

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

Twenty Ninth Sunday of the Year – 20th October 2024

In our second reading, from the letter to the Hebrews, we are encouraged to, “... be confident, then in approaching the throne of grace ...”. In the liturgies, which we celebrate together, we follow this precept according to Christ's will through his Church. In today's catechesis Pope Francis reflects on and teaches the place of liturgy in our lives of prayer. This catechesis was first given on Wednesday, 3 February 2021.

Praying in the liturgy

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

In the history of the Church, there has often been a temptation to practice an intimist Christianity that does not recognize the spiritual importance of public liturgical rites. Often, this tendency claimed the supposed greater purity of a religiosity that did not depend on external ceremonies, which were considered a useless or harmful burden. At the centre of the criticism was not a particular ritual form, or a particular way of celebrating, but rather the liturgy itself, the liturgical form of praying.

Indeed, one can find certain forms of spirituality in the Church that were unable to adequately integrate the liturgical moment. Many of the faithful, while participating assiduously in the rites, especially in Sunday Mass, drew nourishment for their faith and spiritual life more from other sources, of a devotional type.

Much has been achieved in recent decades. The Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council represents a pivotal point in this long journey. It comprehensively and organically reaffirms the importance of the divine liturgy for the life of Christians, who find therein that objective mediation required by the fact that Jesus Christ is not an idea or a sentiment, but a living Person, and his Mystery a historical event. The prayer of Christians passes through tangible mediations: Sacred Scripture, the Sacraments, liturgical rites, the community. In Christian life, the corporeal and material sphere cannot be disregarded, because in Jesus Christ it became the way of salvation. We could say that we should pray with the body too: the body enters into prayer.

Therefore, there is no Christian spirituality that is not grounded in the celebration of the sacred mysteries. The *Catechism* writes: “In the sacramental liturgy of the Church, the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit proclaims, makes present, and communicates the mystery of salvation, which is continued in the heart that prays” (n. 2655). The liturgy, in itself, is not just spontaneous prayer, but something more, and more original: it is an act that founds the whole Christian experience and, therefore, prayer, too, is an event, it is a happening, it is presence, it is encounter. It is an encounter with Christ. Christ makes himself present in the Holy Spirit through the sacramental signs: hence the need for us Christians to participate in the divine mysteries. A Christianity without a liturgy, I dare say, is perhaps a Christianity without Christ. Without the Total Christ. Even in the barest of rites, such as the one some Christians have celebrated and continue to celebrate in places of incarceration, or in the hiddenness of a house in times of persecution, Christ is truly present and gives himself to his faithful.

Precisely because of its objective dimension, the liturgy asks to be celebrated with fervour, so that the grace poured out in the rite is not dispersed, but rather reaches the experience of each one. The Catechism explains it very well and says this: “Prayer internalizes and assimilates the liturgy during and after its celebration” (ibid.). Many Christian prayers do not originate from the liturgy, but all of them, if they are Christian, presuppose the liturgy, that is, the sacramental mediation of Jesus Christ. Every time we celebrate a Baptism, or consecrate the bread and wine in the Eucharist, or anoint the body of a sick person with Holy Oil, Christ is here! It is he who acts and is present just as he was

when he healed the weak limbs of a sick person, or when he delivered his testament for the salvation of the world at the Last Supper.

The prayer of the Christian makes the sacramental presence of Jesus his or her own. What is external to us becomes part of us: the liturgy expresses this even in the very natural gesture of eating. Mass cannot simply be “listened to”: it is also an incorrect expression, “I am going to listen to Mass”. Mass cannot merely be listened to, as if we were just spectators of something that slips away without our involvement. Mass is always *celebrated*, and not only by the priest who presides it, but by all Christians who experience it. And the centre is Christ! All of us, in the diversity of gifts and ministries, join in his action, because he, Christ, is the Protagonist of the liturgy.

When the first Christians began to worship, they did so by actualizing Jesus’ deeds and words, with the light and power of the Holy Spirit, so that their lives, reached by that grace, would become a spiritual sacrifice offered to God. This approach was a true “revolution”. Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Romans: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (12:1). Life is called to become worship to God, but this cannot happen without prayer, especially liturgical prayer. May this thought help us all when we go to Mass: I go to pray in the community, I go to pray with Christ who is present. When we go to the celebration of a Baptism, for example, it is Christ present there, who baptizes. “But Father, this is an idea, a figure of speech”: no, it is not a figure of speech. Christ is present, and in the liturgy you pray with Christ who is beside you.

Summary of the Holy Father's words:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, in our continuing catechesis on prayer, we now turn to the sacred liturgy, the Church’s public prayer. The [Second Vatican Council](#) stressed the importance of the liturgy, together with personal prayer, for the spiritual life of Christians. Indeed, all Christian spirituality is grounded in the celebration of the sacred mysteries, in which Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, becomes present in the midst of his people through the mediation of the sacramental signs of bread and wine, water and oil. Just as, in the Incarnation, the Son of God took flesh and dwelt among us, so too he now becomes present in all his saving power, through the liturgical celebration of word and sacrament. Our personal prayer is meant to interiorize and draw enrichment from the spiritual treasures of the Church’s liturgical prayer. Because the liturgy is the source and summit of our Christian prayer, all of us are called to take an active part in this great act of worship, by offering our own lives in union with Christ as a holy and pleasing sacrifice to the Father.