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Friday night Conference

Introduction on the Importance of Prayer

1. B16 in introduction to Catechesis on Prayer
 - a. I would now like to choose a topic that is dear to all our hearts: it is the theme of prayer, and especially Christian prayer, the prayer, that is, which Jesus taught and which the Church continues to teach us. It is in fact in Jesus that man becomes able to approach God in the depth and intimacy of the relationship of fatherhood and sonship. Together with the first disciples, let us now turn with humble trust to the Teacher and ask him: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1).
 - b. We know well, in fact, that prayer should not be taken for granted. It is necessary to learn how to pray, as it were acquiring this art ever anew; even those who are very advanced in spiritual life always feel the need to learn from Jesus, to learn how to pray authentically. We receive the first lesson from the Lord by his example. The Gospels describe Jesus to us in intimate and constant conversation with the Father: it is a profound communion of the One who came into the world not to do his will but that of the Father who sent him for the salvation of man.
 - c. That’s what we’ll be doing throughout this retreat.
 - d. In this first conference, I want to give an introduction to B16 and prayer, to set the table for the rich fare he is going to nourish us with throughout our time together.
 - e. It’s important that we begin with the context, however.

2. Secularism
 - a. Living as if God doesn’t exist.
 - b. St. Angela of Foligno: “**Today we all risk living as though God did not exist; he seems so distant from daily life..**”
 - c. Milestones
 1. We see this even in the liturgy.
 2. **I am convinced that the crisis in the Church that we are experiencing today is to a large extent due to the disintegration of the liturgy, which at times has even come to be conceived of etsi Deus non daretur: in that it is a matter of indifference whether or not God exists and whether or not he speaks to us and hears us.** ... Then the community is celebrating only itself, an activity that is utterly fruitless. And because the ecclesial community cannot have its origin from itself but emerges as a unity only from the Lord, through faith, such circumstances will inexorably result in a disintegration into sectarian parties of all kinds — partisan opposition within a Church tearing herself apart.
 - d. There are many other objections to prayer.
 1. Feast of Faith
 - a) Three Objections to Prayer
 1. Metaphysical — God doesn’t exist.
 2. No personal causality — God is not a person who can intervene in time.
 3. Eternity can’t enter into time and change the stream of time without losing eternity.
 2. Catechism
 - a) 2726 In the battle of prayer, we must face in ourselves and around us erroneous notions of prayer.
 1. Some people view prayer as a simple psychological activity,
 2. Others as an effort of concentration to reach a mental void.
 3. Still others reduce prayer to ritual words and postures.
 4. Many Christians unconsciously regard prayer as an occupation that is incompatible with

all the other things they have to do: they "don't have the time."

5. Those who seek God by prayer are quickly discouraged because they do not know that prayer comes also from the Holy Spirit and not from themselves alone.
 - b) 2727 We must also face the fact that certain attitudes deriving from the mentality of "this present world" can penetrate our lives if we are not vigilant.
 1. For example, some would have it that only that is true which can be verified by reason and science; yet prayer is a mystery that overflows both our conscious and unconscious lives.
 2. Others overly prize production and profit; thus prayer, being unproductive, is useless.
 3. Still others exalt sensuality and comfort as the criteria of the true, the good, and the beautiful; whereas prayer, the "love of beauty" (philokalia), is caught up in the glory of the living and true God.
 4. Finally, some see prayer as a flight from the world in reaction against activism; but in fact, Christian prayer is neither an escape from reality nor a divorce from life.
 - c) 2728 Finally, our battle has to confront what we experience as failure in prayer:
 1. discouragement during periods of dryness;
 2. sadness that, because we have "great possessions,"[15] we have not given all to the Lord;
 3. disappointment over not being heard according to our own will;
 4. wounded pride, stiffened by the indignity that is ours as sinners;
 5. our resistance to the idea that prayer is a free and unmerited gift; and so forth.
 6. The conclusion is always the same: what good does it do to pray? To overcome these obstacles, we must battle to gain humility, trust, and perseverance.
 - e. People have lost the ability to pray.
 1. God and the world: *Many people were able to pray as children, but at sometime or other they lost the ability. Do you have to learn to talk with God? The organ of sensitivity to God can atrophy to such an extent that the words of faith become quite meaningless.* And whoever no longer possesses a faculty of hearing can no longer speak, because deafness goes together with being mute. It's as if one had deliberately to learn one's own mother tongue. Slowly one learns to spell out God's letters, to speak this language and -- if still inadequately -- to understand God. Gradually, then, one will begin to be able to pray for one's self and to talk with God, at first in a very childlike way -- in a certain sense we always remain like that -- but then more and more in one's own words.
3. Many Catholics are satisfied with a shallow prayer life, incapable of filling life.
- a. NMI 34. Christians who have received the gift of a vocation to the specially consecrated life are of course called to prayer in a particular way: of its nature, their consecration makes them more open to the experience of contemplation, and it is important that they should cultivate it with special care. But it would be wrong to think that ordinary Christians can be content with a shallow prayer that is unable to fill their whole life. Especially in the face of the many trials to which today's world subjects faith, they would be not only mediocre Christians but "Christians at risk". They would run the insidious risk of seeing their faith progressively undermined, and would perhaps end up succumbing to the allure of "substitutes", accepting alternative religious proposals and even indulging in far-fetched superstitions. It is therefore essential that education in prayer should become in some way a key-point of all pastoral planning.
 - b. NMI 32. 32. This training in holiness calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer... We well know that prayer cannot be taken for granted. We have to learn to pray: as it were learning this art ever anew from the lips of the Divine Master himself, like the first disciples: "Lord, teach us to pray!" (Lk 11:1). Prayer develops that conversation with Christ which makes us his intimate friends: "Abide in me and I in you" (Jn 15:4). This reciprocity is the very substance and soul of the Christian life, and the condition of all true pastoral life. Wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, this reciprocity opens us, through Christ and in Christ, to contemplation of the Father's face. Learning this Trinitarian shape of Christian prayer and living it fully, above all in the liturgy, the summit and source of the Church's life,¹⁷ but also in personal experience, is the secret of a truly vital Christianity.

4. Signs of hope despite secularism
 - a. May 11 Catechesis: We live in an age in which the signs of secularism are glaringly obvious. God seems to have disappeared from the horizon of some people or to have become a reality that meets with indifference. Yet at the same time we see many signs of a reawakening of the religious sense, a rediscovery of the importance of God to the human being's life, a need for spirituality, for going beyond a purely horizontal and materialistic vision of human life.

What prayer is in Pope Benedict's thought

1. Benedict fundamentally describes prayer in its incarnate form, in people who pray. In his catecheses he focuses systematically on incarnated prayers. We don't have the chance to ponder everything he teaches in depth in this intro, but I'd like to give a taste.
 1. Pagans who prayed
 1. Dear friends, in these examples of prayer of different epochs and civilizations emerge the human being's awareness of his creatural condition and of his dependence on Another superior to him and the source of every good. The human being of all times prays because he cannot fail to wonder about the meaning of his life, which remains obscure and discomfoting if it is not put in relation to the mystery of God and if his plan for the world.
 2. In the examples of prayer of the various cultures which we have considered, we can see a testimony of the religious dimension and of the desire for God engraved on the heart of every human being, which receives fulfillment and full expression in the Old and in the New Testament. The Revelation, is in fact purifying and brings to its fullness man's original yearning for God, offering to him, in prayer, the possibility of a deeper relationship with the heavenly Father.
 3. Man is religious by nature, he is *homo religiosus* just as he is *homo sapiens* and *homo faber*. "The desire for God" the *Catechism* says further, "is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God" (n. 27).
 4. St Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest theologians of history, defines prayer as "an expression of man's desire for God". This attraction to God, which God himself has placed in man, is the soul of prayer, that then takes on a great many forms, in accordance with the history, the time, the moment, the grace and even the sin of every person praying. Man's history has in fact known various forms of prayer, because he has developed different kinds of openness to the "Other" and to the Beyond, so that we may recognize prayer as an experience present in every religion and culture.
 2. OT figures
 1. Abraham
 1. Prayer of Intercession. A mission of salvation. Mercy. Giving voice to what God wanted.
 2. Dear brothers and sisters, the prayer of intercession of Abraham, our father in the faith, teaches us to open our hearts ever wider to God's superabundant mercy so that in daily prayer we may know how to desire the salvation of humanity and ask for it with perseverance and with trust in the Lord who is great in love.
 2. Jacob
 - a. For the believer the episode of the struggle at the Jabbok¹ thus becomes a paradigm in which the people of Israel speak of their own origins and outline the features of a particular relationship between God and humanity. Therefore, as is also affirmed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "from this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance" (n. 2573). The Bible text speaks to us about a long night of seeking God, of the struggle to learn his name and see his face; it is the night of prayer that,

¹ **JABBOK** (Heb. יַבְבֹּק), tributary of the Jordan from the east, the first river south of the Yarmuk. The Hebrew name is derived either from the root meaning "to empty itself" or from a sound imitating the noise of water flowing over pebbles.

with tenacity and perseverance, asks God for a blessing and a new name, a new reality that is the fruit of conversion and forgiveness

3. For the believer Jacob's night at the ford of the Jabbok thus becomes a reference point for understanding the relationship with God that finds in prayer its greatest expression. Prayer requires trust, nearness, almost a hand-to-hand contact that is symbolic not of a God who is an enemy, an adversary, but a Lord of blessing who always remains mysterious, who seems beyond reach. Therefore the author of the Sacred text uses the symbol of the struggle, which implies a strength of spirit, perseverance, tenacity in obtaining what is desired. And if the object of one's desire is a relationship with God, his blessing and love, then the struggle cannot fail but ends in that self-giving to God, in recognition of one's own weakness, which is overcome only by giving oneself over into God's merciful hands.
 4. Dear brothers and sisters, our entire lives are like this long night of struggle and prayer, spent in desiring and asking for God's blessing, which cannot be grabbed or won through our own strength but must be received with humility from him as a gratuitous gift that ultimately allows us to recognize the Lord's face. And when this happens, our entire reality changes; we receive a new name and God's blessing. And, what is more: Jacob, who receives a new name, and becomes Israel, also gives a new name to the place where he wrestled with God, where he prayed; he renames it Penuel, which means: "The Face of God". With this name he recognizes that this place is filled with the Lord's presence, making that land sacred and thus leaving a memorial of that mysterious encounter with God. Whoever allows himself to be blessed by God, who abandons himself to God, who permits himself to be transformed by God, renders a blessing to the world. May the Lord help us to fight the good fight of the faith (cf. 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7) and to ask, in prayer, for his blessing, that he may renew us in the expectation of beholding his Face
3. Moses
- a. As we read the Old Testament we note one figure who stands out from among the others: Moses, precisely, as a man of prayer. Moses, the great prophet and leader at the time of the Exodus, carried out his role as mediator between God and Israel by making himself a messenger to the people of God's words and divine commands, by leading it towards the freedom of the Promised Land and by teaching the Israelites to live obeying God and trusting in him during their long sojourn in the desert. However, I would say also, and above all, by praying.
 - b. Moses prayed for the Pharaoh when God, with the plagues, was endeavouring to convert the Egyptians' hearts (cf. Ex 8-10); Moses asked the Lord to heal his sister Miriam, afflicted with leprosy (cf. Num 12:9-13); he interceded for the people which had rebelled fearful of what those who had spied out the land would report (cf. Num 14:1-19); he prayed when fire was about to burn down the camp (cf. Num 11:1-2), and when poisonous serpents decimated the people (cf. Num 21:4-9); he addressed the Lord and reacted by protesting when the burden of his mission became too heavy (cf. Num 11:10-15); he saw God and spoke "to him face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (cf. Ex 24:9-17; 7-23; 34:1-10, 28-35).
 - c. This is a constant temptation on the journey of faith: to avoid the divine mystery by constructing a comprehensible god who corresponds with one's own plans, one's own projects.
 - d. With prayer, wanting what God wanted, the intercessor entered more and more deeply into knowledge of the Lord and of his mercy, and became capable of a love that extended even to the total gift of himself. In Moses, on the summit of the mountain face to face with God, who made himself an intercessor for his people and offered himself — "blot me out" — the Fathers of the Church saw a prefiguration of Christ who from the very top of the Cross was truly before God, not only as a friend but as Son. And not only did he offer himself — "blot me out" — but with

his pierced heart he had himself blotted out, he himself became sin, as St Paul himself says, he took *upon himself* our sins to ensure *our* salvation. His intercession was not only solidarity but identification with us: he bears all of us in his Body. And thus his whole life as a man and as Son is a cry to God's heart, it is forgiveness, but forgiveness that transforms and renews.

- e. I think we should meditate upon this reality. Christ stands before God and is praying for me. His prayer on the Cross is contemporary with all human beings, contemporary with me. He prays for me, he suffered and suffers for me, he identified himself with me, taking our body and the human soul. And he asks us to enter this identity of his, making ourselves one body, one spirit with him because from the summit of the Cross he brought not new laws, tablets of stone, but himself, his Body and his Blood, as the New Covenant. Thus he brings us kinship with him, he makes us one body with him, identifies us with him. He invites us to enter into this identification, to be united with him in our wish to be one body, one spirit with him. Let us pray the Lord that this identification may transform and renew us, because forgiveness is renewal and transformation.

4. Elijah

- a. In spite of claiming to follow the Lord, an invisible and mysterious God, the people were also seeking security in a comprehensible and predictable god from whom they believed they could obtain fruitfulness and prosperity in exchange for sacrifices. Israel was capitulating to the seduction of idolatry, the continuous temptation of believers, deluding itself that it could "serve two masters" (cf. Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13) and facilitate the impracticable routes of faith in the Almighty even by putting its faith in a powerless god, fashioned by men.
- b. Instead of using the customary formula, "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", he used a less known title: "God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel". The replacement of the name "Jacob" by "Israel" calls to mind Jacob's struggle at the ford of the Jabbok, with the change of name to which the narrator explicitly refers (cf. Gen 32:31) and of which I spoke in one of the recent catecheses. The substitution acquires a pregnant meaning in Elijah's invocation. The prophet is praying for the people of the kingdom of the north which was called, precisely, Israel, as distinct from Judah, which indicated the kingdom of the south.
- c. The people for which Elijah prayed was faced with its own truth, and the prophet asked that the truth of the Lord might also be shown and that he intervene to convert Israel, detaching it from the deception of idolatry and thereby bringing it to salvation. His request was that the people might finally realize and know in fullness, who truly is its God, and make a decisive choice to follow him alone, the true God
- d. Dear brothers and sisters, what does this history of the past tell us? What is the present of this history?
 1. First of all the priority of the first Commandment is called into question: worship God alone. Whenever God disappears, man falls into the slavery of idolatry, as the totalitarian regimes demonstrated in our time, and as the various forms of nihilism that make man dependent on idols, on idolatry, also demonstrate; they enslave him.
 2. Secondly, the primary aim of prayer is conversion, the flame of God that transforms our heart and enables us to see God and so to live in accordance with God and live for others.
 3. And the third point. The Fathers tell us that this history of a prophet is prophetic too if, they say, it foreshadows the future, the future Christ; it is a step on the journey towards Christ. And they tell us that here we see God's true fire: the love that guided the Lord even to the cross, to the total gift of himself. True worship of God, therefore, is giving oneself to God and to men and women, true worship is love. And true worship of God does not

destroy but renews, transforms. Of course, the fire of God, the fire of love burns, transforms, purifies, but in this very way does not destroy but rather creates the truth of our being, recreates our heart. And thus, truly alive through the grace of the fire of the Holy Spirit, of love of God, we are worshippers in spirit and in truth.

5. Psalms, which incarnate actual prayers, inspired by God and prayed by people.
 - a. Two great areas that sum up the prayer of the Psalter may be identified: supplication, connected to lamentation, and praise. These are two related dimensions that are almost inseparable since supplication is motivated by the certainty that God will respond, thus opening a person to praise and thanksgiving; and praise and thanksgiving stem from the experience of salvation received; this implies the need for help which the supplication expresses. ... In the prayer of the Psalms, supplication and praise are interwoven in this manner and fused in a single hymn that celebrates the eternal grace of the Lord who stoops down to our frailty. It was precisely in order to permit the people of believers to join in this hymn that the Psalter was given to Israel and to the Church. Indeed the Psalms teach how to pray. In them, the word of God becomes a word of prayer — and they are the words of the inspired Psalmist — which also becomes the word of the person who prays the Psalms.
 - b. Since they are a word of God, anyone who prays the Psalms speaks to God using the very words that God has given to us, addresses him with the words that he himself has given us. So it is that in praying the Psalms we learn to pray. They are a school of prayer.
 - c. Something similar happens when a child begins to speak, namely, he learns how to express his own feelings, emotions, and needs with words that do not belong to him innately but that he learns from his parents and from those who surround him. What the child wishes to express is his own experience, but his means of expression comes from others; and little by little he makes them his own, the words received from his parents become his words and through these words he also learns a way of thinking and feeling, he gains access to a whole world of concepts and in it develops and grows, and relates to reality, to people and to God. In the end his parents' language has become his language, he speaks with words he has received from others but which have now become his own.
 - d. The prayers of the Psalter with which we speak to God, speak to us of him, speak to us of the Son, an image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), which fully reveals to us the Father's Face. Christians, therefore, in praying the Psalms pray to the Father in Christ and with Christ, assuming those hymns in a new perspective which has in the paschal mystery the ultimate key to its interpretation.
 - e. Dear brothers and sisters, let us therefore take this holy book in our hands, let us allow God to teach us to turn to him, let us make the Psalter a guide which helps and accompanies us daily on the path of prayer. And let us too ask, as did Jesus' disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1), opening our hearts to receive the Teacher's prayer, in which all prayers are brought to completion. Thus, made sons in the Son, we shall be able to speak to God calling him "Our Father".
 - f. Nov 23: Dear friends, in these recent catecheses I wanted to present to you certain Psalms, precious prayers that we find in the Bible and that reflect the various situations of life and the various states of mind that we may have with regard to God. I would then like to renew to you all the invitation to pray with the Psalms, even becoming accustomed to using the Liturgy of the Hours of the Church, Lauds in the morning, Vespers in the evening, and Compline before retiring. Our relationship with God cannot but be enriched with greater joy and trust in the daily journey towards him.

- a. August 31: some artistic expressions are real highways to God, the supreme Beauty; indeed, they help us to grow in our relationship with him, in prayer. These are works that were born from faith and express faith. We can see an example of this when we visit a Gothic cathedral: we are enraptured by the vertical lines that soar skywards and uplift our gaze and our spirit, while at the same time we feel small yet long for fullness. Or when we enter a Romanesque church we are spontaneously prompted to meditate and to pray. We perceive that these splendid buildings contain, as it were, the faith of generations. Or when we listen to a piece of sacred music that plucks at our heartstrings, our mind, as it were, expands and turns naturally to God.
- b. Dear friends, I ask you to rediscover the importance of this path also for prayer, for our living relationship with God. Towns and villages throughout the world contain treasures of art that express faith and beckon to us to return to our relationship with God. May the visits to places filled with art, then, not only be opportunities for cultural enrichment — that too — but may they become above all moments of grace, incentives to strengthen our bond and our dialogue with the Lord so that — in switching from simple external reality to the more profound reality it expresses — we may pause to contemplate the ray of beauty that strikes us to the quick, that almost “wounds” us, and that invites us to rise toward God.

7. Jesus
8. Mary
9. Church
10. We'll also cover the saints

2. But in Feast of Faith he gave a theological, systematic overview of prayer, which is helpful as an introduction

a. Formal Structure of Christian Prayer

1. The basic reason why man can speak with God arises from the fact that God himself is speech, word. His nature is to speak, to hear, to reply.... Only because there is already speech, “Logos,” in God can there be speech, “logos,” to God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in communication with God.”
2. In God, there is speech and the intercourse of partners in dialogue. Man could speak with God if he himself were drawn to share in this internal speech. And this is what the Incarnation of the Logos means; he who is speech, Word, Logos, in God and to God, participates in human speech. This has a reciprocal effect, involving man in God’s own internal speech. ... As a result of the Incarnation, human speech has become a component in divine speech; it has been taken up, unconfusedly and inseparably, into that speech which is God’s inner nature.
3. Through the Spirit of Christ, who is the Spirit of God, we can share in the human nature of Jesus Christ; and in sharing in his dialogue with God, we can share in the dialogue of who God *is*. This is prayer, which becomes a real exchange between God and man.
4. The locus of this identification with Christ, facilitated by the Spirit, which necessarily implies that those involved are also identified with one another in Christ, is what we call “Church.” We could in fact define “Church as the realm of man’s discovery of his identity through the identification with Christ that is its source”.

b. The content of Christian prayer

1. Abba is the fundamental word in the mouth of the Son. It expresses his whole being. ... Prayer is an act of being; it is affirmation, albeit not affirmation of myself as I am and of the word as it is, but affirmation of the ground of being and hence a purifying of myself and of the world from this ground upward.
2. We can only say Abba together with Christ, consenting to his Yes. Apart from the Son, the Father remains ambivalent and strange; it is Jesus who turns the scales of the Old Testament and makes the message clear. Patrocentrism presupposes the Christological character of prayer. Christian prayer depends on our continually looking to Christ, talking with him, being silent with him, listening to him, doing and suffering with him.
3. We encounter Christ as a living Person only in the foretaste of his presence which is called

“**Church.**” Through identification with Christ I discover my own entirely personal identity. The Church as a whole presents the model of this kind of identity as his body, a one-flesh union through the unifying power of love, which doesn’t destroy the duality but welds it into profound oneness. Middle Ages taught that the aim of prayer was that through it man should become a personal embodiment of the Church. We learn to speak together with our mother and her words become our words.

c. How can I learn to pray? In communion. Prayer is always praying *with* someone. No one can pray to God as an isolated individual and in his own strength. Isolation and the loss of a basic sense of fellowship in prayer constitute a major reason for the lack of prayer. I learn to pray by praying with others, with my mother, by following her words, which are gradually filled out with meaning for me as I speak, live and suffer in fellowship with her. Naturally I must be always asking what these words mean. Naturally, too, I must continually “cash” these words into the small change of daily life. And having done so, I must try to repossess them in exchange for my small coin, little by little, as I draw nearer the fullness of the mystery and become more capable of speaking of it. And that is precisely why it is impossible to start a conversation with Christ alone, cutting out the Church: a Christological form of prayer that excludes the Church also excludes the Spirit and the human being himself.

d. How does God answer prayer?

1. The Father gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. God gives himself. We are to ask no less than this. Jesus wants to give his joy to the full (Jn 16:24). Prayer, because of the transformation of being that it involves, means growing more and more into identity with the spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God (becoming an *anima ecclesiastica*, a personal embodiment of the Church); borne along by the very breath of his love, we have a joy that cannot be taken from us.
2. In Jesus, God participates in time, operating in love, which purifies men to be identified and united with him. To pray is to put oneself on the side of God’s love causality acting in the world, the causality of freedom. As Christians, as those who pray, this is our very highest task.

3. Now I’d like to turn to a less systematic presentation of what B16 says about prayer.

a. First, Prayer is an encounter with God

1. May 11 Catechesis: only in God who reveals himself does man’s seeking find complete fulfilment. The prayer that is openness and elevation of the heart to God, thus becomes a personal relationship with him. And even if man forgets his Creator, the living, true God does not cease to call man first to the mysterious encounter of prayer. As the *Catechism* says: “in prayer, the faithful God’s initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response. As God gradually reveals himself and reveals man to himself, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation” (n. 2567).
2. Gregory of Nazianzen: Gregory teaches us first and foremost **the importance and necessity of prayer.** He says: "It is necessary to remember God **more often than one breathes**" (*Orationes* 27, 4: PG 250, 78), **because prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with our thirst. God is thirsting for us to thirst for him.**
3. Msgr. Michael Cantley: Many in the present age, infected with the spirit of relativism, would answer the question, “how can I know Jesus?” with the suggestion that science, through literary and historical criticism offers the only available way. For the modern mind, knowing *about* often substitutes for knowing something in itself, in the case of religious knowledge it substitutes for knowing someone as a living, breathing, communicating presence. We can know a lot about the ‘historical Jesus’ from the arts and sciences we use to recover the past. But that is all the arts and sciences are equipped to yield: “science ends logically by emphasizing [Jesus’] absence, the irrecoverable absence of the historical past.” ... But Jesus is not just *any* historical figure, he is the eternal Son of God become incarnate at a moment in time and in a particular place, yet one divine Person transcending time and place so that what he did two thousand years ago is present today as he is present today. Knowledge *about* Jesus only “confirms and establishes distance;” knowledge *of* Jesus establishes a personal exchange of friendship through his presence in and to us, through his

love that invites a response. This can be aided by science, and should be, but to stop with science is to admire someone absent. The call to spirituality is the call to communication – the call to prayer.

b. Second, Prayer is meant to lead to a friendship.

1. Catechesis on St. Teresa of Avila:

- a) St Teresa proposes a profound harmony with the great biblical figures and eager listening to the word of God. She feels above all closely in tune with the Bride in the Song of Songs and with the Apostle Paul, as well as with Christ in the Passion and with Jesus in the Eucharist. The Saint then stresses how essential prayer is. Praying, she says, “means being on terms of friendship with God frequently conversing in secret with him who, we know, loves us” (*Vida* 8, 5). St Teresa’s idea coincides with Thomas Aquinas’ definition of theological charity as “amicitia quaedam hominis ad Deum”, a type of human friendship with God, who offered humanity his friendship first; it is from God that the initiative comes (*cf. Summa Theologiae* II-II, 23, 1).
- b) Prayer is life and develops gradually, in pace with the growth of Christian life: it begins with vocal prayer, passes through interiorization by means of meditation and recollection, until it attains the union of love with Christ and with the Holy Trinity. Obviously, in the development of prayer climbing to the highest steps does not mean abandoning the previous type of prayer. Rather, it is a gradual deepening of the relationship with God that envelops the whole of life.
- c) She teaches us truly to feel this thirst for God that exists in the depths of our hearts, this desire to see God, to seek God, to be in conversation with him and to be his friends. This is the friendship we all need that we must seek anew, day after day. May the example of this Saint, profoundly contemplative and effectively active, spur us too every day to dedicate the right time to prayer, to this openness to God, to this journey, in order to seek God, to see him, to discover his friendship and so to find true life; indeed many of us should truly say: “I am not alive, I am not truly alive because I do not live the essence of my life” Therefore time devoted to prayer is not time wasted, it is time in which the path of life unfolds, the path unfolds to learning from God an ardent love for him, for his Church, and practical charity for our brothers and sisters.

2. St. Anthony

- a) St Anthony speaks **of prayer as of a loving relationship that impels man to speak gently with the Lord**, creating an ineffable joy that sweetly enfolds the soul in prayer.

c. Third, Prayer is about the blessed life.

3. SS 11: Saint Augustine, in the extended letter on prayer which he addressed to Proba, a wealthy Roman widow and mother of three consuls, once wrote this: ultimately we want only one thing—the blessed life”, the life which is simply life, simply “happiness”. In the final analysis, there is nothing else that we ask for in prayer. Our journey has no other goal—it is about this alone. But then Augustine also says: looking more closely, we have no idea what we ultimately desire, what we would really like. We do not know this reality at all; even in those moments when we think we can reach out and touch it, it eludes us. “We do not know what we should pray for as we ought,” he says, quoting Saint Paul (*Rom* 8:26). All we know is that it is not this. Yet in not knowing, we know that this reality must exist. “There is therefore in us a certain learned ignorance (*docta ignorantia*), so to speak”, he writes. We do not know what we would really like; we do not know this “true life”; and yet we know that there must be something we do not know towards which we feel driven.
4. Catechesis on St. Teresa of Avila: A final essential aspect of Teresian doctrine which I would like to emphasize is perfection, as the aspiration of the whole of Christian life and as its ultimate goal. The Saint has a very clear idea of the “fullness” of Christ, relived by the Christian. At the end of the route through *The Interior Castle*, in the last “room”, Teresa describes this fullness, achieved in the indwelling of the Trinity, in union with Christ through the mystery of his humanity.
5. For the blessed life, we need to pray:
 - a) St. Anthony: **It is only the prayerful soul that can progress in spiritual life: this is the privileged object of St Anthony's preaching.**
 - b) St. Gregory of Nyssa: Gregory of Nyssa's **spiritual doctrine which is prayer. To progress on the journey to perfection and to welcome God within him, to bear the Spirit of God within him, the love of God, man must turn to God trustingly in prayer:** "Through prayer

we succeed in being with God. But anyone who is with God is far from the enemy. Prayer is a support and protection of charity, a brake on anger, an appeasement and the control of pride. **Prayer is the custody of virginity, the protection of fidelity in marriage, the hope for those who are watching, an abundant harvest for farmers, certainty for sailors."**

d. Fourth, God gives us the grace to pray

1. St. Alphonsus: He stressed the need for prayer, which enables one to open oneself to divine Grace in order to do God's will every day and to obtain one's own sanctification. With regard to prayer he writes: "God does not deny anyone the grace of prayer, with which one obtains help to overcome every form of concupiscence and every temptation. And I say, and I will always repeat as long as I live, that the whole of our salvation lies in prayer". Hence his famous axiom: "He who prays is saved."

e. Fifth, prayer is ultimately comprised of loving trust of God.

1. St. Francis de Sales: The 20-year-old Francis found peace in the radical and liberating love of God: loving him without asking anything in return and trusting in divine love; no longer asking what will God do with me: I simply love him, independently of all that he gives me or does not give me. Thus I find peace and the question of predestination — which was being discussed at that time — was resolved, because he no longer sought what he might receive from God; he simply loved God and abandoned himself to his goodness. And this was to be the secret of his life which would shine out in his main work: the *The Treatise on the Love of God*. ... He wrote to St Jane de Chantal: "... this is the rule of our obedience, which I write for you in capital letters: do all through love, nothing through constraint; love obedience more than you fear disobedience.

f. Sixth, That love comes from openness to God, and from loving him with his own love.

1. John of the Cross: The long and difficult process of purification demands a personal effort, but the real protagonist is God: all that the human being can do is to "prepare" himself, to be open to divine action and not to set up obstacles to it. ... When it reaches this goal, the soul is immersed in Trinitarian life itself, so that St John affirms that it has reached the point of loving God with the same love with which he loves it, because he loves it in the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Mystical Doctor maintains that there is no true union of love with God that does not culminate in Trinitarian union. In this supreme state the holy soul knows everything in God and no longer has to pass through creatures in order to reach him. The soul now feels bathed in divine love and rejoices in it without reserve.
2. In the end the question is: does this Saint with his lofty mysticism, with this demanding journey towards the peak of perfection have anything to say to us, to the ordinary Christian who lives in the circumstances of our life today, or is he an example, a model for only a few elect souls who are truly able to undertake this journey of purification, of mystical ascesis? ... And so we can understand that the journey with Christ, travelling with Christ, "the Way", is not an additional burden in our life, it is not something that would make our burden even heavier but something quite different. It is a light, a power that helps us to bear it. If a person bears great love in himself, this love gives him wings, as it were, and he can face all life's troubles more easily because he carries in himself this great light; this is faith: being loved by God and letting oneself be loved by God in Jesus Christ. Letting oneself be loved in this way is the light that helps us to bear our daily burden. And holiness is not a very difficult action of ours but means exactly this "openness": opening the windows of our soul to let in God's light, without forgetting God because it is precisely in opening oneself to his light that one finds strength, one finds the joy of the redeemed.

g. Seventh, Praying with the heart, not just lips

1. *Mens concordet voci*
2. St. Cyprian

a) **"God is the hearer, not of the voice, but of the heart (*non vocis sed cordis auditor est*)" (3-4). Today too, these words still apply and help us to celebrate the Holy Liturgy well.**

Ultimately, Cyprian placed himself at the root of that fruitful theological and spiritual tradition which sees the "**heart**" as the **privileged place for prayer**. Indeed, in accordance with the Bible and the Fathers, the heart is the intimate depths of man, the place in which God dwells. **In it occurs the encounter in which God speaks to man, and man listens**

to God; man speaks to God and God listens to man. All this happens through one divine Word. In this very sense - re-echoing Cyprian - Smaragdus, Abbot of St Michael on the Meuse in the early years of the ninth century, attests that prayer "**is the work of the heart, not of the lips, because God does not look at the words but at the heart of the person praying.**"

h. Eighth, Importance of silence

3. VD 66: 66. In their interventions, a good number of Synod Fathers insisted on the importance of silence in relation to the word of God and its reception in the lives of the faithful.²³¹ The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God's word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence.²³² Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence. Our liturgies must facilitate this attitude of authentic listening: *Verbo crescente, verba deficiunt*.²³³ The importance of all this is particularly evident in the Liturgy of the Word, "which should be celebrated in a way that favors meditation".²³⁴ Silence, when called for, should be considered "a part of the celebration".²³⁵ Hence I encourage Pastors to foster moments of recollection whereby, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the word of God can find a welcome in our hearts.
4. St. Anthony: Anthony reminds us that prayer requires an atmosphere of **silence**, which does not mean distance from external noise but rather is **an interior experience that aims to remove the distractions caused by a soul's anxieties, thereby creating silence in the soul itself.**
5. August 10 Catechesis:
 - a) Silence is the environmental condition most conducive to contemplation, to listening to God and to meditation. The very fact of enjoying silence and letting ourselves be "filled", so to speak, with silence, disposes us to prayer.
 - b) The great prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb — that is, Sinai — experienced a strong squall, then an earthquake and finally flashes of fire, but he did not recognize God's voice in them; instead, he recognized it in a light breeze (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-13).
 - c) God speaks in silence, but we must know how to listen. This is why monasteries are oases in which God speaks to humanity; and in them we find the cloister, a symbolic place because it is an enclosed space yet open to Heaven.

i. Ninth, Importance of daily prayer

1. St. Peter Canisius: The Christocentric spirituality of St Peter Canisius is rooted in a profound conviction: no soul anxious for perfection fails to practice prayer daily, mental prayer, an ordinary means that enables the disciple of Jesus to live in intimacy with the divine Teacher. For this reason in his writings for the spiritual education of the people, our Saint insists on the importance of the Liturgy with his comments on the Gospels, on Feasts, on the Rite of Holy Mass and on the sacraments; yet, at the same time, he is careful to show the faithful the need for and beauty of personal daily prayer, which should accompany and permeate participation in the public worship of the Church. Among the thousands of activities and multiple distractions that surround us, we must find moments for recollection before the Lord every day, in order to listen to him and speak with him.
2. Lourdes: During his homily, on Sunday, September 14, in Lourdes, Benedict XVI told the faithful that they were "at the feet of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin, eager to learn from her alongside little Bernadette." "Mary comes to remind us that **prayer which is humble and intense, trusting and persevering, must have a central place in our Christian lives.** Prayer is indispensable if we are to receive Christ's power. *People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone (Deus Caritas Est, 36).* To allow oneself to become absorbed by activity runs the risk of depriving prayer of its specifically Christian character and its true efficacy. The prayer of the Rosary, so dear to Bernadette and to Lourdes pilgrims, concentrates within itself the

depths of the Gospel message. It introduces us to contemplation of the face of Christ. From this prayer of the humble, we can draw an abundance of graces.

3. Praying without ceasing: Praying without ceasing means: never losing contact with God, letting ourselves be constantly touched by him in the depths of our hearts and, in this way, being penetrated by his light. Only someone who actually knows God can lead others to God. Only someone who leads people to God leads them along the path of life.
- j. Tenth, Prayer is more mystagogy than pedagogy
 1. Catechesis on St. Teresa of Avila: Rather than a pedagogy Teresa's is a true "mystagogy" of prayer: she teaches those who read her works how to pray by praying with them. Indeed, she often interrupts her account or exposition with a prayerful outburst.
- k. Eleventh, prayer grows by stages
 2. St. Bonaventure describes that it's by a counter-intuitive way:
 - a) *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, [*The Mind's Road to God*], a "manual" for mystical contemplation. This book was conceived in a deeply spiritual place: Mount La Verna, where St Francis had received the stigmata. In the introduction the author describes the circumstances that gave rise to this writing: "While I meditated on the possible ascent of the mind to God, amongst other things there occurred that miracle which happened in the same place to the blessed Francis himself, namely the vision of the winged Seraph in the form of a Crucifix. While meditating upon this vision, I immediately saw that it offered me the ecstatic contemplation of Fr Francis himself as well as the way that leads to it."
 - b) The six wings of the Seraph thus became the symbol of the six stages that lead man progressively from the knowledge of God, through the observation of the world and creatures and through the exploration of the soul itself with its faculties, to the satisfying union with the Trinity through Christ, in imitation of St Francis of Assisi. The last words of St Bonaventure's *Itinerarium*, which respond to the question of how it is possible to reach this mystical communion with God, should be made to sink to the depths of the heart:
 - c) "If you should wish to know how these things come about, (the mystical communion with God)
 1. question grace, not instruction;
 2. desire, not intellect;
 3. the cry of prayer, not pursuit of study;
 4. the spouse, not the teacher;
 5. God, not man;
 6. darkness, not clarity; not light, but the fire that inflames all and transports to God with fullest unction and burning affection...
 7. Let us then... pass over into darkness; let us impose silence on cares, concupiscence, and phantasms; let us pass over *with the Crucified Christ from this world to the Father*, so that when the Father is shown to us we may say with Philip, "*It is enough for me*" (cf. *ibid.*, VII 6).
 - d) For St Bonaventure the whole of our life is a "journey", a pilgrimage, an ascent to God. But with our own strength alone we are incapable of climbing to the loftiness of God. God himself must help us, must "pull" us up. Thus prayer is necessary. Prayer, says the Saint, is the mother and the origin of the upward movement - "*sursum actio*", an action that lifts us up, Bonaventure says. Accordingly I conclude with the prayer with which he begins his "Journey": "Let us therefore say to the Lord Our God: "Lead me forth, Lord, in thy way, and let me step in thy truth; let my heart be glad, that it fears thy name."
3. St. Anthony
 - a) St Anthony speaks **of prayer ... [being]** structured in four indispensable attitudes which in Anthony's Latin are defined as *obsecratio, oratio, postulatio, gratiarum actio*. We might translate them in the following manner.
 1. **The first step in prayer is confidently opening one's heart to God; this is not merely accepting a word but opening one's heart to God's presence.**
 2. **Next, is speaking with him affectionately, seeing him present with oneself;**

3. **then a very natural thing presenting our needs to him;**
 4. **and lastly, praising and thanking him.**
4. St. John Climacus (c. 600) and the importance of faith, hope and love
- a) Work the Ladder is **a complete treatise of spiritual life in which John describes the monk's journey from renunciation of the world to the perfection of love.** This journey according to his book covers 30 steps, each one of which is linked to the next. **The journey may be summarized in three consecutive stages:**
 1. The first is expressed in **renunciation of the world** in order to return to a state of evangelical childhood. Thus, the essential is not the renunciation but rather the connection with what Jesus said, that is, **the return to true childhood in the spiritual sense**, becoming like children. John comments: "A good foundation of three layers and three pillars is: innocence, fasting and temperance. Let all babes in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 3: 1) begin with these virtues, taking as their model the natural babes" (1, 20; 636). Voluntary detachment from beloved people and places permits the soul to enter into deeper communion with God. This renunciation leads to obedience which is the way to humility through humiliations which will never be absent on the part of the brethren. John comments: "Blessed is he who has mortified his will to the very end and has entrusted the care of himself to his teacher in the Lord: indeed he will be placed on the right hand of the Crucified One!" (4, 37; 704)
 2. The second stage of the journey consists in **spiritual combat against the passions.** Every step of the ladder is linked to a principal passion that is defined and diagnosed, with an indication of the treatment and a proposal of the corresponding virtue. All together, these steps of the ladder undoubtedly constitute the most important treatise of spiritual strategy that we possess. The struggle against the passions, however, is steeped in the positive it does not remain as something negative thanks to the image of the "fire" of the Holy Spirit: that "all those who enter upon the good fight (cf. 1 Tm 6: 12), which is hard and narrow,... may realize that they must leap into the fire, if they really expect the celestial fire to dwell in them" (1,18; 636). The fire of the Holy Spirit is the fire of love and truth. The power of the Holy Spirit alone guarantees victory. However, according to John Climacus it is important to be aware that the passions are not evil in themselves; they become so through human freedom's wrong use of them. If they are purified, the passions reveal to man the path towards God with energy unified by asceticism and grace and, "if they have received from the Creator an order and a beginning..., the limit of virtue is boundless" (26/2, 37; 1068).
 3. The last stage of the journey is **Christian perfection** that is developed in the last seven steps of the *Ladder*. These are the highest stages of spiritual life, which can be experienced by the "Hesychasts": the solitaries, those who have attained quiet and inner peace; but these stages are also accessible to the more fervent cenobites. Of the first three (simplicity, humility and discernment), John, in line with the Desert Fathers, considered the ability to discern, the most important. Every type of behaviour must be subject to discernment; **everything, in fact, depends on one's deepest motivations**, which need to be closely examined. Here one enters into the soul of the person and it is a question of reawakening in the hermit, in the Christian, spiritual sensitivity and a "feeling heart", which are gifts from God: "After God, we ought to follow our conscience as a rule and guide in everything," (26/1,5; 1013). In this way one reaches tranquility of soul, *hesychia*, by means of which the soul may gaze upon the abyss of the divine mysteries. The state of quiet, of inner peace, prepares the Hesychast for prayer which in John is twofold: **"corporeal prayer" and "prayer of the heart"**. The former is proper to those who need the help of bodily movement: stretching out the hands, uttering groans, beating the breast, etc. (15, 26; 900). The latter is spontaneous, because it is an effect of the reawakening of spiritual sensitivity, a gift of God to those who devote themselves to corporeal

prayer. In John this takes the name "Jesus prayer" (*Iesou enche*), and is constituted in the invocation of solely Jesus' name, an invocation that is continuous like breathing: "May your remembrance of Jesus become one with your breathing, and you will then know the usefulness of *hesychia*", inner peace (27/2, 26; 1112). At the end the prayer becomes very simple: the word "Jesus" simply becomes one with the breath.

4. The last step of the ladder (30), suffused with "**the sober inebriation of the spirit**", is dedicated to the supreme "trinity of virtues": faith, hope and above all charity. John also speaks of charity as *eros* (human love), a symbol of the matrimonial union of the soul with God, and once again chooses the image of fire to express the fervour, light and purification of love for God. The power of human love can be reoriented to God, just as a cultivated olive may be grafted on to a wild olive tree (cf. Rm 11: 24) (cf. 15, 66; 893). **John is convinced that an intense experience of this *eros* will help the soul to advance far more than the harsh struggle against the passions, because of its great power.** Thus, in our journey, the positive aspect prevails. Yet charity is also seen in close relation to hope: "Hope is the power that drives love. Thanks to hope, we can look forward to the reward of charity.... Hope is the doorway of love.... The absence of hope destroys charity: our efforts are bound to it, our labours are sustained by it, and through it we are enveloped by the mercy of God" (30, 16; 1157). The conclusion of the *Ladder* contains the synthesis of the work in words that the author has God himself utter: "May this ladder teach you the spiritual disposition of the virtues. I am at the summit of the ladder, and as my great initiate (St Paul) said: "*So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love*" (1 Cor 13: 13)!" (30, 18; 1160).

- b) What do we learn from him? **We see that the monastic life is only a great symbol of baptismal life, of Christian life.** It shows, so to speak, in capital letters what we write day after day in small letters. It is a prophetic symbol that reveals what the life of the baptized person is, in communion with Christ, with his death and Resurrection. The fact that the top of the "ladder", the final steps, are at the same time the fundamental, initial and most simple virtues is particularly important to me: faith, hope and charity. These are not virtues accessible only to moral heroes; rather they are gifts of God to all the baptized: in them our life develops too. The beginning is also the end, the starting point is also the point of arrival: the whole journey towards an ever more radical realization of faith, hope and charity. The whole ascent is present in these virtues. Faith is fundamental, because this virtue implies that I renounce my arrogance, my thought, and the claim to judge by myself without entrusting myself to others. This journey towards humility, towards spiritual childhood is essential. It is necessary to overcome the attitude of arrogance that makes one say: I know better, in this my time of the 21st century, than what people could have known then. Instead, it is necessary to entrust oneself to Sacred Scripture alone, to the word of the Lord, to look out on the horizon of faith with humility, in order to enter into the enormous immensity of the universal world, of the world of God. In this way our soul grows, the sensitivity of the heart grows toward God. Rightly, John Climacus says that hope alone renders us capable of living charity; hope in which we transcend the things of every day, we do not expect success in our earthly days but we look forward to the revelation of God himself at last. It is only in this extension of our soul, in this self-transcendence, that our life becomes great and that we are able to bear the effort and disappointments of every day, that we can be kind to others without expecting any reward. Only if there is God, this great hope to which I aspire, can I take the small steps of my life and thus learn charity. The mystery of prayer, of the personal knowledge of Jesus, is concealed in charity: simple prayer that strives only to move the divine Teacher's heart. So it is that one's own heart opens, one learns from him his own kindness, his love. Let us therefore use this "ascent" of faith, hope and charity. In this way we will arrive at true life.

1. Twelfth, The Our Father teaches us about prayer

1. St. Thomas Aquinas: In presenting the prayer of the *Our Father*, **St Thomas shows that it is perfect in itself, since it has all five of the characteristics that a well-made prayer must possess:**
 - a. trusting, calm abandonment;
 - b. a fitting content because, St Thomas observes, "it is quite difficult to know exactly what it is appropriate and inappropriate to ask for, since choosing among our wishes puts us in difficulty" (*ibid.*, p. 120); and then
 - c. an appropriate order of requests,
 - d. the fervour of love and
 - e. the sincerity of humility
2. St. Cyprian
 - a. Let us not forget **Cyprian's teaching on prayer**. I am particularly fond of his treatise on the "Our Father", **which has been a great help to me in understanding and reciting the Lord's Prayer better**. Cyprian teaches that it is precisely in the *Lord's Prayer* that **the proper way to pray** is presented to Christians. And he stresses that this prayer is in the plural in order that "the person who prays it might not pray for himself alone. Our prayer", he wrote, "is public and common; and when we pray, we pray not for one, but for the whole people, because we the whole people, are one. **Thus, personal and liturgical prayer seem to be strongly bound**. Their unity stems from the fact that they respond to the same Word of God. The Christian does not say "*my* Father" but "*our* Father", even in the secrecy of a closed room, because he knows that in every place, on every occasion, he is a member of one and the same Body.
3. Homily in Zagreb
 - a. The Lord directed his disciples "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father" (*Acts* 1:4); he asked that *they might remain together* to prepare themselves to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And they gathered together in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room, waiting for the promised event (cf. *Acts* 1:14). Remaining together was the condition given by Jesus for them to experience the coming of the Paraclete, and prolonged prayer served to maintain them in harmony with one another. We find here a formidable lesson for every Christian community. Sometimes it is thought that missionary efficacy depends primarily upon careful planning and its intelligent implementation by means of specific action. Certainly, the Lord asks for our cooperation, but his initiative has to come first, before any response from us: his Spirit is the true protagonist of the Church, to be invoked and welcomed.
- m. Thirteenth, Prayer is essential for the new evangelization
 1. 2000 Conference in Sicily: "Jesus preached by day, by night he prayed." With these few words, he wished to say: Jesus had to acquire the disciples from God. The same is always true. We ourselves cannot gather men. We must acquire them by God for God. All methods are empty without the foundation of prayer. The word of the announcement must always be drenched in an intense life of prayer.
 2. Here too we must keep the practical aspect in mind. God cannot be made known with words alone. One does not really know a person if one knows about this person second-handedly. To proclaim God is to introduce to the relation with God: to teach how to pray. Prayer is faith in action. And only by experiencing life with God does the evidence of his existence appear. This is why schools of prayer, communities of prayer, are so important. There is a complementarity between personal prayer ("in one's room," alone in front of God's eyes), "para-liturgical" prayer in common ("popular religiosity") and liturgical prayer. Yes, the liturgy is, first of all, prayer; its specificity consists in the fact that its primary project is not ourselves (as in private prayer and in popular religiosity), but God himself—the liturgy is actio divina, God acts and we respond to this divine action. Speaking about God and speaking with God must always go together. The proclamation of God is the guide to communion with God in fraternal communion, founded and vivified by Christ.
- n. Fourteenth, Encounter God in prayer not in discussion

1. St. Bernard's treatise *De Consideratione* to Eugene III: "**it may be easier to search for him and find him in prayer rather than in discussion.** So let us end the book here, but not the search." **St Bernard, solidly founded on the Bible and on the Fathers of the Church, reminds us that without a profound faith in God, nourished by prayer and contemplation, by an intimate relationship with the Lord, our reflections on the divine mysteries risk becoming an empty intellectual exercise and losing their credibility.** Theology refers us back to the "knowledge of the Saints", to their intuition of the mysteries of the living God and to their wisdom, a gift of the Holy Spirit, which become a reference point for theological thought. **Together with Bernard of Clairvaux, we too must recognize that man seeks God better and finds him more easily "in prayer than in discussion".** In the end, the truest figure of a theologian and of every evangelizer remains the Apostle John who laid his head on the Teacher's breast.
2. St. Benedict: Throughout the second book of his *Dialogues*, Gregory shows us how **St Benedict's life was steeped in an atmosphere of prayer, the foundation of his existence. Without prayer there is no experience of God.** In his *Rule* he describes monastic life as "a school for the service of the Lord" (Prol. 45) and advises his monks, "let nothing be preferred to the Work of God" [that is, the Divine Office or the Liturgy of the Hours] (43, 3). **However, Benedict states that in the first place prayer is an act of listening (Prol. 9-11), which must then be expressed in action.** ... Thus, the monk's life becomes a fruitful symbiosis between action and contemplation, "so that God may be glorified in all things" (57, 9). In contrast with a facile and egocentric self-fulfilment, today often exalted, the first and indispensable commitment of a disciple of St Benedict is the sincere search for God (58, 7) on the path mapped out by the humble and obedient Christ (5, 13), whose love he must put before all else (4, 21; 72, 11), and in this way, in the service of the other, he becomes a man of service and peace. In the exercise of obedience practised by faith inspired by love (5, 2), the monk achieves humility (5, 1).... In this way, man conforms ever more to Christ and attains true self-fulfilment as a creature in the image and likeness of God.

Overview of what's coming in other conferences

1. Christ's prayer
2. Prayer and the Word of God
3. Adoration
4. The prayer of the Mass