

2023 -2024 Year of Prayer

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

Third Sunday of Easter 14th April 2024

In Pope Francis' catechesis this week he reminds us that mankind's prayer is closely linked to the sentiment of wonder. The Easter Season is a time where our prayer is nourished by our sense of wonder and of joy. Pope Francis gave this teaching on 20th May 2020.

The mystery of creation

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning!

Let us continue the catechesis on prayer, by meditating on the mystery of Creation. Life, the simple fact that we exist, opens mankind's heart to prayer.

The first page of the Bible resembles a great hymn of thanksgiving. The narrative of Creation has a rhythm with refrains, where the goodness and beauty of every living thing is continually emphasized. With his word, God calls to life, and every thing comes into existence. With his word, he separates life from darkness, alternates day and night, interchanges the seasons, opens a palette of colours with the variety of plants and animals. In this overflowing forest that quickly vanquishes the chaos, the last one to appear is man. And this appearance inspires an extreme exultation that amplifies his satisfaction and joy: "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (*Gen 1:31*). Very good, but also beautiful: the beauty of all creation can be seen!

The beauty and mystery of Creation create in the human heart the first impulse that evokes prayer (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2566). The eighth Psalm which we heard earlier states: "When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast established; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (vv. 3-4). The one praying contemplates the mystery of the life around him; he sees the starry sky that lies above him — and that astrophysics shows us today in all its immensity — and asks himself what loving plan must there be behind such ponderous work!... And, in this boundless expanse, what is man? 'Almost nothing', another Psalm states (cf. 89:48): a being that is born, a being that dies, an extremely fragile creature. Yet, in all the universe, the human being is the only creature aware of the great profusion of beauty. A small being who is born, who dies; he is here today and gone tomorrow. He is the only one who is aware of this beauty. We are aware of this beauty!

Mankind's prayer is closely linked to the sentiment of wonder. The greatness of man is infinitesimal when compared to the dimensions of the universe. His greatest conquests seem quite small... However man is not nothing. In prayer a sentiment of mercy is powerfully confirmed. Nothing exists by chance: the secret of the universe lies in a benevolent gaze that someone meets in our eyes. The Psalm states that we are made little less than God; we are crowned with glory and honour (cf. 8:6). The relationship with God is man's greatness, his enthronement. By nature we are almost nothing, small, but by vocation, by calling, we are the children of the great King!

It is an experience that many of us have had. If life's events, with all their bitterness, sometimes risk choking the gift of prayer that is within us, it is enough to contemplate a starry sky, a sunset, a flower..., in order to rekindle a spark of thanksgiving. This experience is perhaps the basis of the first page of the Bible.

The people of Israel were not experiencing happy days when the great biblical narrative of Creation was written. An enemy power had occupied their land; many had been deported, and they now found themselves slaves in Mesopotamia. There was no more homeland, nor temple, nor social and religious life, nothing.

Yet, precisely in starting from the great narrative of Creation, someone began to find reasons for thanksgiving, to praise God for his or her existence. Prayer is the first strength of hope. You pray and hope

grows, it moves forward. I would say that prayer opens the door to hope. There is hope but I open the door with my prayer. Because people of prayer safeguard basic truths; they are the ones who repeat, first and foremost to themselves and then to all the others, that this life, despite all its toils and trials, despite its difficult days, is full of a grace that is awe inspiring. And as such it must always be defended and protected.

Men and women who pray know that hope is stronger than discouragement. They believe that love is more powerful than death, and that surely one day it will triumph, even if in times and ways that we do not understand. Men and women of prayer bear gleaming reflections of light on their faces: because, the sun does not stop illuminating them, even in the darkest of days. Prayer illuminates you: it illuminates the souls, it illuminates the heart and it illuminates the face. Even in the darkest times, even in times of greatest suffering.

We are all bearers of joy. Have you considered this? That you are bearers of joy? Or do you prefer to bring bad news, things that sadden? We are capable of bearing joy. This life is the gift that God gave us: and it is too short to consume it in sadness, in bitterness. Let us praise God, happy to simply exist. Let us look at the universe, let us look at beauty and let us also look at our crosses and say: 'You exist, you made us like this, for you'. It is necessary to feel that unrest of the heart that leads to thanking and praising God. We are children of the great King, of the Creator, capable of reading his signature in all of Creation. We are not safeguarding that creation today, but that creation holds the signature of God who made it out of love. May the Lord make us understand this ever more deeply and lead us to say "thank you"; and that "thank you" is a beautiful prayer.