itself in the life of each man and woman, and to be fulfilled in eternity. When we

pray, we believe that God can and wants to transform reality by overcoming evil with good. It makes sense to obey and to surrender oneself to this God, even at the hour of the most difficult trial.

So it was for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he experienced anguish and prayed: “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Lk 22:42). Jesus is crushed by the evil of the world. However, he trustingly surrenders himself to the ocean of love of the Father’s will. The martyrs, too, were not seeking death in their trials. They were seeking the “after-death”, the resurrection. Out of love, God can lead us to walk along difficult paths and to experience wounds and painful thorns, but he will never forsake us. He will always be with us, beside us, within us. For a believer this is more than a hope, it is a certainty: God is with me. The same that we find in the parable in Luke’s Gospel regarding the need to always pray. Jesus says: “will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily” (18:7-8). Such is the Lord. This is how he loves us. This is how he cares for us. But now I would like to invite you to pray the “Our Father” all together. And those who do not know Italian can pray it in their own language. Let us pray together.

— CHAPTER XI —

**Give Us Our Daily Bread**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 27 March 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today we move on to analyze the second part of the “Lord’s Prayer”, in which we present our needs to God. This second part begins with a word with the scent of daily life: *bread*.

Jesus’ prayer begins with a compelling request, which quite resembles a beggar’s plea: “Give us our daily bread!”. This prayer comes from an evident [fact] that we often forget, which is to say that we are not self-sufficient beings, and that we need to nourish ourselves every day.

Scripture shows us that for many people the encounter with Jesus is realized by beginning with a request. Jesus does not ask for refined invocations, but rather, the whole of human existence, with its most concrete and mundane problems, can become prayer. In the Gospels we find a multitude of mendicants who plead for liberation and salvation. Those who ask for bread, those for healing; some for purification, others sight; or that a dear one may live again.... Jesus

never moves indifferently past these requests and this suffering.

Thus, Jesus teaches us to ask the Father for our daily bread. And he teaches us to do so united with many men and women for whom this prayer is a plea often stifled within which accompanies the anxiety of each day. How many mothers and how many fathers, even today, go to sleep with the torment of not having enough bread for their own children tomorrow! Let us imagine this prayer recited not in the security of a comfortable apartment, but in the precariousness of a room in which one adapts, where life's necessities are lacking. Jesus' words take on new meaning. Christian prayer begins at this level. It is not an exercise for ascetics; it begins from reality, from the heart and from the flesh of people who live in need, or who share the condition of those who do not have life's necessities. Not even the most exalted Christian mystics can overlook the simplicity of this request. "Father let there be the necessary bread for us and for all". And "bread" also means water, medicine, home, work.... Asking for life's necessities.

The bread a Christian requests in prayer is not "mine", but "ours". This is what Jesus wants. He teaches us to request it not only for ourselves but for the world's entire fraternity. If one does not pray in this way, the "Our Father" ceases to be a

Christian prayer. If God is our Father, how can we present ourselves to him without taking each other by the hand? All of us. And if we steal from one another the bread that he gives us, how can we call ourselves his children? This prayer contains an attitude of empathy, an attitude of solidarity. In my hunger I feel the hunger of the multitudes, and thus I will pray to God until their request is answered. This is how Jesus teaches his community, his Church, to bring to God the needs of all: “We are all your children, O Father, have mercy on us!”. And now it will do us good to pause a bit and think about the starving children. Let us think about the children who are in warring countries: the starving children of Yemen, the starving children in Syria, the starving children in so many countries where there is no bread, in South Sudan. Let us think about these children and, thinking of them, let us recite the prayer together aloud: “Father, give us this day our daily bread”. Everyone together.

The bread we request from the Lord in prayer is the very same that one day will fault us. It will reproach us for the paltry habit of breaking it with those who are close to us, the paltry habit of sharing it. It was bread given for mankind, and instead it was eaten by just one: love cannot bear this. Our love cannot bear it; nor can God’s love bear this selfishness of not sharing our bread.

Once there was a great crowd before Jesus: they were people who were hungry. Jesus asked whether someone had something, and they found only one lad willing to share his provisions: five loaves and two fish. Jesus multiplied that generous act (cf. Jn 6:9). That lad had understood the lesson of the “Our Father”: that food is not private property let us keep this in mind: food is not private property but Providence to be shared, with the grace of God.

The true miracle performed by Jesus that day is not so much the multiplication which is true but the sharing: give what you have and I will perform a miracle. He himself, in multiplying that given bread, revealed the offering of Himself in the Eucharistic Bread. Indeed, the Eucharist alone is capable of satisfying the infinite hunger and the desire for God which animates each person, even in the search for daily bread.

— CHAPTER XII —

**Forgive Us Our Debts**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 10 April 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

It is not a very nice day but just the same, good morning!

After asking God for our daily bread, the “Lord’s Prayer” enters the sphere of our relationships with others. Jesus teaches us to ask the Father: “forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12). Just as we need bread, we also need forgiveness; this too, this every day.

A Christian who prays asks God first of all that his *debts* be forgiven, that is, his sins, the bad things he does. This is the first truth of every prayer: even if we were perfect people, even if we were pure saints who never deviate from a virtuous life, we continue to be children who owe everything to the Father. What is the most dangerous attitude for every Christian life? It is pride. It is the attitude of those who stand before God thinking that they always have their affairs in order with him: the proud think they have everything in order. Like that Pharisee in the parable

who thinks he is praying in the Temple, but in reality, he is commending himself before God: “I thank you, Lord, because I am not like the others”. And the people who feel they are perfect, the people who criticize others, are proud people. None of us is perfect, no one. On the contrary, the tax collector, who was at the back of the Temple, a sinner despised by everyone, stops at the threshold of the Temple and does not feel worthy to enter and entrusts himself to God’s mercy. And Jesus comments: “this man went down to his house justified rather than the other” (Lk 18:14), that is, forgiven, saved. Why? Because he was not proud, because he recognized his limitations and his sins.

There are sins that are seen and sins that are unseen. There are glaring sins that make noise but there are also sins that are devious, that lurk in our heart without us even noticing. The worst of these is pride, which can even infect people who live a profound religious life. There was once a well-known convent of nuns, in the 1600-1700s, at the time of Jansenism. They were utterly perfect, and it was said of them that they were really pure like angels, but also proud like demons. It is a bad thing. Sin divides fraternity; sin makes us imagine we are better than others; sin makes us think we are comparable to God.

And instead, we are all sinners before God and we have reason to beat our breast everyone like

the tax collector in the Temple. In his First Letter, Saint John writes: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn 1:8). If you want to deceive yourself, say that you have not sinned: this way, you are deceiving yourself.

We are debtors above all because we have received much in this life: a father and a mother, friendship, the splendours of creation.... Even if we all happen to experience difficult days, we must always remember that life is a grace. It is the miracle that God drew out of nothing.

Secondly, we are debtors because, even if we are able to love, none of us is capable of doing so solely by our own strength. True love is when we can love, but through the grace of God. None of us shines of our own light. There is what the ancient theologians called a *mysterium lunae*, not only in the identity of the Church, but also in the history of each of us. What does this *mysterium lunae* mean? That it is like the moon, which does not have its own light: it reflects the light of the sun. Nor do we have our own light. The light we have is a reflection of God’s grace, of God’s light. If you love, it is because someone other than yourself made you smile when you were a child, teaching you to respond with a smile. If you love it is because someone beside

you has awakened you to love, making you understand that the meaning of life lies therein.

Let us try to listen to the story of some person who has made mistakes: a detainee, a convict, a drug addict ... we know many people who make mistakes in life. Notwithstanding the responsibility, which is always personal, you sometimes ask yourself who is to blame for their mistakes; whether it is just their conscience, or the history of hatred and abandonment that some carry within.

And this is the mystery of the moon: first and foremost, we love because we have been loved, we forgive because we have been forgiven. And if someone has not been illuminated by the light of the sun, he becomes icy like the ground in winter.

How can we fail to recognize in the chain of love that precedes us, also the presence of God's Providential love? None of us loves God as much as he has loved us. It is enough to place oneself before a Crucifix to understand the disproportion: he has loved us and will always love us first.

Let us therefore pray: Lord, not even the most holy in our midst cease to be in your debt. O Father, have mercy on us all!



— CHAPTER XIII —

**Jesus Prays to the Father**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 17 April 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

In these past weeks we have been reflecting on the “Lord’s Prayer”. Now on the eve of the Paschal Triduum, let us pause on some of the words with which Jesus prayed to the Father during his Passion.

The first invocation occurs after the Last Supper when the Lord “lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son’” and then “glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made” (Jn 17:1-5). Jesus asks for *glory*, a request which seems a paradox as his Passion is imminent. What glory is he referring to? In the Bible, glory refers to God’s self-revelation. It is the distinctive sign of his saving presence among mankind. Now, Jesus is the One who definitively manifests God’s presence and salvation. And he does this at Easter: lifted up on the Cross, he is *glorified* (cf. Jn 12:23-33). There, God finally reveals his glory: he removes the last veil and astonishes us as never before.

Indeed, we discover that the Glory of God is *entirely love*: pure, unbridled and inconceivable love, beyond every limit and measure.

Brothers and sisters, let us make Jesus' prayer our own: let us ask the Father to remove the veil from our eyes, so that in looking at the Crucifix over these days, we may understand that God is love. How often do we imagine him as master and not as Father; how often do we think of him as an austere judge rather than a merciful Saviour! But at Easter, God voids the distances, revealing himself in the humility of a love that seeks our love. Thus, we give him glory when we live whatever we do with love, when we do everything from our heart, as if for him (Col 3:17).

True glory is the glory of love because it is the only kind that gives life to the world. This glory is certainly the opposite of worldly glory, which comes from being admired, praised, acclaimed: when the 'I' is at the centre of attention. The Glory of God, on the other hand, is paradoxical: no applause, no *audience*. At the centre is not the 'I', but rather the other. Indeed, at Easter we see that the Father glorifies the Son as the Son glorifies the Father. No one glorifies him- or herself. We can ask ourselves today: "which glory do I live for? Mine or God's? Do I wish

only to receive from others or also to give to others?”.

After the Last Supper, Jesus enters the Garden of *Gethsemane* and here too, he *prays to the Father*. While the disciples are unable to stay awake and Judas is approaching with the soldiers, Jesus begins to feel “distressed and troubled”. He feels all the anguish at what awaits him: betrayal, contempt, suffering, failure. He is “sorrowful” and there in the abyss, in that desolation, he addresses the Father with the most tender and gentle word: “*Abba*”, that is, Father (cf. Mk 14:33-36). Jesus teaches us to embrace the Father in our trials, because in praying to him, there is the strength to go forward in suffering. In times of struggle, prayer is relief, entrustment, comfort. Abandoned by all, in inner desolation, Jesus is not alone. He is with the Father. On the other hand, we in our own Gethsemanes, often choose to remain alone rather than say “*Father*” and entrust ourselves to him, as Jesus did, entrusting ourselves to his will which is our true good. But when we remain closed within ourselves during trials, we dig a tunnel inside ourselves, a painful, introverted path that has only one direction: ever deeper into ourselves. Solitude does not offer a way out, prayer does, because it is relationship, it is entrustment. Jesus entrusts everything and all of himself to the Father, bringing to him all that he feels, leaning on him in the struggle. When we

enter our own Gethsemanes we each have our own Gethsemanes or have had them or will have them let us remember this: when we enter, when we will enter our Gethsemane, let us remember to pray in this way: “*Father*”.

Lastly, Jesus addresses to the Father a third prayer *for us*: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Jesus prays for those who were cruel to him, for his killers. The Gospel points out that this prayer occurs at the moment of the Crucifixion. It was probably the moment of sharpest pain, when nails were being driven into his wrists and feet. Here, at the peak of suffering, comes the pinnacle of love: *forgiveness*, which is the gift to the Nth power that breaks the cycle of evil.

As we pray the “Lord’s Prayer” in these days, we can ask for one of these graces: to live our days for the glory of God, that is, to live with love; to know how to entrust ourselves to the Father in times of trial and to utter “dad” to the Father and, in the encounter with the Father, to find forgiveness and the courage to forgive. Both things go together, The Father forgives us, but he gives us the courage to be able to forgive.

— CHAPTER XIV —

**As We Also Have Forgiven Our Debtors**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 24 April 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today we shall complete the catechesis on the fifth request of the “Lord’s Prayer”, by focusing on the expression “as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12). We have seen that it is actually human to be debtors before God: we have received everything from him, in terms of nature and grace. Our life has not only been wanted, but has been loved by God. Truly, there is no room for presumption when we fold our hands to pray. In the Church there is no ‘self-made man’, men who have created themselves. We are all debtors to God, and to all those people who have given us favourable living conditions. Our identity is built first and foremost with the good received. The first is life.

One who prays learns to say “thank you”. And so often we forget to say “thank you”. We are selfish. One who prays learns to say “thank you” and to ask God to be benevolent to him or her. As much as we may strive, there is always an inexhaustible debt to God which we can never pay back: he loves us infinitely more than we

love him. And then, as much as we try to live according to Christian Teaching, in our life there will always be something for which to ask forgiveness. Let us think about days spent lazily, about moments in which rancour has filled our heart, and so on. These unfortunately not rare experiences are what make us implore: “Lord, Father, forgive us our debts”. Thus we ask God for forgiveness.

On close reflection, the invocation could well be limited to this first part; that would have been nice. But instead Jesus joins it to a second expression that forms one with the first. The vertical relationship with benevolence on God’s part refracts and is called to translate into a new relationship with our brothers and sisters: a horizontal relationship. The good God invites all of us to be good. The two parts of the invocation are linked together with a stern conjunction: we ask the Lord to forgive our debts, our sins, ‘*as*’ we forgive our friends, the people who live with us, our neighbours, the people who have done something bad to us.

Every Christian knows that forgiveness of sins exists for him or her. We all know this: God forgives everything and forgives always. When Jesus describes the face of God to his disciples, he outlines it with expressions of tender mercy. He says that there is more joy in heaven for one

sinner who repents than for a multitude of righteous people who need no repentance (cf. Lk 15:7, 10). Nothing in the Gospels lets one suspect that God would not forgive the sins of whoever is ready and asks to be embraced again.

But the Grace of God, so abundant, is always demanding. Those who have received much must learn to give much, and not to keep only for themselves what they have received. Those who have received much must learn to give much. It is not by chance that the Gospel of Matthew, immediately after having given the text of the “Our Father”, of the seven expressions used pauses to emphasize precisely that of fraternal forgiveness: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14-15). But this is powerful! I recall: several times I have heard people say: “I will never forgive that person! I will never forgive that person for what he did to me!”. But if you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. You close the door. Let us consider whether we are able to forgive or if we do not forgive.

When I was in the other Diocese, a distressed priest told me that he had gone to administer the Last Rites to an elderly woman who was on her deathbed. The poor woman could not speak.

And the priest asked her: “Madam, do you repent of your sins?”. The woman said “yes”; she could not confess them, but she said yes. It is sufficient. And then again: “Do you forgive others?”. And the woman said, on her deathbed: “No”. The priest was upset. If you do not forgive, God will not forgive you. Let us consider, we who are here, whether we forgive or whether we are able to forgive. “Father, I cannot do it, because those people treated me so harshly”. But if you cannot do it, ask the Lord to give you the strength to do so: Lord, help me to forgive.

Here again, we find the connection between love of God and love of neighbour. Love attracts love; forgiveness attracts forgiveness. Again in Matthew we find a very strong parable dedicated to fraternal forgiveness (cf. 18:21-35). Let us listen to it.

There was a servant who had contracted an enormous debt with his king: 10,000 talents! An impossible amount to repay; I do not know how much that would be today, but hundreds of millions. However, a miracle happened, and that servant received not a deferred payment but full commutation. An un-hoped for grace! But here, immediately thereafter, that servant got angry with a fellow servant who owed him 100 denari something minor and, although this is an attainable sum, he would not accept excuses or pleas.

Therefore, in the end, the master called for him and had him condemned. Because if you do not strive to forgive, you will not be forgiven; if you do not strive to love, neither will you be loved.

Jesus includes the power of forgiveness in human relationships. In life not everything is resolved with justice. No. Especially where one must put a stop to evil, someone must love beyond what is due, in order to recommence a relationship of grace. Evil knows revenge, and if it is not stopped, it risks spreading, suffocating the entire world.

Jesus replaced the law of retaliation what you have done to me, I will do to you in return with the *law of love*: what God has done for me, I shall do for you in return! Let us consider today, in this most beautiful week of Easter, whether I am able to forgive. And if I do not feel I can, I must ask the Lord to give me the grace to forgive, because knowing how to forgive is a grace.

God gives every Christian the grace to write a story of good in the life of his or her brothers and sisters, especially of those who have done something regrettable or wrong. With a word, an embrace, a smile, we can pass on to others the most precious thing we have received. What is the most precious thing we have received? Forgiveness, which we too must be able to give to others.

— CHAPTER XV —

**Lead Us Not into Temptation**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 1st May 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Let us continue the catechesis on the “Lord’s Prayer”, now arriving at the penultimate invocation: “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Mt 6:13). Another version says: “let us not fall into temptation”. The “Our Father” begins in a calm manner: it makes us desire that God’s great plan be fulfilled in our midst. It then casts a gaze on life, and makes us ask ourselves what we need each day: “daily bread”. Then the prayer turns to our interpersonal relationships, often tarnished by selfishness: we request forgiveness and we commit to bestow it. But it is with this penultimate invocation that our dialogue with the heavenly Father gets, so to speak, to the heart of the drama: that is, to the matter of the contrast between our freedom and the pitfalls of evil.

As we know, the original Greek expression contained in the Gospels is difficult to render in an exact manner, and all the modern translations are somewhat weak. But we can agree unanimously on one element: however one

understands the text, we have to exclude the possibility that God is the protagonist of the temptations that loom over mankind's journey. As if God himself were lurking with hidden pitfalls and snares for his children. One such interpretation contrasts first and foremost with the text itself, and is far from the image of God that Jesus revealed to us. Let us not forget: the "Our Father" begins with "Father". And a father does not lay snares for his children. Christians are not dealing with an envious God, in competition with mankind, or who enjoys putting them to the test. These are the images of many pagan divinities. We read in the Letter of the Apostle James: "let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one" (1:13). If anything, it is the contrary: the Father is not the creator of evil. He does not give a serpent to any child who asks for a fish (cf. Lk 11:11) as Jesus teaches and when evil appears in people's lives, he fights beside them, so they may be freed from it. A God who always fights for us, not against us. He is the Father! It is in this sense that we pray the "Our Father".

These two moments trial and temptation were mysteriously present in the life of Jesus himself. In this experience the Son of God became wholly our brother, in a way that is almost scandalous. And it is precisely these Gospel passages that show us that the most difficult invocations

of the “Our Father”, those that conclude the text, have already been granted: God does not leave us on our own, but in Jesus he manifests himself as the “God-with-us” up to utmost consequences. He is with us when he gives life; he is with us throughout life; he is with us in joy; he is with us in trials; he is with us in sorrow; he is with us in defeat when we sin. But he is always with us, because he is Father and cannot abandon us.

If we are tempted to commit evil, by denying our fraternity with others and desiring absolute power over everything and everyone, Jesus has already fought this temptation for us: the first pages of the Gospels attest to it. Right after receiving Baptism from John, amid the multitude of sinners, Jesus withdraws into the desert and is tempted by Satan. Thus begins Jesus’ public life, with the temptation that comes from Satan. Satan was present. Many people say: “But why speak of the devil, which is antiquated? The devil does not exist”. But look at what the Gospel teaches you: Jesus is confronted by the devil; he was tempted by Satan. But Jesus rejects every temptation and emerges victorious. The Gospel of Matthew has an interesting note that concludes the duel between Jesus and the Enemy: “Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him” (4:11).

But even at the time of supreme trial God does not leave us on our own. When Jesus withdraws to pray in Gethsemane, his heart is overwhelmed by unspeakable anguish as he says to the disciples and he experiences loneliness and abandonment. Alone, with the responsibility of the sins of the world upon his shoulders; alone, with unspeakable anguish. The trial is so excruciating that something unexpected happens. Jesus never begs for love for himself, but that night he feels his soul sorrowful, even to death, and so he asks his friends for closeness: “remain here, and watch with me” (Mt 26:38). As we know, the disciples, weighed down by a lethargy wrought by fear, fall asleep. In a time of agony, God asks man not to abandon him, but instead, man falls asleep. But when man faces times of trial, God is watching. In the most awful moments of our life, in the most painful moments, in the most anguishing moments, God watches with us; God fights alongside us; he is always close to us. Why? Because he is Father. Thus, we began the prayer: “Our Father”. And a father does not abandon his children. That night of Jesus’ suffering and struggle is the ultimate seal of the Incarnation: God descends to find us in our abyss and in the anguish that pervades our history.

He is our comfort at the time of trial: knowing that since Jesus crossed it, that valley is no

longer desolate but is blessed by the presence of the Son of God. He will never abandon us!

Deliver us, thus, Oh God, from the time of trial and temptation. But when this time arrives for us, Our Father, show us that we are not alone. You are the Father. Show us that Christ has already taken upon himself the weight of that cross too. Show us that Jesus calls us to carry it with him, abandoning ourselves trustfully to your Fatherly love. Thank you.

— CHAPTER XVI —

**Deliver Us from Evil**

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 15 May 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

We have finally reached the seventh request in the “Our Father: “And lead us not into temptation” (Mt 6:13b).

With this expression, the one praying is not only asking not to be abandoned in times of temptation, but is also imploring to be delivered from evil. The original Greek verb is very powerful: it evokes the presence of the evil one who tends to grab hold of us and bite us (cf. 1 Pt 5:8) and from whom we ask God for deliverance. The Apostle Peter also says that the evil one, the devil, prowls around us like a roaring lion, to devour us, and we ask God to deliver us.

With this twofold plea: “do not abandon us” and “deliver us”, an essential characteristic of Christian prayer emerges. Jesus teaches his friends to place the invocation of the Father above all else, also and especially in moments in which the evil one makes his threatening presence felt. Indeed, Christian prayer does not close its eyes to life. It is a filial prayer and not a childish prayer. It is

not so infatuated with God's paternity as to forget that mankind's journey is filled with difficulties. If the last verses of the "Our Father" were not there, how could sinners, the persecuted, the desperate, the dying, pray? The last petition is precisely the petition we make when we are at the limit, always.

There is an evil in our lives that is an unassailable presence. History books are a dismal catalogue of how much our existence in this world has been an often ruinous adventure. There is a mysterious evil which is certainly not a work of God but which silently insinuates itself among the folds of history: silent like the serpent that silently delivers poison. In some moments it seems to prevail: on some days his presence seems even more evident than God's mercy.

The prayerful are not blind and can clearly see before their eyes this evil that is so cumbersome, and so contradictory to God's mercy itself. They perceive it in nature, in history, even in their own heart. Because there are none among us who can say they are exempt from evil or at least, that they have not been tempted by it. We all know what evil is; we all know what temptation is; we have all experienced temptation of some kind in the flesh. But it is the tempter who persuades and

pushes us towards evil, telling us: “do this, think about this, go down that road”.

The last cry of the “Our Father” is cast against this ‘wide-brimmed’ evil which keeps the most varied experiences under its umbrella: mankind’s mourning, innocent suffering, slavery, the exploitation of others, the tears of innocent children. All these things protest in man’s heart and become a voice in the final words of Jesus’ prayer.

It is precisely in the narratives of the Passion that some expressions of the “Our Father” find their most striking resonance: Jesus says: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee: remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mk 14:36). Jesus experiences the piercing of evil in its entirety. Not only death, but death on the cross. Not only solitude, but also contempt, humiliation. Not only ill will but also cruelty, rage against him. This is what man is: a being consecrated to life, who dreams of love and goodness, but who then continually exposes himself and others to evil, to the point that we can be tempted to despair of mankind.

Dear brothers and sisters, in this way, the “Our Father” is similar to a symphony which seeks to be fulfilled in each of us. A Christian knows how enslaving the power of evil is, and at the same time, experiences how Jesus, who never gave in

to its seduction, is on our side and comes to our aid.

Thus Jesus' prayer leaves us the most precious legacy: the presence of the Son of God who delivered us from evil, fighting to convert it. In the hour of the final struggle he commands Peter to put his sword back in its sheath; he ensures paradise to the thief; to all the people who were there, unaware of the tragedy that was taking place, he offers a word of peace: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34).

From Jesus' forgiveness on the cross springs peace; true peace comes from the cross. It is the gift of the Risen One, a gift that Jesus gives us. Just think that the first greeting the Risen Jesus gives is "peace be with you", peace in your souls, in your hearts, in your lives. The Lord gives us peace; he gives us forgiveness, but we must ask: "deliver us from evil", in order not to succumb to evil. This is our hope, the strength given to us by the Risen One who is in our midst: he is here. He is here with that strength that he gives us to go forward, and he promises to deliver us from evil.

## — CHAPTER XVII —

### Conclusion

*St Peter's Square  
Wednesday, 22 May 2019*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!*

Today we conclude our series of catecheses on the “Lord’s Prayer”. We can say that Christian prayer arises from the courage to address God with the name ‘Father’. This to say ‘Father’ to God. But it takes courage! It is not so much a matter of a formula, as much as a filial intimacy into which we are introduced by grace: Jesus is the revealer of the Father and he gives us intimacy with him. He “does not give us a formula to repeat mechanically. As in every vocal prayer, it is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father” (ccc, n. 2766). Jesus himself used different expressions to pray to the Father. If we read the Gospels carefully, we discover that these expressions of prayer that come from Jesus’ lips recall the text of the “Our Father”.

For example, on the night of Gethsemane, Jesus prays this way: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mk 14:36). We have already cited this text from Mark’s Gospel.

How can we fail to recognize in this prayer, albeit short, a trace of the “Our Father”? In the midst of darkness, Jesus invokes God with the name ‘Abba’, with filial trust and, despite feeling fear and anguish, he asks that his will be done.

In other passages of the Gospel, Jesus insists that his disciples nurture a spirit of prayer. Prayer must be insistent, and above all it must carry the memory of our brothers and sisters, especially when we have difficult relationships with them. Jesus says: “whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mk 11:25). How can we fail to recognize in these expressions, their consonance with the “Our Father”? And the examples could be numerous, also for us.

We do not find the “Our Father” in Saint Paul’s writings, but its presence emerges in that wonderful summary where the invocation of the Christian is condensed into a single word: ‘Abba!’ (cf. Rm 8:15; Gal 4:6).

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus fully satisfies the request of the disciples who, seeing him withdraw and immerse himself in prayer, decide to ask him one day: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John” the Baptist “taught his disciples” (Lk 11:1). And so the Teacher taught them to pray to the Father.

When considering the New Testament as a whole, one can clearly see that the first protagonist of every Christian prayer is the Holy Spirit. But let us not forget this: the protagonist of every Christian prayer is the Holy Spirit. We could never pray without the power of the Holy Spirit. It is he who prays within us and moves us to pray well. We can ask the Holy Spirit to teach us to pray because he is the protagonist, the one who makes the true prayer within us. He breathes into the heart of each of us who are Jesus' disciples. The Holy Spirit makes us able to pray as children of God, as we truly are by our Baptism. The Holy Spirit helps us pray in the 'furrow' that Jesus ploughed for us. This is the mystery of Christian prayer: by grace we are attracted to that dialogue of love of the most Holy Trinity.

Jesus prayed this way. At times he used expressions that are certainly far removed from the text of the "Our Father". Let us think about the initial words of Psalm 22 that Jesus uttered on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46). Can the heavenly Father abandon his Son? Certainly not. And yet, his love for us, sinners, brought Jesus to this point: up to experiencing the abandonment of God, his distance, because he took our sins upon himself. But even in his anguished cry, "*my* God, *my* God" remains. In that 'my' lies the core of the relationship with the Father; there lies the core of faith and of prayer.

This is why, starting from this core, a Christian can pray in any situation. He can adopt all the prayers of the Bible, especially of the Psalms; but he can also pray with many expressions that in thousands of years of history have gushed forth from the heart of mankind. And let us never cease to tell the Father about our brothers and sisters in humanity, so that none of them, particularly the poor, may remain without comfort or a portion of love.

At the end of this catechesis, we can repeat that prayer of Jesus: “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes” (Lk 10:21). In order to pray, we have to make ourselves little so that the Holy Spirit may come within us and may be the One to lead us in prayer.