

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 1 February 2012*

[\[Video\]](#)



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to talk about Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Olives at Gethsemane. The scenario of the Gospel narrative of this prayer is particularly significant. Jesus sets out for the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper while he is praying together with his disciples. The Evangelist Mark says: "when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Mk 14:26).

This is probably an allusion to singing one of the *Hallel* Psalms, with which thanks are given to God for the liberation of the People from slavery and his help is asked for the ever new difficulties and threats of the present. The walk to Gethsemane is punctuated by Jesus' remarks that convey a sense of his impending death and proclaim the imminent dispersion of the disciples.

Having reached the grove on the Mount of Olives, that night too Jesus prepares for personal prayer. However, this time something new happens: it seems that he does not want to be left alone. Jesus would often withdraw from the crowd and from the disciples themselves "to a lonely place" (Mk 1:35) or he would go up "into the hills", St Mark says (cf. Mk 6:46). Instead at Gethsemane he invites Peter, James and John to stay closer to him. They are the disciples he called upon to be with him on the Mount of the Transfiguration (cf. Mk 9:2-13). This closeness of the three during his prayer in Gethsemane is important. On that night too Jesus was going to pray to the Father "apart", for his relationship with the Father is quite unique: It is the relationship of the Only-Begotten Son.

Indeed, one might say that especially on that night no one could really have come close to the Son, who presented himself to the Father with his absolutely unique and exclusive identity.

Yet, although Jesus arrives “alone” at the place in which he was to stop and pray, he wants at least three disciples to be near him, to be in a closer relationship with him. This is a special closeness, a plea for solidarity at the moment in which he feels death approaching, but above all it is closeness in prayer, in a certain way to express harmony with him at the moment when he is preparing to do the Father’s will to the very end; and it is an invitation to every disciple to follow him on the Way of Cross.

Mark the Evangelist recounts: “he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them ‘*My soul is very sorrowful*, even to death; remain here, and watch” (14:33-34).

In the words he addresses to the three, Jesus once again expresses himself in the language of the Psalms: “*My soul is very sorrowful*”, an expression borrowed from Psalm 43 (cf. Ps 43[42]:5). The firm determination “unto death” thus calls to mind a situation lived by many of those sent by God in the Old Testament and which is expressed in their prayers. Indeed, following the mission entrusted to them frequently means encountering hostility, rejection and persecution.

Moses is dramatically aware of the trial he is undergoing while guiding the people through the desert and says to God: “I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is too heavy for me. If you will deal thus with me, rather kill me at once, kill me if I have found favour in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness” (cf. Num 11:14-15).

Elijah too finds doing his duty to God and to his People difficult. The first Book of Kings recounts: “he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, ‘It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers’” (19:4).

What Jesus says to the three disciples whom he wants near him during his prayer at Gethsemane shows that he feels fear and anguish in that “Hour”, experiencing his last profound loneliness precisely while God’s plan is being brought about. Moreover Jesus’ fear and anguish sums up the full horror of man in the face of his own death, the certainty that it is inescapable and a perception of the burden of evil that touches our lives.

After the invitation to stay with him to watch and pray which he addresses to the three, Jesus speaks to the Father “alone”. Mark the Evangelist tells us that “going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him” (14:35). Jesus fell prostrate on the ground: a position of prayer that expresses obedience to the Father and abandonment in him with complete trust. This gesture is repeated at the beginning of the celebration of the Passion, on Good Friday, as well as in monastic profession and in the ordination of deacons, priests and bishops in order to express, in prayer, corporally too, complete entrustment to God, trust in him. Jesus then asks the Father, if this be possible, to obtain that this hour pass from him. It is not only man’s fear and anguish in the face of death, but is the devastation of the

Son of God who perceives the terrible mass of evil that he must take upon himself to overcome it, to deprive it of power.

Dear friends, in prayer we too should be able to lay before God our labours, the suffering of certain situations, of certain days, the daily commitment to following him, to being Christian, and also the weight of the evil that we see within ourselves and around us, so that he may give us hope and make us feel his closeness and give us a little light on the path of life.

Jesus continues his prayer: “*Abba*, Father, all things are possible to you; remove this cup from me; yet **not what I will, but what you will**” (Mk 14:36). In this invocation there are three revealing passages. At the beginning we have the double use of the word with which Jesus addresses God: “*Abba!* Father!” (Mk 14:36a). We know well that the Aramaic word *Abbà* is the term that children use to address their father and hence that it expresses Jesus’ relationship with God, a relationship of tenderness, affection, trust and abandonment.

The second element is found in the central part of the invocation: awareness of the Father’s omnipotence: “all things are possible to you”, which introduces a request in which, once again, the drama of Jesus’ human will appears as he faces death and evil: “remove this cup from me!”.

However, there is the third expression in Jesus’ prayer, and it is the crucial one, in which the human will adheres to the divine will without reserve. In fact, Jesus ends by saying forcefully: “**yet not what I will but what you will**” (Mk 14:36c). In the unity of the divine person of the Son, the human will finds its complete fulfilment in the total abandonment of the I to the You of the Father, called *Abba*.

St Maximus the Confessor says that ever since the moment of the creation of man and woman, **the human will has been oriented to the divine will and that it is precisely in the “yes” to God that the human will is fully free and finds its fulfilment**. Unfortunately, because of sin, this “yes” to God is transformed into opposition: Adam and Eve thought that the “no” to God was the crowning point of freedom, of being fully themselves.

On the Mount of Olives, **Jesus brings the human will back to the unreserved “yes” to God; in him the natural will is fully integrated in the orientation that the Divine Person gives it**. Jesus lives his life in accordance with the centre of his Person: his being the Son of God. His human will is drawn into the I of the Son who abandons himself totally to the Father. Thus **Jesus tells us that it is only by conforming our own will to the divine one that human beings attain their true height, that they become “divine”; only by coming out of ourselves, only in the “yes” to God, is Adam's desire — and the desire of us all — to be completely free. It is what Jesus brings about at Gethsemane: in transferring the human will into the divine will the true man is born and we are redeemed**.

The [*Compendium of the Catholic Church*](#) teaches concisely: “The prayer of Jesus during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and his last words on the Cross reveal the depth of his filial prayer. Jesus brings to completion the loving plan of the Father and takes upon himself all the anguish of humanity and all the petitions and intercessions of the history of salvation. He presents them to the Father who accepts them and answers them beyond all hope by raising his Son from the dead” (n.

543). Truly “nowhere else in Sacred Scripture do we gain so deep an insight into the inner mystery of Jesus as in the prayer on the Mount of Olives (*Jesus of Nazareth*, II, 2011, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 157).

Dear brothers and sisters, every day in the prayer of the *Our Father* we ask the Lord: “thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). In other words we recognize that there is a will of God with us and for us, a will of God for our life that must become every day, increasingly, the reference of our willing and of our being; we recognize moreover that “heaven” is where God’s will is done and where the “earth” becomes “heaven”, a place where love, goodness, truth and divine beauty are present, only if, on earth, God’s will is done.

In Jesus’ prayer to the Father on that terrible and marvellous night in Gethsemane, the “earth” became “heaven”; the “earth” of his human will, shaken by fear and anguish, was taken up by his divine will in such a way that God’s will was done on earth. And this is also important in our own prayers: we must learn to entrust ourselves more to divine Providence, to ask God for the strength to come out of ourselves to renew our “yes” to him, to say to him “thy will be done”, so as to conform our will to his. It is a prayer we must pray every day because it is not always easy to entrust ourselves to God’s will, repeating the “yes” of Jesus, the “yes” of Mary.

The Gospel accounts of Gethsemane regretfully show that the three disciples, chosen by Jesus to be close to him, were unable to watch with him, sharing in his prayer, in his adherence to the Father and they were overcome by sleep. Dear friends, let us ask the Lord to enable us to keep watch with him in prayer, to follow the will of God every day even if he speaks of the Cross, to live in ever greater intimacy with the Lord, in order to bring a little bit of God’s “heaven” to this “earth”. Many thanks.

Fiat!

FROM THE BOOK OF HEAVEN

V24 – 5.26.28 - “My daughter, God is order, and when He wants to give a good to creatures, He always places His Divine order in it, and everything that is done in order to obtain a good so great begins from God, as He places Himself at the head of it to take on the commitment, and then orders the creature for the same purpose.

“I did this in order to give, Myself, the Redemption, and so that creatures might receive It; and I am doing this, Myself, to give the Kingdom of the Divine Fiat, and so that creatures may receive It. By forming, Myself, the ‘Our Father,’ I placed Myself at the head of it and took on the commitment to give this Kingdom; and by teaching it to My Apostles, I placed in the creatures the order of how to be able to obtain a good so great. So, the whole Church is praying—there is not one soul who belongs to Her that does not recite the ‘Our Father.’

“And even though many recite it without interest in wanting and asking for a Kingdom so holy—that the Divine Will be done on earth as It is in Heaven—since the interest is in He who taught it, by their reciting it, My interest is renewed, and I hear My own prayer asking: ‘May Your Kingdom

come, so that Your Will be done on earth as It is in Heaven.’ However, if the creature, in reciting the ‘Our Father,’ had this interest of wanting and longing for My Kingdom, she would take part in My own interest, and her will would be fused in Mine for the same purpose. But, regardless of this, My Will and interest always run in each ‘Our Father.’

V26 – 7.24.29 - My coming upon earth served to draw the two wills, human and Divine, closer to each other, and to place them in intimate relations, and to increase the news in order to make It known; so much so, that I taught the ‘Our Father,’ making them say: ‘Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done on earth as It is in Heaven.’ If My Will does not live on earth as It does in Heaven, it cannot be said that It has Its Kingdom in the midst of creatures. And therefore, in the time of Its Kingdom, It will be present not only in their midst, but inside each one of them as perennial life; and in order to come to this, It must be recognized—how It is like head and primary life of each creature; and because this head is not recognized, Its strength, Its sanctity, Its beauty, does not flow to the members, nor can It let Its noble and Divine blood flow in their veins, and therefore the life of Heaven cannot be seen in creatures. So, this is why I love so much that My Divine Will be known—knowledge will make love arise; and feeling loved and longed for, It will feel drawn to come to reign in the midst of creatures.”

V26 – 8.25.29 - “My daughter, you must know that My coming upon earth and everything I did in Redemption, My very Death and Resurrection, was nothing other than preparatory act for the Kingdom of My Divine Will; and when I formed the ‘Our Father,’ I formed the seed of the Kingdom of My Divine Fiat in the midst of creatures.

“And if, when I speak, I create and I make the greatest, most beautiful and marvelous works come out of nothing, much more so when, with the empire of My speaking prayer, I have the virtue of creating what I want. Therefore, the seed of the Kingdom of My Will was created by Me in the act of My praying, as I formed and recited the ‘Our Father.’ And if I taught it to the Apostles, it was so that the Church, by reciting it, might water and fecundate this seed, and they might dispose themselves to model their lives according to the dispositions of My Divine Fiat.

“My knowledges about It, My many manifestations, have developed this seed; and since they have been accompanied by the acts done by you in My Divine Will, so many little grains have formed as to form a great mass, from which each one can take his part—always if they want to—in order to live of the life of the Divine Will. Therefore, everything is there, My daughter—the most necessary acts. There is the seed created by Me, because if there is no seed, it is useless to hope for the plant; but if the seed is there, it takes work, the will of wanting the fruit of that seed; and one is sure of having the plant, because, by possessing the seed, one has in his power the life of the plant of that seed.

“There are those who water this seed in order to make it grow—each ‘Our Father’ that is recited serves to water it; there are My manifestations in order to make it known. All that is needed are those who would offer themselves to be the criers—and with courage, without fearing anything, facing sacrifices in order to make it known. So, the substantial part is there—the greatest is there; the minor is needed—that is, the superficial part, and your Jesus will know how to make His way in order to find he who will accomplish the mission of making known My Divine Will in the midst of the peoples.

V31 – 2.24.33 - I Myself, without anyone having prayed Me, extended the heavens, I Created the sun, and everything else. The same for My Will, completely spontaneous I told them: ‘Pray that My Will be done on earth as It is in Heaven.’ And when spontaneously ‘Pray this will happen’ is said, without anyone having importuned Me, it means that first I looked at everything in My All-Seeingness, I pondered things very well, and when I saw that this was possible, then I decided to teach the Our Father, wanting the human will united to Ours so that it might yearn that It would come to Reign on earth as It does in Heaven. Therefore, everything I have manifested about My Will, is enclosed in these words alone: ‘May Your Will be done on earth as It is in Heaven.’ In these few words are contained abysses of Graces, of Sanctity, of Light, and abysses of communication and Divine Transformations between the Creator and creature.

“My daughter, it was the Regal Gift that your Jesus made to the human generations, as Fulfillment of My Redemption. My Love was not yet content, My sufferings had not brought Me Full Satisfaction; I wanted, I wanted to still give, I wanted to see My Heaven on earth in the midst of My children. Therefore, a few days before departing for Heaven, first I decided to give My Will on earth as It is in Heaven, and afterwards I taught the Our Father, in which I remained committed to giving this Great Gift. And your Jesus, when He commits Himself, never fails to keep His Word.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:

III. “Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven”

2822 Our Father “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”⁹⁵ He “is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish.”⁹⁶ His commandment is “that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”⁹⁷ This commandment summarizes all the others and expresses his entire will. ([851](#), [2196](#))

2823 “He has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ... to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will.”⁹⁸ We ask insistently for this loving plan to be fully realized on earth as it is already in heaven. ([59](#))

2824 In Christ, and through his human will, the will of the Father has been perfectly fulfilled once for all. Jesus said on entering into this world: “Lo, I have come to do your will, O God.”⁹⁹ Only Jesus can say: “I always do what is pleasing to him.”¹⁰⁰ In the prayer of his agony, he consents totally to this will: “not my will, but yours be done.”¹⁰¹ For this reason Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”¹⁰² “And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”¹⁰³ ([475](#), [612](#))

2825 “Although he was a Son, [Jesus] learned obedience through what he suffered.”¹⁰⁴ How much more reason have we sinful creatures to learn obedience—we who in him have become children of adoption. We ask our Father to unite our will to his Son’s, in order to fulfill his will, his plan of salvation for the life of the world. We are radically incapable of this, but united with Jesus and

with the power of his Holy Spirit, we can surrender our will to him and decide to choose what his Son has always chosen: to do what is pleasing to the Father.¹⁰⁵ (615)

In committing ourselves to [Christ], we can become one spirit with him, and thereby accomplish his will, in such wise that it will be perfect on earth as it is in heaven.¹⁰⁶

Consider how [Jesus Christ] teaches us to be humble, by making us see that our virtue does not depend on our work alone but on grace from on high. He commands each of the faithful who prays to do so universally, for the whole world. For he did not say “thy will be done in me or in us,” but “on earth,” the whole earth, so that error may be banished from it, truth take root in it, all vice be destroyed on it, virtue flourish on it, and earth no longer differ from heaven.¹⁰⁷

2826 By prayer we can discern “what is the will of God” and obtain the endurance to do it.¹⁰⁸ Jesus teaches us that one enters the kingdom of heaven not by speaking words, but by doing “the will of my Father in heaven.”¹⁰⁹

2827 “If any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him.”¹¹⁰ Such is the power of the Church’s prayer in the name of her Lord, above all in the Eucharist. Her prayer is also a communion of intercession with the all-holy Mother of God¹¹¹ and all the saints who have been pleasing to the Lord because they willed his will alone: (2611, 796)

It would not be inconsistent with the truth to understand the words, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” to mean: “in the Church as in our Lord Jesus Christ himself”; or “in the Bride who has been betrothed, just as in the Bridegroom who has accomplished the will of the Father.”¹¹²