



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 15 November 2017 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Good morning!*

We are continuing with the catecheses on the Holy Mass. To illustrate the beauty of the Eucharistic celebration, I would like to begin with a very simple aspect: Mass is prayer; rather, it is prayer *par excellence*, the loftiest, the most sublime, and at the same time the most “concrete”. In fact it is the loving encounter with God through his Word and the Body and Blood of Jesus. It is an encounter with the Lord.

But first we must answer a question. What truly is prayer? It is first of all a dialogue, a personal relationship with God. Man was created as a being in a personal relationship with God who finds his complete fulfillment only in the encounter with his Creator. The path of life leads toward the definitive encounter with the Lord.

The Book of Genesis states that man was created in the image and likeness of God, who is the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, a perfect relationship of love which is unity. From this we can understand that we were all created in order to enter a perfect relationship of love, in the continuous giving and receiving of ourselves so as to be able to find the fulfillment of our being.

When Moses, before the burning bush, receives God’s call, he asks Him His name. And how does God respond? “I am who I am” (Ex 3:14). This expression, in its original sense, expresses *presence and favour*, and indeed, immediately afterwards God adds: “the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob” (cf. v. 15). Thus, when Christ calls his disciples, he, too, calls them so that they may be *with Him*. This indeed is the greatest grace: being able to feel that the Mass, the Eucharist, is the privileged moment to be with Jesus and, through him, with God and with brothers and sisters.

Praying, as every true dialogue, is also knowing how to be in silence — in dialogues there are moments of silence — in silence together with Jesus. When we go to Mass, perhaps we arrive five

minutes early and begin to chat with the person next to us. But this is not the moment for small talk; it is the moment of silence to prepare ourselves for the dialogue. It is the moment for recollection within the heart, to prepare ourselves for the encounter with Jesus. Silence is so important! Remember what I said last week: we are not going to a spectacle, we are going to the encounter with the Lord, and silence prepares us and accompanies us. Pausing in silence with Jesus. From this mysterious silence of God springs his Word which resonates in our heart. Jesus himself teaches us how it is truly possible to “be” with the Father and he shows us this with his prayer. The Gospels show us Jesus who withdraws to secluded places to pray; seeing his intimate relationship with God, the disciples feel the desire to be able to take part in it, and they ask him: “Lord, teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). We heard it in the First Reading, at the beginning of the Audience. Jesus responds that the first thing necessary for prayer is being able to say “Father”. Let us take heed: if I am not able to say “Father” to God, I am not capable of prayer. We must learn to say “Father”, that is, to place ourselves in his presence with filial trust. But to be able to learn, we must humbly recognize that we need to be taught, and to say with simplicity: ‘Lord, teach me to pray’.

This is the first point: to be humble, to recognize ourselves as children, to rest in the Father, to trust in him. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven, it is necessary to become little, like children. In the sense that children know how to trust; they know that someone will take care of them, of what they will eat, of what they will wear and so on (cf. Mt 6:25-32). This is the first perspective: *trust and confidence*, as a child toward his parents; to know that God remembers you, takes care of you, of you, of me, of everyone.

The second condition, too, is being precisely like children; it is to let ourselves be surprised. A child always asks thousands of questions because he wants to discover the world; and he even marvels at little things because everything is new to him. To enter the Kingdom of Heaven we must let ourselves be astonished. In our relationship with the Lord, in prayer — I ask — do we let ourselves be astonished or do we think that prayer is speaking with God as parrots do? No, it is trusting and opening the heart so as to let ourselves be astonished. Do we allow ourselves to be surprised by God who is always the God of surprises? Because the encounter with the Lord is always a living encounter; it is not a museum encounter. It is a living encounter, and we go to Mass, not to a museum. We go to a living encounter with the Lord.

The Gospel speaks of a certain Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), an elderly man, an authority in Israel, who goes to Jesus to get to know him; and the Lord speaks to him of the need to “be born anew” (cf. v. 3). But what does it mean? Can one be “reborn”? Is it possible to return to having the zest, the joy, the wonder of life, even in the face of so much tragedy? This is a fundamental question of our faith, and this is the longing of every true believer: the longing to be reborn, the joy of beginning anew. Do we have this longing? Does each of us have the wish to be born ever anew in order to meet the Lord? Do you have this wish? Indeed, one can easily lose it because, due to so many activities, so many projects to implement, in the end we are short of time and we lose sight of what

is fundamental: the inner life of the heart, our spiritual life, our life which is the encounter with the Lord in prayer.

In truth, the Lord surprises us by showing us that he loves us even in our weaknesses. “Jesus Christ ... is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn 2:2). This gift, the source of true consolation — but the Lord always forgives us — this consoles; it is a true consolation; it is a gift that we are given through the Eucharist, that wedding feast at which the Bridegroom encounters our frailty. Can I say that when I receive communion during Mass, the Lord encounters my frailty? Yes! We can say so because this is true! The Lord encounters our frailty so as to lead us back to our first call: that of being in the image and likeness of God. This is the environment of the Eucharist. This is prayer.

Special greetings:

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, particularly the groups from England, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Hong Kong and the United States of America. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I offer a special thought to *young people*, to *the sick* and to *newlyweds*. Today we are celebrating the Memorial of Saint Albertus Magnus, Bishop and Doctor of the Church. Dear *young people*, may you strengthen your dialogue with God, seeking him diligently in your every action; dear *sick people*, may you find comfort in the reflection of the mystery of the Cross of the Lord Jesus, who continues to illuminate the life of all men and women; and may you, dear *newlyweds*, strive to maintain a steadfast relationship with Christ, so that your love may be evermore a reflection of God's.