

THE COURAGE TO PRAY

[Italicized quotes – Pope Francis – General Audience on May 22, 2019]

The “Lord’s Prayer” is not a formula for us to simply repeat mechanically. Pope Francis says prayer arises from the courage to address God as “Father,” to place ourselves so close to Him that we share the intimacy of a Father-child relationship. Yet that is what Jesus reveals to us. “It is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit teaches the children of God to pray to their Father” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 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”.

Mark’s Gospel, which does not have a “Lord’s Prayer” text, nevertheless has Jesus pray in Gethsemane: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:36).

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 another passage, Jesus speaks of the need to reconcile with others before we pray: “When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions” (Mk 11:25).

How can we fail to recognize in these expressions, their consonance with the “Our Father”?

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).

And where do we get the courage to address God as Father? From the Holy Spirit, whom the Father and the Son send to burn within us, to “fire us up” to pray and to live as Christians.

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. ... This is the mystery of Christian prayer: by grace we are attracted to that dialogue of love of the most Holy Trinity.

Even in Jesus' anguished invocation from the cross of Psalm 22 – "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" – he retains intimacy as he says "My God, My God."

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.

Recall this prayer of Jesus: "I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike" (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.