

# **JESUS: THE TEACHER OF PRAYER**

## **Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***



### ***The explicit teaching of Jesus on prayer***

When Jesus prays he is already teaching us how to pray. His prayer to his Father is the theological path [the path of faith, hope and charity] of our prayer to God. But the Gospel also gives us Jesus' explicit teaching on prayer. Like a wise teacher he takes hold of us where we are and leads us progressively toward the Father. Addressing the crowds following him, Jesus builds on what they already know of prayer from the Old Covenant and opens to them the newness of the coming Kingdom. Then he reveals this newness to them in parables. Finally, he will speak openly of the Father and the Holy Spirit to his disciples who will be the teachers of prayer in his Church. (2607)

### ***He insists on conversion of heart***

From *the Sermon on the Mount* onwards, Jesus insists on *conversion of heart*: reconciliation with one's brother before presenting an offering on the altar, love of enemies and prayer for persecutors, prayer to the Father in secret, not heaping up empty phrases, prayerful forgiveness from the depths of the heart, purity of heart and seeking the Kingdom before all else. (Cf. Mt 5:23-24, 44-45; 6:7, 14-15, 21, 25, 33) This filial conversion is entirely directed to the Father. (2608)

### ***The need to pray in faith***

Once committed to conversion, the heart learns to pray in *faith*. Faith is a filial adherence to God beyond what we feel and understand. It is possible because the beloved Son gives us access to the Father. He can ask us to 'seek' and to 'knock', since he himself is the door and the way. (Cf. Mt 7:7-11, 13-14) (2609)

### ***He teaches the power of prayer with faith and with boldness***

Just as Jesus prays to the Father and gives thanks before receiving his gifts, so he teaches us *filial boldness*: "Whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you receive it, and you will" (Mk 11:24). Such is the power of prayer and of faith that does not doubt: "all things are possible to him who believes" (Mk 9:23). Jesus is as saddened by the "lack of faith" of his own neighbours and the "little faith" of his own disciples (Cf. Mk 6:6; Mt 8:26) as he is struck with admiration at the great faith of the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. (Cf. Mt 8:10; 15:28) (2610)

### ***A willing heart is also necessary***

The prayer of faith consists not only in saying "Lord, Lord", but in disposing the heart to do the will of the Father. (Cf. Mt 7:21) Jesus calls his disciples to bring into their prayer this concern for cooperating with the divine plan. (Cf. Mt 9:38; Lk 10:2; Jn 4:34) (2611)

### ***...and watchfulness***

In Jesus "the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk 1:15). He calls his hearers to conversion and faith, but also to *watchfulness*. In prayer the disciple keeps watch, attentive to Him Who Is and Him Who Comes, in memory of his first coming in the lowliness of the flesh, and in the hope of his second coming in glory. In communion with their Master, the disciples' prayer is a battle; only by keeping watch in prayer can one avoid falling into temptation. (Cf. Mk 13; Lk 21:34-36; Lk 22:40, 46) (2612)

### ***Jesus' parables on prayer***

Three principal *parables* on prayer are transmitted to us by St. Luke:

→ The first, "the importunate friend", invites us to urgent prayer: "Knock, and it will be opened to you." To the one who prays like this, the heavenly Father will "give whatever he needs," and above all the Holy Spirit who contains all gifts. (Cf. Lk 11:5-13)

→ The second, “the importunate widow”, is centred on one of the qualities of prayer: it is necessary to pray always without ceasing, and with the patience of faith. “And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Cf. Lk 18:1-8)

→ The third parable, “the Pharisee and the tax collector”, concerns the humility of the heart that prays. “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” The Church continues to make this prayer its own: *Kyrie eleison!* (Cf. Lk 18:9-14) (2613)

### ***Praying to the Father in Jesus’ name***

When Jesus openly entrusts to his disciples the mystery of prayer to the Father he reveals to them what their prayer and ours must be, once he has returned to the Father in his glorified humanity. What is new is to “ask *in his name*” (Jn 14:13). Faith in the Son introduces the disciples into the knowledge of the Father, because Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). Faith bears its fruit in love: it means keeping the word and the commandments of Jesus, it means abiding with him in the Father who, in him, so loves us that he abides with us. In this new covenant the certitude that our petitions will be heard is founded on the prayer of Jesus. (Cf. Jn 14:13-14) (2614)

### ***...and through the Holy Spirit***

Even more, what the Father gives us when our prayer is united with that of Jesus is “another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:16-17). This new dimension of prayer and of its circumstances is displayed throughout the farewell discourse. In the Holy Spirit, Christian prayer is a communion of love with the Father, not only through Christ but also *in him*: “Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn 16:24). (2615)

### ***Jesus hears our prayer whether in words or in silence***

Prayer to Jesus is answered by him already during his ministry, through signs that anticipate the power of his death and Resurrection: Jesus hears the prayer of faith, expressed in words (the leper, Jairus, the Canaanite woman, the good thief) or in silence (the bearers of the paralytic, the woman with a haemorrhage who touches his clothes, the tears and ointment of the sinful woman). The urgent request of the blind men, “Have mercy on us, Son of David” or “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” has been renewed in the traditional prayer to Jesus known as the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” Healing infirmities or forgiving sins, Jesus always responds to a prayer offered in faith: “Your faith has made you well; go in peace.” (Mt 9:27; Mk 10:48.)

### ***Jesus prays for us and in us***

St. Augustine wonderfully summarizes the three dimensions of Jesus' prayer: “He prays for us as our priest, prays in us as our Head, and is prayed to by us as our God. Therefore let us acknowledge our voice in him and his in us.” (St. Augustine) (2616)

## **IN BRIEF**

- **In his teaching, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray with a purified heart, with lively and persevering faith, with filial boldness. He calls them to vigilance and invites them to present their petitions to God in his name. Jesus Christ himself answers prayers addressed to him. (2621)**

