



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE
TO NORWAY, ICELAND, FINLAND,
DENMARK AND SWEDEN

CELEBRATION OF THE WORD

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Stortorget, Tromsø (Norway)
Friday, 2 June 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Kjäre Vänner!

Text in Norwegian

[Det er en glede for meg å kunne besøke dere her i Tromsø. Det er første gang jeg besøker et land nord for polarcirkelen. Jeg vet at dere har mørketid i tva måneder av året. Men nu er det de lyse netters tid. Solen går ikke ned!

Jeg forstar hvor meget dere må elske lyset!

Jesus Kristus har sagt: "Jeg er verdens lys". Han er lyset som alltid skinner, Han er lys som alltid varmer! Han er selve lyset som bringer oss Kjærlighet, Glede, Hap och Fred.

Jeg hilser dere alle og ber om velsignelse over dere og landet her i nord.]

2. As we come together this evening in prayer, we must ask ourselves what it means to pray. The beautiful Psalms that we have just sung teach us the basis of all prayer; they remind us that we are *creatures who have a relationship with the God who made us*:

“In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his. To him belongs the sea, for he made it. and the dry land shaped by his hands... *let us kneel before the God who made us*” (Ps. 95 (94), 4-6).

The Psalms also speak of our need for deliverance, or, to be more exact, they celebrate with thanks giving the *mighty deeds of deliverance* that God has accomplished for his people:

“He remembered us in our distress, for his love endures for ever. And he snatched us away from our foes... He gives food to all living things, for his love endures for ever” (Ps. 136 (135), 23-25).

Dear brothers and sisters: in the Psalms we see how God’s chosen people were filled with praise and thanks for the gift of creation and for their deliverance from earthly enemies. How much greater then is our need to pray to Almighty God, who *frees us from sin and death* through his Son’s Cross and Resurrection, and who *makes us into a new creation* through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus we are led to the Gospel. Like the very first disciples, we come to Christ eager to learn how to pray (Cfr. *Luc. 11, 1*). By teaching us the “Our Father” Christ establishes *the pattern for all prayer*. He explains our relationship with God and with one another: God is our Creator. He is our Redeemer. With him as our common Father we are brothers and sisters to one another.

3. And so we say: “*Our Father who art in heaven*” (*Matth. 6, 9*).

When Jesus prays he uses the Aramaic word “*Abba*” (Cfr. *Marc. 14, 36*), which is what small children would have called their fathers. Only Christ, the Eternal Son who is one in being with the Father, has the right to address with such familiarity, with such intimacy, the one whose throne is in the heavens. But we too have been given this privilege *by our adoption as children of God in Baptism* (Cfr. *Rom. 8, 15; Gal. 4, 6*). We have become sons and daughters “in the Son” Jesus Christ.

This unimagined and undeserved gift of communion with God transforms every human relationship. We pray not to “my” father or to “your” father, but to “our Father”. Even when we “shut the door and pray... in secret” (*Matth. 6, 6*), we are *spiritually united with all our brothers and sisters* in Christ and with every human person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Prayer delivers us from selfishness, from isolation and loneliness. It opens us up to the mystery of communion with God and with others.

4. “Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (*Ibid. 6, 9-10*).

In the modern world, scientific and technological developments have dispelled many of our fears,

relieved so many of the burdens of our existence, and opened up new possibilities for human self-realization. But these developments can also lead to *a great temptation like the one "in the beginning"* in the Book of Genesis: the temptation to decide for ourselves what is good and evil without reference to the God who made us, the vain attempt to place ourselves and our wills, rather than God and his law, at the centre of the universe. But if we reject or ignore God "who is love", we reject love itself.

The first concern of the "Lord's Prayer" is *that God's name should be glorified, that his Kingdom should come, that his will should be done*. If that is our priority, then all else will be given us besides. Progress in science, economics, social organization and culture will not rob us of our humanity, but will reflect the love that alone gives life, meaning and joy to our human efforts. *It is God who "gives us our daily bread" (Ibid. 6, 11)*, even as we remember that it is not by bread alone that we live, "but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (*Ibid.* 4, 4).

5. "Forgive us our debts, *as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (*Matth.* 6, 12)

Christ's teaching is simple but sobering. He says, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, *neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*" (*Ibid.* 6, 14-15).

Dear brothers and sisters: is this not perhaps the most difficult petition of the "Lord's Prayer", precisely because what is asked of us is so clear and uncompromising? In praying these words we profess our trust in God's mercy, but we also *commit ourselves to a life of forgiveness*. So often we impose conditions on our forgiveness, or refuse to seek reconciliation if we have been wronged. Yet if God were to treat us like this, who could be saved? With good reason we deplore the hatred, revenge and hardness of heart that afflict society in so many parts of the world, but the "Lord's Prayer" challenges us to change the world by first being converted in our own hearts. Christ's way of forgiveness demands that we should *love even our enemies and pray for our persecutors* (Cfr. *Ibid.* 5, 44). Only then can we truly pray as Jesus taught us.

6. "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (*Ibid.* 6, 13).

This final petition in the "Our Father" helps us to understand *divine Providence in the light of Christ's Death and Resurrection*. It warns us of the existence of evil and calls to mind Christ's words: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (*Ibid.* 10, 28).

This does not mean that God is deaf to our prayers for deliverance from physical danger and evil, or that he is indifferent to the suffering and death caused by natural calamities, disease, famine and war. It is only natural that we should *turn to our heavenly Father for protection* from these evils which entered the world because of original sin. But at the same time we must have confidence in

Christ's victory over suffering and death. When, despite our prayers and human efforts, we still suffer evil in this passing world, we must have faith that it can be overcome *through the redeeming power of love*. The greatest evil that can ultimately befall us is to be separated from God because of sin. That, above all, is what we mean when we pray that we may not be led into temptation but delivered from evil.

7. Dear brothers and sisters: what does it mean to pray? It means to lift up our minds and hearts to God in praise and thanksgiving, and *to live according to the truth* about God, about ourselves and about the world. It means to worship God *not just with words but also with deeds*, as the "Lord's Prayer" teaches us.

Gathered this evening in the long bright twilight of the North, in the light of the unsetting sun which so clearly symbolizes Christ, the Light of the world, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, let us take to heart the words with which he ended his sermon in the Gospel. What he said to the crowd that day is addressed to each one of us too: "Every one... who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but *it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock*" (Matth. 7, 24-25).

May "our Father in heaven" grant us always *this wisdom and this strength*.

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