

2023 -2024 Year of Prayer

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

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

24th March 2024

As we start our Holy Week journey this week we look at Pope Francis' catechesis on the Paschal prayer of Jesus for us, which he gave as his teaching on Wednesday, 16 June 2021.

The Paschal prayer of Jesus for us

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

We have recalled several times in this series of catecheses that prayer is one of the most evident characteristics of Jesus' life: Jesus prayed, and he prayed a lot. In the course of his mission, Jesus immersed himself in it because dialogue with the Father was the incandescent core of his entire existence.

The Gospels testify how Jesus' prayer became even more intense and deep at the hour of his passion and death. These culminating events of his life constitute the central core of Christian preaching: those last hours lived by Jesus in Jerusalem are the heart of the Gospel, not only because the Evangelists reserve proportionally greater space to this narrative, but also because the event of his death and resurrection — like a flash of lightning — sheds light on the rest of Jesus' life. He was not a philanthropist who took care of human suffering and illness: he was and is much more. In him there is not only goodness: there is something more, there is salvation, and not an episodic salvation — the type that might save me from an illness or a moment of despair — but total salvation, messianic salvation, which gives hope in the definitive victory of life over death.

In the days of his last Passover, we thus find Jesus fully immersed in prayer.

He prays dramatically in the garden of Gethsemane, as we heard, assailed by mortal anguish. And yet, precisely in that moment, Jesus addresses God as "*Abba*", Father (cf. Mk 14: 36). This word, in Aramaic, which was Jesus' language, expresses intimacy, it expresses trust. Just as he feels the darkness gather around him, Jesus breaks through it with that little word: *Abba*, Father.

Jesus also prays on the cross, obscurely shrouded in God's silence. And yet once again the word "Father" emerges from his lips. It is the most ardent prayer, because on the cross, Jesus is the absolute intercessor. He prays for others. He prays for everyone, even for those who have condemned him, with no one, apart from a poor delinquent, taking his side. Everyone was against him or indifferent; only that criminal recognized the power. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). In the midst of the tragedy, in the excruciating pain of soul and body, Jesus prays with the words of the psalms; with the poor of the world, especially those forgotten by all. He pronounces the tragic words of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (v. 1). He felt abandonment, and he prayed. On the cross is the fulfilment of the gift of the Father who offers love, that is, our salvation is fulfilled. And also, once, he calls Him "My God", "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit": that is, everything, everything is prayer in the three hours of the Cross.

Jesus therefore prays in the decisive hours of his passion and death. And with the resurrection, the Father will grant the prayer. Jesus' prayer is intense, Jesus' prayer is unique, and it also becomes the model for our prayer. Jesus prayed for everyone: He even prayed for me, for each one of you. Every one of you can say: "Jesus, on the cross, prayed for me". He prayed. Jesus can say to every one of us: "I prayed for you at the Last Supper, and on the wood of the Cross". Even in the most painful of our

suffering, we are never alone. Jesus' prayer is with us. "And now, Father, here, we who are listening to this, does Jesus pray for us?". Yes, he continues to pray so that his word may help us keep going forward. But pray, and remember that he prays for us.

And this seems to me the most beautiful thing to remember. This is the final catechesis of this series on prayer: to remember the grace that not only do we pray, but that, so to speak, we have been "prayed for". We have already been welcomed into Jesus' dialogue with the Father, in communion with the Holy Spirit. Jesus prays for me: each one of us can carry this in their heart. We must not forget this. Even in the worst moments. We are already welcomed into Jesus' dialogue with the Father, in communion of the Holy Spirit. We were willed by Christ Jesus, and even in the hour of his passion, death and resurrection, everything was offered for us. And so, with prayer and with life, all that remains is only to have courage and hope, and, with this courage and hope, to deeply feel Jesus' prayer and to keep on going: so that our life may be one of giving glory to God in the knowledge that he prays for me to the Father, that Jesus prays for me.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, today we conclude our series of catecheses on prayer by turning once again to the prayer of Jesus. In the final hours of his life, Jesus' constant dialogue with the Father becomes all the more intense, as he approaches his saving death and resurrection. In the great "priestly prayer" of the Last Supper, Jesus intercedes for his disciples and for all those who will believe through their word. In the agony in the garden, he offers his anguish to the Father and lovingly embraces his will. At the darkest hour of his suffering on the cross, Jesus continues to pray, using the traditional words of the Psalms, identifying himself with the poor and abandoned of our world. In those moments, the crucified Lord takes upon himself the burden of all the sins of the world. For our sake, he experiences the distance separating sinners from God, and becomes the supreme and eternal intercessor for all mankind. In our own life of prayer, may we always be mindful that the Lord never ceases to pray for us, uniting us to his own eternal dialogue of love with the Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit.