



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

*Paul VI Audience Hall
Wednesday, 7 December 2011*

[\[Video\]](#)

The “jewel” of the Cry of Exultation

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Evangelists Matthew and Luke (cf. Mt 11:25-30 and Lk 10:21-22) have handed down to us a “jewel” of Jesus’ prayer that is often called the *Cry of Exultation* or the *Cry of Messianic Exultation*. It is a prayer of thanksgiving and praise, as we have heard. In the original Greek of the Gospels the word with which this jubilation begins and which expresses Jesus’ attitude in addressing the Father is *exomologoumai*, which is often translated with “I praise” (cf. Mt 11:25 and Lk 10:21). However, in the New Testament writings this term indicates mainly two things: the first is “to confess” fully — for example, John the Baptist asked those who went to him to be baptized *to recognize their every sin* (cf. Mt 3:6); the second thing is “*to be in agreement*”. Therefore, the words with which Jesus begins his prayer contain his *full recognition* of the Father’s action and at the same time, his being in *total, conscious and joyful agreement* with this way of acting, with the Father’s plan. The “Cry of Exultation” is the apex of a journey of prayer in which Jesus’ profound and close communion with the life of the Father in the Holy Spirit clearly emerges and his divine sonship is revealed.

Jesus addresses God by calling him “Father”. This word expresses Jesus’ awareness and certainty of being “the Son” in intimate and constant communion with him, and this is the central focus and source of every one of Jesus’ prayers. We see it clearly in the last part of the hymn

which illuminates the entire text. Jesus said: “All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Lk 10:22). Jesus was therefore affirming that only “the Son” truly knows the Father.

All the knowledge that people have of each other — we all experience this in our human relationships — entails involvement, a certain inner bond between the one who knows and the one who is known, at a more or less profound level: we cannot know anyone without a communion of being. In the *Cry of Exultation* — as in all his prayers — Jesus shows that true knowledge of God presupposes communion with him. Only by being in communion with the other can I begin to know him; and so it is with God: only if I am in true contact, if I am in communion with him, can I also know him. True knowledge, therefore, is reserved to the “Son”, the Only Begotten One who is in the bosom of the Father since eternity (cf. Jn 1:18), in perfect unity with him. The Son alone truly knows God, since he is in an intimate communion of being; only the Son can truly reveal who God is.

The name “Father” is followed by a second title, “Lord of heaven and earth”. With these words, Jesus sums up faith in creation and echoes the first words of Sacred Scripture: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

In praying, he recalls the great biblical narrative of the history of God’s love for man that begins with the act of creation. Jesus fits into this love story, he is its culmination and its fulfilment. Sacred Scripture is illumined through his experience of prayer and lives again in its fullest breadth: the proclamation of the mystery of God and the response of man transformed. Yet, through the expression: “Lord of heaven and earth”, we can also recognize that in Jesus, the Revealer of the Father, the possibility for man to reach God is reopened.

Let us now ask ourselves: to whom does the Son want to reveal God’s mysteries? At the beginning of the Hymn Jesus expresses his joy because the Father’s will is to keep these things hidden from the learned and the wise and to reveal them to little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). Thus in his prayer, Jesus manifests his communion with the Father’s decision to disclose his mysteries to the simple of heart: the Son’s will is one with the Father’s.

Divine revelation is not brought about in accordance with earthly logic, which holds that cultured and powerful people possess important knowledge and pass it on to simpler people, to little ones. God used a quite different approach: those to whom his communication was addressed were, precisely, “babes”. This is the Father’s will, and the Son shares it with him joyfully. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says: “His exclamation, ‘Yes, Father!’ expresses the depth of his heart, his adherence to the Father’s ‘good pleasure,’ echoing his mother’s ‘Fiat’ at the time of his conception and prefiguring what he will say to the Father in his agony. The whole prayer of Jesus is contained in this loving adherence of his human heart to the ‘mystery of the will’ of the Father (Eph 1:9)” (n.

2603).

The invocation that we address to God in the “Our Father” derives from this: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”: together with Christ and in Christ we too ask to enter into harmony with the Father’s will, thereby also becoming his children. Thus Jesus, in this “Cry of Exultation”, expresses his will to involve in his own filial knowledge of God all those whom the Father wishes to become sharers in it; and those who welcome this gift are the “little ones”.

But what does “being little” and simple mean? What is the “littleness” that opens man to filial intimacy with God so as to receive his will? What must the fundamental attitude of our prayer be? Let us look at “The Sermon on the Mount”, in which Jesus says: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Mt 5:8). It is purity of heart that permits us to recognize the face of God in Jesus Christ; it is having a simple heart like the heart of a child, free from the presumption of those who withdraw into themselves, thinking they have no need of anyone, not even God.

It is also interesting to notice the occasion on which Jesus breaks into this hymn to the Father. In Matthew’s Gospel narrative it is joyful because, in spite of opposition and rejection, there are “little ones” who accept his word and open themselves to the gift of faith in him. The “Cry of Exultation” is in fact preceded by the contrast between the praise of John the Baptist — one of the “little ones” who recognized God’s action in Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 11:2-19) — and the reprimand for the disbelief of the lake cities “where most of his mighty works had been performed” (cf. Mt 11:20-24).

Hence Matthew saw the Exultation in relation to the words with which Jesus noted the effectiveness of his word and action: “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news of the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offence at me” (Mt 11:4-6).

St Luke also presented the Cry of Exultation in connection with a moment of development in the proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus sent out the “seventy-two” others (Luke 10:1) and they departed fearful of the possible failure of their mission. Luke also emphasized the rejection encountered in the cities where the Lord had preached and had worked miracles. Nonetheless the seventy-two disciples returned full of joy because their mission had met with success; they realized that human infirmities are overcome with the power of Jesus’ word. Jesus shared their pleasure: “in that same hour”, at that very moment, he rejoiced.

There are still two elements that I would like to underline. Luke the Evangelist introduces the prayer with the annotation: Jesus “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (Lk 10:21). Jesus rejoiced from the depths of his being, in what counted most: his unique communion of knowledge and love with the Father, the fullness of the Holy Spirit. By involving us in his sonship, Jesus invites us too to open ourselves to the light of the Holy Spirit, since — as the Apostle Paul affirms — “we do not know

how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words... according to the will of God" (Rom 8:26-27), and reveals the Father's love to us.

In Matthew's Gospel, following the *Cry of Exultation*, we find one of Jesus' most heartfelt appeals: "Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). Jesus asks us to go to him, for he is true Wisdom, to him who is "gentle and lowly in heart". He offers us "his yoke", the way of the wisdom of the Gospel which is neither a doctrine to be learned nor an ethical system but rather a Person to follow: he himself, the Only Begotten Son in perfect communion with the Father.

Dear brothers and sisters, we have experienced for a moment the wealth of this prayer of Jesus. With the gift of his Spirit we too can turn to God in prayer with the confidence of children, calling him by the name Father, "Abba". However, we must have the heart of little ones, of the "poor in spirit" (Mt 5:3) in order to recognize that we are not self-sufficient, that we are unable to build our lives on our own but need God, that we need to encounter him, to listen to him, to speak to him. Prayer opens us to receiving the gift of God, his wisdom, which is Jesus himself, in order to do the Father's will in our lives and thus to find rest in the hardships of our journey. Many thanks.

To special groups:

I offer a warm welcome to the Missionaries of Charity and their families. Upon all the English-speaking visitors present, including the various pilgrimage groups from the United States, I cordially invoke God's blessings of joy and peace!

Lastly, I address an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception which we shall be celebrating tomorrow reminds us of Mary's special adherence to God's saving plan. Preserved from every shadow of sin to be the all-holy dwelling place of the incarnate Word, she always entrusted herself totally to the Lord. Dear *young people*, strive to imitate her with pure and limpid hearts, letting yourselves be moulded by God who also wishes "to do great things" in you (cf. Lk 1:49). Dear *sick people*, with Mary's help may you always trust in the Lord, who knows your suffering and by uniting it with his own, offers it for the salvation of the world. And you, dear *newlyweds*, who wish to build your home on the grace of God, make your home a hearth of love and piety, in imitation of that of Nazareth.

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