



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Saint Peter's Square

Wednesday, 30 May 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this series of Catecheses we are meditating on prayer in the Letters of St Paul and we are endeavouring to see Christian prayer as a true and personal encounter with God the Father, in Christ, and through the Holy Spirit. At this meeting today the faithful “yes” of God and the trusting “amen” of believers enter into dialogue and I would like to emphasize this dynamic by reflecting on the Second Letter to the Corinthians. St Paul sends this passionate Letter to a Church which has called his apostolate into question on several occasions and opens his heart so that those to whom he is writing may be reassured of his fidelity to Christ and to the Gospel. This Second Letter to the Corinthians begins with one of the most exalted prayers of blessing in the New Testament. It says “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Cor 1:3-4).

Indeed Paul lived amidst great trials, he had to pass through much difficulty and affliction but he never gave in to discouragement. He was sustained by the grace and closeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, for whom he had become an apostle and a witness, putting his whole life into Jesus’ hands. For this very reason Paul begins this Letter with a prayer of blessing and thanksgiving to God, since in his life as an Apostle of Christ he never, not even for a single moment, felt deprived of the support of the merciful Father, the God of all comfort.

His suffering was appalling, as he says in this very Letter, but in all these situations, when it seemed that there was no way out, he received consolation and comfort from God. He was also persecuted for proclaiming Christ and even thrown into prison, but he always felt inwardly free, enlivened by Christ's presence and keen to proclaim the word of hope of the Gospel.

So it was that he wrote from prison to Timothy, his faithful collaborator. In chains, he wrote, "the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endure everything for the [God's] sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:9b-10). In suffering for Christ, he experiences God's consolation. He writes: "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too" (2 Cor 1:5).

So, in the prayer of blessing that introduces the Second Letter to the Corinthians, the theme of affliction stands out next to the theme of consolation. This should not be understood merely as comfort but especially as an encouragement and an exhortation not to let oneself be overcome by trials and tribulations. The invitation is to live every situation united to Christ, who takes upon his shoulders the whole burden of the world's suffering and sin in order to bring light, hope and redemption.

So it is that Jesus makes us capable in our turn of consoling those experiencing every sort of affliction. Profound union with Christ in prayer and trust in his presence, lead to the readiness to share in the suffering and troubles of our brethren. St Paul writes: "Who is weak, and am I not weak? Who is made to fall, and am I not indignant?" (cf. 2 Cor 11:29). This sharing is not born simply from kindness, nor solely from human generosity or an altruistic spirit; rather, it stems from the consolation of the Lord, from the steadfast support of the "transcendent power [that] belongs to God and not to us" (2 Cor 4:7).

Dear brothers and sisters, our life and our journey are frequently marked by difficulty, misunderstanding and suffering. We all know it. In a faithful relationship with the Lord, in constant, daily prayer, we too can feel tangibly the consolation that comes from God. And this strengthens our faith, because it enables us to have an actual experience of God's "yes" to man, to us, to me, in Christ. It makes us feel the fidelity of his love which even extended to the gift of his Son on the Cross. St Paul says, "for the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No; but in him it is always Yes. For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God" (2 Cor 1:19-20). The "yes" of God is not halved, it is not somewhere between "yes" and "no", but is a sound and simple "yes". And we respond to this "yes" with our own "yes", with our "amen", and so we are sure of the "yes" of God.

Faith is not primarily a human action but rather a freely given gift of God which is rooted in his faithfulness, in his "yes", which makes us understand how to live our life, loving him and our brethren. The whole history of salvation is a gradual revelation of this faithfulness of God, in spite

of our infidelity and negation, in the certainty that “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!”, as the Apostle declares in his Letter to the Romans (11:29).

Dear brothers and sisters, God’s way of acting — very different from ours — gives us comfort, strength and hope because God does not withdraw his “yes”. In the face of stressful human relations, even in the family, we often fail to persevere in freely given love which demands commitment and sacrifice. Instead, God does not grow tired of us; he never wearies of being patient with us and, with his immense mercy, always leads the way and reaches out to us first: his “yes” is absolutely reliable.

In the event of the Crucifixion he offers us the measure of his love which does not count the cost and knows no bounds. St Paul writes in his Letter to Titus: “the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared” (Tit 3:4). And because this “yes” is renewed every day, “it is God who... has commissioned us; he has put his seal upon us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (2 Cor 1:21b-22).

Indeed, it is the Holy Spirit who makes God’s “yes” in Jesus Christ constantly present and alive and creates in our hearts the desire to follow him so as to enter totally into his love, one day, when we will receive a dwelling-place in heaven not built by human hands. There is no one who has not been touched and called into question by this faithful love, which is also capable of waiting even for all those who continue to respond with the “no” of rejection or of the hardening of their hearts. God waits for us, he always seeks us out, he wants to welcome us into communion with him to give to each one of us fullness of life, hope and peace.

The Church’s “amen” is grafted onto God’s faithful “yes” which resonates in every action of the Liturgy. “Amen” is the answer of faith that always concludes our personal and community prayers and expresses our “yes” to God’s project. We often respond to prayers with our “amen” out of habit, without grasping its deep meaning.

The word derives from *’aman*, which in Hebrew and in Aramaic means “to make permanent”, “to consolidate” and, consequently, “to be certain”, “to tell the truth”. If we look at Sacred Scripture we see that this “amen” is said at the end of the Psalms of blessing and praise, such as, for example, Psalm 41[40] “But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence for ever. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen” (vv. 12-13).

Or else it expresses adherence to God at the moment when the People of Israel return full of joy from the Babylonian Exile and say their “yes”, their “amen” to God and to his Law. In the Book of Nehemiah it is told that after this return, “Ezra opened the book [of the Law] in the sight of all the people; for he was above all the people; and when he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God; and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen’, lifting up their

hands” (Neh 8:5-6).

From the outset, therefore, the “amen” of the Jewish liturgy became the “amen” of the first Christian communities. Indeed the Book of the Christian liturgy par excellence, the Revelation to John begins with the “amen” of the Church: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5b-6). This is what it says in the first chapter of the Book of Revelation. And the same Book ends with the invocation “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

Dear friends, prayer is the encounter with a living Person to listen to and with whom to converse; it is the meeting with God that renews his unshakeable fidelity, his “yes” to man, to each one of us, to give us his consolation in the storms of life and to enable us to live, united to him, a life full of joy and goodness, which will find fulfilment in eternal life.

In our prayers we are called to say “yes” to God, to respond with this “amen” of adherence, of faithfulness to him throughout our life. We can never achieve this faithfulness by our own efforts; it is not only the fruit of our daily striving; it comes from God and is founded on the “yes” of Christ who said: my food is to do the will of the Father (cf. Jn 4:34).

It is into this “yes” that we must enter, into this “yes” of Christ, into adherence to God’s will, in order to reach the point of saying with St Paul that it is not we who live but Christ himself who lives in us. Then the “amen” of our personal and community prayers will envelop and transform the whole of our life into a life of God’s consolation, a life immersed in eternal and steadfast love. Thank you.

To special groups:

I welcome the Vietnamese pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Hochiminh City, led by Cardinal Jean-Baptiste Pham Minh Mân. I also welcome the participants in the Buddhist-Christian Symposium being held in Castel Gandolfo. My greeting likewise goes to the Hope for Tomorrow Foundation from the United States. Upon all the English-speaking visitors, including those from England, Ireland, Norway, India, Indonesia, Japan and the United States I invoke God’s blessings of joy and peace!

Then I would like to address a special greeting to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. May the Holy Spirit, the gift of the Risen Christ guide you, dear *young people* and enable you to orientate your life to goodness with determination; may he sustain you, dear *sick people*, in accepting suffering as a mysterious instrument of salvation for you and for your brothers and sisters; may it help you, dear *newlyweds*, to rediscover every day the demands of love, to be ever ready to understand each other and be of mutual support.

APPEAL

The incidents of these days concerning the Curia and my co-workers have filled my heart with sorrow but have never obscured the firm certainty that, despite the human weakness, difficulties and trials, the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit and the Lord will never withhold his help to sustain her on her journey. However, rumours, exaggerated by some of the media, totally gratuitously and that have gone far beyond the facts, paint an image of the Holy See that does not correspond to reality. For this reason, I wish to renew my truth and my encouragement to my closest collaborators and to all who, daily, with fidelity, with a spirit of sacrifice and in silence, help me in fulfilling my daily Ministry.

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