
Pope at audience: "Seeing each one of you in person pleases me"

"I am happy to resume this face-to-face meeting, because I will tell you something: it is not nice to speak in front of nothing, to a camera. It is not nice", Francis said, greeting the faithful gathered in the San Damaso Courtyard for the in-person resumption of papal audiences, albeit with all due caution in the face of the unfortunately still ongoing health emergency. "finding people, finding you here, each one of you with your own story", the Pope said: "Seeing each one of you pleases me as we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. Thank you for your presence and your visit. Take the Pope's message to everyone. The Pope's message is that I pray for everyone, and I ask you to pray for me, united in prayer." In his greetings to Polish pilgrims at the end of the audience, Francis remembered the 40th anniversary of the assassination attempt on Pope Saint John Paul II, on the liturgical feast of Our Lady of Fatima: *"Let's entrust the Church, ourselves and the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Let's pray for peace, for the end of the pandemic, for a spirit of penitence and for our conversion"*, the Pope said. "Praying is not something easy, and this is why we flee from it", Francis said in the opening lines of the catechesis devoted to the Struggle of Prayer. "Every time we want to pray, we are immediately reminded of many other activities, which at that moment seem more important and more urgent", Francis said. "This happens to me too!", he remarked.

"Christian prayer, like all Christian life, is not a 'walk in the park'".

The Pope explained: "None of the great people of prayer we meet in the Bible and in the history of the Church found prayer 'comfortable.'" "One can pray like a parrot, but that is not prayer", Francis added in unwritten remarks: "Prayer certainly gives great peace, but through inner struggle, at times hard, which can accompany even long periods of life." In fact, all Godly men and women "report not only the joy of prayer, but also the tediousness and fatigue it can bring", Francis recalled that "some saints continued it for years finding any satisfaction in it, without perceiving its usefulness. Silence, prayer and concentration are difficult exercises, and sometimes human nature rebels. We would rather be anywhere else in the world, but not there, in that church pew, praying." **"Those who want to pray must remember that faith is not easy**, and sometimes it moves forward in almost total darkness, without points of reference", Francis said. **"There are moments in the life of faith that are dark**, and therefore some saints call this 'the dark night', because we hear nothing. But I continue to pray."

"The worst enemies of prayer are found within us",

said the Pope. What should be done in time of temptation, when everything seems to waver? We must follow the example of the masters of spirituality, in the Pope's words, the "masters of the soul", taking as example the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, "a short book of great wisdom that teaches how to put one's life in order. It makes us understand that the Christian vocation is militancy, it is the decision to stand beneath the standard of Jesus Christ and not under that of the devil, trying to do good even when it becomes difficult." "In times of trial, it is good to remember that we are not alone, that someone is watching over us and protecting us", is the Pope's invitation.

"Fighting in prayer. And very often, prayer is combat."

To illustrate this invitation and this definition, Francis concluded his catechesis with an extensive, powerful recount of an episode he witnessed when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires. It involves a married couple with a daughter aged nine, affected by an illness that the doctors were unable to cure. The mother of the child called her husband, a manual labourer, to bid a last farewell to their daughter but he refused to accept that fate. He took the train and travelled seventy kilometres towards the

Basilica of Our Lady of Luján, Patroness of Argentina. He arrived at 10 p.m. and the basilica was closed. He clung to the grates of the Basilica and spent all night praying to Our Lady. At the end, at six o'clock in the morning, the Church opened, he entered to salute Our Lady, and returned home. He went to see his wife and she was smiling, saying: "I don't know what happened. The doctors said that something changed, and now she is cured." "That man, fighting with prayer, received the grace of Our Lady. Our Lady listened to him", the Pope said:

"Prayer works miracles, because prayer goes directly to the heart of the tenderness of God."

"The Lord is always with us", he concluded: "if in a moment of blindness we cannot see His presence, we will in the future. We will also end up repeating the same sentence that the patriarch Jacob said one day: 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I did not know it.' At the end of our lives, looking back, we too will be able to say: 'I thought I was alone, but no, I was not: Jesus was with me.' We will all be able to say this."

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