



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 13 February 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

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.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from Sweden, Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, the Philippines and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the Lord’s blessings of joy and peace. God bless you!

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the elderly*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Tomorrow we will celebrate the Feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, evangelizers of the Slavic peoples and co-Patrons of Europe. May their example help all of us to become, in all of life’s settings, disciples and missionaries, for the conversion of those who are distant, as well as those who are near. May their love for the Lord give us the strength to bear every sacrifice, so that the Gospel may become the fundamental rule of our life. Thank you.

To give the blessing, I would like to wear this stole which was given to me yesterday by the Valdocco group and was made by the women of the Wichí people, a native people of great culture.
