



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

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[\[Video\]](#)

The prayer of Jesus linked to His miraculous healing action

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today I would like to reflect with you on the prayer of Jesus linked to his miraculous healing action. Various situations are presented in the Gospels in which Jesus prays while he contemplates the beneficial and healing work of God the Father who acts through him. This is a form of prayer which, once again, demonstrates his unique relationship of knowledge and communion with the Father, while Jesus lets himself be involved with deep human participation in the hardships of his friends, for example, those of Lazarus and his family or of the many poor and sick people to whom he seeks to give practical help.

A significant case is the healing of the deaf mute (cf. Mk 7:32-37). Mark the Evangelist's account — that we have just heard — shows that Jesus' healing action is connected with the intense relationship he had both with his neighbour — the sick man — and with the Father. The scene of the miracle is described carefully, in these words: "taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, '*Ephphatha*', that is 'Be opened'" (Mk 7:33-34).

Jesus wanted the healing to take place "aside from the multitude". This does not seem to be due solely to the fact that the miracle must be kept hidden from people to prevent them from making

any restrictive or distorted interpretation of the Person of Jesus. The decision to take the sick man aside ensures that at the moment of his healing Jesus and the deaf mute are on their own, brought together in a unique relationship. With a single gesture the Lord touches the sick man's ears and tongue, that is, the specific sites of his infirmity. The intensity of Jesus' attention is also demonstrated in the unusual treatment that was part of the healing. He uses his fingers and even his saliva. And the fact that the Evangelist records the original word spoken by the Lord, '*Ephphatha*', in other words, "be opened", highlights the unusual character of the scene.

The central point of this episode however is the fact that when Jesus, was about to work the healing, he directly sought his relationship with the Father. Indeed the account relates that "looking up to heaven, he sighed" (v. 34). Jesus' attention and treatment of the sick man are linked by a profound attitude of prayer addressed to God. Moreover, his sighing is described with a verb which, in the New Testament, indicates the aspiration to something good which is still lacking (cf. Rom 8:23).

Thus, as a whole, the narrative shows that it was his human involvement with the sick man that prompted Jesus to pray. His unique relationship with the Father and his identity as the Only Begotten Son surface once again. God's healing and beneficial action become present in him, through his Person. It is not by chance that the people's last remark after the miracle has been performed is reminiscent of the evaluation of the Creation at the beginning of the Book of Genesis: "He has done all things well" (Mk 7:37). Prayer clearly entered the healing action of Jesus as he looked up to heaven. The power that healed the deaf mute was certainly elicited by compassion for him but came from recourse to the Father. These two relationships interact: the human relationship of compassion with the man enters into the relationship with God, and thus becomes healing.

In the Johannine narrative of the raising of Lazarus this same dynamic is testified by an even greater proof (cf. Jn 11:1-44) Here too are interwoven, on the one hand, Jesus' bond with a friend and with his suffering and, on the other, his filial relationship with the Father. Jesus' human participation in Lazarus' case has some special features. His friendship with Lazarus is repeatedly mentioned throughout the account, as well as his relationship with Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus. Jesus himself says: "our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep" (Jn 11:11).

Jesus' sincere affection for his friend is also highlighted by Lazarus' sisters, as well as by the Jews (cf. Jn 11:3; 11:36). It is expressed in Jesus' deep distress at seeing the grief of Martha and Mary and of all Lazarus' friends and he finds relief by bursting into tears — so profoundly human — on approaching the tomb: "When Jesus saw her [Martha] weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, 'Where have you laid him?'. They said to him, 'Lord, come and see'. Jesus wept" (Jn 11:33-35).

This bond of friendship and Jesus' participation and distress at the sorrow of Lazarus' relatives and acquaintances, is connected throughout the narrative to a continuous, intense relationship with the Father. The event, from the outset, is interpreted by Jesus in relation to his own identity and mission and to the glorification that awaits him. In fact on hearing of Lazarus' illness he commented: "The illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it" (Jn 11:4).

Jesus also hears the news of his friend's death with deep human sadness but always with a clear reference to his relationship with God and with the mission that God has entrusted to him; he says: "Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe" (Jn 11:14-15). The moment of Jesus' explicit prayer to the Father at the tomb was the natural outlet for all that had happened, which took place in the double key of his friendship with Lazarus and his filial relationship with God.

Here too, the two relationships go hand in hand. "And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me'" (Jn 11:41): it was a *eucharist*. The sentence shows that Jesus did not cease, even for an instant, his prayer of petition for Lazarus' life. This prayer continued, indeed, it reinforced his ties with his friend and, at the same time strengthened Jesus' decision to remain in communion with the Father's will, with his plan of love in which Lazarus' illness and death were to be considered as a place for the manifestation of God's glory.

Dear brothers and sisters, in reading this account each one of us is called to understand that in our prayers of petition to the Lord we must not expect an immediate fulfilment of what we ask, of our own will. Rather, we must entrust ourselves to the Father's will, interpreting every event in the perspective of his glory, of his plan of love, which to our eyes is often mysterious. For this reason we too must join in our prayers, petitions, praise and thanksgiving, even when it seems to us that God is not responding to our real expectations.

Abandoning ourselves to God's love which always precedes and accompanies us is one of the basic attitudes for our dialogue with him. On Jesus' prayer in the account of the raising of Lazarus the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* comments: "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' (cf. Mt 6:21, 33)" (n. 2604). To me this seems very important: before the gift is given, committing ourselves to the One who gives. The Giver is more precious than the gift. For us too, therefore, over and above what God bestows on us when we call on him, the greatest gift that he can give us is his friendship, his presence and his love. He is the precious treasure to ask for and to preserve for ever.

The prayer that Jesus prays as the rock was rolled away from the entrance to Lazarus' tomb thus has a special and unexpected development. In fact, after thanking God the Father, he adds: "I

knew that you hear me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that you sent me” (Jn 11:42). With his prayer Jesus wanted to lead people back to faith, to total trust in God and in his will. And he wanted to show that this God who so loved man and the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son (cf. Jn 3:16). He is the God of Life, the God who brings hope and can reverse humanly impossible situations. Therefore a believer’s trusting prayer is a living testimony of God’s presence in the world, of his concern for humankind, of his action with a view to bringing about his plan of salvation.

Jesus’ two prayers on which we have meditated just now and which accompany the healing of the deaf mute and the raising of Lazarus, reveal that the deep connection between the love of God and love of one’s neighbour must also come into our own prayer.

In Jesus, true God and true man, attention to others, especially if they are needy and suffering, compassion at the sight of the sorrow of a family who were his friends, led him to address the Father in that fundamental relationship which directed his entire life. However, the opposite is also true: communion with the Father, constant dialogue with him, spurred Jesus to be uniquely attentive to practical human situations so as to bring God’s comfort and love to them. Human relationships lead us toward the relationship with God, and the relationship with God leads us back to our neighbour.

Dear brothers and sisters, our prayer opens the door to God who teaches us to come out of ourselves constantly, to make us capable of being close to others to bring them comfort, hope and light, especially at moments of trial. May the Lord grant us to be capable of increasingly more intense prayer, in order to strengthen our personal relationship with God the Father, to open our heart to the needs of those beside us and to feel the beauty of being “sons in the Son”, together with a great many brothers and sisters. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking visitors present, including the groups from Vietnam, Nigeria and the United States. As we prepare to celebrate the Saviour’s birth at Christmas, I cordially invoke upon you and your families his abundant blessings of joy and peace!

I greet and thank all those who have sponsored, funded and undertaken the restoration of the famous sculpture called “The Resurrection” by Maestro Pericle Fazzini, which the Servant of God Paul VI commissioned for this Hall and which you can see in front of you. After a period of painstaking labour, today we have the joy of admiring this work of art and faith in all its original splendour.

Lastly, my thoughts turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. I hope that you, dear

young people, will prepare your hearts to welcome Jesus who saves us with the power of his love. Dear *sick* people who are feeling increasingly the burden of the Cross, may the forthcoming Christmas celebrations bring you serenity and comfort. And may you, dear *newlyweds*, grow increasingly in that love which Jesus came to bring us in his Nativity.

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