

Pope Francis and the Art of Prayer

- Introduction
 - I'll never forget being in St. Peter's Square for the election of Pope Francis.
 - More than any other moment, I'll remember as I was translating for all those around me what he was saying in Italian, he asked us to pray for him and bent over to receive God's blessing. "And now I would like to give the blessing, but first - first I ask a favor of you: before the Bishop blesses his people, I ask you to pray to the Lord that he will bless me: the prayer of the people asking the blessing for their Bishop. Let us make, in silence, this prayer: your prayer over me." Then he bent down. And the whole packed square went totally silent. No one was taking photos. Everyone was praying. He's been asking us to pray for him ever since.
 - In his press conference aboard Shepherd One (July 28, 2013) coming back from Rio, a reporter asked him why he was always asking us to pray for him, something that reporters and most Catholics are not used to. He replied, "I have always asked this. When I was a priest, I asked it, but less frequently. I began to ask with greater frequency while I was working as a bishop, because I sense that if the Lord does not help in this work of assisting the People of God to go forward, it can't be done. I am truly conscious of my many limitations, with so many problems, and I a sinner – as you know! – and I have to ask for this. But it comes from within! I ask Our Lady too to pray to the Lord for me. It is a habit, but a habit that comes from my heart and also a real need in terms of my work. I feel I have to ask ... I don't know, that's the way it is."
 - He's also been leading us in prayer.
 - Prior to his asking us to pray for him, he asked us all to pray with him an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, for Pope Benedict — the simple prayers that everyone knows regardless of education and training.
 - He has his own strong habits of prayer
 - (Fr. Spadaro interview, Sept 19, 2013) "I pray the breviary every morning. I like to pray with the psalms. Then, later, I celebrate Mass. I pray the Rosary. What I really prefer is adoration in the evening, even when I get distracted and think of other things, or even fall asleep praying. In the evening then, between seven and eight o'clock, I stay in front of the Blessed Sacrament for an hour in adoration. But I pray mentally even when I am waiting at the dentist or at other times of the day. ... Prayer for me is always a prayer full of memory, of recollection, even the memory of my own history or what the Lord has done in his church or in a particular parish. For me it is the memory of which St Ignatius speaks in the First Week of the Exercises in the encounter with the merciful Christ crucified. And I ask myself: 'What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What should I do for Christ?' It is the memory of which Ignatius speaks in the 'Contemplation for Experiencing Divine Love,' when he asks us to recall the gifts we have received. But above all, I also know that the Lord remembers me. I can forget about him, but I know that he never, ever forgets me. Memory has a fundamental role for the heart of a Jesuit: memory of grace, the memory mentioned in Deuteronomy, the memory of God's works that are the basis of the covenant between God and the people. It is this memory that makes me his son and that makes me a father, too."
 - (Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio) In my view, prayer should somehow be an experience of giving way, of surrendering, where our entire being enters into the presence of God. It is there where a dialogue happens, the listening, the transformation. Look to God, but above

all feel looked at by God. Sometimes the religious experience in prayer occurs to me when I pray aloud with the Rosary or the psalms. Or when I joyfully celebrate the Eucharist. But the moment I most savor the religious experience, however long it may be, is when I am before the tabernacle. At times, I allow myself to fall asleep while sitting there, looking at Him. I feel as if I were in someone else's hands, as if God were taking me by the hand. I think you have to reach the transcendental otherness of the Lord, that the Lord is everything but He always respects our freedom. In morning prayers, in supplications, I first ask to be understanding and impartial. I then continue asking for many more things related to my failings as I travel through life. I want to travel with humility, with interpretative goodness. But I must emphasize, I was always loved by God. He lifted me up when I fell along the way. He helped me travel through it all, especially during the toughest periods, and so I learned.

- What I propose to do:
 - I'd like to ponder Pope Francis' thoughts on prayer.
 - Unlike with Pope Benedict who gave us a systematic presentation on prayer during a year and a half of catecheses on the art of prayer between May of 2011 and October of 2012, Pope Francis' thoughts, which are similarly profound, need to be put into a schema. So I've arranged what he's tried to communicate on prayer during his pontificate and in various pre-papal fonts into six headings:
 - The priority of prayer in Christian life
 - What Christian prayer is
 - The qualities of Christian prayer
 - The importance of adoration in his life and thought
 - Other expressions of Christian prayer
 - Diagnosing and Overcoming Difficulties in Prayer
 - Like Mercy, which we've already discussed, prayer — a dialogue more than of words and ideas but of life — is essential for the reform of the Church and for our reform. It's how we open ourselves up to what God is asking and re-form our lives according to the form he seeks to impart. And so we will broach this topic both as disciples called to pray and men, models and master teachers of prayer to others.
- Priority of prayer
 - We need to make the time for prayer because of a recognition of how much we need God.
 - (March 27, 2013 Audience) Someone might say to me: "but Father, I don't have time", "I have so many things to do", "it's difficult", "what can I do with my feebleness and my sins, with so many things?". We are often satisfied with a few prayers, with a distracted and sporadic participation in Sunday Mass, with a few charitable acts; but we do not have the courage "to come out" to bring Christ to others. We are a bit like St Peter.
 - (Oct 27, 2013 Family encounter) Yes, all that is true enough, but it is also a matter of humility, of realizing that we need God, like the tax collector!
 - We need to make the space for God
 - (May 1 Audience) With reference to the second thought: in the silence of the daily routine, St Joseph, together with Mary, share a single common center of attention: Jesus. They accompany and nurture the growth of the Son of God made man for us with commitment and tenderness, reflecting on everything that happened. In the Gospels, St Luke twice emphasizes the attitude of Mary, which is also that of St Joseph: she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (2:19,51). To listen to the Lord, we must learn to contemplate, feel his constant presence in our lives and we must stop and converse with him, give him space in prayer. Each of us, even you boys and girls, young people, so many of you here this morning, should ask yourselves: "how much space do I give to the Lord? Do I stop to talk with him?" Ever since we were children, our parents have taught us to start and end the day with a prayer, to teach us to feel that the friendship and the love of God accompanies us. Let us remember the Lord more in our daily life!
 - We must pray for good soil to receive God's word and bear fruit

speaks to us of worship: the myriads of angels, all creatures, the living beings, the elders, prostrate themselves before the Throne of God and of the Lamb that was slain, namely Christ, to whom be praise, honor and glory (cf. Rev 5:11-14). I would like all of us to ask ourselves this question: You, I, do we worship the Lord? Do we turn to God only to ask him for things, to thank him, or do we also turn to him to worship him? What does it mean, then, to worship God? It means learning to be with him, it means that we stop trying to dialogue with him, and it means sensing that his presence is the most true, the most good, the most important thing of all. All of us, in our own lives, consciously and perhaps sometimes unconsciously, have a very clear order of priority concerning the things we consider important. Worshipping the Lord means giving him the place that he must have; worshipping the Lord means stating, believing – not only by our words – that he alone truly guides our lives; worshipping the Lord means that we are convinced before him that he is the only God, the God of our lives, the God of our history. This has a consequence in our lives: we have to empty ourselves of the many small or great idols that we have and in which we take refuge, on which we often seek to base our security. They are idols that we sometimes keep well hidden; they can be ambition, careerism, a taste for success, placing ourselves at the center, the tendency to dominate others, the claim to be the sole masters of our lives, some sins to which we are bound, and many others. This evening I would like a question to resound in the heart of each one of you, and I would like you to answer it honestly: Have I considered which idol lies hidden in my life that prevents me from worshipping the Lord? Worshipping is stripping ourselves of our idols, even the most hidden ones, and choosing the Lord as the center, as the highway of our lives

- Prayer is to abide in Christ and allow ourselves to be looked at by him
 - (Pentecost Vigil, May 18) The second word is: prayer. Looking at the face of God, but above all — and this has to do with what I said earlier — realizing that he is also looking at us. The Lord looks at us. He looks at us first. My experience is what I feel in front of the tabernacle, when I go in the evening to pray before the Lord. Sometimes I nod off for a while; this is true, for the strain of the day more or less makes you fall asleep, but he understands. I feel great comfort when I think of the Lord looking at me. We think we have to pray and talk, talk, talk.... No! Let the Lord look at you. When he looks at us, he gives us strength and helps us to bear witness to him — for the question was about witnessing to faith, wasn't it?
 - Louis Chaffangeon in *Ars* to St. John Vianney: *“Je l'avise et il m'avise!”* The Curé of *Ars* used to love to cite this wisdom from a simple farmer across the street from the Church as the great definition of contemplative prayer: “I stare at him and he stares at me!”
 - (Sept 27, 2013 with Catechists) To start anew from Christ means being close to him, being close to Jesus. Jesus stresses the importance of this with the disciples at the Last Supper, as he prepared to give us his own greatest gift of love, his sacrifice on the Cross. Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches and says: Abide in my love, remain attached to me, as the branch is attached to the vine. If we are joined to him, then we are able to bear fruit. This is what it means to be close to Christ. Abide in Jesus! This means remaining attached. The first thing for a disciple is to be with the Master, to listen to him and to learn from him. This is always true, and it is true at every moment of our lives. I remember, in the diocese, the other diocese I had first, how I would often see catechists finish their training courses and say: “I have the title of catechist!” This means nothing, you have nothing, you took a little journey. What good will it do you? But one thing is true. Being a catechist is not a title, it is an attitude: abiding with him, and it lasts for a lifetime! It means abiding in the Lord's presence and letting ourselves be led by him. I ask you: How do you abide in the presence of the Lord? When you visit the Lord, when you look at the tabernacle, what do you do? Without speaking... “But I speak, I talk, I think, I meditate, I listen...” Very good! **But do you let yourself be looked at by the Lord? Letting ourselves be gazed upon by the Lord. He looks at us and this is itself a way of praying. Do you yourselves be gazed upon by the Lord?** But how do you do this? You look at the tabernacle and you let yourselves be looked at... it is simple! “It is a bit boring, I fall asleep”. Fall asleep then, sleep! He is still

looking at you. But know for sure that he is looking at you! This is much more important than having the title of catechist. It is part of “being” a catechist. This warms the heart, igniting the fire of friendship with the Lord, making you feel that he truly sees you, that he is close to you and loves you. to him, in him, with him, talking to him. Abide in Jesus! ... In the Church, there are a variety of vocations and a variety of spiritualities. What is important is to find the way best suited for you to be with the Lord, and this everyone can do; it is possible for every state of life. Now each one of you could ask: how am I experiencing “being” with Jesus? This is a question I leave you: “How do I experience this remaining with Jesus, abiding in Jesus? Do I find time to remain in his presence, in silence, to be looked upon by him? Do I let his fire warm my heart? If the warmth of God, of his love, of his tenderness is not in our own hearts, then how can we, who are poor sinners, warm the heart of others? Think about it!

- Prayer is a loving dialogue with the Lord, a dialogue not just of words or of ideas but of persons.
 - It’s a sacred “conversation” in which we begin to “turn together with” each other. A conversation comes from the same Latin root as convert, which means a conversation is meant to be far more than an sharing, but something that changes us.
 - But there are different types of conversations we can have with the Lord, just like in Jesus’ earthly life there were different types of conversations.
 - In the 2006 retreat he preached to the Spanish Episcopacy, published in English as “In Him Is Our Hope: The Church according to the Heart of Pope Francis,” he said that there are three types of dialogues: dialogues with those who want to impose their conditions; dialogues with those who try to find fault with him; and dialogues with those who have their heart open to the hope of salvation. We can learn a lot about the way people converse with Jesus in prayer from these insights.
 - Conditional dialogues
 - The three reluctant disciples
 - Lk 9:57-62: As they were proceeding on their journey someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus answered him, “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” And to another he said, “Follow me.” But he replied, “[Lord,] let me go first and bury my father.” But he answered him, “Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” And another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home.” [To him] Jesus said, “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.”
 - We see here that their dialogues were conditional, placing limits on their commitment, riches, friends, father.
 - The Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1-41).
 - She tries to divert the dialogue because she doesn’t want to touch on the essential; she would rather talk about theology than her numerous “husbands.”
 - Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21)
 - He wants a dialogue in security, coming under the cover of night to ask him questions. “And Jesus, because he senses that the Pharisee is not well disposed, lets him remain wrapped up in his trivial objections. For Nicodemus, such objections serve as an egoistic refuge for not being honest.”
 - Deceptive dialogues
 - These involve attempts to “entrap” the Lord, to find cracks in his coherence. This would then permit a piety along the lines of a trade-off: faith for security, hope for possessions, love for egoism.

- Adulterous woman
 - In the scene with the adulterous woman (Jn 8:1-11), if Jesus says yes, then his mercy is disqualified; if he says no, then he contradicts the law.
 - In these deceptive dialogues, Jesus usually does two things: he speaks a word of doctrine to the one trying to entrap him, and a different word to the victim (like the adulterous woman) or, in certain instances, he addresses the deceptive situation in itself. Here, he both confounds and condemns his entrappers, telling them to apply the law to themselves. To the woman he returns her life, lovingly but firmly telling her to assume responsibility for it.
- Paying tribute to Caesar
 - Seems to be no alternative between the Sadducean temptation of collaboration with the State and rebellion against authority.
 - Jesus responds by exhorting his detractors to assume responsibility for the ‘authorities’ whom God has sent them, but whom they have not accepted.
- Sadducees about heaven
 - The Sadducees bring Jesus the question about the woman with seven husbands and the question of resurrection.
 - The Lord refuses to dignify their dialectic with a response; he simply turns to the purity of his glory and from there he offers his reply.
- We can also think of the attempt by people to get him to admit his authority, while refusing to answer a question about John the Baptist’s authority.
- The root of all deceit is always vainglory, possessions, sensuality, pride. The Lord himself taught us to respond to these deceptive temptations with the joyful story of the faithful people of God (in his responses to the temptation of the devil)
- Honest dialogues
 - These take place with those who approach Jesus without duplicity; their hearts are upright and open to the manifestation of God. Nothing is hidden under the table. When someone comes to Jesus in this way, his heart is filled with joy (Lk 10:21, revealing his wisdom to the merest of children).
 - Dialogue of Christ with the man born blind (Jn 9:1-41).
 - When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he found him and said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” He answered and said, “Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?” Jesus said to him, “You have seen him and the one speaking with you is he.” He said, “I do believe, Lord,” and he worshiped him.
 - True joy is forged in work, in the Cross. Joy that has not yet been tested is nothing more than simple enthusiasm, often indiscreet, and whose fruitfulness is far from certain.
 - Nathaniel
 - Disciples in today’s Gospel (Andrew and John)
- We seek an honest dialogue with the Lord in our prayer.
 - For that, we need to be ready, to be all in, to be unconditional.
 - We need to be sincere (in our examination, in our sorrow, in our petition)
 - We need to be docile, capable of being led.
- Praying is a turning to the Father
 - (June 20, 2013 daily homily) There is no need to fritter away words in order to pray: the Lord knows what we want to say to him. The important thing is that our first word be “Father”. In order to pray, there is no need to make noise or believe that that it is better to

use more words. There is no need to trust in noise, the noise of worldliness that Jesus pointed out, “to sound the trumpet” or “making oneself seen while fasting”. To pray, the Holy Father repeated, there is no need to heap up empty phrases: Jesus called this a characteristic of pagans. Prayer must not be considered a magic formula: “Praying is not something magic; one doesn't practice magic with prayer”. So how should we pray? Jesus has taught us: “he says that the Father who is in heaven 'knows what you need before you ask him’”. Therefore, let our first word be “Father’. **This is the key to prayer.** Without speaking, without feeling this word, praying is not possible”, the Bishop of Rome explained. Then he asked: “To whom do I pray? The almighty God? He is too far away. I don't feel him; neither did Jesus feel him. To whom do I pray? The God of the cosmos? This is quite frequent nowadays, isn't it? Praying to the cosmic God. This polytheistic model comes with a superficial culture”. Rather, we must “pray to the Father”, who begot us. But this is not all: we must pray “our” Father, that is, not the Father of a generic and too anonymous “all”, but the One “who begot you, who gave you life, who gave life to you and me”

- We pray to the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit
 - (April 10, 2013 Audience on HS) In his Letter to the Romans St Paul wrote: “you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry ‘Abba! Father! it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15-16). It is the Spirit himself whom we received in Baptism who teaches us, who spurs us to say to God: “Father” or, rather, “Abba!”, which means “papa” or [“dad”]. Our God is like this: he is a dad to us. The Holy Spirit creates within us this new condition as children of God. And this is the greatest gift we have received from the Paschal Mystery of Jesus. Moreover God treats us as children, he understands us, he forgives us, he embraces us, he loves us even when we err. In the Old Testament, the Prophet Isaiah was already affirming that even if a mother could forget her child, God never forgets us at any moment (cf. 49:15). And this is beautiful! Yet this filial relationship with God is not like a treasure that we keep in a corner of our life but must be increased. It must be nourished every day with listening to the word of God, with prayer, with participation in the sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and with love. We can live as children! And this is our dignity — we have the dignity of children. We should behave as true children! This means that every day we must let Christ transform us and conform us to him; it means striving to live as Christians, endeavouring to follow him in spite of seeing our limitations and weaknesses. The temptation to set God aside in order to put ourselves at the center is always at the door, and the experience of sin injures our Christian life, our being children of God. For this reason we must have the courage of faith not to allow ourselves to be guided by the mentality that tells us: “God is not necessary, he is not important for you”, and so forth. It is exactly the opposite: only by behaving as children of God, without despairing at our shortcomings, at our sins, only by feeling loved by him will our life be new, enlivened by serenity and joy. God is our strength! God is our hope!
 - St. Augustine, not *quid ores* but *qualis ores*, not what you say but who you are as you say it that is most important in prayer. We pray in the Holy Spirit as beloved sons and daughters of the Father, who won't give us a stone when we ask for bread or a poisonous eel when we ask for a fish.
- We pray through the Holy Name and Person of Jesus
 - Oct 28, 2013 daily homily) “I would like for all of us to look today to Jesus who prays”. Does Jesus still pray, the Pope asked. “Yes”, he replied, “the Bible clearly says so”. “He is our intercessor, the one who prays to the Father with us and for us. Jesus saved us. He offered the great prayer of the sacrifice of his life in order to save us... now he has gone away, and he prays”. “Jesus is a person, he is a man with flesh like our own, but he is in glory. Jesus retains the marks of his wounds in his hands, his feet and his side. And when he prays he shows the Father the price of our justification, and he prays for us”. Jesus always has our salvation in mind, the Holy Father continued, and “this is why when we pray, we say: through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son. For he is the first to pray, he is our brother ... our

intercessor”. Pope Francis concluded by inviting those present to contemplate this reality and to thank the Lord: “Let us tell him: Lord, you are the intercessor, you have saved me ... and now you pray for me. And let us entrust our problems and our lives to him, for he brings them to the Father”.

- (April 5, 2013 daily Mass) The Pope recounted a personal experience linked to his memory of a man, the father of eight, who worked for 30 years in the Archiepiscopal Curia of Buenos Aires. “Before going out, before going to do any of the things he had to do”, the Holy Father said, “he would whisper to himself: ‘Jesus!’. I once asked him ‘Why do you keep saying Jesus?’. ‘When I say Jesus’, this humble man answered me, ‘I feel strong’, I feel able to work because I know he is beside me, that he is preserving me”. This man, the Pope said, “had not studied theology. He had only the grace of Baptism and the power of the Spirit. His witness did so much good for me. The name of Jesus. There is no other name. Perhaps it will do good to all of us”, who live in a “world that offers us such a multitude of ‘saviors’”, the Pope said. Whenever there are problems, he noted, “people do not commend themselves to Jesus, but to others”, even turning to self-styled “magicians”, “that they may resolve matters”. People “consult tarot cards”, to know what to do. But there is no salvation there: it is “in the name of Jesus. And we should bear witness to this! He is the one Savior”.
- In prayer, we contemplate Jesus’ humanity so that through he can make us both more like his divine image and more human at the same time.
 - (Sept 12, 2013 daily homily) “Only by contemplating the suffering humanity of Jesus can we become meek, humble, and tender as he is. There is no other way.” Certainly, we must make an effort to “find Jesus; to dwell on his passion, on how much he suffered; to think of his meek silence.” That is our effort; then “the rest is up to him, and he will take care of everything that is missing. But you have to do this much: hide your life in God with Christ”. Thus, to be good Christians you have to contemplate the suffering humanity of Jesus. “How can we bear witness? Contemplate Jesus. How can we forgive? Contemplate Jesus suffering. How can we not hate our neighbor? Contemplate Jesus suffering. How can we avoid gossiping about our neighbor? Contemplate Jesus suffering. There is no other way”. These virtues are those of the Father, who forgives us always, and Our Lady, Our Mother, shares in these virtues too.
- In prayer God responds by giving himself
 - (October 10, 2013 daily homily) Jesus tells us: ‘What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give ...’ — the Pope paused and said — “and then we expect to hear he will give good things to you. But no,” he continued, “he doesn't say that! He says that he will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! And this is tremendous”. When we pray courageously the Lord not only gives us grace; he gives us his very self in the grace,” for “the Lord never gives or sends a grace by post: he brings it himself, he is grace!” Pope Francis concluded: “Today in collect of the Mass we ask the Lord to give us even that for which we do not know how to ask. And what is that that we don't know how to ask for? For him! We ask for a grace, but we do not know how to say to him: come and bring it to me. We know that he always brings a grace; he comes and gives it to us. Let us not make the mistake of accepting the grace without acknowledging that the one who brings it, the one who gives it to us, is the Lord”.
- The Qualities of Christian Prayer
 - We must pray with humility, repentance and thanksgiving
 - (On Heaven and Earth) I would like to mention ... the value of repentance in prayer, to ask God to have mercy on me because I am a sinner. Jesus tells a parable [of the publican and the Pharisee]. ... The first left exactly as he entered, but the second left justified. That is repentance, to put oneself in the presence of God, to recognize the foolishness, the sins, and to humble oneself before Him. It is because of this that the proud man is incapable of prayer, the self-sufficient man cannot pray.”

- First, listening to the word of Jesus, a word through which he gives us peace and assures us of his closeness.
 - Then, the moment of our renunciation: we must be ready to “leave something: ‘Lord, what do you want me to leave in order to be closer to you?’. Perhaps at that moment he does not tell you. But let us ask him with a generous spirit.
 - Lastly, the moment of mission: prayer always helps us to understand what ‘we must do’”.
- Prayer is a struggle. For that reason we need to contemplate with our mind, heart and knees
 - (Sept 26, 2013 daily homily) The fact remains that knowing about Jesus through the Catechism “is not enough”: knowing him with the mind is a step in the right direction, but “in order to know Jesus, we need to enter into a dialogue with him. By talking with him, in prayer, on our knees. If you don't pray, if you don't talk to Jesus,” he said, “you don't know him”. Lastly, there is a third way to know Jesus: “It is by following him, by going with him, by walking with him, by travelling along the road of his ways”. If you know Jesus with these three languages: of mind, heart and action, then you can say that you know Jesus”. Therefore, in order truly to know him, it is necessary to read “what the Church tells us about him, to speak with him in prayer and to walk along the path of his ways with him”. This is the road, he concluded, and “everyone has a decision to make”.
 - (Daily Mass, Oct 22, 2013) The first word is contemplation. The mystery of our redemption in Christ is extraordinary, the Pope said. So much so, he added, that “when the Church wishes to tell us something about the manner of this mystery, she uses one word: wondrously. She says: O God, you have wondrously created the world and even more wondrously recreated it...”. This is precisely what Paul wishes to tell us: “in order to understand this mystery we need to put ourselves on our knees, we need to pray and contemplate”. Then he said, “contemplation is mind, heart, knees, prayer”, and it is the way we enter into this mystery, for it “can only be understood on bended knee, in contemplation, and not with the mind alone”.
- Prayer must be persistent, bold, confident and faithful to the point of bothering God
 - (Nov 16, 2013 daily homily) God has a weakness for the prayers of his people. Indeed, prayer is man’s greatest power. Therefore, we must never tire of knocking at the door of God’s heart and asking for help. For God is a relentless warrior when he is called upon to defend his people. In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples a parable about the necessity of praying without losing heart, like the widow who insistently petitioned a dishonest judge for justice, until she eventually obtained it. God “will secure the rights of his chosen ones who call out to him day and night”, Pope Francis said, “as he did when he called Moses and told him, ‘I have heard the cries and laments of my people’; for the Lord is listening”.
 - (July 1, 2013 daily homily) If you want to obtain something from God you must “negotiate” with him through insistent and convinced prayer of few words. Pope Francis was speaking once again of the courage that must sustain prayer addressed to the Father, with “as much familiarity as possible”. He pointed to Abraham’s way of praying: talking to God as if he were negotiating with a man. The Pope cited Abraham’s courageous intercession to prevent the death of the righteous in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:16-33). This is a true example of familiarity and respect for God. Abraham, the Pope said, was more than 100 years old. He had been conversing with the Lord for a good 25 years and was well acquainted with him and so could ask the Lord “what to do with that sinful city”. Abraham feels “strong enough to speak to the Lord face to face and seeks to defend the city. He is insistent”. The first thing we notice in the Bible, he added is the affirmation that “prayer must be courageous”. When we speak of courage “we always think of apostolic courage” that spurs us “to go and preach the Gospel”. But there is also courage in standing before the Lord... in going bravely to the Lord to ask him things”. Abraham insists and “from 50, he

manages to get the price down to 10”, although he knows it is impossible to save sinful cities from punishment.

- (Dec 6, 2013 daily Mass) “Here crying aloud is a sign of prayer,” the Pontiff explained. Jesus himself, when he taught his disciples how to pray, told them to pray like the bothersome friend who went at midnight to ask for bread and a little pasta for his guests”. Or again, he told them “to do as the widow with the corrupt judge”. Pope Francis continued: “To do so — I would say — by being bothersome. I don’t know, perhaps this sounds rather bad, but praying is a little like bothering God so that he listens to us”. Prayer, he said, is a matter of “drawing God’s eyes and heart to us”. This is precisely what the lepers in the Gospel did; who drew near to Jesus and said: “If you will it, you can heal us!”. And, Pope Francis added, “they did so with a certain assuredness”. “This is how Jesus teaches us to pray,” he explained. We generally bring our requests to the Lord “one, two or three times, but without great strength, and then I tire of asking and I forget to ask”. Yet, he said, the blind men whom Matthew describes “cry aloud and do not cease crying out”. In fact, the Pope added, “Jesus tell us: ‘Ask!’ and he also says: ‘Knock at the door!’ and whoever knocks at the door makes noise, he disturbs, he bothers”. “These are the words Jesus uses to tell us how we should pray,” he said. “This is also the way the needy pray in the Gospel ... the blind feel confident in asking the Lord to make them well. So much so that the Lord asks them: ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’, to which they respond, ‘Yes, Lord. We believe! We are sure!’”. These, then, are prayer’s two attitudes: prayer is “needy and confident”. “When we ask for something, our prayer is needy: I need this, hear me Lord!” And, “when it is true, it is also confident: listen to me, I believe you can do it, for you have promised it!”. In fact, Pope Francis explained, “true Christian prayer is founded on God’s promise”. When we pray, the Lord asks us, as he asked the blind men in the day’s Gospel: “Do you believe that I can do this?” This question, the Pope said, is the source of the question we must all ask ourselves: “Am I sure he can do it? Or do I pray a little but without really being sure if he can really do it?” “He can do it,” the Pope said, “even if we do not know when or how he will do it”. “This,” he said, “is the confidence of prayer”.
- (Oct 20, 2013 Angelus) In today’s Gospel Jesus tells a parable on the need to pray always, never wearying. The main character is a widow whose insistent pleading with a dishonest judge succeeds in obtaining justice from him. ... “Crying day and night” to God! This image of prayer is striking, but let us ask ourselves: Why does God want this? Doesn’t he already know what we need? What does it mean to “insist” with God? This is a good question that makes us examine an important aspect of the faith: God invites us to pray insistently not because he is unaware of our needs or because he is not listening to us. On the contrary, he is always listening and he knows everything about us lovingly. On our daily journey, especially in times of difficulty, in the battle against the evil that is outside and within us, the Lord is not far away, he is by our side. We battle with him beside us, and our weapon is prayer which makes us feel his presence beside us, his mercy and also his help. But the battle against evil is a long and hard one; it requires patience and endurance, like Moses who had to keep his arms outstretched for the people to prevail (cf Ex 17:8-13). This is how it is: there is a battle to be waged each day, but God is our ally, faith in him is our strength and prayer is the expression of this faith. Therefore Jesus assures us of the victory, but at the end he asks: “when the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18:8). If faith is snuffed out, prayer is snuffed out, and we walk in the dark. We become lost on the path of life. Therefore, let us learn from the widow of the Gospel to pray always without growing weary. ... Pray always, but not in order to convince the Lord by dint of words! He knows our needs better than we do! Indeed persevering prayer is the expression of faith in a God who calls us to fight with him every day and at every moment in order to conquer evil with good
- Prayer and work, *ora* and *labora* need to stay connected.
 - (July 21, 2013 Angelus) Both welcome the Lord on his brief visit, but they do so differently. Mary sets herself at the feet of Jesus to listen but Martha lets herself become absorbed in preparing everything, and so much so that she says to Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my

sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me” (v. 40). And Jesus answers scolding her sweetly: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing” (v. 41). What does Jesus mean? What is this one thing that we need? First of all, it is important to understand that this is not about two contradictory attitudes: listening to the word of the Lord, contemplation, and practical service to our neighbor. These are not two attitudes opposed to one another, but, on the contrary, they are two essential aspects in our Christian life; aspects that can never be separated, but are lived out in profound unity and harmony. Why then was Martha scolded, even if kindly, by Jesus? Because she considered only what she was doing to be essential; she was too absorbed and worried by the things “to do”. For a Christian, works of service and charity are never detached from the principle of all our action: that is, listening to the Word of the Lord, to be — like Mary — at the feet of Jesus, with the attitude of a disciple. And that is why Martha was scolded. In our Christian life too, dear brothers and sisters, may prayer and action always be deeply united. A prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother — the poor, the sick, those in need of help, a brother in difficulty — is a sterile and incomplete prayer. But, in the same way, when ecclesial service is attentive only to doing, things gain in importance, functions, structures, and we forget the centrality of Christ. When time is not set aside for dialogue with him in prayer, we risk serving ourselves and not God present in our needy brother and sister. St Benedict sums up the kind of life that indicated for his monks in two words: *ora et labora*, pray and work. It is from contemplation, from a strong friendship with the Lord that the capacity is born in us to live and to bring the love of God, his mercy, his tenderness, to others. And also our work with brothers in need, our charitable works of mercy, lead us to the Lord, because it is in the needy brother and sister that we see the Lord himself. Let us ask the Virgin Mary, the Mother of listening and of service, to teach us to meditate in our hearts on the Word of her Son, to pray faithfully, to be ever more attentive in practical ways to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

- (Oct 8, 2013 daily homily) “The word of the Lord is clear,” the Pope began. “Mary chose the better part: prayer and the contemplation of Jesus, and yet it seemed to her sister that she was wasting time”. Yet Mary's attitude was the right one for she “listened to the Lord and prayed with her heart”. This, he said, is what the Lord wishes to tell us: “The most important task in life is to pray, not to pray with many words ... but to pray with the heart” for this prayer enables us “to gaze upon the Lord, to listen to the Lord, and to ask the Lord for what we need”. “And we know” he added, “that prayer can work miracles”. However, there are those with a more pessimistic view of things, the Pope explained. They say: “why pray? Let it be, that's just the way life is!”. This was Martha's attitude. “She did many things, but she didn't pray”.
- (May 22 Audience) I will only mention a third element, which, however, is particularly important: a new evangelization, a Church which evangelizes, must always start with prayer, with asking, like the Apostles in the Upper Room, for the fire of the Holy Spirit. Only a faithful and intense relationship with God makes it possible to get out of our own closedness and proclaim the Gospel with parrhesia. Without prayer our acts are empty, and our proclamation has no soul, it is not inspired by the Spirit.
- But prayer must be more than words but must be put into practice
 - (June 27, 2013 daily homily) In the Gospel passage, the Holy Father said, Jesus also mentions to all who believe they can build their life on words alone: “Not everyone who says ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven. But Jesus straight away suggests building our house upon the rock”. On the basis of this teaching Pope Francis identified “two classes of Christians in the history of the Church”: the first, of whom to beware, are the “Christians of words”, those who limit themselves to repeating: ‘Lord, Lord, Lord’. The second, the genuine Christians, are “Christians of action and of truth”. The Pope pointed out that there is always a temptation to live our Christianity away from the rock that is Christ; the only One who gives us the freedom to say “Father” to God; the only one who supports us in difficult moments”. Jesus himself says so with vivid examples: “the rain fell, and the floods came, and

the Father and in profound and intimate listening to his will. For this reason, moreover, his decision was firm, because it was made together with the Father. In the Father Jesus found the strength and light for his journey. And Jesus was free, he took that decision freely. Jesus wants us to be Christians, freely as he was, with the freedom which comes from this dialogue with the Father, from this dialogue with God. Jesus does not want selfish Christians who follow their own ego, who do not talk to God. Nor does he want weak Christians, Christians who have no will of their own, “remote-controlled” Christians incapable of creativity, who always seek to connect with the will of someone else and are not free. Jesus wants us free. And where is this freedom created? It is created in dialogue with God in the person’s own conscience. If a Christian is unable to speak with God, if he cannot hear God in his own conscience, he is not free, he is not free. This is why we must learn to listen to our conscience more. But be careful! This does not mean following my own ego, doing what interests me, what suits me, what I like.... It is not this! The conscience is the interior place for listening to the truth, to goodness, for listening to God; it is the inner place of my relationship with him, the One who speaks to my heart and helps me to discern, to understand the way I must take and, once the decision is made, to go forward, to stay faithful. ... Our Lady, in her inmost depths with great simplicity was listening to and meditating on the Word of God and on what was happening to Jesus. She followed her Son with deep conviction and with steadfast hope. May Mary help us to become increasingly men and women of conscience, free in our conscience, because it is in the conscience that dialogue with God takes place; men and women, who can hear God’s voice and follow it with determination, who can listen to God’s voice, and follow it with decision.

- We’re called to *pray for others* with insistence, especially those who are persecuted, those in greatest need, and our enemies
 - (May 18 Pentecost Vigil) I put a question to you: do you pray for these brothers and sisters? Do you pray for them? In your daily prayers? I am not going to ask those who do to raise their hands: no. I am not going to ask that now. But think about it carefully. In our daily prayers let us say to Jesus: “Lord, look at this brother, look at this sister who is suffering so much, suffering atrociously!” They experience the limit, the very limit between life and death.
 - (May 24, 2013 daily homily) Praying for our enemies, for those who make us suffer, the Pope continued, “is not easy”. But we are “defeated Christians” if we do not forgive enemies and if we do not pray for them. And “we find so many sad, discouraged Christians”, he exclaimed, because “they did not have this grace of enduring with patience and overcoming with love”.
- The importance of Adoration in Pope Francis’ thought we’ll have a chance to consider tonight during Eucharistic Adoration.
- Expressions of Christian Prayer
 - Besides adoration, which should characterize all our prayer in some form, there are other expressions of Christian prayer.
 - Prayerful listening to God’s word (*lectio divina*)
 - (Assisi, Oct 4 to Clergy, Consecrated, Diocesan Pastoral Councils) The first thing is to listen to God’s Word. This is what the Church is: as the Bishop said, it is the community that listens with faith and love to the Lord who speaks. The pastoral plan that you are living out together insists precisely on this fundamental dimension. It is the Word of God that inspires faith, which nourishes and revitalizes it. And it is the Word of God that touches hearts, converts them to God and to his logic that is so different from our own. It is the Word of God that continually renews our communities... I think we can all improve a bit in this respect: by becoming better listeners of the Word of God, in order to be less rich on our own words and richer in his words. I think of the priest who has the task of preaching. How can he preach if he has not first opened his heart, not listened in silence to the Word of God? Away with these never ending, boring homilies that no one understands. This is for you! I think of fathers and mothers, who are the primary educators [of their children]: how

can they educate them if their consciences have not been enlightened by the Word of God. If their way of thinking and acting is not guided by the Word, what sort of example can they possibly give to their children? This is important, because then mothers and fathers complain: “Oh, this child...”. But you, what witness have you given the child? How have you spoken to him? Have you talked with him about the Word of God or about TV news? Fathers and mothers need to be talking about the Word of God! And I think of catechists and of all those who are involved in education: if their hearts have not been warmed by the Word, how can they warm the hearts of others, of children, of youth, of adults? It is not enough just to read the Sacred Scriptures, we need to listen to Jesus who speaks in them: it is Jesus himself who speaks in the Scriptures, it is Jesus who speaks in them. We need to be receiving antennas that are tuned into the Word of God, in order to become broadcasting antennas! One receives and transmits. It is the Spirit of God who makes the Scriptures come alive, who makes us understand them deeply and in accord with their authentic and full meaning! Let us ask ourselves as the Synod draws near: what place does the Word of God have in my life, in my everyday life? Am I tuned into God or into the many buzz words or into myself? This is a question that everyone of us needs to ask him- or herself.

○ The prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours

- Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio [When asked what would be the first thing he'd save from a burning house, he replied]: My breviary and my agenda. I would be truly sorry to lose them. ... I'm very attached to my breviary; it's the first thing I open in the morning and the last thing I close before going to bed. What I travel, I sometimes have to take the two volumes of the breviary, and I carry them on. Inside, between the pages, I keep my grandmother's creed and the poem by Nino Costa that I cited earlier [about his love for Piedmonte for his roots: 'But most times a lost season or a fever or a misfortune at work nails them in a bare tomb lost in a foreign cemetery]."
- (Returning from Rio, July 28, 2013) Andrea Tornielli asked: “So my questions are these: firstly, why was it you carrying the black bag, and not one of your entourage, and secondly, could you tell us what was in it?” Pope Francis: “It wasn't the key for the atom bomb! Well! I was carrying it because that's what I've always done. When I travel, I carry it. And inside, what was there? There was a razor, a breviary, an appointment book, a book to read, I brought one about Saint Thérèse, to whom I have a devotion. I have always taken a bag with me when travelling – it's normal. But we must be normal ... I don't know ... what you say is a bit strange for me, that the photograph went all over the world. But we must get used to being normal. The normality of life.”
- Prayer of Breviary by Canons of St. Peter's (Nov 16, 2013 daily homily)
 - “It is a pleasure to listen to these readings with the Canons of St Peter's, since your chief work is to knock on the door of God's heart ... to pray to the Lord for God's people. And you, who reside in the basilica closest to the Pope, where prayers of petition are gathered from around the world, you receive these petitions and present them to the Lord by your prayer”. “You are like the widow,” Pope Francis said. “You must pray, ask, knock at the heart of God every day. The widow never tired, she was always courageous”. Addressing the Canons, the Pope concluded: “The Lord listens to the prayers of his people. You are privileged representatives of God's people who exercise the role of praying to the Lord for the many needs of the Church, of all humanity, of everyone. I thank you for this work. Let us always remember that God has the power to change everything — all creation was fashioned anew — he is able to fashion everything anew. However, he also has a weakness, our prayer, our universal prayer, close to the Pope in St Peter's. Thank you for your service; and continue on for the good of the Church”.

○ The Rosary is a prayer that helps us make Jesus the center of our thoughts, attention and action

- (May 1 Audience) And in this month of May, I would like to recall the importance and beauty of the prayer of the Holy Rosary. Reciting the Hail Mary, we are led to contemplate the mysteries of Jesus, that is, to reflect on the key moments of his life, so that, as with Mary

and St Joseph, he is the center of our thoughts, of our attention and our actions. It would be nice if, especially in this month of May, we could pray the Holy Rosary together in the family, with friends, in the parish, or some prayer to Jesus and the Virgin Mary! Praying together is a precious moment that further strengthens family life, friendship! Let us learn to pray more in the family and as a family!

- (July 6, with seminarians and novices) Be both contemplatives and missionaries. Always keep Our Lady with you and please pray the Rosary.... Do not neglect it! Always keep Our Lady with you at home, as did the Apostle John. May she always accompany you and keep you. And also pray for me, because I too need prayers, because I am a poor sinner, but let us go ahead.
- (Oct 6, 2013) And how do we draw from this strength [of faith]? We draw it from God in prayer. Prayer is the breath of faith: in a relationship of trust, in a relationship of love, dialogue cannot be left out, and prayer is the dialogue of the soul with God. October is also the month of the Rosary, and on this first Sunday it is tradition to recite the Prayer to Our Lady of Pompeii, the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Most Holy Rosary. Let us join spiritually together in this act of trust in our Mother, and let us receive from her hands the crown of the Rosary: The Rosary is a school of prayer, the Rosary is a school of faith!
- The prayer of the Angelus
 - (Angelus, July 28, at WYD) May Mary teach us by her life what it means to be a missionary disciple. Every time we pray the Angelus, we recall the event that changed the history of mankind forever. When the Angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary that she would become the Mother of Jesus the Saviour, even without understanding the full significance of that call, she trusted God and replied: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). But what did she do immediately afterwards? On receiving the grace of being the Mother of the Incarnate Word, she did not keep that gift to herself; with a sense of responsibility, she set off from her home and went in haste to help her kinswoman Elizabeth, who was in need of assistance (cf. Lk 1:38-39); she carried out an act of love, of charity, and of practical service, bringing Jesus who was in her womb. And she did all this in haste!
 - (July 26 Angelus, Rio) The Angelus prayer is a beautiful popular expression of the faith. It is a simple prayer, recited at three specific times during the day. It thus punctuates the rhythm of our daily activities: in the morning, at midday, and at sunset. But it is an important prayer. I encourage each of you to recite it, along with the Hail Mary. It reminds us of a luminous event that transformed history: the Incarnation, the moment when the Son of God became man in Jesus of Nazareth. Every time we pray the Angelus, we recall the event that changed the history of mankind for ever. When the Angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary that she would become the Mother of Jesus the Saviour, even without understanding the full significance of that call, she trusted God and replied: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). But what did she do immediately afterwards? On receiving the grace of being the Mother of the Incarnate Word, she did not keep that gift to herself; with a sense of responsibility, she set off from her home and went in haste to help her kinswoman Elizabeth, who was in need of assistance (cf. Lk 1:38-39); she carried out an act of love, of charity, and of practical service, bringing Jesus who was in her womb. And she did all this in haste!
- The importance of praying the General Examination
 - (May 6, 2013 daily homily) The best moment to find him is, according to the Pope, at the end of the day, when following a good Christian habit, as one examine one’s conscience. Before going to bed the Christian “thinks about what has happened”, of what “the Lord has said, what the Holy Spirit has done in me”. This practice of examining our conscience will do us good... because this helps to render fruitful, to make present in every moment, the fruitfulness of Easter, as we asked today in the oration. Let us ask for this grace to accustom ourselves to the presence of this travelling companion: the Holy Spirit”.

- Prayer is enhanced by retreats that are real encounters with God (Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio)
 - Spiritual retreats are artificially created oases, where everyday rhythm pauses and gives way to prayer. But remember, what is artificial about them is the creation of space, not the retreat itself. The kind of spiritual retreat where you listen to a cassette of religious behaviors with the aim of being stimulated into a response won't work. It doesn't sooth the soul. The encounter with God must come surging from within. I must put myself in the presence of God and, aided by His Word, go forward in what He desires. What is at the heart of all this is the question of prayer. It is one of the points that, in my opinion, must be approached with the most courage.
- Prayer should be the soul of the domestic Church and home life:
 - (October 27, 2013 daily Mass) In the light of God's word, I would like to ask you, dear families: Do you pray together from time to time as a family? Some of you do, I know. But so many people say to me: But how can we? As the tax collector does, it is clear: humbly, before God. Each one, with humility, allowing themselves to be gazed upon by the Lord and imploring his goodness, that he may visit us. But in the family how is this done? After all, prayer seems to be something personal, and besides there is never a good time, a moment of peace... Yes, all that is true enough, but it is also a matter of humility, of realizing that we need God, like the tax collector! And all families, we need God: all of us! We need his help, his strength, his blessing, his mercy, his forgiveness. And we need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary! Praying the Our Father together, around the table, is not something extraordinary: it's easy. And praying the Rosary together, as a family, is very beautiful and a source of great strength! And also praying for one another! The husband for his wife, the wife for her husband, both together for their children, the children for their grandparents...praying for each other. This is what it means to pray in the family and it is what makes the family strong: prayer.
- Diagnosing and Overcoming Difficulties in Prayer
 - We often struggle in prayer because we're trying to control God (On Heaven and Earth)
 - "Prayer is an act of freedom, but sometimes it emerges as an attempt at control, which is the same as wanting to control God. That has to do with a deformation, with an excessive ritualism or with many other attitudes of control. Prayer is talking and listening. There are moments of profound silence, adoration, waiting to see what will happen. In prayer, there coexists this reverent silence together with a sort of haggling, like when Abraham negotiated with God for the punished citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses also bargains when he pleads with his people, hoping to convince the Lord not to punish his people. This attitude of courage goes along with humility and adoration, which are essential for prayer."
 - We are often tempted to flee from God like Jonah because we don't want him to change our priorities (Oct 7 2013 daily homily)
 - To hear the voice of God in one's life, one needs to open his heart to surprise. Otherwise, one can start "fleeing from God". In fact, it happens that Christians sometimes run away from God, while people who are "far away" are able to hear him.
 - The Bishop of Rome used the story of Jonah as a paradigm in commenting on the first reading (1:1-16; 2:2-11): "he had his entire life in order; he served the Lord, perhaps he even prayed a great deal. He was a prophet, a good man and he did much good". Yet "he didn't want to be disturbed in the way of life he had chosen; when he heard the word of God he sought to escape. And he fled from God".
 - In the end, the Pontiff explained, Jonah had already written his own story: "I want to be like this, this and this, according to the commandments". He did not want to be disturbed. This is why he fled from God. The Pope warned that we, too, can be tempted to flee. "We can run away from God," he said, "as a Christian, as a Catholic," and even "as a priest, bishop or Pope". We can all flee from God. This is a daily temptation: not to listen to God, not to hear his voice, not to hear his promptings, his invitation in our hearts".

mind as an example is that of Fr. Arrupe in his last conversation in the refugee camp, when he said to us — something he used to say — “I say this as if it were my swan song: pray”. Prayer, union with Jesus. Having said these words he took the plane to Rome and upon arrival suffered a stroke that led to the sunset — so long and so exemplary — of his life. Two sunsets, two images, both of which it will do us all good to look at and to return to. And we should ask for the grace that our own passing will resemble theirs.