

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Catechesis on prayer - 28. Praying in communion with the Saints

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today, I would like to reflect on the connection between prayer and the communion of saints. In fact, when we pray, we never do so alone: even if we do not think about it, we are immersed in a majestic river of invocations that precedes us and proceeds after us. A majestic river.

Contained in the prayers we find in the Bible, that often resound in the liturgy, are the traces of ancient stories, of prodigious liberations, of deportations and sad exiles, of emotional returns, of praise ringing out before the wonders of creation... And thus, these voices are passed on from generation to generation, in a continual intertwining between personal experience and that of the people and the humanity to which we belong. No one can separate themselves from their own history, the history of their own people. We always bear in our attitudes this inheritance, even in the way we pray. In the prayer of praise, especially that which unfolds from the hearts of the little ones and the humble, echo parts of the Magnificat that Mary lifted up to God in front of her relative Elizabeth; or of elderly Simeon's exclamation who, taking the Baby Jesus in his arms, spoke thus: "Now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word" (Lk 2:29).

Those prayers that are good are "expansive", like anything that is good; they propagate themselves continuously, with or without being posted on social networks: from hospital wards, from moments of festive gatherings to those in which we suffer silently... One person's pain is everyone's pain, and one person's happiness is transmitted to someone else's soul. Pain and happiness, all a story, stories that create the story of one's own life, this story is relived through one's own words, but the experience is the same.

Prayer is always born again: each time we join our hands and open our hearts to God, we find ourselves in the company of anonymous saints and recognized saints who pray with us and who intercede for us as older brothers and sisters who have preceded us on this same human adventure. There is no grief in the Church that is borne in solitude, there are no tears shed in oblivion, because everyone breaths and participates in one common grace. It is no coincidence that in the ancient church people were buried in gardens surrounding a sacred building, as if to say that, in some way, the hosts of those who have preceded us participate in every Eucharist. Our parents and grandparents are there, our godfathers and godmothers are there, our catechists and other

teachers are there... The faith that is passed on, transmitted, that we have received. Along with faith, the way of praying and prayer have been transmitted.

The saints are still here not far from us; and their representations in churches evoke that “cloud of witnesses” that always surrounds us (see Heb 12:1). At the beginning, we heard the reading from the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews. They are witnesses that we do not adore – that is understood that we do not adore these saints – but whom we venerate and who in thousands of different ways bring us to Jesus Christ, the only Lord and Mediator between God and humanity. A “saint” that does not bring you to Jesus is not a saint, not even a Christian. A saint makes you remember Jesus Christ because he or she trod the path of living as a Christian. The saints remind us that even in our lives, however weak and marked by sin, holiness can unfold. Even at the last moment. In fact, we read in the Gospel that the first saint canonized by Jesus Himself was a thief, not a Pope. Holiness is a journey of life, a long or short or instantaneous encounter with Jesus. But he or she is always a witness, a saint is a witness, a man or woman who encountered Jesus and followed Jesus. It is never too late to be converted to the Lord who is good and great in love (see Ps 103:8).

The Catechism explains that the saints contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth. [...] Their intercession is their most exalted service to God’s plan. We can and should ask them to intercede for us and for the whole world” (CCC, 2683). There is a mysterious solidarity in Christ between those who have already passed to the other life and we pilgrims in this one: from Heaven, our beloved deceased continue to take care of us. They pray for us, and we pray for them and we pray with them.

The connection in prayer between ourselves and those who have already arrived – we already experience this connection in prayer here in this earthly life. We pray for each other, we make requests and offer prayers.... The first way to pray for someone is to speak to God about him or her. If we do this frequently, each day, our hearts are not closed but open to our brothers and sisters. To pray for others is the first way to love them and it moves us toward concretely drawing near. Even in conflictual moments, a way of dissolving the conflict, of softening it, is to pray for the person with whom I am in conflict. And something changes with prayer. The first thing that changes is my heart and my attitude. The Lord changes it so it might be turned into an encounter, a new encounter so that that the conflict does not become a never-ending war.

The first way to face a time of anguish is by asking our brothers and sisters, the saints above all, to pray for us. The name given to us at Baptism is not a label or a decoration! It is usually the name of the Virgin, or a Saint, who expect nothing other than to “give us a hand” in life, to give us a hand to obtain the grace from God that we need. If the trials of life have not reached the breaking point, if we are still capable of persevering, if despite everything we proceed trustingly, more than due to our own merits, perhaps we owe all this to the intercession of all the saints, some who are in Heaven, others who are pilgrims like us on earth, who have protected and accompanied us, because all of us know there are holy people here on this earth, saintly men and women who live in holiness. They do not know it; neither do we know it. But there are saints, everyday saints, hidden saints, or as I like to say, “saints who live next door”, those who share their lives with us, who work with us and live a life of holiness.

Therefore, blessed be Jesus Christ, the only Saviour of the world, together with this immense flowering of saintly men and women who populate the earth and who have praised God through

their own lives. For – as Saint Basil confirmed – “The Spirit is truly the dwelling of the saints since they offer themselves as a dwelling place for God and are called his temple” (On the Holy Spirit, 26, 62: PG 32, 184A; see CCC, 2684).