

JESUS: THE MASTER AT PRAYER

Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*



The drama of prayer is fully revealed to us in the Word who became flesh and dwells among us. To seek to understand his prayer through what his witnesses proclaim to us in the Gospel is to approach the holy Lord Jesus as Moses approached the burning bush: first to contemplate him in prayer, then to hear how he teaches us to pray, in order to know how he hears our prayer. (2598)

The filial prayer of the Son to his Father

The Son of God who became Son of the Virgin also learned to pray according to his human heart. He learns the formulas of prayer from his mother, who kept in her heart and meditated upon all the ‘great things’ done by the Almighty. He learns to pray in the words and rhythms of the prayer of his people, in the synagogue at Nazareth and the Temple at Jerusalem. But his prayer springs from an otherwise secret source, as he intimates at the age of twelve: “I must be in my Father's house.” (Lk 2:49) Here the newness of prayer in the fullness of time begins to be revealed: his *filial prayer*, which the Father awaits from his children, is finally going to be lived out by the only Son in his humanity, with and for men. (2599)

Jesus prays before the decisive moments of his mission

The Gospel according to St. Luke emphasizes the action of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of prayer in Christ's ministry. Jesus prays *before* the decisive moments of his mission: before his Father's witness to him during his Baptism and Transfiguration, and before his own fulfilment of the Father's plan of love by his Passion. He also prays before the decisive moments involving the mission of his apostles: at his election and call of the Twelve, before Peter's confession of him as “the Christ of God”, and again that the faith of the chief of the Apostles may not fail when tempted. Jesus' prayer before the events of salvation that the Father has asked him to fulfil is a humble and trusting commitment of his human will to the loving will of the Father. (2600)

Contemplating the Son of God at prayer

“He was praying in a certain place and when he had ceased, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’” (Lk 11:10) Seeing the Master at prayer the disciple of Christ also wants to pray. By *contemplating* and hearing the Son, the master of prayer, the children learn to pray to the Father. (2601)

Jesus prays in solitude and for all of us

Jesus often draws apart to pray *in solitude*, on a mountain, preferably at night. *He includes all men* in his prayer, for he has taken on humanity in his Incarnation, and he offers them to the Father when he offers himself. Jesus, the Word who has become flesh, shares by his human prayer in all that ‘his brethren’ experience; he sympathizes with their weaknesses in order to free them. It was for this that the Father sent him. His words and works are the visible manifestation of his prayer in secret. (2602)

Prayers of thanksgiving to his Father

The evangelists have preserved two more explicit prayers offered by Christ during his public ministry. Each begins with thanksgiving. In the first, Jesus confesses the Father, acknowledges and blesses him because he has hidden the mysteries of the Kingdom from those who think themselves learned and has revealed them to infants, the poor of the Beatitudes. (Cf. Mt 11:25-27; Lk 10:21-23) His exclamation, “Yes, Father!” expresses

the depth of his heart, his adherence to the Father's 'good pleasure', echoing his mother's *Fiat* at the time of his conception and prefiguring what he will say to the Father in his agony. The whole prayer of Jesus is contained in this loving adherence of his human heart to the mystery of the will of the Father. (2603)

Jesus constantly thanked and petitioned his Father

The second prayer, before the raising of Lazarus, is recorded by St. John. (Cf. Jn 11:41-42) Thanksgiving precedes the event: "Father, I thank you for having heard me", which implies that the Father always hears his petitions. Jesus immediately adds: "I know that you always hear me", which implies that Jesus, on his part, *constantly made such petitions*. Jesus' prayer, characterized by thanksgiving, reveals to us how to ask: *before* the gift is given, Jesus commits himself to the One who in giving gives himself. The Giver is more precious than the gift; he is the "treasure"; in him abides his Son's heart; the gift is given "as well". (Mt 6:21, 33)

The priestly prayer of Jesus holds a unique place in the economy of salvation. (Cf. John 17) A meditation on it will conclude Section One. It reveals the ever-present prayer of our High Priest and, at the same time, contains what he teaches us about our prayer to our Father, which will be developed in Section Two. (2604)

Jesus prays on the Cross

When the hour had come for him to fulfil the Father's plan of love, Jesus allows a glimpse of the boundless depth of his filial prayer, not only before he freely delivered himself up ("Abba ... not my will, but yours"), (Lk 22:42) but even in *his last words* on the Cross, where prayer and the gift of self are but one: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34); "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk 23:43); "Woman, behold your son" - "Behold your mother" (Jn 19:26-27); "I thirst" (Jn 19:28); "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34); "It is finished" (Jn 19:30); "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Lk 23:46) until the "loud cry" as he expires, giving up his spirit (Cf. Mk 15:37; Jn 19:30). (2605)

The cry of the Incarnate Word to his Father for our salvation

All the troubles, for all time, of humanity enslaved by sin and death, all the petitions and intercessions of salvation history are summed up in this cry of the incarnate Word. Here the Father accepts them and, beyond all hope, answers them by raising his Son. Thus is fulfilled and brought to completion the drama of prayer in the economy of creation and salvation. The Psalter gives us the key to prayer in Christ. In the "today" of the Resurrection the Father says: "You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" (Ps 2:7-8; cf. Acts 13:33). (2606)

The prayer of Jesus accomplishes salvation for us all

The Letter to the Hebrews expresses in dramatic terms how the prayer of Jesus accomplished the victory of salvation: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." (Heb 5:7-9)

IN BRIEF

- **Jesus' filial prayer is the perfect model of prayer in the New Testament. Often done in solitude and in secret, the prayer of Jesus involves a loving adherence to the will of the Father even to the Cross and an absolute confidence in being heard. (2620)**

